CrossMark

CONSIDERING *WHERE IS GOD IN A CORONAVIRUS WORLD?* AN EXERCISE IN CRITICAL THINKING

Peter Worley

This article is a critical response to a short book by John C. Lennox entitled Where is God in a Coronavirus World? *in which he rejects atheism as a world-view equipped to deal with an event such as the coronavirus crisis and makes a case for the Christian outlook as the best way to meet such a crisis. The aim of this article is not to affirm or deny theism, but to examine critically the key arguments put forward for Christianity and against atheism by Lennox. Because of the centrality of the appeal to free will by Lennox in his article, some time is spent considering the* free will response *to the problem of evil, in which some close examination of the Bible is undertaken. The article finishes by outlining a personal, humanistic, secular response to the coronavirus crisis, and addresses solace and hope, two things Lennox denies atheism can provide.*

This is a response to a recently published book called *Where Is God in a Coronavirus World?* by John C. Lennox.[1] The main aim is to examine the key arguments made by the author. My response is an exercise in critical thinking and I invite anyone to respond critically to my own examination, either by showing what I get (logically or factually) wrong, what is redeemable in Lennox's arguments, or by presenting better arguments for his conclusion. I will end with a personal, secular response to living in a coronavirus world.

Lennox begins with a question that is at the heart of his book: 'many are asking where God is – that is, if he is

doi:10.1017/S1477175620000408 © The Royal Institute of Philosophy, 2021
Think 57, Vol. 20 (Spring 2021)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

there at all'. He then adds this question: 'Where and from whom can we get real solace or hope?' (p. 11). He outlines some well-known disaster examples, Christchurch Cathedral, Coventry and Dresden cathedrals, in order to draw an important distinction between what is known as 'natural evil' events (those which result from a force of nature having nothing to do with human action) and 'moral evil' events (those which result from human actions). With qualifications, Lennox classifies coronavirus under *natural evil*. When either of these kinds of events happens, Lennox says that we often ask ourselves questions such as, 'Why has this happened to me, or to them? Why did they get infected and die, and I was spared? . . . Is there hope?' Lennox also asks, 'what shall I say about God when it comes to a pandemic like coronavirus, where we can see no positive dimension whatsoever – only unrelieved disaster?' (p. 19).

Atheism

He begins answering his questions by looking, first, at the atheist/pantheist positions. He describes atheism as a world-view 'which holds that this universe (or multi-verse) is all there is; there is no supernatural dimension', and Pantheism as a world-view 'which merges the concepts of God and the world into one impersonal entity' (p. 21). The title of his third chapter is 'Can Atheism Help?' (p. 22).

I suggest his argument that atheism cannot help falls foul of the fallacy of *wishful thinking*: that finding the implications of something undesirable or psychologically unacceptable means that it is false. Having quoted the philosopher David Hume's famous formulation of *the problem of evil*, which is at the heart of this book's question, he then asks, 'But where does this atheist path end up?' (p. 26). First, here is Hume's formulation of the problem:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then, is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?

To see where he thinks 'atheism ends up', Lennox turns to Richard Dawkins. Owing to space restrictions, I will paraphrase the first part. Dawkins begins by listing many examples of death and suffering that are happening in the world as he writes and he also describes the indifferent, natural processes that are at work behind these events. He then finishes with:

> The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music. (pp. 26–7, taken from Dawkins, *River Out of Eden*[2])

Lennox's first response is to say 'that Dawkins' deterministic version of atheism seems here to abolish the categories of good and evil and replace them with blind, pitiless indifference in a fatalistic universe' (p. 27).

There is nothing in the passage that abolishes the *concepts* of good and evil, only its presence in the universe independent of human conceptualisation. Naturalistic explanations do not necessarily 'abolish' the phenomena they describe, they merely offer an explanation that may be at odds with how we intuitively understand those phenomena to have occurred. Just as a scientific explanation of the sun (a stationary ball of gas and energy) does not deny the existence of the sun but only that it is a god riding across the sky on a chariot every day, atheism challenges the human intuition that there are anthropomorphic gods hidden behind natural occurrences.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lennox's mistake here is to assume that this is a dichotomy (A *or* B but not A *and* B), that *either* Dawkins' brand of reductionism is true *or* good and evil exist, when this is a *false dichotomy*: it could be true that Dawkins' description contains or is consistent with humans having evolved such concepts.

Very shortly after this, Lennox asks the following rhetorical question:

> If there is no God, where do the concepts of good and bad that all of us possess come from in the first place? We are left unable to say that the coronavirus and its effects are in any sense 'bad', because its consequences, including the fatalities it inflicts, are simply atoms rearranging themselves.

The question of where concepts of *good* and *bad* come from is one which many are interested to investigate regarding naturalistic explanations for such phenomena: psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, moral philosophers, neuroscientists and more. There are many plausible naturalistic explanations for how a moral sense has emerged in humans and Lennox considers not a single one of them.

There is also no problem in preserving the concept 'bad' for the coronavirus even in a world without god. At its simplest, 'bad' means nothing more than that which harms or hinders us or our projects, and this is not necessarily even a moral sense of 'bad', merely *prudential*, but it works perfectly well for anyone (including atheists) for describing the nature of the relationship between coronavirus and human beings.

Lennox is not clear about whether he means the *concepts* good and bad or that *goodness* and *badness* have some kind of metaphysical reality as constituent parts of reality, but it is false to say, wholesale, that the atheist world-view excludes any notion of good and evil, yet this is a central argument for Lennox. As well as taking a look at

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the plethora of literature and research examining naturalistic explanations for the concepts good and evil and the human behaviours that surround them, Lennox also needs to look into the distinction between *moral* and *prudential* notions of good and bad. It is contestable whether there is a real distinction here; perhaps, in the end, all moral behaviour is reducible to prudential calculation, and there is a compelling case that this is true. Either way, Lennox has not even shown an awareness of the distinction let alone any consideration of the issues surrounding it. As Lennox suggests, atheists should consider (he says 'answer', but there is no imperative that it must be *answered* only *considered*) the question set by Nietzsche, 'Why morality at all, when life, nature, and history are 'non-moral'?' (p. 30), but that is precisely what many philosophers have attempted to do. So, why does Lennox not consider any of those arguments? And even if we assume that atheists have not answered the question (or fail to do so), that would not, in and of itself, make *his* claims true. This is common within religious rhetoric: that because there may be difficulty in providing some kind of naturalistic explanation for something, it therefore follows that the religious explanation is true.[3] This is another false dichotomy: A (atheist explanation) or B (religious explanation); not A, therefore B. However, it could be the case that *both* A and B are false.

The Christian Answer

Let's turn to the case he makes for the Christian response to the problem of evil. As Lennox expresses it, the problem is: 'Can the coronavirus be reconciled with the existence of a loving god?' (p. 31). He suggests that 'Both viruses and earthquakes . . . appear to be essential for life.' He adds, 'If there is a creator God, he is by definition ultimately responsible for their existence . . . Yet why do they have to exist at all?' And he goes on to say, 'Surely, it is not enough to say – as some might – that the coronavirus

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pandemic is just biology doing what biology does? Surely there must be more to it than that?' (p. 35).

One very simple question: why 'surely'? Why does there have to 'be more to it than that'? Again, it could just be an unpalatable truth that 'that is all there is to it'. One's difficulty in accepting that 'that's all there is to it' is not reason enough to conclude that *that isn't all there is to it*. This fallacy appears again and again in this book. It says much more about Lennox and his own psychological needs than it does about what case he's making. The question he closes this section with is: 'Could God have made a world without viral pathogens?' (p. 35).

The short answer, given that God is all-powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient) and a loving God, is, of course, 'yes, he *could* have' (from his being omnipotent), but there is also a good case to be made that he *should* have (from his also being a loving and all-knowing God). However, Lennox's response to this is to make a claim about human nature. Even though coronavirus has earlier been established to fall into the category of *natural evil* (not *moral evil*), he now rehearses the usual Christian response to the problem of *moral evil* (which, as Lennox himself says, does not apply to *natural evil*): the 'free will response'. Even though this is a red herring to the issue of coronavirus, because some think it is a punishment by God for our sins, and because it is such a common response to the problem of evil, it is worth spending some time with this argument. The argument, as he puts it, goes something like this: in order that humans should not be automatons, god granted them free will, and the consequence of this is that humans are capable of doing evil as well as good: hence the existence of moral evil.

First of all, this argument emerged from the commentators on the Bible and nowhere is it made in the Bible itself. Because the concept of 'free will' is conspicuously absent from the Bible, it has had to be imported from outside the Bible in order to attempt to rescue the entire system from the problem of evil.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I should qualify that there are passages that refer to 'choice' and 'willingness' etc. (e.g. those often drawn upon are: Philemon 14, Genesis 1:26, Deuteronomy 30:19–20, Isaiah 48:18, Ecclesiastes 9:10, Proverbs 21:5, Matthew 22:37), but these in no way amount to an argument for God's giving humans free will. It is from such passages as these that Christians are left to *infer* that God must have given us free will, but it is not even implied let alone entailed. In addition to there being no argument for free will, neither is the *concept* of free will, in the significant sense, anywhere *explicitly* mentioned in the Bible. But a subtler point is that none of these references to voluntarism imply free will. If determinism is true, we are not denuded of our capacity for choice (we will still choose which cereal to eat, for example), we are simply denuded of any free will in the *making* of that choice (i.e. at the very same moment and under the very same conditions, we would choose the same cereal). For free will to be true, we must be able to make a different choice *at the same moment and under the same conditions* and it is this that the determinist denies, counting our intuition that we can as nothing but illusion, just like humans' earlier belief that the sun was a god riding across the skies on a chariot or that the earth was flat were illusions. All that can be inferred from the passages referenced above is that the writers of the Bible had the same language for action that we have today: 'choice', 'willingness', 'liberty' and so on, and as I have explained above, choice and willingness and other expressions of voluntarism are neither suggestive of free will nor are they proof that God gave us a free will.

The argument against the problem of evil is trotted out so often and habitually that the proponents have become blind to the host of assumptions the argument contains: that free will exists and is possible, that automatons would be any different from how we are now (if the determinists are right, we are automatons determined to believe in free will!), that God gave it to us, that the Bible *says* that God gave it to us, that a world without free will would be bad

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and that a world with free will is good and that preserving our free will is more important than a world without evil. All of these assumptions are highly contestable.

The most striking part of this section is when Lennox acknowledges *determinism* in the following sentence: 'Richard Dawkins thinks, and the late scientist Stephen Hawking thought, that we live in a deterministic universe.' Lennox denies this with, 'We do not.' And at this point I was expecting an argument for *why* we do not live in a deterministic universe. Here's what he says instead: 'God gave humans choice, and he remains sovereign – the Bible declares both clearly.'

This is astonishing because there is *simply no argument at all*, no *reasons* of any kind are offered, only two *assertions* (unsupported claims). What's more, there is no reference to where in the Bible it states that God gave humans free will or choice, that, it is said, 'the Bible declares . . . clearly' (see above). There is also something of a tension between the two assertions he makes that is borne out in the Bible. Whenever 'choice', 'liberty' or 'willingness' are mentioned it is done so as part of an imperative command (e.g. Deut. 30: 19–20, Isaiah 48:18, Proverbs 21:5, Joshua 24:15, Romans 13:2, Galatians 5:13), reminding one of the famous Henry Ford quote, when he said, 'any colour so long as it's black'! The 'choices' are rhetorical ways of saying: 'You must obey or else (die)!' (Romans 6:23). It is difficult to reconcile this with a genuine free will or with attempts to legitimately draw upon these examples as evidence of genuine free will in the Bible.

Lennox's slippage from talk of 'free will' into the word 'choice' here also allows me to bring in another distinction. *Choice* is not the same as *free will*. Unlike free will, choice is unproblematically compatible with determinism. Making a choice is what happens whether we are determined or not. In fact, the issue of whether my choice was a free choice hinges on whether I made my choice with a free will. Determinists speak of 'the illusion of free will'; they don't deny that we make choices, just about whether the choice

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was something we could have done differently. So, the concepts used in the Bible to describe voluntary action are compatible with determinism and are distinct from agency or free will.

Finally, although there are no explicit references in the Bible to free will (or statements or arguments that God gave us one) where you would expect to find them (especially around Genesis 1:26), there are explicit expressions of *determinism*, notably: Proverbs 16:9, 'a man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps' and, particularly this one, John 1:13, 'Which were born . . . not of the will of man but of God.' So, though free will has to be imported into the Bible from outside (by theologians such as Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther and so on), determinism – more specifically, 'divine determinism' – does not: it is, to use Lennox's words, 'declared clearly'.

Now we enter the internal world of the Bible, where the questions asked are answered only with reference to scripture. This is problematic for someone such as myself who is not already a fully paid up member of the club, as this response *begs the question* (makes a circular appeal), but it is worth taking a look at the internal logic of the biblical response that Lennox makes. Many will respond that the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis is a metaphor or to be understood symbolically. I agree with that, but given that Lennox (and plenty of other Christians) appeals to this story to explain the 'disagreement they had with God' and therefore why the world is full of pain, I will analyse this section in some detail.

The first thing that strikes me is that Lennox seems quite comfortable with what can only be described as the cruelty and vindictiveness of God. In response to his question, 'Why are things the way they are?', he appeals to the 'disagreement' between God and Adam and Eve in Genesis regarding 'the nature of life and the serious possibility of death' (p. 37). He says that they were 'endowed . . . with the marvellous gift of free will' and that their downfall was brought about 'through a misuse of that freedom' (p. 37).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

There are a number of problems with this. Ignoring for now that it does not anywhere say in the Bible that God gave them any free will (see above), the way it plays out for them can only be described as cruel.

Before they ate of the tree of knowledge, presumably, they were innocent and without sin. When my daughter was five years old she was innocent and precisely *because* of that innocence I knew that she would not seek out any inappropriate material high up on my bookshelf, so I felt no need to hide such material. When she is older, and less innocent, I will probably need to remove that more adult material and put it out of sight, but while she is innocent, there is no need. Imagine if I said to her, as a five-year-old, 'Whatever you do, DO NOT look at that book there!' It does not take a great leap of the imagination to entertain that she will probably look at it, when no one is around, if she is able to do so. This is the same book she would have paid no attention to if nothing was said. The point here is that 'sin' begins not in the mind of the innocent who has been forbidden from doing something, it comes from whoever it is who does the forbidding. In other words, sin must be prior to the action(s). We might even be inclined to say that *it is because* of their innocence (having no understanding of right and wrong) that the child, and Adam and Eve, did what they did. This analysis, which I contend is very human and intuitive, doesn't warrant long-term punishment. Further, how can other human beings be held accountable for the actions of their forefathers? If we are trying to import the notion of free will into all this, it makes no sense to then say that we all suffer for the actions of two people whose will has no significant connection to everyone else with regard to *agency* – that key concept within the notion of free will.

Also, it is not the case that Adam and Eve, once they knew about the tree of knowledge, simply weighed it up and then, on balance, decided to eat of the tree of knowledge having exercised their free choice. This is surely what would be expected if they are to be held responsible for

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

exercising their free will. Instead, they are tempted by the embodiment of evil itself, the serpent (which, presumably, stands for the devil, though it doesn't say so explicitly in Genesis). You can hardly be held morally responsible for acting under the influence of a malevolent deceiver you hadn't been warned about while you are still in a state of innocence, and therefore easily influenced. But, does the serpent even deceive anyone? It tells Eve that she will not surely die but will instead have her eyes opened, knowing good and evil and become as a god (Genesis 3:5). As it happens the serpent is *right*: upon eating the fruit they do not drop dead, which is what you'd expect from what God said ('Thou shalt surely die!'), and as it happens, they *do* come to know good from evil, they become moral creatures, and there is a very good case that this is what it is to become as a god: to have agency is to become a *prime mover*. You may be thinking that I have just found the bit in the Bible where it *does* say that God gave us free will, as I have just ascribed agency to Adam and Eve. Human beings undeniably conceive of themselves as moral creatures, which explains why we believe we have a free will, but it does not mean that we *have* a free will, only that we intuitively *feel* that we do (just as we intuitively *felt* that the earth was flat). Another problem is that the answer to the problem of evil says that humans *decided* to transgress and eat from the tree of knowledge *because* they had already been granted free will by God. That would mean that they would need to have already been in possession of free will, so one cannot appeal to the eating of the forbidden fruit to explain what it is that explains why they ate the forbidden fruit. So, not only is it impossible that God gave humans free will *before* their eating of the fruit, what is entailed from this analysis is that God did not 'endow humans with the marvellous gift of free will' (p. 37), but, contrary to the usual Christian narrative, God *denied* humans free will by putting the possibility of free will into the fruit of the tree of knowledge and then forbidding its consumption.[4]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The 'curse' (this is how Lennox describes it) that God makes in Genesis 3:17–18 comes after the fact and he punishes them differently from the promised sanction of death. This is what's known as 'moving the goal posts'. Any good parent/teacher will tell you that when you punish a child, firstly, you must tell them exactly what you will do; secondly, you must do what you said you'd do, and not something different; thirdly, it is good to give children a second chance, so that once they understand the punishment/consequences they will be able to think more carefully the next time. God seems to ignore all of these good parenting/teaching principles. Yes, god says that if thou eat of the tree of knowledge thou shalt surely die, but there is no reason to suppose that Adam and Eve, as innocents, would have had any understanding of what this means prior to eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. My daughter often ends up injured despite my repeated warnings about doing this and that because her innocence means that she does not understand. I may tell her off severely in order to deter her from making the same mistake in the future but I do not hold her morally responsible in any deep sense, because she is young, innocent and without understanding – actually, many of us (including Christians!) believe that we *need* to make mistakes in order to learn from them, that there is *value* in erring.

Lennox's next move is to try to provide evidence of the goodness of God's character. Apart from the fact that everything in the previous chapter seems to be evidence against this (see above), his basic move is what's known as 'wishful thinking'. This is a fallacy: no amount of wanting or needing something to be true, in and of itself, makes it true. Yet, this is a very common motivation for belief in God. Lennox expresses this in terms of 'ultimate justice'. He says that this is a 'fundamental difficulty that the atheistic worldview cannot cope with' (p. 45). Atheists, like myself, instead believe that we should do our best to establish systems of justice on earth, as there is no justice in the afterlife. Lennox himself seems to agree with the first part

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of this (p. 45), though it is unclear why, as he can surely wait for the afterlife and for God and Jesus to dispense justice then, and not rely on imperfect human endeavours.

The need for 'ultimate justice' is a kind of immaturity. When we are children, if anything perceived as unfair happens to us, we instantly appeal to our parents to distribute justice. And, in many cases, this will be done. It might not always be what we want exactly, but some kind of justice is meted out. As we get older we expect similar things from the justice system, but, just as with our parents, this system is sometimes wanting. The reason for this is that the justice system is limited and human-made and therefore open to all kinds of errors and corruption. That said, arguably, over the years the justice system has become better and it contains many more checks and balances to mean that it is not as susceptible to these imperfections as it once was, but, being human-made, it remains fallible. There is a case for saying that humans have conceived of something akin to 'ultimate justice' in that we have devised a way of understanding justice to go beyond the particular value systems of individual cultures and societies in the concept of *universal human rights* and *international law.* This is not without its problems, but it is certainly the case that secular humans do have recourse to some kind of system of 'ultimate justice'.

A Personal, Secular Response to the Coronavirus World[5]

This world, the only world I believe there is for us humans, will only get better if we *make* it better, limited by the extent to which we are *able* to make it better; after all, some things are in our control and some things aren't. Our lives are meaningful, even without a God, only if we *make* our lives meaningful; there is love in the world only if we *love*, there is beauty in the world for as long as we *apprehend* beauty and *create* beautiful things. Sometimes 'shit

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

happens': earthquakes, viruses, tsunamis, asteroid-strikes and sometimes, because of these, people and animals suffer greatly, but, whether we like it or not, these are just indifferent events that happen because of sets of physical causes. Humans – not gods – have developed all kinds of ways of dealing with these problems, and to someone such as myself that includes religions and everything good that they afford us, and we will continue to respond to problems that we are faced with as best we can with our limited resources. Probably the most pressing of these challenges, long-term, is climate change. Currently, it will be seen to be coronavirus, although this is a fairly short-term problem. We will either get on top of this (and other problems) or we will perish (sadly, some of us certainly will). I believe in naturalistic explanations for the causes of things only because *there's good reason and evidence to do so*. We know some stuff, and we know a lot more stuff than we used to know, but we are struggling to manage the technology we have created and developed for our own benefit. Having a secular outlook does not mean that I cannot recognize moral behaviour (however it has arisen and developed), and I believe that it is perfectly consistent with a naturalistic outlook. I fully accept that there are many mysteries in the universe, and some things we are simply incapable of (perhaps, *ever*) answering or explaining. That is just a fact we have, maturely, to live with. I don't know whether I have a free will; I think it likely that we do not and that free will is an illusion, but it is a question that has not been resolved philosophically and no amount of simply asserting that we have one will make it true. But, as humans, we have some knowledge, and it is that knowledge that will be our saviour, if we use it wisely. My life is painful, brief and fragile, and it is also meaningful, beautiful and full of love. (And although I would like to live a long, healthy life, my longevity is less important to me than the quality of my life.) My life is full of such things because I and others in my life make it so. This is what it is to be human. And quite apart from the truth of whether god exists, I just don't see any *need* for

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

such a belief. As it happens, I rather look forward to the oblivion death will bring, but that does not mean that I don't value the life I have. We humans have the opportunity to develop a mature response to our mortality and the fact that we have to do that says something about the extensive development of our (mysterious) consciousness. Actually, our being born into mortality gives us something gods don't have: *we have to live with the fact of death and the knowledge of the fact of death*, of being of the flesh, and we have to learn to respond to it, to *create* responses to it, to reconcile ourselves to it. This is really tough, and it is probably the root and motivation of all religious belief. This is something no immortal god need do. So, in a way, we are greater than gods because we live and we die, affording ourselves a maturity that gods can only dream of. This is what it is to be a good human without God: to live well and to die well as best we can according to our limited but growing understanding.

To return to Lennox's question, 'Where and from whom can we get real solace or hope?' *Solace* is available to atheists, as well as people of faith, through poetry, music, art, film, the natural world, history, literature (including the Bible and all the other religious texts), friends, family and community. The *numinous* is just as available to atheists as it is to people of faith. This is very often overlooked.

Atheists *hope*, too. Speaking personally, I hope for my daughter's future, I hope for a better world for her generation, I hope for a solution to the problems of climate change, poverty, famine and disease; I hope for many, many things. However, my hope, and that of other atheists/humanists, is directed towards the world we live in. And even though my *hoping* may breach the confines of my own life span and personal interests, it is a hope that is connected to action, implementation and instantiation, not a hope of wishful thinking, quietism and armchair judgmentalism. I hope, for instance, that a vaccine will be found to protect my daughter's generation (and ensuing generations) from a future of social distancing and restricted movement.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But the hope that I have is worthless if we do not facilitate human endeavour: science, research, trials, unified action and so on. And, oddly enough, when it comes down to it, most religious people, as well as praying, also trust in these things ('Trust in God, but always tie up your camel!' as Rumi said). It seems that prayer, belief and faith are not enough after all! And for those few people of faith who *do* put their complete trust in their faith *instead* of human medical and technological developments, the truth is that they are very vulnerable indeed and, therefore, more likely to die or suffer. It turns out that people of faith have no special treatment after all, however much they may convince themselves otherwise.

But even if our attempts to produce a vaccine fail, or if we remain vulnerable for a long time to come, I remain hopeful. Hopeful of human beings' ability to adapt to a 'new normal', to perhaps gain something positive from the restrictions to their lives, for there to be 'happy' consequences to what we now see as 'plain awful': to learn to be more communal, more caring, more moral. As Nietzsche said (something C. S. Lewis echoes in a more religious way in Lennox's piece), 'What doesn't kill me, makes me stronger', and this is as true for atheists as it is for people of faith, perhaps more so, given that what does kill us *really kills us!*

Peter Worley is a Visiting Research Associate at King's College London and also a PhD candidate at the University of Sheffield. peter@philosophy-foundation.org

Notes

[1] J. C. Lennox, *Where is God in a Coronavirus World*? (Epsom: The Goodbook Company, 2020).

[2] R. Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 133.

[3] I include a note made by Stephen Law, the editor of this piece: 'Worse still – there is a false dilemma involved as

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press

theism and naturalism are not the only alternatives. According to a *PhilPapers* survey only 50% of professional philosophers lean towards naturalism, while fewer than 15% lean towards theism. Even if naturalism were refuted, that wouldn't yet make much of a case for theism.'

[4] Thanks to Emma Worley for noticing this entailment from my analysis.

[5] I write this while suffering from persistent breathing problems as a result of having contracted coronavirus.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1477175620000408 Published online by Cambridge University Press