

Heroical Apatheism: Mala Fide Bootstrapping Obligations

Ian von Hegner

University of Copenhagen

Abstract: Discussions on hypothetical gods virtually always focus on the latter's existence or nonexistence. However, these are only the secondary questions. Heroical apatheism distinguishes these questions from the primary question, which pertains to the importance of these gods. It is a deeply ingrained assumption that if the gods have created the universe and humankind, then this implicitly entails the obligations that these 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 their existence. The rights of these gods are simply assumed at face value. However, the issues pertaining to these necessary relations are not trivial in any respect. This paper highlights these relations by first formulating two cosmological models for the initial condition of the universe and, thereafter, applying these in the analyses of the claims regarding these relations. By doing so, it shows that the justifications for the aforementioned obligations always result in a Münchhausen bootstrapping circularity or are ad hoc. Any necessary relations between existence and worship and between acts of creation and obedience cannot be demonstrated. Furthermore, these assumptions are based on the frequently overlooked reasoning that arguing for or against the obligations to the gods implicitly assumes that these gods have a right to such obligations to begin with. However, all that can be shown is the power to enforce obedience. Thus, heroical apatheism is founded on neither doubt nor disobedience because disobedience implies that an authority exists and an authority's right presupposes that there is such a right. However, there is no such right, and we do not equate might with right.

Keywords: gods, obligations, cosmology, astrobiology.

Introduction

Natural science no longer concerns itself with hypothetical gods as explanations in its models, theories, and actions. Instead, it has handed over the topics on such gods entirely to the scientific discipline called comparative religion¹. Similarly, most of the disciplines of philosophy no longer concern themselves with gods and religions and leave such topics to the discipline of philosophy of religion. However, the question regarding gods is nevertheless one that continually reappears. It is noted that very few individuals live their lives without being confronted with such questions. Hence, regardless of one individual's personal point of view, the question of gods had, and continues to have, much importance in and a profound influence on the cultural and political orientation of humankind.

Throughout the recorded history of humankind, many political laws and ethical dictates have been based on postulations of the sayings and wants of gods. To date, there are many countries where lawmaking enforces human beings, regardless of their personal points of view, to respect or submit to gods [von Hegner, 2016]. Hence, it is important to discuss the concept of gods, irrespective of whether they exist or not.

Before we continue this discussion, it is necessary to clarify that, historically, many abilities, actions, and attitudes have been attributed to gods, and there is no consensus regarding what godhood entails or what attributes are possessed by gods [Bullivant and Ruse, 2013]. Accordingly, there is no generic definition of gods that 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 (which are the only empirical facts that we have in this entire discussion), then let us for gods' sake use these facts. Consequently, in my referral, I henceforth use the plural term gods.

¹ The German term *Religionswissenschaft* or the Danish term with the same meaning *Religionsvidenskab* would be more adequate, since these terms clearly state that they refer to the scientific study of religions.

Throughout the course of history, the questions pertaining to the gods have mainly been discussed between polytheists/theists and atheists and agnostics. However, this is regrettable since, obviously, more can be understood from such discussions than simply the questions on existence, which is the main focus of this article. For the existence or nonexistence of hypothetical gods leads to more than just scientific or philosophical inquiries into this question. It also leads to questions on their importance or nonimportance. Hence, one further position exists next to polytheism/theism, atheism, and agnosticism, that is, apatheism.

A lack of interest in the existence of gods most likely has a long history. In response to Voltaire, Diderot wrote, ‘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 the two words ‘apathy’ and ‘theism’ or apathy and ‘atheism’, is a relatively new term that seems to have first appeared in printing in 2003 [Rauch, 2003]. The term has 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].

The definitions by Diderot, Rauch and Budimir seem to have their foundation in a normative justification, whereas the definition by Hedberg and Huzarevich seem to have its foundation in an ontological and epistemological way and, by doing so, has normative importance.

Finally, we consider the term heroic apatheism, according to which one is apathetic towards hypothetical gods due to the fact that no adequate justifications, ontological, epistemological, or existential, can be put forward regarding the gods’ rights towards humankind, and one is heroic regarding hypothetical gods since the gods’ rights, whether normatively or politically, do not have any preeminence over the rights of humankind [von Hegner, 2016].

Thus, the existence or nonexistence of hypothetical gods is not all that is in question since it is commonly assumed that gods have certain rights in comparison to humankind and the latter has certain obligations towards the former. Hence, it is implicitly assumed that there is a necessary relation between the attributes of gods and worship of gods, and a necessary relation between the supposed act of creation and obedience toward gods. Thus, apparently, worship and obedience are virtues and not fulfilling these requirements is a vice. According to 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 the following 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 be obeyed are considered obvious. However, is there such a right or such an obligation? What are these relations based on? Certainly, Kierkegaard is incorrect since the assumption that we deal with only two forms of insubordination is not true. Other forms exist, such as a wish for freedom, dignity, justifications, and so on. Kierkegaard opines, ‘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 gives rise to even simpler questions: Why should one obey? Why should one bow before divine authority? Is not a sentient being bowing before another sentient being 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 numerous assumptions. Further, this discussion on obligations ignores a simple, but easily overlooked, primary point. Arguing for the gods implicitly assumes that these gods have a right to demand obligations, and this stated, but unjustified, assumption makes the claims regarding obligations exceedingly problematic. Such questions of why and how humankind should have obligations towards the gods are virtually never asked, and this is the goal of this paper. I clarify 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 concept in a manner similar to atheism or agnosticism, which question the existence of gods or what we can understand about the gods. Further, heroical apatheism is not founded on disobedience, because disobedience necessarily implies the existence of an authority. As previously stated, there is more in this matter than just the discussion of the existence or nonexistence of gods. Now, we discuss some conjectures on the duty of human beings to worship.

One author states, ‘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]. Finally, yet another author opines, ‘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 a god 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]. Finally, the third statement justifies total devotion and unconditional commitment thus, that a god ‘is more noble and more perfect than anything else besides him’ [Wainwright, 2013]. These conjectures can be more adequately formulated as follows:

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

These relations have always been assumed in discussions throughout history. The gods’ right to be worshipped and obeyed is 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?” seems foolish to anyone who understands the context in which such a question is asked’ [Zagzebski, 2005].

However, there are no foolish questions in philosophy, and no attempt is being made to explain why a question is simply foolish, instead of being a non-trivial question to offend a god. The reason no attempts are being made might be that these questions are never being asked. This conjecture is simply considered obvious. The concept authority is ambiguous, possessing both a descriptive and a normative meaning. However, for all, possessing godhood seems to entail an obligation that they should be worshipped and obeyed. The claims of such relations are so deeply ingrained in the philosophy of religion that no one seems to doubt them. The attributes of gods are simply listed, and then it is claimed ad hoc that humankind have obligations towards the gods. However, do they have such a right? On what bases are these relations founded on?

The fact that ‘ought’ statements cannot be validly deduced from ‘is’ statements has long been part of the philosopher’s toolbox. The inferences ranging from ‘a god is worthy of admiration’ to ‘everyone ought to admire that god’ do not place humankind under any obligation. If an ought cannot be validly deduced from an is, then the gods’ commands or wills to humankind do not entail the obligations of humankind towards these commands. Thus, the questions on these relations are not trivial at all. It is not even a conscious neglect not asking about them. These assumptions have existed for such a long period that no one even considers their validity and soundness. In the following sections, these relations will be discussed by the formulation of two cosmological models, which, thereafter, will be applied in analysing the claims about these relations.

Cosmological model 1. All available data point to how approximately 13.8 billion years ago, the cosmos was tightly packed into a small, but immensely dense, point—a singularity [Planck Collaboration, 2015]. From this point, everything eventually hurtled into existence. Roger Penrose proposes a twist for this theory, that is, the hypothesis of Aeons, whereby the Big Bang was not the beginning but instead only one in a sequence of

cyclical Big Bangs. Therefore, the history of this universe is 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 the last of its kind [Penrose, 2006]. Although there exist several beautiful scientific models for the universe, they are not the important point in this discussion. For the sake of argument, let us assume that Penrose's model of the universe is the correct one. It provides an explanation for why and how a low entropy state existed at the start of this universe. The cosmic events were in motion even before the Big Bang 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 and has no need for an origin. This dense mass of highly ordered everything that repeatedly spawn into a vast and magnificent universe is everything that is, was, and ever will be. The beginning of the present Aeon led to the abiogenesis of life, and the evolution of humankind. Thus, an Aeon is so to speak the highest good. However, despite all this, not even the most dedicated cosmologists and astrobiologists will probably not worship this new Aeon. There seems to be consensus that an obligation to worship or obey cannot be inferred as a necessary part of the initiation of the Big Bang. No scientific or philosophical inclinations are required to understand why this is the case. It does not seem to follow that there is a necessary relation between the existence and worship of a new Aeon. Moreover, it does not seem to follow that there is a necessary relation between a new Aeon's attributes and obedience towards the new Aeon.

Cosmological model 2. All available data point to how approximately 13.8 billion years ago, the cosmos was tightly packed into a small, but immensely dense, point—a singularity [Planck Collaboration, 2015]. From this point, everything eventually hurtled into existence. Many followers of gods believe in a twist on this theory, that is, this was not the first in existence, but was initiated by something that previously existed, that is, eternal gods. The knowledge that the universe began to exist seemed to confirm or lend plausible support to the religious doctrine of creation ex nihilo [Smith, 1991]. The belief that gods created the universe is common in many religions, and the Big Bang cosmology has been relatively easy to incorporate into this belief. Hence, the idea that a god initiated the Big Bang is very popular and has become a meme in the polythetic/theistic educated world view. However, not all followers of gods agree with this mixture of Big Bang cosmology with the actions of their specific gods. Even among those who do believe, there is a plurality of opinions. However, this is not the important issue under discussion. For the sake of argument, we consider the Big Bang as the doctrine of creation ex nihilo. It is not clear what is meant by possessing godhood. For simplicity, we will 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, including the emergence of life and humankind. This causes the followers of gods to worship the preexisting cause of the Big Bang. There seems to be consensus that an obligation to worship or obey can be inferred as a necessary part of the initiation of the Big Bang. Now, it seems to follow that there is a necessary relation between the gods' existence, and worship of gods'. Now, it seems to follow that there is a necessary relation between the attributes of the gods', and obedience to the gods'.

Hypothetical relation between perfection and worship

As mentioned in the previous section, a hypothetical god is claimed to be 'more noble and more perfect than anything else besides him'. Thus, humankind have an obligation to 'total devotion and unconditional commitment' to that god [Wainwright, 2013]. This obligation is supported by the claim that a god is 'a person who is eternal, all powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient), and perfectly good' [Rowe, 2005]. This greatness leads to the claim that a god is 'worthy of unreserved praise, admiration, and worship' [Rowe, 2005]. Certainly, such claims are untrue. Although they are doctrines within some traditions of some religions, they are not valid for concepts pertaining to gods, in general. Many gods do not fulfil these claims and are still gods [Saunders and Allen, 2015].

However, for the sake of argument, we will agree with certain doctrines and assume that worshipping a god is appropriate due to the following reasons: First, a god is humankind's ultimate benefactor and humankind is

dependent on the former. Second, a god is greatness. Due to the god's greatness, humankind's dependence on this god, and the god's benefaction, humankind owes the god worship.

However, first, worshipping something simply because it is greater than oneself is an insufficient argument. Furthermore, it is not a noble act. According to 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]. Second, this argumentation can equally well be applied to the first cosmological model, as well. We could say that worshipping an Aeon (or just the universe, for simplicity) is appropriate due to the following reasons: First, the universe is the ultimate benefactor on whom humankind is dependent and, second, the universe is greatness. Thus, we can consider the appropriate basis of worship to be the universe's greatness and beneficence to humankind and humankind's dependence on it.

However, most polytheists/theists, atheists, and agnostics will probably not agree with the view that there is a necessary relation between the fact that we depend on the universe and the universe possesses greatness and that the universe must be worshipped by humankind. But why not? An Aeon is the existing period from one Big Bang to infinite expansion. The disappearance of the previous Aeon becomes the highly ordered Big Bang state of the next Aeon cycle. Aeons follow an eternally existing sequence. 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 an insufficient justification.

But then it follows that greatness or dependence is inadequate. They are not the primary reasons for worship. One can admire the universe or gods or refrain from doing so. There is no necessary relation between the beneficence or greatness of the universe or gods and their worship. Both the cosmological models emphasize the case that the Aeons or gods simply are. They have always been and will always be there. However, 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, considering the worship of such an existence to be an appropriate action seems to be philosophically irresponsible. Something more is warranted in the discussion.

Some followers of gods might respond that a god is not worshipped merely because the god exists or possesses greatness compared to humankind and that humankind is dependent on that god. These followers conceive of a god who is not only great, good, or perfect but also the personification of goodness or perfection itself. Thus, worshipping a god implies simultaneously worshipping goodness or perfection [Kretzmann, 1999]. From this perspective, worshipping a god is justified on grounds other 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 the latter depends on the former. Hence, we can conceive of a universe that is not merely existing but is existence itself. The universe is everything there is, was, and ever will be, the highest good so to speak; it is existence as the most perfectly imaginable². Thus, worshipping the universe implies worshipping goodness or perfection itself. From this perspective, worship of the universe can be justified on grounds other than dependence and greatness.

However, some might object that goodness and perfection are not attractive attributes for worship because they are impersonal abstractions. On the other hand, 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 basis of all existence and someone who influences their followers personally [Kretzmann and Stump, 1988]. However, this could once again be applied to the first model. Thus, one could perceive the universe's existence as goodness or perfection itself, the basis of all being, and also something that influences humankind through the laws of nature.

² It can be discussed whether this universe is perfection. However, since the universe is all there is and ever will be and if perfection is not simply an empty phrase, this phrase can reasonably be applied to the universe.

However, most polytheists/theists, atheists, and agnostics will probably not agree that there is a necessary relation between the claim that the universe's existence is goodness or perfection and the demand that the universe should be worshipped by humankind. Although one have respect for the forces of nature and the grandeur that is the universe, one do not need to worship it. To state the obvious, goodness or perfection in itself does not demand anything. They simply are. There are no relations in them at all. Thus, in both models, goodness or perfection is insufficient as a justification for the worship of gods or the universe.

It is possible that the followers of gods in the second cosmological model are stubborn and insist that comparing the two models is insufficient, even when they provide the same results. According to 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. In the second model, according to which the universe was initiated by preexisting gods, the situation is apparently different from that in the first model. Here, the beginning of the universe and gods can apparently demand worship. However, how can we justify the existence of a necessary relation between the existence and worship of gods? To answer this question, let us utilize a rigorous procedure. Some opine that humankind's obligation to the gods emerges from the latter's perfection. However, this opinion presupposes an independent standard that obligates humankind to perfection. What can this standard be? Something more is needed:

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

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

Obviously, this is a circular argument. It is empty and tells us nothing. Then, let us inspired by the cosmological models try it differently:

B1. Is the reason compelling the worship of a god this, 'a god has initiated the act of creation'? Then, what reason compels the worship of the act of creation?

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

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

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

Once again, this argument does not place us in a better position, and we end up in a Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario. Furthermore, the first cause will still give the exactly same universe as in the first cosmological model. Thus, the gods cannot demand worship simply through a first cause.

As seen so far in the two models, existence and the act of creation are not sufficient conditions for worship. The two models represent different origins, but the same universe. It is true that the followers of gods do not accept the first model. However, that is not the point here. Many cosmologists and astrobiologists do not accept the second model, as well. The point is that in both cases, both the universe and humankind exist and the existence relation is the same. However, in one model alone, there is 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. The only difference between the two models is a conscious act, which we discuss in the next section. However, it is not easy to see how this makes a difference and gives rise to necessary relations. We reach the bootstrapping scenario where the gods, similar to 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.

However, 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. In their opinion, the fact that an obligation to worship the gods comes from the gods themselves is appropriate. Hence, one author opines 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 is established 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]. However, the mere fact that a god is unsurpassable or unique does not *ipso facto* imply that there is a necessary relation between unconditional commitment or worship and the property of being unsurpassable. There are several ad hoc premises not put forward, or realized, that must first be assumed. There is no explanation as to why there should be necessary obligations.

Instead, many authors appeal to the assigned status of gods as being supremely lovable and, therefore, deserving worship [Adams, 1973]. However, deserving is not a necessary relation. Further, although being lovable is probably a good attribute, it does not necessitate an obligation.

Must a god’s attributes such as greatness or perfection be worshipped? One could say that a person is insensitive if he or she does not worship perfection, similar to someone who does not appreciate a great piece of art or beautiful equation. Although this view may be valid, it does not change the fact that there is no necessary relation between worship and perfection; hence, linking obligations to the worship of a perfect god implies the linking of two distinct things. It is ad hoc. Humankind can admire or refrain from admiring the supposed perfection of gods. There is no necessary relation here.

We emerge empty-handed from all this. The arguments lack any strength. A necessary relation can be established between the gods and worship only by clarifying that the gods directly create the act of worship, create that humankind worship no matter what, only then will there be a necessary relation between the gods and worship. However, in that case, first, there will be no reason to talk about worship. It would not be an obligation because worship would be performed by automatons and the act would simply take place as clockwork. Second, there are evidently many human beings past and present (similar to this author) who do not worship hypothetical gods. Hence, there is no enforced worship here.

Hypothetical relation between the act of creation and obedience

The worship of hypothetical gods is not the only obligation that is supposedly required of humankind. Another well-known and widely distributed, though perhaps more ancient, obligation is obedience to 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 seem to believe. This is because obedience is not a simple 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?

In some places, humankind’s obligation to conform to the will of the gods is justified as follows: Since gods are the creators of the universe and humankind, the gods own the latter, that is, everything and everyone are the property of the gods [Swinburne, 1974]. This line of thought seems obvious to many. But not so fast. Let us consider the following statements: ‘ 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; further, ‘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 Φ ’ is not false per definition, and ‘if Φ is property’, ‘the gods own Φ ’ and ‘if the gods own Φ ’, ‘ Φ is property’ are not mere tautologies. Hence, contrary to common belief, ‘ Φ is property’ does not mean ‘the gods own Φ ’. Thus, being property and being owned by gods do not have the same semantic meaning.

However, despite this, the claim of a necessary relation between the gods' act of creation and humankind's obligation to obey the gods is maintained. Hypothetical gods have a right to demand obedience because they can exert their command or will over the universe and humankind that they have created. But how do the gods exert their will? Why do the gods command or obligate their creations? As already pointed out by Cudworth, mere commands do not create obligations unless the commander possesses some commanding authority [Cudworth, 1731]. However, this commanding authority cannot be founded on the commands themselves, that is, there cannot be a command to obey commands, because then a vicious circle would emerge. If humankind already has an obligation to obey a god's commands, then it is *ipso facto* meaningless for that god to command them to obey its commands. If humankind does not have an obligation, then the mere fact that a god can 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. Hence, in order for the gods' commands or will to obligate humankind, they must derive commanding authority from a source other than their own commands or will. In this case, where does a necessary relation between the gods' right to rule and humankind's obligation to obedience come from? Let us examine in depth whether there is such a relation. A first attempt is as follows:

P1. Is the reason compelling obedience towards the gods this, 'the gods have a right to rule'? Then, what reason compels obedience to a right to rule?

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

Obviously, this is a circular argument. It's empty and generate nothing. Some might opine that humankind's obligation to the gods is the result of the gods' act of creation. However, this view presupposes some independent standard that obligates humankind to the act of creation. What is this standard? More in-depth examination is required to answer this question'. Hence, let us apply some components from the cosmological models. Then, we can attempt to answer the following questions:

Q1. Is the reason compelling obedience towards the gods this, 'the gods have initiated the act of creation'? Then, what reason compels obedience towards the act of creation?

Q2. Is the reason compelling obedience towards the act of creation this, 'the act of creation leads to divine property rights'? Then, what reason compels obedience towards divine property rights?

Q3. Is the reason compelling obedience towards divine property rights this, 'property rights are dictated by the gods'? Then, what reason compels obedience towards the gods?

This does 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 of obedience towards the gods is founded on an act of creation, because an act should lead to a property right. However, is an act of creation sufficient to realize a property right? In both the cosmological models, an act of creation, whose cause is eternal, occurs. However, in the first model, no indication of a property right in relation to a new Aeon exists. In the other model, a property right, an obedience to the gods, is claimed to exist. However, both models present the same scenario, that is, the creation of the universe and emergence of humankind.

But this means, that contrary to many traditional beliefs, an act of creation alone is not a sufficient condition to demand property rights or obedience. The only difference between the two models is consciousness. Hence, the gods' rights towards humankind are not founded on their act of creation, but on their consciousness.

Apparently, the fact that the gods' consciousness or will, instead of an act of creation, gives them the right to demand obedience is then a sufficient condition. But not so fast. Let us consider the following statements: 'Ω is the universe' means that 'Ω is everything there is'. Hence, 'Ω is the universe' but 'Ω isn't everything

there is' is false per definition, and if 'Ω is the universe', 'Ω is everything there is' and if 'Ω is everything there is,' 'Ω is the universe' are tautologies. However, 'Ω is obedient' but 'the gods' consciousness does not will Ω' is not false per definition, and if 'Ω is obedient', 'the gods' consciousness wills Ω' and 'if the gods' consciousness wills Ω', 'Ω is obedient' are not mere tautologies. Hence, contrary to common belief, 'Ω is obedient' does not mean 'the gods' consciousness wills Ω'. Thus, being obedient or obligatory and being willed by the gods' consciousness do not have the same semantic meaning (the same argument can be accomplished with the act of creation alone).

It is true that the followers of the gods in the second cosmological model could be stubborn and insist that making comparisons between two such models is insufficient, even when they give the same results. For these followers, the existence of gods and their consciousness as a brute fact is not a *non sequitur* as a source to obligations. For them, such an existence can somehow demand obedience. Hence, there is an implicit claim that humankind's obligation to the gods emerges from the gods' consciousness. However, this claim presupposes some type of independent standard that obligates humankind to the gods' consciousness. What is this standard? We could attempt the following:

R1. Is the reason compelling obedience towards the gods this, 'the gods have initiated the act of creation'? Then, what reason compels obedience towards the act of creation?

R2. Is the reason compelling obedience towards the act of creation this, 'the act of creation is a conscious act'? Then, what reason compels obedience towards a conscious act?

R3. Is the reason compelling obedience towards a conscious act this, 'a conscious act comes from the gods'? Then, what reason compels obedience towards the gods?

However, this does not provide an adequate explanation. First, again, we attain a Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario and, second, a conscious act will still give the exactly same universe as the first cosmological model.

Thus, a necessary relation between the gods' conscious act and humankind's obligations towards them is not present. A demand for obedience that is exerted simply through a conscious act is not obvious. Initially, it is not even clear how mere consciousness can demand obligations. Could it be that a higher intelligence compared to human beings can make demands on obligations? When asked about the relation between the rights and intelligence of human beings with dark skin pigmentation, Jefferson responded that '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]. It is true that this statement clarifies a relation between human beings, rather than between gods and humans. However, the fact that gods can demand obedience because they are gods is a circular argument. Once again, we reach the bootstrapping scenario where the gods, similar to Münchhausen, who pulls 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 emerge empty-handed. It is not obvious that any of the supposed obligations to hypothetical gods can be inferred from the mere existence, attributes, and act of creation of gods without first accepting a number of assumptions.

One commonly encountered argument is that if the commanding or willing of Φ by gods is the only factor that makes Φ obligatory, then it is apparently impossible for the gods to command or will Φ and Φ will not be obligatory. Hence, being obligatory is identical to being commanded or willed by the gods. Because if Φ is identical to Ψ , Ψ is Φ is a necessary truth [Wainwright, 2005]. Another similar argument is that the gods are intrinsically worthy of worship and obedience [Sobel, 2004]. If we inquire into why the gods are intrinsically worship and obedience worthy, the reply is that this is a matter of necessity, which has no deeper justification.

Although these seem to be tempting arguments, they presuppose what they attempt to demonstrate. It is agreed on in philosophy that causal sufficiency and necessity are different from logical sufficiency and necessity. It is noted that the aforementioned arguments are logical, rather than causal, arguments.

However, this results in two clear-cut problems. In the second cosmological model, it is stated as a fact that the gods' causal activity is not governed by causal laws since the gods are the architects of these very laws. However, the logical laws must also necessarily have been designed by the gods, since the gods are the creators of everything. Thus, once again, the arguments lead us to the same trap as earlier. It is again implicitly presupposed that the gods have a right to give themselves rights. In other words, the gods create the fact that being obligatory is identical to 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. They are intrinsically obedience worthy because they have created the fact that they are intrinsically obedience worthy. This leads us straight back to the Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario.

Thus, only by saying that the gods directly create the act of obeying, create the very event that humankind obey no matter what, will a necessary relation exist. This can more conveniently be formulated by using the distinction between contingent and necessary beings. It is generally agreed on that there are two types of existent entities: those that exist but could have failed to exist, that is, entities that are not necessary, and those that could not have failed to exist, that is, entities that are necessary. The first type comprises contingent beings, whereas the second comprises necessary beings [Davidson, 2015]. Whether any of this is valid at all will be discussed elsewhere. However, for the sake of argument, we follow it here.

Most phenomena seem to exist contingently. Even nature seems to be contingent, the cosmos itself might have evolved in such a way that no galaxies existed at all. Parents have created their children, which are contingent beings that only exist because their parents united the information content in their DNA and brought them into this world. Although parents have to take care of their children, they do not own their children. When children reach the legal age, their parents can no longer dictate their actions. However, then, why is there a type 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. Therefore, the parents, similar to their children, are contingent beings.

Throughout history, many followers of gods have believed that anything that exists must depend on a god for its existence [Davidson, 2015]. Hence, according to this line of thought, humankind can follow its origin, step by step, back to the gods, who have created everything but, as necessary beings, are not themselves dependent on anything prior existing. Accordingly, they own humankind and humankind has an obligation to obey its owner's hypothetical commands. Essentially, this scenario is the second cosmological model. But once again, this scenario could be applied to the first cosmological model, as well.

We could state that the cosmos in its entirety is contingent. Hence, the case might have been that nothing existed at all. However, the universe indeed exists, and it can be traced back to the beginning of this universe, to the beginning of the present Aeon. We can discuss whether the universe's existence is a necessary truth, similar to discussing the existence of gods as a necessary truth. Once again, it does not seem to follow without first making assumptions that there is a necessary relation between the fact that humankind depends on the universe, the assumption that the universe is a necessary truth, and to the claim that the universe must be obeyed or any obligations exist at all.

However, if, for a moment, we agree with the followers of the gods in the second model, who insist that there is a difference and there are obligations as a consequence of this connection between contingent and necessary beings, then we are dealing with two issues. We have the issue that humankind has been created as contingent beings and it continuously owes its existence and sustenance to the gods, who are necessary beings. We must also consider causal and logical necessities. Hence, we have a connection where contingent beings depend both causally and logically on necessary beings in any case. Hence, it follows that the acts of contingent beings must necessarily follow the will of necessary beings. It is not possible for contingent beings to oppose the will of necessary beings. Further, it is not possible for the former to even have thoughts of opposing the latter's will (since this statement implies that necessary beings must have willed that contingent beings should oppose their will).

Let us consider an example. In many different religions, one of the commandments assumed to have been given by hypothetical gods is that a human being must not slay another human being. However, there is

sufficient evidence to demonstrate that it is possible for a human being to slay another. This has happened many times in the past and continues to happen in the present. Since this has happened many times, it follows that an obligation to obey a god in not slaying another human being is not a causally enforced obligation. Further, since it is possible to do it, an obligation not to slay another human being is not a logically enforced obligation either³.

Therefore, if an obligation to obey the gods about not slaying another human being exists, then this obligation cannot be based on a causal or logical necessity. Since one can disregard this command and contingent beings can perform acts that necessary beings obligate the former not to do, there are *ipso facto* no causal or logical relations here. Thus, in this case, the attempt to create a necessary relation between contingent and necessary beings is insufficient. This is because if contingent beings are continuously sustained and controlled by necessary beings, then it follows that the former cannot disregard any obligations. However, contingent beings evidently can.

Hence, connecting a distinction between contingent and necessary beings to a property right, where an obligation to obey exists, is not valid, since no obligation can be enforced. This means the gods' act of creation does not lead to a necessary relation to an obligation to obey them.

Importantly, based on the assumption about contingent and necessary beings, it is realized that one of the main problems associated with obligations is that there are numerous entities that are considered necessary, such as relations, propositions, properties, states of affairs, and numbers. However, while, for example, logical relations seem not to have could failed to exist, obligations are those that could have failed to exist. They do not seem to be necessary entities. Then, what could humankind's obligations to the gods be based on? Attempting to answer this question, let us consider the following scenarios:

i) Gods can will humankind to automatically perform an act or think a thought. This follows necessarily from the concept of contingent and necessary beings. However, this statement *ipso facto* undermines the concept of obligations, because such acts would be automatic acts that are performed with clockwork precision by automatons. A light bulb is not obedient to its creator. It simply does what it does. Stating that the light bulb has obligations to obey its creator is meaningless. In the first model, it might be the case that contingent beings are automatically being enforced to do things by, for example, the laws of nature. There are things one can and cannot do as a consequence of being part of the universe. It might be said that this is the case in the second model, as well. However, this is not an obligation. The fact that a heart beats is not an obligation; it is an automatic reflex. Thus, in summary, there is no reason to discuss obligations or do philosophy at all in this line of thought. Humankind would become mere puppets, whose every act and thought continually was bestowed by the gods.

ii) Gods can threaten humankind to perform acts. This follows sufficiently from the idea of existence of beings with greater power than human beings. However, this *ipso facto* undermines the concept of contingent and necessary beings. If humankind already automatically follows the gods' will, it is pointless for the gods to threaten humankind to do anything. This is because someone who has complete control over others does not need to threaten others to obey their commands. However, the mere fact that gods have to threaten or command implies that they do not possess complete control over humankind.

iii) Gods have created free will such that humankind can choose to follow or not follow obligations. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between the gods' antecedent and consequent wills. This means that a god's consequent will is this god's will considered absolutely with no dependence on any other factors, whereas the god's antecedent will is this god's will considered with respect to a subset of actual circumstances [Murphy,

³ It is not possible to do something that is not logically possible. A hypothetical god can presumably change the logical possibility; however, in this case, it is the changed possibility that one follows, and the overall situation will remain unchanged.

2014]. Hence, it should be possible to choose to follow or not follow a god's commands (usually with consequences of some type), even when everything depends on a god. However, first, free will does not escape the distinction between contingent and necessary beings. Second, obligations will still not be mandatory or justified here. Further, apart from the fact that it is questionable whether there is truly any free will in this scenario, it still does not answer the question here'. Because this choosing or not choosing to follow obligations implicitly presupposes that there is a necessary relation between gods and humankind's obedience to the gods. I go one step further and inquire into the underlying presupposition that the gods have a right to demand obedience. A god's antecedent or consequent will is irrelevant, since a justification to this will is asked for here.

iv) Gods are not the only necessary beings. There exist other necessary entities. Hence, logical relations could exist independently of gods. There could be a necessary relation if there is an obligation independently of the gods to obey the gods' commands about, for example, not slaying a fellow human being. Therefore, whenever the gods give a command that a human being must perform some act, for instance, not to slay a fellow human being, it follows that a human being is obligated to perform the act. However, first, if we follow this approach, then why should human beings obey the gods? Why should we not directly consider the obligations themselves? Thus, why should we equate obligations with the gods, rather than with the reasons of obligations, regardless of their origins? If logical relations exist prior to the existence or independently of the gods, then why should we bother with the gods? This requires us to consider questions similar to Lavelle's dilemma [von Hegner, 2016b]. Second, since humankind can evidently disregard these obligations, there is no necessary relation here regardless of the source.

v) It might be considered that humankind's obligation to obey gods comes from its gratitude towards them for creating it and the universe. Hence, it can be considered that humankind is ungrateful if human beings do not appreciate what the gods have done for them, similar to how someone who does not appreciate a gift or beneficence from someone else is considered ungrateful. However, first, the reception of a gift by one being from another being does not equate to letting the giver dictate the thoughts and actions of the acceptor, since these are two distinct things. Second, while giving a gift is probably an admirable act and being grateful for a gift is a decent behaviour, it does not change the fact that gratefulness is not a necessary relation. Since there is no necessary relation between one being grateful and another being a commander, the identification of obligations with gratefulness to gods is to tie it to two distinct things. The relation is ad hoc. Humankind can either be or refrain from being grateful to the gods' supposed act of creation. There is no obligation.

Hypothetical relation between power and obedience

It is apparent that no necessary relations pertaining to obligations between hypothetical gods and humankind can be demonstrated without them being circular or ad hoc. There are people like Hobbes, who do not consider this an issue. He believed that the gods have created the universe and humankind, but specifically justified the demand for obedience with the powers of gods. According to 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 on what constitutes a god or what attributes are possessed by gods [Bullivant and Ruse, 2013]. However, one common factor attributed to gods by the majority of their followers throughout history seems, *prima facie*, to be that the gods possess greater power than humankind and, for this reason, human beings have a submissive relation to the gods. Thus, it follows that hypothetical gods have the right to interfere in the lives and existence of human beings and even to judge and punish the latter. This continuing right to influence the opinions and actions of human beings has been designated 'the gods right to rule' [von Hegner, 2016]. Hence, we can simplify the entire discussion continued in the previous sections to a Hobbesian power argument and attempt the following justifications:

S1. Is the reason compelling obedience to the gods this, ‘the gods have power’? Then, what reason compels obedience with power?

S2. Is the reason compelling obedience with power this, ‘the gods’ power has initiated the act of creation’? Then, what reason compels obedience towards the act of creation?

S3. Is the reason compelling obedience towards the act of creation this, ‘the act of creation leads to divine property rights’? Then, what reason compels obedience towards divine property rights?

S4. Is the reason compelling obedience towards divine property rights this, ‘divine property rights are created by the gods’? Then, what reason compels obedience towards the gods?

Again, we encounter a Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario, on the one hand, and the same result in the two cosmological models, on the other. ‘The results are an existing universe and an existing humankind’. Further, in both scenarios, they have been initiated by an eternally existing cause. However, in one model alone, we talk about obedience and power.

Although the argument is circular, power seems to be the only factor that can issue a type of pragmatic demand. Beings with greater power can obviously enforce demands on beings with lesser power. However, if no justification other than how power enforces humankind to obey the gods exists, then it follows that we do not need to talk about obligations. This is because, then, we are in the same situation as in a master–slave relationship. Certainly, this support for raw power is attempted softened up in the debate. Hence, it may be agreed on that obligations result from authoritative demands; however, this is true only if it is agreed on that the authoritative demands from authentic authorities result in these obligations. Therefore, according to this line of thought, what makes gods authentic authorities is not raw power but the fact that they can provide reasons for obligatory acts.

It is not obvious what sort of reasons they must be, but following, for example, Raz give authentic authorities protected reasons by their authoritative demands, where a protected reason to ϕ is a reason to ϕ and a reason to disregard some reasons against ϕ -ing [Raz, 1979]. However, first, we must agree that obligations emerge from authoritative demands, and a demand is authoritative if it constitutes a specific type of reason, which is a protected one in this case. Then, it is not obvious at all why obligations should be identified using protected reasons that originate from authoritative demands, instead of the protected reasons themselves. Hence, if protected reasons exist in other ways than mere demands, then why should gods be allowed to give them? Why should we not proceed directly to the reasons themselves? Second, in the past, all the supporters of slavery were not mindless thugs; some were, indeed, well versed in the science and philosophy of their eras. They could provide well-argued reasons for supporting slavery by explaining that gods had given ‘protected reasons’ by their authoritative demands and, hence, slavery was legitimate. Today, it is true that we will consider these to be insufficient justifications. However, then, why do so many people think that gods’ reasons are protected or justified? Third, all this again implicit presupposes that the gods have a right to raise demands to begin with. And it is the very foundation of this that is asked for here. The statement that gods must be obeyed because they are gods is obviously a circular argument. Only their power remains. Nevertheless, is ‘might is right’ a protected reason? According to 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 overcome this circular relation or, specifically, justify this circularity involves resorting to the doctrine of divine simplicity, which we briefly discussed in the section on perfection. Such attempts have, among other things, been used to avoid Euthyphro’s dilemma and Lavelle’s dilemma [von Hegner, 2016b]. In general, most followers of gods have the fixed perspective that a god is good. [Murphy, 2014]. According to some perspectives on godly perfection, it is possible to obtain a distinction between the possession and exercise of perfection. Thus, one can obtain a distinction between a god’s goodness and its manifestations.

Hence, resorting to the doctrine of divine simplicity means that the trope of perfect goodness can simultaneously be a source of morality and, yet, have application to itself [Oppy, 2006]. Thus, a god is

considered to be uniquely ‘being itself’; it is the god that is essentially goodness itself, and whatever that god commands regarding moral properties is identical to the god’s nature [Kretzmann and Stump, 1988]. This basically takes the form of an axiomatic point of view. One begins with a statement that is considered true: Do gods exist? Yes. Are gods good? Yes. This statement serves as a premise or starting point for the derivation of everything else. Perhaps, this view can be adapted to include gods’ power, as well. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between a god’s creative power and its exercise. One begins with the axiomatic statement that is considered true: Do gods exist? Yes. Do gods have power? Yes. This statement serves as a starting point for discussing how gods’ power gives them a right to demand obedience.

Hence, one could claim that power, authority, similar to goodness, supervenes on every feature of a god not because some general principles are true, but because they are the features of that god. In this case, asserting that gods represent goodness or authority implies the assertion that gods are as they will themselves to be or, in other words, they command what they want to command. This is what we could fittingly call the vacuity problem because this attempt entails the problem that the authoritarian claims about gods are empty tautologies: A god is a standard for goodness because a standard for goodness is a god.

Surely, we can demand a better justification for a necessary relation between gods and obedience than this? Because one still cannot demonstrate a necessary relation between the gods’ existence and possession of these attributes and an obligation to obedience. The fact that a god simply acts as the god is inclined to act is hardly a sufficient explanation for treating the gods as anything other than dictators. Again, we encounter the bootstrapping scenario, where the gods, similar to Münchhausen, pull up their rights from their own hair.

Obviously, there are no cogent arguments for establishing a necessary relation between these entities. Then, why has it been claimed for so long? More importantly, why is it claimed today? For many, the fact that gods exist and are powerful, knowledgeable, perfect, and good seems to mean that the gods must be worshipped and obeyed. This implication is so deeply ingrained that no one seems to doubt it. However, why not?

Although the term dictator has a negative meaning today, this has not always been the case. The concept originated as the designation of an extraordinary, supreme magistracy in Rome and was applied first in military and later in domestic crises. 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 consider the concept ‘tyrant’, which was originally a neutral title used by the Greeks to refer to a person who had seized authority in a free state, where it mattered that ‘There was in fact no absolute distinction between tyrannoi and orthodox leaders in Greek poleis. The former aimed to dominate established oligarchies, not to subvert them’ [Anderson, 2005]. However, over time, both tyrant and dictator have come to be used almost solely as a term for oppressive, even abusive rule. A dictator is considered a malevolent immoral ruler who wields absolute authority.

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

It is true that the idea might is not right does not prevent the hypothetical scenario in which gods in a practical sense impose themselves on humankind. However, in this case, the relation between gods and humankind becomes something that is very well known. A dark chapter in the history of humankind is the master–slave relation. In this relation, one being was another being’s property and could be treated in any manner that the former wanted. Initially, this statement might seem 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]. Another author opines that ‘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]. Further, 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]. Hence, for most of the followers of gods, there is a single narrow obligation, that is, the obligation to obey the gods, irrespective of whatever they say or do. This is clearly a master–slave relation. We add one more quotation, 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 not unreasonable to say that Burke’s words express the dominant attitude held by most people today. The attitude is that no one may or can own other people as their property. *Prima facie*, most people will say that human beings cannot be someone’s property at all. Yet, many support the master-slave relation without implicitly realizing their support. Unlike the concepts of dictators and tyrants, the concept of gods has avoided a redefinition [von Hegner, 2016].

Let us consider a historical example. Ultimately, kings justified their right to rule as ‘the divine right of kings’, which is a political and religious doctrine of royal absolutism [Burgess, 1992]. Overall, this concept asserts that a monarch answers to no political authority and derives the right to rule solely from the gods’ award of temporal power. At the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment, questions were asked about the monarch’s superiority and legitimacy and, gradually, kings began to be subjected to punishment or removal for breaking the laws. Thus, since the Enlightenment period, the divine right justification has fallen out of favour. However, in this context, it is particularly interesting that those who asked critical questions about the kings’ right to rule did not simultaneously ask such questions about the gods’ right to rule.

Although we have eliminated the kings’ right to rule, the gods’ principal right to rule remains. Hypothetically, gods can still do whatever they want. All this embody a Hobbesian understanding. The people depicted in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* had no rights against their sovereign. This sovereign or dictator could do as he pleased with the people, including causing deliberate harm to the latter, and the people would have no valid grievance against the dictator [Hood, 1964]. Let us consider a seventeenth-century plantation owner who decides to torture and kill a slave. Instead, if the slave were to succeed in slaying the plantation owner and fleeing to safety in another part of the world, then, for us, the ethical justification would seem to favour the ex-slave. However, according to a Hobbesian understanding, this is not the case. According to Hobbes, although the dictator had a certain obligation to treat the people well, 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. It is true that they would have no obligation to the property itself; their obligation would be directed merely to its owner. Depending on the outcome, either the plantation owner or ex-slave would be accountable to a god for destroying its property.

If we simplify this situation by removing the middleman, that is, the human dictator or plantation owner, and rerun the same argument, we would still have a master–slave relation. How can we not have it? It is true that those who defended the divine right to rule of human rulers did not claim that the rulers were intrinsically worthy of obedience. On the contrary, their right to rule rested in divine imprimatur. However, the claim that the gods are intrinsically obedience worthy does not avoid that they are dictators and that this right is a Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario. Thus, the concept of gods, as opposed to that of dictators, has not kept up with modern times. Clearly, hypothetical gods’ demand for obedience is dictatorship. This is the reason many still claim a necessary relation between gods and their right to be obeyed to this day.

Hypothetical relation between morality and gods

One of the reasons why so many people discuss the existence or nonexistence of gods is that such questions have historically been linked to the philosophy of ethics. Further, one of the reasons for the importance attributed to gods is that they are believed to be a type of guarantee for the existence of objective ethics. However, here, we observe an unjustified transition between the existence or nonexistence of gods and ethics. In their excellent article on practical atheism, Hedberg and Huzarevich writes that ‘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 view resonates with the well-known many gods' objection. With more than approximately 10,000 different religions [Barrett et al., 2001] and more than 4,000 documented gods [Saunders and Allen, 2015] in the world today, it is obviously not very credible to apply one of these religions and gods as the 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 certainly a valid point. However, we can proceed one step further. 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, rather than the religious ethical traditions themselves. Let us assume we somehow obtain absolute knowledge that one of these traditions is correct. One of the gods from one of the religions might show itself before humankind tomorrow and, thus, we may conclusively get rid of the plurality of religious ethical traditions. In this case, we now know which god and which religion are true. Thus, a universal moral code can be given to humankind by the god.

However, even in this case, where a 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. However, heroic atheism proceeds one step further and points 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 that it is a dictum given by the gods, who have no right to give a moral code.

In a democratic system, leadership 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 concept of gods originated during a time when being ruled by single individuals was commonly accepted. However, the scenario is different today. The gods' right to rule negates ethical autonomy and democratic rights. A world founded on the wants of gods will always be a dictatorial world. The gods have not been elected, and their commands are not based on a valid constitution. Furthermore, there are no controls on their power. A democracy is a system of rule based on laws passed by majority decisions, rather than on laws commanded by single beings, regardless of their power. Thus, in a democracy, the role of gods 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 always applicable. However, this might *pro tanto* not be a necessity. Through rational debate, laws are passed by elected politicians. These laws secure rights and protection to all citizens. Such rights and protection form the foundation of moral commitment. Such laws are regularly passed independently of what hypothetical gods are postulated to command and, overall, such law-making do very well. In truth, democratic societies are forced to do this; otherwise, a violation of freedom from religions would result. It is noted that freedom from religions also implies freedom from gods. Therefore, the very idea of gods as rulers can be equated with dictatorship.

This lack of concern for the moral role of gods and relaxed attitude towards objective fundamentals, for example, those pertaining to democracy, could be criticized as apatheism lacking an 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 apatheism’s lack of concern for whether or not a god or gods really exist’ [Budimir, 2008].

However, whether this is the perspective depicted in the original formulations of apatheism will be left for others to discuss. Nevertheless, it is noted that heroic apatheism is not indifference towards the existence or nonexistence of gods attributed to a lack of interest in what is true or false. Quite the contrary. Heroic apatheism is the indifference that emerges precisely due to the question of what is true or false. As previously mentioned, there is more to the discussion regarding gods than simply the question of whether gods exist or not. The concept of gods leads to a discussion on the relevancy of gods and the relation between them and the rest of the beings in existence. Heroic apatheism is precisely concerned with the objective. It emphasizes that the gods’ right to rule, or dictate morality, does not have sufficient foundation and derives the normative consequences of this realization.

Many studies extensively discuss whether gods can be a source of morality [Wielenberg, 2005]. However, to date, all attempts to provide a necessary relation between gods and morality have been ineffective. Such discussions follow a top–down approach and start with the gods concept, since it is widely assumed that the starting point of moral discussions should be gods. However, the starting point of moral discussions is of course morality itself. Thus, the proper approach for such discussions is to follow a bottom-up, since morality is necessarily an interaction between a group of conscious individuals. This is a prime example for a case in which 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, in a circle of logical dependence) when there is more than one conscious individual. An interaction within a group of conscious individuals leads to a scenario in which a common set of agreed on rules that consider every single individual such that the well-being and freedom of everyone is maintained is put forward. This is essentially what morality has always been. Hence, the very notion that morality could be commanded or defined by a single individual is *ipso facto* immoral.

This may not be absolute morality. However, this is *pro tanto* not necessary either. As implied by a 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?’ In any case, either moral properties are arbitrary or gods, even if they exist, play no essential part in them [von Hegner, 2016b]. It is possible that gods may still have a different view of what humankind must do. However, it is irrelevant if they do have a different view because they have no right to enforce and humankind has no obligations to follow their view. If their view is enforced through power, then we are back to the master–slave relation again, and we have a dictatorship that we are obligated to oppose.

Discussion

In heroic apatheism, one is relaxed regarding the existence or nonexistence of hypothetical gods since no justifications, whether ontological, epistemological, normative, or existential, can be provided for a necessary relation between the gods’ existence and attributes and humankind’s obligations towards them. Some supporters of the rights of gods might consider this view a representation of defiance or rebelliousness towards the gods. However, being defiant implies that there is someone to be defiant against or a relation to be defied, and being a defier implies that the one being defied has a right resulting in being defied. This point is questioned in this discussion. The apatheian principle specifies that obligations cannot be established since it implies negotiations with the gods. However, the gods have no right to negotiate.

Some opine that humankind’s obligations emerge from its gratitude to the gods for creating them and the universe. However, this view still presupposes an independent standard that obligates humankind to be grateful to the gods.

Some others might say that gods are beyond human reasoning. However, this claim does not exempt one from the demand to justify why gods must be worshipped or obeyed. If such obligations are accepted without question, then not only will the study of philosophy become unnecessary, there will be no reason to dedicate any attention towards the supposed obligations to the gods either.

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

Further, many opine that despite all these arguments being valid and sound, gods' power enforces their will on everyone else regardless. However, in this case, there will be no need to justify one's heroic apatheism. All one needs to do is state that one finds the abuse of power despicable and, thus, will oppose the obligations to the authorities at any time.

Some might put forward a parent argument that gods are the caretakers of humankind for its own sake. We already have a scenario in which human beings decide the destiny of many other species on this planet. Although humankind may not have a fundamental right to decide the destiny of other species, they have it nonetheless due to their higher intelligence compared to other beings and the power derived from that intelligence. Therefore, along the same line of thought, gods, who are supposedly more powerful and intelligent than humankind, can be said to have a right to rule over humankind. However, this type of argumentation is dangerous. Let us follow an astrobiological approach and, for the sake of argument, assume that, one day, the Earth is visited by an alien super civilization. The intelligence of this alien species is so evolved and their technology so advanced that it is, according to Arthur C. Clarke, indistinguishable from magic [Clarke, 1973]. Hence, if higher intelligence and greater power give one species rights over others, then it follows that these aliens have a right to rule over the life and destiny of humankind. Presumably, most of us will not agree with this right. Then, why do so many people agree on the gods right to rule us? If we eliminate the middle man and have powerful gods, instead of a powerful alien species, then we have, in principle, the exactly same situation as earlier. Considering the difference between contingent and necessary beings will, as seen in the previous section, be irrelevant for the above argumentation.

In this paper, two cosmological models with different causes are put forward; nevertheless, both lead to the same results in order to analyse what obligations could be founded on. The only difference between the two cosmological models is that a conscious act existed in the second model, whereas none existed in the first. In the first model, there seemed to be consensus that worship or obedience cannot be inferred as a necessary part of the cause of the Big Bang. There also seemed to be consensus that the existence of consciousness could not be inferred as a necessary part of the cause of the Big Bang. Thus, worship or obedience cannot be inferred as a necessary part of this model. In the second model, any sufficient explanation as to why obligations should exist could not be found. In this model, consciousness and power existed. However, none of these provided different results between the two models and, hence, any explanation for the existence of a necessary relation between attributes and obligations. In this model, it would be possible for power to enforce worship and obedience. However, this is dissatisfactory since it raises the question is might right? Further, this would also entail automatous actions, and thus not obligations.

The primary question regarding hypothetical gods' demand for worship and obedience, or the conjecture of obligations, remains unaddressed in the philosophical debate. It is true that since atheists and agnostics believe gods do not exist or we cannot know if they exist, there is no reason for them to pay any attention to that type of arguments. There may also be individuals who consider it self-contradictory to be an apatheist and, yet, write articles on gods. However, the discussion of the basis of the gods concept is quite fruitful. Because if gods were to conclusively reveal themselves to humankind tomorrow, then what would happen? Most atheist and agnostics will probably agree that hypothetical gods do not have a right to worship and obedience. Hence, something more is needed. This separation of the question on the existence or nonexistence of gods from the question on the relevancy of gods is important, regardless of whether the gods do or do not exist, because religions continue to play a significant role in the political sphere worldwide. The acceptance of obligations to

the gods and the very idea of gods as rulers can be equated with dictatorship. The fact that gods' right to rule is commonly accepted by democratically minded citizens and is not met with objections represents a challenge to democratic thought and philosophy itself.

Heroical apatheism is a fruitful concept with great potential for research. Its views and argumentation remain valid, regardless of any evidence, proof, or faith. If gods are conclusively shown not to exist, then polytheism/theism would fall. If they are conclusively shown to exist, then atheism would fall. In both cases, agnosticism would be dissolved, since a conclusive answer is obtained. However, even in this scenario, heroical apatheism remains valid. If gods exist, it is a pragmatic response to dictatorship. If they do not, it is a philosophical thesis.

One of the primary problems associated with the claims regarding the rights and worship of and obedience to gods is that their adherents repeatedly try to maintain and perform reinterpretation of old concepts in light of, or despite, new knowledge and sophisticated philosophy. It shows how far reason and ethics can be led astray in an attempt to maintain old ideas. Thus, many people maintain the claims of obligations to the gods due to the simple reason that this has always been done so. All the long and detailed attempts at providing justifications do not lead to any valid or sound conclusions because such efforts continuously presuppose the concepts that they try to demonstrate using defunct assumptions.

Since the Age of Enlightenment, concepts such as dictator, tyrant, and the kings' right to rule have not merely been revised, but 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 the gods and religions away, and begin anew. Reboot everything: what do we know? How do we know it? Why should we introduce this concept? How do we justify this concept? This approach has been extremely powerful in the natural sciences and, similarly, highly successful in philosophy. This would be a philosophically responsible and, moreover, honest approach.

If gods do exist, they would certainly be interesting to study, similar to how it is interesting to study the Big Bang or an alien civilization. It is true that there is nothing to indicate the existence of gods. However, if we must talk about gods, we should be able to do it without referring to archaic and outdated concepts from the political past of humankind. Can we not leave these unpleasant aspects with master–slave relations behind? If there are gods, can they not coexist with us peacefully and respectfully without resorting to commands, obedience, worship, and inferiority? Is it not about time that we move away from dictators having a positive sound?

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