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A Universe Devoid of Sentient Beings?

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Abstract

In his published Gifford Lectures, Professor Michael Dummett asks 'what would it be for there to be a universe devoid of sentient beings? What would be the difference between God's creating a material universe, in the whole of which there never was any creature able to experience it ['a unidead', in Moonan's shorthand], and His creating nothing at all? ... What difference would its *existing* make?' He answers: 'there would surely be no difference...' and 'unless there are sentient and rational observers, it would not be *possible* for either observation or inference to occur'. (*Thought and Reality*, 97.)

Some theists might find this a disconcerting restriction on divine power; and if in addition realist, might put it down to a refusal of realism for the range of language in question. In this article, however, I presuppose a coherent realism for the range, and argue that Dummett's contentions can hold for realisms too, and ought not to disconcert serious theists. What is crucial is not (just) whether you are prepared to understand your assertions in an 'anti-realist' rather than a realist manner, but whether or not you are prepared to use 'God' to stand for something not finite in any way, if there is any, and for nothing else in extra-mental reality. Dummett's Giffords are metaphysically serious: where it would matter if there were no God.

Keywords

unidead, infinite God, omnipotence, Dummett

Professor Dummett's Gifford Lectures, as represented in *Thought and Reality* [=TR],[1] have put the supposition of a strictly infinite God – where 'God' is taken to stand for something in no way finite, and for nothing else in extra-mental reality – firmly back in philosophers' centre stage. It is arguably needed there, if there is to be a genuine alternative to an ontology in which we and the things around us come to a sum of things, and in addition to nothing more than a sum of

[1] M.Dummett, *Thought and Reality*, Oxford [2006], xi + 111pp.

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things. In the alternative, we and the things around us come to a sum of things, but in addition to an ultimately unfailingly ordered totality of things. This is where the supposition of something not finite in any way comes in: 'for how is there to be order unless there is something eternal and independent and permanent?'[2]

TR will surely invite resistance from those committed directly or indirectly to a "mere sum of things" ontology, not excluding those many academic theists whose practice implies that God has at least some determinate characteristics, whether we can know them or not; and from those theologians who have become detached from the position on God which Hume's character Demea had arguably correctly identified as that of 'all the Divines, almost, from the Foundation of Christianity' until the time of Locke. But TR also contains positions which could at least initially disconcert theists who, like Demea's divines, do not require a divine nature endowed with determinate characteristics. For example, positions at least insinuated in:-

> a totality of propositions cannot be conceived independently of any particular resources comprising a conceptual vocabulary by means of which these propositions can be framed; and likewise the world as it is in itself cannot be conceived independently of how it is apprehended by any mind. What would it be for there to be a universe devoid of sentient beings? What would be the difference between God's creating a material universe, in the whole of which there never was any creature able to experience it, and His creating nothing at all? ... What difference would its *existing* make? There would surely be no difference. That is not to say that there is no matter or radiation that is unperceived and uninferred; but, unless there are sentient and rational observers, it would not be *possible* for either observation or inference to occur. (TR 97, Dummett's italics.)

Ideally, 'any creature able to experience it', 'possible for either observation or inference to occur', 'existing', and 'universe' all invite examination. I attend here to 'the world as it is in itself' before considering the possibility of a world devoid of sentience. In a consistent realism,[3] 'the world as it is in itself' can sustain an importantly different use from the one allowing the sense of which Dummett said 'no other sense can be allotted to that phrase'. That different use, however, precisely does not provide any counter-instance to Dummett's assertion, which concerns a *sense* which the consistent realist who supposes God to be strictly infinite cannot maintain. Yet

[2] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XI,1, 1060a25, tr. Oxford rev. J.Barnes, Princeton 1984, 2 vols.

[3] In particular, realism for ranges of assertions mentioning 'God', where 'God' is to stand for something strictly infinite, in no way finite, if there is any; and for nothing else in extra-mental reality.

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it can take us towards an appreciation of why such a consistent realist cannot allow himself grounds to dispute Dummett's judgment on the possibility of a universe devoid of sentience. What is crucial in the matter is not any preferred type of theory of meaning. It is the supposition of a strictly infinite God which already rules that out, as will appear.

If neither it nor the fundamental alternative supposition (the "mere sum of things" view), can be excluded beyond reasonable doubt by any proof, realism for either alternative would seem unavoidable anyway; and not necessarily objectionable to Dummett. At TR 65 he says: 'Realism is the belief in a reality independent of our knowledge of it and of our means of attaining such knowledge, which renders our statements true when they are true and false when they are false. When realism is characterized in this highly general way, it behoves us all to be realists to a large degree.'

I speak of 'consistent' realists, to exclude the kind of realist envisaged, and rightly objected to, by Dummett in an earlier book: a realist who 'assumes that, if God knows every prime number, he must *thereby* know whether or not there are infinitely many prime pairs'.[4] His objection was merely that the envisaged realist was begging the question. In fact, a realist who, speaking of God, is supposing him to be strictly infinite, could in addition be running into inconsistency, because of the 'thereby'. A realist who also supposes God to be strictly infinite may be able to assume that God knows A *and* that God knows B. But even for cases where we human reasoners might be able to argue 'A, and thereby B', such a realist cannot consistently assume that God can. A strictly infinite God can no more argue stepwise than he can tell the time.

1. *Dummett's sense for 'the world as it is in itself'.* At TR 103 he says that 'God's knowledge of the material universe consists in a grasp of an immensely complex structure determining what will be observed by the various kinds of sentient creatures . . .'. I omit the details, because Dummett seems to me to be correct in the matter. He then says, with emphasis: 'This structure, as God conceives it, *is* the world as it is in itself; no other sense can be allotted to that phrase.' By 'the world as it is in itself' he appears to mean nothing other than the world around us, and including us, viewed as a structured entity existing in extra-mental reality.

'This structure, as God conceives it' is thus nothing in God, but is to be identified with the structured entity of which we form part, viewed in relation to God. That is precisely what you can expect, if 'God' is to be understood to stand for something

[4] M.Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, Cambridge, Mass. 1991, xiii + 355 pp., 349–50.

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strictly infinite – something with no parts or facets for 'as' phrases to hold of. Whereas the World Bank, as I conceive it, is not necessarily identical with the World Bank, the world is necessarily identical to the world, as God conceives it. Dummett's own answer to the question 'what would be the difference between His creating such a universe ['a material universe, in the whole of which there never was any creature able to experience it'] and His merely conceiving of it?' (TR 97), has got to be: There would be no difference. Indeed his answer to 'What would be the difference between God's creating any universe, and his merely conceiving of it?' ought to be the same. That is what 'God's conceiving of a universe' comes down to: creating a universe. And God's 'creating nothing at all' is going to be the same as God's conceiving of nothing at all.

Yet out of context, at any rate, 'the world, as it is in itself' need not be taken to stand for the actual world around us at all, i.e., for what God is 'conceiving'. As for its sense, it might indeed have no other: but for the different reason that it has no sense at all in that other use; save its conversational sense, a sense perhaps usable heuristically or mnemonically, but unusable to even broadly "scientifical" purpose. How so?

3. '__, *as it is in itself*'. That incomplete expression can call up a variety of associations, even within philosophy: Bolzano's *Sätze an Sich*, Kant's *Ding an Sich*, Augustine's *res ipsae*, Plato's *kalon* in virtue of which the beautiful things are beautiful .... Narrowly apposite to present issues is 'the world, considered as it is in itself', in the abstract way of considering things (*consideratio absoluta)* obtainable from a distinction of Avicenna's,[5] distinguishing three ways of considering things. I take this first from one of the western Schoolmen who took it from Avicenna. In a convenient shorthand, he says:

> It is to be said that, following Avicenna in his Metaphysics, there are three ways of considering the nature of something.
> One, as it may be considered in respect of the existence which it has in singular things – like the nature of a stone, in this stone and that;
> Another is the consideration of the nature of something in respect of its existence in the understanding, just as the nature may be considered insofar as it is an object of someone's understanding.[6]

A third way is a consideration of things in an abstract manner (*absolute,* hence *consideratio absoluta*), to the extent that [someone

[5] Ibn Sina: Abu 'Ali al-Husayn b. 'Abd Allah b. Sina (AH 370-428/ AD 980-1037).

[6] This is sometimes called a thing's 'conceived quiddity': 'a representation in the intelligence, where it has intentional existence (*esse rationis*) (thus P.Hoenen, *Reality and Judgment* ... 1952,45).

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making a judgment] may abstract from either of the two modes of existing mentioned; and according to this way of considering things, the nature of a stone (or of anything else) may be considered, only to the extent in which those things hold *per se* of a nature of just that kind, are being taken into consideration.[7]

If those things which hold *per se* of the nature of some determinate kind of thing are to be identified with precisely the things predicable essentially of something, as in Aristotle's *Topics* I,5, then this abstract "nature" resulting from the third, abstract manner of considering things, not only includes the strictly Aristotelian essence (definition), but also the invariant characteristic (*idion, proprium*) and the genus. The "essence" in this wider sense is what is sometimes called the Avicennian essence of the thing.

In his expository shorthand, Aquinas speaks as though it were this Avicennian essence which was being considered in the three ways. Strictly speaking, neither he nor we should rely on a reification of this kind, if only two kinds of thing are actually there, in such a way as to lend themselves to our consideration: singular, determinate things existing in extra-mental reality, and determinate objects of our thought, "existing" only in the mind.

We can consider singular determinate existents *absolute*, in an abstract manner;[8] and we can consider the determinate *entia rationis* of our actual judging thought in an abstract manner likewise. These are types of thing determinate enough to lend themselves to considerations of ours, and I am supposing that they are the only two types that will.

When I abstractly consider this stone on my desk, I prescind from the fact that it is on my desk, that I use it as a paperweight, that friends gave it to me because it shows a fossil from a particular geological period . . . . From anything, indeed, which is not true of the stone precisely in virtue of its being a thing of the kind it is. When I abstractly consider my idea of the stone, I prescind (in practice, to the extent to which I am psychologically able to do so) even from its being my idea and not anyone else's. Even while I am engaged in this abstract consideration of my idea, the idea as such does not exist in extra-mental reality, save as jangles in my central nervous system. As we progress in knowledge of our nervous systems, we may well come to the point of being confident that some particular, describable set of jangles is always and only present when I am thinking of the stone. Even then, however, I would wish to understand a difference in type between the object of my actual, judging thought, and the set

[7] Aquinas, *Quodlibet 8*, qu.1,art.1, Utrum senarius numerus, secundum quem omnes creaturae dicuntur esse perfectae, sit creator, vel creatura, ed. Busa, *Opera* . . . 3, 482–83.

[8] Determinate in at least some respect; not necessarily in all respects.

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of independently perceptible jangles, if there is such a set. Without a further argument for the nature of the relationship between my idea and the related jangles, I could still not be entitled to claim that the objects of my thought, precisely as objects of my thought, have as such any existence in extra-mental reality.[9] This is where expressions of the form '__, as it is in itself' can work, for a consistent realist at least, if any is to be found.

In Aquinas's view of things, as in Avicenna's own, there is existence other than in the two modes of existence which can in principle lie subject to our consideration: that of the stone, and that of my idea of the stone. That other existence is not supposed limited in any way, not even supposed limited to determinate modes of existing: provided of course that there is anything strictly infinite, anything existing without qualification or restriction of any kind. In that other, strictly infinite, existence, and there only, can the abstract content of the stone, or water, or being human – or of any other determinate entity – indeed be said to exist in extra-mental reality. But if it can, it is in an existence which no longer lends itself to our consideration: the logically prior existence of the strictly infinite, which cannot strictly be called a *mode* of existence, if it is existence in no determinate mode. In that existence, but entirely indistinctly from it, the being of all determinate beings cannot but be found, without the limitations which it has in this stone before me, or in whatever else determinately exists.

It is if a stone can be taken to be a determinate entity, and for that reason, if it is true, that Aquinas, if I understand him, will allow 'God is a stone', or for that matter 'God is a devouring cancer', to be allowed to be asserted with truth, if asserted figuratively; and that he may not necessarily allow 'God is blind', even figuratively, under the same principle. Where not stones or cancers are concerned, but, say, intelligence or the descriptive goodness of things, he will allow us more: to assert, for example, 'God is good' – not figuratively, not categorically either, but under a restriction (*cum determinatione*), under an analysis, where an appropriate one can be found. In other words, 'God is good', 'God is wise' and the like can be "predicated" within the unanalysed or incompletely analysed speech in which dialectical arguments are conducted; provided that an appropriate analysis, tenable consistently with the supposition of a strictly infinite God, can be had. That is why he can say:

[9] This approach is sometimes called attributionist; as against, in particular, either the more plainly dualist approaches, or those embodied in what Ayer used to call the Australasian Creed of central states materialism. For a helpful guide through the older "isms" in the matter, and through many of the main related issues still in need of resolution, see D.M.Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind,* London [1968], xii + 372 pp., 5–14, 37–48.

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> That which is called goodness in creatures, prae-exists in God, and that in accordance with a higher mode [than the one in which it exists, or may be said to exist, in creatures].[10]

If that which is called (descriptive) goodness in creatures includes stone, or water, then it will follow that stone, say, 'prae-exists in God, and that in accordance with a higher mode [than the one in which it exists, or may be said to exist, in creatures]'. Even if 'pre-exists' is intended in the *prae-existit* of the text, no chronological priority need be imagined to be entailed; a logical priority, explaining the stone's limited existence by reference to a strictly infinite existence, which stands in no need of explanation, would be enough. But the *prae* in the text could well be intended to convey (in addition) the note of "before (in merit or regard)" which the word can also carry; thus being reinforced or spelt out in the 'in accordance with a higher mode'. Strictly, the 'higher mode' in this case is no determinate *mode* of existence at all, but existence in no way distinctly from the strictly infinite, if there is any.

In that existence the stone, say, cannot lend itself to be considered by us, if only what is in at least some way determinate can be an object of our consideration. Yet, almost bizarrely, we may still be able to refer determinately to it. If you could point to anything strictly infinite, you could not but be right if you said 'what makes a stone to be a stone, is there', or for that matter, 'what makes love to be love, if love is anything, is there', 'whatever makes intelligence to be anything, if intelligence is anything, is there'. If that is so, it may be thought to be for a reason of the following kind. Whatever makes something to be a stone, or to be red, or whatever, also makes it to be something, in the first place; and whatever *is something in some or other determinate way* cannot but be identified, when considered abstractly, with what simply *is something*, if there is anything which simply – without qualification or modification – is something.

As for the abstract Avicennian essences themselves, quite generally, they can be said in a tolerable shorthand to exist in extra-mental reality as things of the specific, intrinsic content they may be supposed to have; but only in the infinite divine nature, indistinctly from it, in the case where there is an infinite divine nature in extra-mental reality. They do not then exist in any way open to our consideration. (I am disregarding prima facie possibilities speciously offered by some full-blooded doctrines of Platonic Ideas which are inconsistent with the supposition of a strictly infinite God.) We cannot point to them or refer determinately to them in their specific contents, but

[10] *Summa theologiae*, 1/13/2c ad fin. Cf. L.Moonan, *Divine Power* . . . 1994, 239–45. A way of doing this is shown in chs 5 and 6 of *Infinite God: The central issues addressed by existence-theism*, forthcoming.

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only as existing indistinctly from the strictly infinite divine nature. To the extent that they can be said to have an intrinsic content, they can be specifically identical with the contents of some ideas of ours – fictions, as both Hume and Aquinas called such entities. To the extent that ideas of ours can be said to exist determinately in extra-mental reality, they are no more than jangles in our central nervous system, opaque to our judging thought, and without any further intrinsic content to lend itself to our consideration.

What I would wish to mark here is that, even if this line of argument may be made out without inconsistency on a realist understanding, and may have a use of great importance, it should *not* be seen to give a *sense* to '__, as it is in itself' ('water, as it is in itself', 'love, as it is in itself', 'cancer, as it is in itself'...) other than that where it will refer to the water, love or cancer in the world around us. Before saying more on this, I turn to 'the world, as it is in itself'.

4. *'The world, as it is in itself'*. If the material universe is to be seen as 'an immensely complex structure determining what will be observed by the various kinds of sentient creatures...', it can be understood further as the ordering of a set of integral forms. Even if only what is ultimately unfailingly ordered (not necessarily seen to be ordered) can co-exist with anything strictly infinite, the material universe is thus in principle not impossible to co-exist with the strictly infinite, if there is any.

Even supposing all that, however, it does not necessarily follow that the complex structure as a whole, when considered 'as it is in itself', in the Avicennian way of understanding that, can be said to "prae-exist" in the strictly infinite in precisely the way in which stone was envisaged to do in the example given. (Real-world stone, in any case, would often seem even less amenable than "the world" to being treated as the straightforward instantiation of any form or ordered set of forms.) The emphasis on integral forms, and ordered sets of these, comes from the need to be able to co-exist with something strictly infinite, which of its nature – whatever that might be – cannot suffer interference or resistance, or indeed even the slightest frustration. And if anything strictly infinite does exist, it can have no parts. Whether you call it God or not, there is no place within that infinite nature for anything to be ordered within it.

'The world, as *it* is in itself' will thus be at best a loose way of speaking, a possibly tolerable shorthand, for anyone using the Avicennian use of the expression, if there is no "it" simple enough to be said to "prae-exist" in an infinite divine nature. The "it" in question – if it is meant to stand for the instantiated world around us, and including us – is being supposed internally ordered; and anything supposed strictly infinite, is being implied *not* to be internally ordered.

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If it is no worse than a loose way of speaking, there ought to be a "cash value" for it, a less loose way of speaking, to justify the looser formula. What can properly be said, it seems to me, is that all the integral forms ordered in the structure, and the integral form(s) of the structure itself, can be said to "prae-exist", free of the limitations imposed by their instantiation, in the divine nature: not, however, as ordered in the structure instantiated, or as ordered in any way, either within themselves, or to each other; but so as to permit each of the forms involved, considered in itself, to be said to "prae-exist" in the divine nature. 'Something in God is unfailingly ordered' is absurd, if 'God' stands for something in no way finite.

As for 'the world as it is in itself', used for the world considered in the abstract manner allowed by Avicenna, that can stand for something existent in extra-mental reality only as existing indistinctly from the infinite divine nature itself, if there is any. And in that case, 'the world as it is in itself' stands for nothing other than the divine nature itself, and like 'God', 'the divine nature', 'the strictly infinite' and any other expression used to stand for the strictly infinite, if there is any, can be allowed a reference in extra-mental reality; provided always that there is in extra-mental reality something for which it successfully stands, a *suppositio* in extra-mental reality, as the older philosophers called it. But it can then, like the other expressions used to stand for anything strictly infinite, be allowed no "signification" of the same thing; no *sense* at all, beyond the heuristic or mnemonic senses the expressions can have in unanalysed speech. If in this way you wish to use 'the world as it is in itself', as for that matter 'the divine nature' or 'God', you must be content to allow that they succeed in their reference – i.e., in referring determinately to the infinite divine nature, if there is any – only at the cost of being able to signify literally nothing about it that you or I can understand.

There need then be no dispute, from a consistent realist, with Dummett's conclusion that the only *sense* of 'the world as it is in itself' is the one it may have when it is taken to stand for the (created) world around us.

And there need likewise be no dispute with Dummett's identification of God's conceiving of the world with God's creating it. 'The world as it is in itself', when identified with the infinite divine nature, is known to God, not by his 'conceiving' it, for an infinite nature cannot be 'conceived', but as he knows himself. To avoid confusions of this kind, the Schoolmen distinguished *scientia visionis*, bearing on the created order; and *scientia simplicis intelligentiae*, God's knowledge of things as "prae-existent" indistinctly from his own nature, and thus as totally opaque to us.

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5. *Making a difference*. 'What would be the difference between God's creating a material universe, in the whole of which there never was any creature to experience it [for convenience = 'a unidead'], and His creating nothing at all? . . . What difference would its *existing* make?' (TR 97.) The answer apparently expected is that there would be no difference; but readers of TR could well expect that this is meant to show something to be expected from understanding 'God's creating a material universe . . .' and the like in accordance with justificationist principles, and perhaps not to be expected under realist counterparts.

The crucial issue here, however, need not be between the rival theories of meaning which might be expected to come into play, but between whether you are supposing a strictly infinite God, and the ultimately unfailingly ordered world that goes with that; or else are supposing no strictly infinite God, and the mere sum of things which goes with that.

Answering the first of the questions just mentioned demands saying what the difference is between what 'a unidead's being created by God' stands for, and what 'God' stands for. Answering the second demands saying what the difference is between a-unidead's-being-created-by-God, considered abstractly ("absolutely", *absolute*), and the same, considered as an instantiated singular.

If 'God' is to stand for something strictly infinite, 'a unidead's being created by God', if it stands for anything, will stand for something other than God: something in at least some respect finite, but *viewed as standing in a non-necessary relation of ontological dependency towards the strictly infinite God*. That, or something very like it, is what 'created by God' has to mean where 'God' is to stand for something strictly infinite; and it need not, I think, be disputed by Dummett, who rightly complains that 'when people speak of God as Creator, they often entertain absurd imagery' (TR 104). He is concerned there with confusions of creation and initiation, and speaking of God as though 'existing *before* there was any time' (TR 105). I would add the more currently damaging confusions of creation with fabrications of some kind, to be found not uncommonly in the rhetoric of the "creationists" so evidently active in educational politics in the United States. Yet his own expression 'Creation is an act' (TR 104) itself could seem to sail close to the wind of absurdity, as some might understand it as meant to ascribe something specific (an act) to something supposed in no genus or species (a divine nature supposed in no way finite). If 'God is the Creator of the physical universe as a whole' (TR 104) is to be understood as 'the physical universe as a whole is something created by God', however, any surface suggestion of absurdity is removed. The 'act' can be understood as the actuality or "first act" of the physical universe, and the basic contention can be seen for one purporting to tell us about the physical universe as viewed in relation to God; not about God. 'God is the

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Creator of the physical universe as a whole' will then be understood as apt for telling us that the physical universe as a whole is (part of) an ultimately unfailingly ordered totality, not just a sum of things.

On the face of it, 'God' and 'a unidead's being created by God' could hardly sound anything other than totally different. But the conditional clause in 'a unidead's being created by God, if it stands for anything . . .' is not idle. Even if *being a unidead* is an intrinsically consistent concept, it does not follow that *being a unidead created by God* is. If 'an open goal's being missed' is unobjectionable, 'an open goal's being missed by (a strictly infinite) God' is not. The trouble is with 'created', in the sense of '*viewed as* non-necessarily dependent for its existence on something in no way dependent for its existence'. The difference between a unidead and a unidead-created-by-God does not appear from a comparison of what is there; or for that matter of what can in principle be observed to be there. It rests crucially on a discriminating judgment about what is observably there, a judgment not entailed by any amount of observed evidence. Even in the case where someone judges on the basis of all the evidence there in fact is, nothing in the evidence he has seen necessarily implies in addition "and those are all the relevent items of evidence that there are".

In that case, 'a __ created by God' can be allowed to be had, only where there is either some entity within the __, or with access to it, whatever it may be, who or which is at least in principle capable of "viewing" what is there *as* a creation, or not; and making the kind of judgment needed.

By definition, there is no such "viewer" within a unidead, and a unidead-created-by-God is intrinsically impossible. There is in that case no difference between what 'God' stands for and and anything 'a unidead created by God' might be imagined to stand for. There is nothing other than God, in that case, to be different from God.

But perhaps we, from our situation within the actual universe, can supply what is needed, by viewing a unidead, considered abstractly, in its intrinsic content, as something possible, within God's option-neutral power, to be created by God, if he wished to do so? This might well be the kind of possibility that a realist of some kind might look to. But can it advance his case?

If we are "viewers" of the kind needed, it follows that at any rate our actual universe is not a unidead, and that what is in question is not anything in some spatiotemporal region of our actual universe where no observation, never mind "viewing as", is practically possible.

The only other universes possible to be instantiated, where the supposition of a strictly infinite God is being made, are those which, considered abstractly, are not only intrinsically coherent, but are such as are contingent ultimately to co-exist, or not, with something strictly infinite. We have no access to the content of these, save within some fiction of ours, where the most they can have is "existence in the

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mind". For that matter, we have no more access to unideads themselves, considered in their intrinsic natures, even if they themselves are not inherently absurd. If the only existence they have in extra-mental reality, is in the infinite divine nature, where they may have to exist, but to exist indistinctly from it, then they are accessible to us only through the incomprehensible divine nature – which is to say, that they are totally inaccessible to us in their intrinsic content. This, incidentally, is a crucial difference between the states of affairs envisaged by many medieval Schoolmen as being abstractly possible within God's option-neutral power (within his "absolute" power, *de potentia absoluta dei*) and the "possible worlds" exploited, not always so critically, as semantic models in more recent times.

So, if there can be no such thing as a unidead-created-by-God, there can be no difference between what 'God' stands for and what 'a unidead's being created by God' stands for. If the latter cannot stand for anything, there is nothing then in extra-mental reality to *be* different from God. This answers that there is no difference, to the question, 'What would be the difference between God's creating a material universe, in the whole of which there never was any creature to experience it, and His creating nothing at all?' (TR 97).

'What difference would its *existing* make?', TR 97 asks further. If the 'it' refers to 'a material universe, in the whole of which there never was any creature to experience it', not to 'God's creating' one; and if 'universe' and 'creature' are being used neutrally there, then 'its existing' can be understood to mean its instantiation in extra-mental reality, *if* it should in fact be instantiated by God's will. (By 'neutrally' I mean: so as not necessarily to imply any relationship to an infinite God; perhaps rather to imply nothing more than 'state of affairs' and 'sentient or intelligent entity' respectively.) The question can then be asking about an envisaged difference between its existence if not instantiated, and its existence if instantiated. Whether instantiated or not, it has to exist ("prae-exist"), without limitation, in the infinite divine nature, and indistinctly from it, if there is any. The only difference then would be in its being limited in the one case, and not limited in the other.

But if a limitation is no kind of thing, no kind of *factum*, no part of the furniture of any world, but a way of viewing some existent, there is strictly no difference in what there is between the instantiated unidead – if one could be instantiated – and the unidead prae-existing in the infinite divine nature. By definition there are no "viewers" within the unidead, and if an infinite divine nature is incomprehensible, totally opaque to us, in what it is, whatever that may be, any limitations of any instantiated entity envisaged as instantiable within God's option-neutral ("absolute") power – a power to do things, ascribed to God, prescinding from whether it will or will not in fact be exercised – are going to be opaque to us too.

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So even a consistent realist's answer to 'What difference would its existing make?' will have to be that we humans, in the actual state and situation of man, do not and cannot know. And once again, what is crucial to the answer is not whether you are prepared to understand your assertions or other expressions in an anti-realist as against a realist manner, but whether you are prepared to take seriously the supposition of a strictly infinite God.

There is good reason for that, but it has ramifications which cannot be pursued here.

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