

Rejoinder to William Lane Craig

DAVID B. MYERS

Department of Philosophy, Minnesota State University Moorhead, Moorhead, MN 56563

Abstract: While I may have misunderstood certain points in Craig's Molinist theodicy, a careful reading of my article will show that Craig is incorrect in his claim that I have failed to evaluate his proposal on the basis of its asserted standard: plausibility. The heart of my argument is that Craig's theodicy is implausible because it fails to provide a credible explanation of the culpability of all non-believers. In this rejoinder I try to show (1) why an evidentialist exoneration of reflective disbelievers (in Christ) also applies, *contra* Craig, to the unevangelized; and (2) that an evidentialist account of reflective disbelief is more plausible than Craig's sinful-resistance account.

I found William Lane Craig's response helpful. I appreciate his correction of my misunderstanding of certain points. Craig reminds me that theodicy, as he uses the term (following Plantinga), does not aspire to prove the truth of what is proposed, but only to show its plausibility. While realizing this, I wanted to suggest that something stronger is *implied* in his proposal. (Craig himself, at one point, in his original article, states that he thinks his Molinist view 'probably is true' ("No other name", 182).) My critique does not, in fact, rest on the assumption that his theodicy makes a truth-claim (that must be proved). Although I do at one point (at the outset, on only one page) construe his theodicy as making a truth-claim, I in fact evaluate his proposal using the standard of *plausibility*, not truth. This is made clear in my concluding paragraph.

Craig also points out that, contrary to what I claim, his position does not presuppose the doctrine of original sin: rather, he informs me, it depends on belief in 'universality of sin' (423), which has a 'hardening effect on man's heart' ('Talbot's universalism once more', 517). Since in many Christian traditions the notion of universal sin is grounded in the doctrine of original sin, I reasonably but incorrectly inferred that this was Craig's view. This mistaken inference does not, however, in any way weaken my fundamental challenge to Craig's attempt to make non-belief culpable. What I specifically question is his claim that no-one fails to become a Christian because of a lack of evidence. On his view, those I refer

to as informed reflective non-believers refuse to become Christians because of sinful resistance to the truth. This account of disbelief – a claim about motivation – is what I find implausible. One must not lose sight of the basic problem I have with Craig’s theodicy – namely that it does not provide a *credible* explanation of the culpability of any of the three categories of non-believers.

I was drawn to Craig’s proposal because it addresses a much-neglected dimension of the problem of evil: how a just God can condemn *all* non-believers. Craig reminds me that he was concerned only with the unevangelized. My point is that informed conventional non-believers and informed reflective non-believers are also a part of the soteriological problem of evil. It should be kept in mind that I am not concerned only with those Craig labels the unevangelized – a group that corresponds to my category of uninformed non-believers. The category of uninformed non-believers may not be materially equivalent to or synonymous with the category of reflective non-believers. However, the two categories of non-believers must, in the name of justice, have something in common that makes them equally culpable such that they equally deserve eternal punishment. Reflective non-believers must freely reject something that God, in His middle knowledge, knows that uninformed non-believers would, if given the opportunity, also freely reject.

I maintain that the very existence of informed reflective non-Christians calls into question Craig’s solution to the soteriological problem of evil, even granting that his proposal is restricted to the unevangelized. If the unevangelized did have an opportunity to receive special revelation, they would – I argue – be justified, *on the basis of evidence*, in rejecting it. (Indeed, I maintain that non-believers can have good grounds for rejecting both special and general revelation.) In this sense, I see the unevangelized as virtual – or potential – reflective non-believers.

Craig does not respond to my challenge to his initial assumption that all individuals who make a well-informed and free decision to reject Christ are ‘self-condemned’ (“No other name”, 176): I question his fundamental exclusivist claim that rejecting Christ is a sin. I argue that those who reject Christ are not necessarily culpable because they might have good evidential reasons for doing so. Craig’s thesis is that no person who is informed about Christ and freely rejects him does so only for evidential reasons. Where Craig thinks my critique of exclusivism ‘goes wrong’ (424) is precisely where I think it goes right. This is the crucial difference between our positions: namely that, on the question of the ethics of religious belief, I focus on intellectual reasons as an explanation and justification for disbelief while Craig focuses on sinfulness. I assert, *contra* Craig, that non-believers *sometimes do* reject Christianity because of a lack of evidence for its truth. Thus, on my view, the unevangelized might, if evangelized, have good intellectual reasons for not embracing the Gospel and, in that case, would

not be culpable if they rejected it. So my exoneration of reflective disbelievers applies equally to persons who never have the opportunity to hear the Gospel.

According to Craig, a person informed about the Gospel *knows* that Christianity is true through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. In his response Craig asserts that even persons who have no good evidence to believe – or have persuasive evidence to disbelieve – are culpable for their unbelief because their rejection of Christianity is rooted in a free rejection of God’s witness. From this he concludes that the rejection of Christ is irrational. I assert that this is an implausible explanation of all reflective disbelief, and that therefore this is not a plausible account of the culpability of all reflective non-believers. To justify condemnation of all non-believers Craig must make *plausible* (I never say that he must *prove*) his bold claim that no person ever does (or would) reject Christ for intellectual (evidential) reasons alone. Craig does not do this.

In *Reasonable Faith*, Craig claims that well-informed non-believers ultimately reject Christ because they ‘love darkness rather than light and wish to have nothing to do with God’ (36). This motivational claim, which presupposes a doctrine of universal (though apparently not *original*) sin, is, I argue, simply not a convincing explanation of *all* non-belief. No matter how intellectually well-grounded a person’s rejection of Christianity is, Craig’s trump card will always be *sinful resistance*. This seems to me to be nothing more than a device to end all further discussion about the intellectual tenability of belief in Christ. More plausible is the view that, at least in some cases, individuals reject Christianity because of insufficient evidence for the truth of the Gospel, or because they find an alternative religious (or non-religious) world view more credible. In other words, it seems more plausible – and less question-begging – to say that non-believers *can* reject Christianity for purely intellectual reasons.

Thus, from the standpoint of a reasonable ethics of belief, I see no reason to hold all non-believers (in Christ) blameworthy. Thoughtful Muslims, such as Suzanne Haneef, serve as counter-examples. The burden of proof is on Craig to show that the free rejection of Christ is *always and everywhere* a culpable act. Craig, however, wants to shift the burden: ‘Myers gives no reason to think that well-informed Muslims like Suzanne Haneef are not willingly resisting the drawing of God’s Spirit on their hearts’ (425). Although Craig may question Haneef’s integrity (which he in fact does in his response), does he also want to question the integrity of all Muslims – indeed the integrity of all well-informed people who freely reject Christ? It seems that he must.

In response to my point that Muslims could turn the tables on Craig – by maintaining that Christians are resisting the drawing of Allah’s spirit on their hearts – Craig simply concedes, appealing to Plantinga, that ‘such an epistemology is ... available to all ... monotheistic faiths’ (426). A Muslim could therefore also make use of the notion of cognitive dysfunction. But if both Muslims and

Christians can make the same move, with no objective way to determine which, if either, monotheistic faith is true, what happens to culpability?

Even if I *experience* what I take to be the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, I can always reasonably ask whether this experience is veridical, or how I know that it is really the Holy Spirit of the Triune God rather than another deity (for example, Allah) that I am misperceiving through the distorting lenses of Christian indoctrination. Craig must say that persons who report the experience of Allah working on their hearts are mistaken, but I do not know how he can reasonably defend such a claim. In light of the irresolvable conflicting claims of Christians and Muslims about a particular God working on their hearts, it seems to me unreasonable to present the Christian claim as privileged. If it is justifiable for a Christian to reject the claim that Allah is drawing on her heart, I think that it is equally justifiable for a reflective non-Christian to do the same with respect to the asserted Triune God.

The important point is that Craig's Molinist theodicy does not make a credible case for the culpability of non-believers. That means that the Christian hell may be occupied by at least some, perhaps many, inculpable disbelievers. If so, the soteriological problem of evil is not solved. This is a more serious problem for exclusivism than the conventional problem of evil because the former involves the *eternal* suffering of inculpable persons.