ACTA PHILOSOPHICA

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Redazione

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Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Pisa, n. 5 in data 17.02.2005.
Iscrizione al Registro Nazionale della Stampa, n. 3873, del 29.11.1992.
Rivista associata all'Unione Stampa Periodica Italiana.

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Gli articoli sono indicizzati da Academic Accelerator, Arts and Humanities Citation Index, atla cpli, «Current Contents/Arts and Humanities», Dialnet-Universidad de la Rioja, European Reference Index for the Humanities (erihplus), Google Scholar, gvk-Gemeinsamer Verbundkatalog, JournalTOCs, mla International Bibliography, Philosophy Documentation Center, Répertoire Bibliographique de la Philosophie, Scientific Indexing Services, Scopus, The Philosopher's Index, Web of Science (WoS), Zeitschriftendatenbank (zdb).

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Il capitolo *Norme redazionali*, estratto dalle *Regole*, cit., è consultabile *Online* alla pagina «Pubblicare con noi» di www.libraweb.net.

issn print 1121-2179 · e-issn 1825-6562

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITÀ DELLA SANTA CROCE

ACTA PHILOSOPHICA

Rivista internazionale di filosofia

FASCICOLO I · VOLUME 34 · ANNO 2025

PISA · ROMA
FABRIZIO SERRA · EDITORE
MMXXV

https://actaphilosophica.libraweb.net

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Fabrizio Serra editore
Uffici di Pisa: Via Santa Bibbiana 28, I 56127 Pisa
Uffici di Roma: Via Carlo Emanuele I 48, I 00185 Roma
fse@libraweb.net

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Rivista semestrale · *A Semiannual Journal*

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Stampato in Italia · *Printed in Italy*

SOMMARIO

THE MODAL-EPISTEMIC ARGUMENT: WINTEIN'S REBUTTALS REBUTTED

Emanuel Rutten

1. Introduction

In this paper, I respond to Stefan Wintein's (2022) criticisms of my (2022) responses to Wintein's (2018) objections to my modal-epistemic argument (MEA) for the existence of God, developed in Rutten (2014). I aim to show that none of his criticisms succeed. God is defined in Rutten (2014) as a 'personal first cause' or as a personal being that is the first cause of reality. There is at most one first cause because two first causes directly or indirectly cause each other, leading to a cycle of causes, which is impossible. Wintein (2022) presents the following correct representation of my MEA.

P_1 For every FoCons proposition p that is true in some possible world w there is some possible world w' (such that p is true in w' and) such that there is a subject in w' that knows$_R$ that p.

P_2 It is not the case that there is a possible world in which there is a subject that knows$_R$ that there is no personal first cause.

P_3 The proposition that there is no personal first cause is a FoCons proposition.

C In every possible world there is a personal first cause.

A *FoCons* proposition is a first-order consistently believable proposition. A *first-order* proposition only states something about the world itself, like 'John left Amsterdam'. First-order propositions do not state something about the propositional attitudes of a subject. The proposition 'John knows that he left Amsterdam' is thus not a first-order proposition. A *consistently believable* proposition is a proposition which is such that believing it is not self-contradictory. The proposition 'Nothing exists' is thus not consistently believable.

My MEA employs a quite specific conception of knowledge, denoted by knowledge$_R$ hereafter. This conception requires near-certainty produced in such a way that it isn't the result of dogmatism or other epistemically improper conditions. On the conception I employ, for a subject S to know that p is true, S cannot sincerely or genuinely doubt that p is true. That is, S cannot but believe that p is true. Such a degree of certain-

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https://doi.org/10.19272/202500701009 · «acta philosophica» · i, 34, 2025 · pp. 143-162
https://actaphilosophica.libraweb.net · © fabrizio serra editore
submitted: 1.6.2024 · reviewed: 1.11.2024 · accepted: 10.11.2024

ty is obtained when a proposition is (i) deductively proven, (ii) self-evident, (iii) grounded in indisputable sensory or inner experience (including indisputable memory), or (iv) based on indisputable testimony.

After these preliminary remarks, let me summarize the dialectical situation. Wintein (2018) presents four objections to my MEA, as recounted by Wintein (2022, p. 2) as follows:

> I argue (a) that premise P_1 is false, (b) that premise P_2 is false and (c) that the MEA is effectively equivalent to the *modal-epistemic Core argument*, the latter argument being clearly untenable. In addition, I presented (d) a parody argument to the Core argument […].

In Rutten (2022) I refute these objections. Wintein (2022) argues that my refutations fail by raising multiple criticisms of each of them. In the following eight sections, I shall evaluate Wintein's criticisms and argue that they are unsuccessful. Consequently, my MEA still stands. I will address Wintein's criticisms of my refutations in the same order as I initially refuted his objections, namely in reverse order. The next section thus begins with my evaluation of Wintein's criticisms of my refutation of objection (d), followed by seven sections, in which I assess his criticisms of my refutations of objection (c), (b), and (a). The tenth and last section concludes the paper.

2. The Parody Objection

Objection (d) is Wintein's (2018, pp. 321-322) parody objection. Wintein (2018, p. 320) claims that I am committed to (⋆):

(⋆) A proposition p is knowable$_R$ by some subject if and only if p is knowable$_R$ by a personal first cause.

Wintein (2018, p. 321) correctly points out that on (⋆) my MEA is equivalent to what he refers to as the (modal-epistemic) Core argument. The Core argument is obtained by substituting 'personal first cause' for 'subject' in premises P_1 and P_2. Subsequently, Wintein (2018, p. 322) presents the following Parody argument to the Core argument in order to show that the Core argument (and therefore also my MEA) is unsuccessful.

K_1 All possibly true FolKri propositions are knowable$_R$ by Saul Kripke.
K_2 The proposition that Saul Kripke does not exist is not knowable$_R$ by Saul Kripke.
K_3 The proposition that Saul Kripke does not exist is a FolKri proposition.
C_K The proposition that Saul Kripke exists is necessarily true.

As Wintein (2018, p. 321) explains, 'a *FolKri proposition* is any proposition that is expressible by a sentence of a first-order language with identity, without any predicate or function symbols and with a single constant symbol k that refers to Saul Kripke'.

In Rutten (2022, pp. 776-778) I argue that his parody objection fails for two reasons. First, I am not committed to (⋆). I come back to this in the next section. Second, I show that even on (⋆) his parody objection fails since – contrary to the first premise of the Core argument – K_1 is obviously false. Indeed, as I show in Rutten (2022, p. 778), the proposition 'The world contains exactly n objects,' denoted by World(n), is a FolKri proposition that is, for sufficiently large values of n, both possibly true and unknowable$_R$ by Saul Kripke. Consequently, for sufficiently large values of n, World(n) constitutes a successful counterexample to K_1.

Now, Wintein (2022, p. 4) purports to show that my World(n) counterexample to K_1 fails. As he writes:

One can argue that the (necessary) truth of [There are infinitely many prime numbers] renders any World(n) proposition (necessarily) false: when there are infinitely many prime numbers, it is false that there are exactly n objects, so that any World(n) proposition is false. In a similar vein, one can argue that World(n) propositions are necessarily false by pointing to the necessary truth of a proposition like [There are infinitely many propositions].

Indeed, if World(n) propositions are necessarily false, then my counterexample to K_1 is not successful, as I require my counterexample to be possibly true. However, as Wintein (2022, p. 4) correctly points out, if anti-realism about numbers and propositions is true, his attempt to show that my counterexample is unsuccessful fails. To preempt a move to anti-realism, Wintein suggests that embracing anti-realism may be a price that I cannot pay. But why would this be the case? To conclude that my counterexample is unsuccessful, Wintein must demonstrate that embracing anti-realism is indeed a price I cannot afford – a task he does not undertake. Therefore, Wintein (2022) has not shown my counterexample from World(n) propositions to be unsuccessful. Thus, even on (⋆), Wintein's (2018) parody objection still fails. Moreover, as will become clear by the end of this section, I'm not dialectically forced to embrace anti-realism with respect to numbers and propositions.

Wintein (2022, p. 4), however, offers one final criticism. He contends that the question of whether I can or cannot pay the price of embracing anti-realism can be sidestepped. He aims to do this by presenting a slight variation of his parody argument, which, according to him, is immune to my counterexample:

> Let a *Fol^x Kri proposition* be any proposition that is expressible by a sentence of a first-order predicate language with *1 variable x*, with identity, without any predicate or function symbols and with a single constant symbol $\varkappa$ that refers to Saul Kripke. Let *the Parody^x argument* be obtained from the Parody argument by replacing 'FolKri proposition(s)' with 'Fol^x Kri proposition(s)' throughout. The Parody^x argument is immune to Rutten's objection from World(n) propositions and fulfils the dialectical role of the (original) Parody argument equally well: it vividly illustrates that the modal-epistemic *Core argument* is untenable.

If this slightly adjusted parody argument is a successful parody to the Core argument, then, on (⋆), my MEA would indeed be unsuccessful. However, Wintein's slightly adjusted parody argument does not succeed. For again – contrary to the first premise of the Core argument – the first premise of his slightly adjusted parody argument is obviously false.

Here is a counterexample to it. Let $P(0)$ be the true proposition '$\varkappa{=}\varkappa$' and for each natural number n, let $P(n{+}1)$ be the proposition $\neg P(n)$. For example, $P(1) = \neg(\varkappa{=}\varkappa)$, and $P(4) = \neg\neg\neg\neg(\varkappa{=}\varkappa)$. Here, $P(1)$ is false, and $P(4)$ is true. In general, $P(n)$ is true if and only if n is an even number. Let N be an even natural number so large that it is impossible for Saul Kripke to be presented with $P(N)$ in such a way that he can count and thereby know with near certainty that the number of negations in $P(N)$ is even. Consequently, Saul Kripke cannot know$_R$ that $P(N)$ is true. Yet, $P(N)$ is necessarily and thus possibly true. Hence $P(N)$ is indeed a successful counterexample to the first premise of the adjusted parody argument, demonstrating that the adjusted parody argument doesn't succeed.

Note that $P(N)$ is also a successful counterexample to the first premise of Wintein's original parody argument. So, even if my World(n) counterexample to this premise

fails (e.g., on realism about numbers and propositions), the original parody argument remains unsuccessful. I conclude that Wintein's criticisms of my refutation of his parody objection fail. Wintein's objection (d) remains successfully refuted.

3. The Core Argument Objection

Objection (c) is Wintein's (2018, pp. 320-321) Core argument objection. He maintains that the modal-epistemic Core argument, even without considering any potential parodies to it, already reveals *itself* to be clearly circular and thus flawed. Since he maintains that I am committed to (⋆), and thus to my MEA being equivalent to the Core argument, he concludes that I have no choice but to accept that the MEA is flawed as well. Yet, if the Core argument is clearly circular, why did Wintein propose parodies to it? Parodies, moreover, that I have shown to be ineffective in the previous section. The Core argument may therefore not be clearly circular.

Indeed, there might be compelling independent reasons to accept the first premise of the Core argument that are epistemically more forceful than the suggestion that the FoCons proposition 'There is no personal first cause' is possibly true and therefore a successful counterexample to the first premise of the Core argument. I am not asserting the existence of such reasons; instead, I am emphasizing that such reasons might exist – either reasons adjusted from reasons to accept the first premise of the MEA, or entirely different sorts of reasons. If such reasons exist, the conclusion of the Core argument, namely that it is necessarily false that there is no personal first cause, follows in a non-circular manner from its premises. Now, if the Core argument were to be clearly circular, the absence of such reasons would be manifestly clear from merely looking at the Core argument – which is simply not the case.

One could even argue that since on (⋆) the Core argument is equivalent to MEA, the MEA not being clearly circular carries over to the Core argument not being clearly circular. In any case, since Wintein hasn't established that the Core argument is clearly circular, his objection (c) remains unsuccessful.

I could stop here. However, as I explain in Rutten (2022, p. 779), since I am actually not committed to (⋆), objection (c) is unsuccessful even if I were to accept that the Core argument is clearly circular. As I write:

> A personal first cause may indeed be a very strong knower$_R$ as Wintein points out. A personal first cause may know$_R$ a great many propositions. In his article, Wintein successfully argues that I am committed to the former claim. He does this by providing an overview of various propositions I take to be knowable$_R$ by a personal first cause, such as 'There is a personal first cause,' 'A Spaghetti monster does not exist,' and so-called Gödel propositions. But from this it does not follow that I am committed to the claim that *each and every* proposition knowable$_R$ by some subject is knowable$_R$ by a personal first cause.

In short: many is not all. There being *many* propositions knowable$_R$ by some subject that are knowable$_R$ by a personal first cause doesn't force me to accept that this holds for *all* propositions knowable$_R$ by some subject. Wintein (2018) thus hasn't shown that I am committed to (⋆). Since objection (c) depends on (⋆), it fails even if I were to accept that the Core argument is clearly circular. Wintein (2022) does not address my 'many is not all' refutation. He remains wholly silent about this important point. Therefore, I again could stop here. Objection (c) remains flawed even if the Core argument is clearly circular.

In Rutten (2022, pp. 779-780) I also provide two counterexamples to (★), showing that (★) is in fact false. Wintein's (2022, pp. 5-8) criticism of my refutation of objection (c) is limited to arguing that both counterexamples are unsuccessful. In what follows I show that his criticism is unsuccessful.

4. The First Counterexample to (★): Counterfactuals of Libertarian Freedom

A counterfactual of libertarian freedom (CLF) is a proposition of the form 'Agent *S* would libertarianly freely do action *A* in circumstances *C*'. As I explain in Rutten (2022, p. 780), a CLF for a libertarian creaturely free agent *S* constitutes a counterexample to (★) in case it is knowable$_R$ by agent *S* but unknowable$_R$ by a personal first cause. Wintein (2022, pp. 5-6) offers three criticisms of my counterexample from CLFs.

First, according to Molinism, God knows all counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, i.e., God knows all CLFs for libertarian creaturely free agents. Thus, as Wintein (2022, p. 5) asserts, on Molinism my counterexample fails. But my counterexample is not incompatible with Molinism *tout court*. It is only incompatible with those Molinist accounts that are premised on the very demanding conception of knowledge I deploy for my MEA. Molinist accounts premised on less demanding conceptions of knowledge do not refute my counterexample. Therefore – contrary to what Wintein (2022, p. 5) claims – the MEA does not have to become less attractive for friends of Molinism.

In any case, as long as the debate on Molinism remains unsettled, my counterexample from CLFs emphasizes the need for skepticism regarding the truth of (★). This is because (★) requires Molinism to be true on the highly demanding conception of knowledge I deploy for my MEA – which is less likely than Molinism being true on a less demanding conception of knowledge.

Second, Wintein (2022, p. 5) points out that I have not argued that CLFs for libertarian creaturely free agents are knowable$_R$ by those agents. However, I do not have to argue for this. To counter (★), it is already sufficient to argue that there is *at least one* CLF for a libertarian creaturely free agent that is knowable$_R$ by that agent. And this is a significantly weaker claim. Indeed, it is reasonable to assert that there is at least one possible world in which at least one libertarian creaturely free agent *S* knows$_R$ that *S* would libertarianly freely do action *A* in circumstances *C*. Agent *S* would know$_R$ this perhaps by indisputable inner experience that is such that *S* cannot sincerely or genuinely doubt that *S* would do action *A* in circumstances *C*. That is to say, agent *S* would know this with near-certainty because it would be a form of self-denial for *S* to claim that *S* would not do *A* in *C*, just as it would be a form of self-denial for me to claim that I do not believe that I have two hands. Precisely this is what knowledge$_R$ amounts to. Agent *S* knows with near-certainty, say by virtue of some ultimate inner existential reason, that *S* will no matter what not refrain from doing *A* in *C*. Agent *S* knows with near-certainty that *S* will do *A* in *C* come what may. That is to say, agent *S* knows$_R$ *S* will do *A* in *C*.

Moreover, it is not metaphysically impossible for *S* to refrain from doing *A* in *C*. For indeed, *S* is libertarian free to refrain from doing *A* in *C*. Agent *S* not doing *A* in *C* is still *metaphysically possible*. Agent *S can* refrain from doing *A* in *C*. But it not *feasible* for *S* to refrain from doing *A* in *C*. Agent *S will not* refrain from doing *A* in *C*. So there is no insurmountable tension between *S* being a libertarian free agent and *S* possessing

said knowledge. Especially since I do not claim that all CLFs for libertarian creaturely free agents are known$_R$ by those agents. Just one possible world and just one agent in that world for which this is the case will do – which is given the aforementioned not unreasonable.

Third, Wintein (2022, p. 6) purports to show that arguing that CLFs for libertarian creaturely free agents are counterexamples to (*) in order to defend the MEA is self-undermining. He considers the following two propositions:

(4) Kripke would (libertarianly) freely do action *A* in circumstances *C*,
(5) Kripke does not exist.

Wintein claims that the conjunction of (4) and (5) – denoted by him as (4.5) – is a possibly true Focons proposition that is unknowable$_R$ by any subject, so that I allegedly have no choice but to accept that (4.5) is a successful counterexample to P_1. This objection fails though. For (4.5) is not possibly true. Proposition (5) and thus (4.5) is clearly false in possible worlds where Kripke exists. Now consider possible worlds in which Kripke does not exist. In those worlds (4) and thus (4.5) is false as well. The falsehood of (4) follows from Russell's apt and famous logical analysis of the bald king of France. The logical form of (4) is 'There is an x such that x is Kripke and x would (libertarianly) freely do action *A* in circumstances *C* and for all y (y is Kripke) entails (y=x)'. In those possible worlds this form is indeed false since there is no x in those possible worlds that satisfies the first condition. I conclude that (4.5) is false in all possible worlds and thus (4.5) is not possibly true. It is therefore indeed not a successful counterexample to P_1.

Wintein may attempt to reinstate his third criticism by substituting (4) with one of the following:

(4^1) If Kripke exists, then Kripke will (libertarianly) freely do action *A* in circumstances *C*,
(4^2) If Kripke would have existed, Kripke would have (libertarianly) freely done action *A* in circumstances *C*,
(4^3) If Kripke were to exist, Kripke would (libertarianly) freely do action *A* in circumstances *C*,
(4^4) In all possible worlds where Kripke exists, Kripke does (libertarianly) freely action *A* in circumstances *C*.

Now, let $(4.5)^1$, $(4.5)^2$, $(4.5)^3$, and $(4.5)^4$ respectively denote the conjunction of (4^1) and (5), (4^2) and (5), (4^3) and (5), and (4^4) and (5). Wintein may claim that $(4.5)^1$, $(4.5)^2$, $(4.5)^3$, and $(4.5)^4$ are all possibly true and unknowable$_R$ by any subject, so that I have to concede that $(4.5)^1$, $(4.5)^2$, $(4.5)^3$, and $(4.5)^4$ are all successful counterexamples to P_1.[1]

However, this will not help Wintein in his attempt to substantiate his third criticism. To demonstrate that his third criticism remains unsuccessful, I will further elaborate on my concept of first-order propositions. As discussed, a first-order proposition is a proposition about the world and not about propositional attitudes towards the world. Here 'world' is context dependent. For it refers to the possible world in which a first-order proposition is evaluated. More specifically, first-order propositions have an important presupposition at their core. A first-order proposition assigns qualities to one or more

[1] To preempt the suggestion that Kripke-like creatures might know$_R$ what Kripke would freely do in those circumstances, Wintein may substitute 'Kripke' with 'Kripke or Kripke-like creatures' in all these propositions.

entities, which are presupposed to exist in the possible world where the proposition is evaluated. Alternatively, a first-order proposition may attribute non-existence to one or more entities in that same possible world, or it may do both.

Let me clarify this presupposition with three examples. The proposition 'Kurt Gödel loves logic' is a first-order proposition. By attributing a quality to Kurt Gödel, it presupposes that Kurt Gödel exists. This presupposition is incorrect in possible worlds where Kurt Gödel doesn't exist. In those possible worlds the first-order proposition 'Kurt Gödel loves logic' still has a truth value though, namely the value 'false'. This follows from Russell's aforementioned analysis of the bald king of France. The logical form of 'Kurt Gödel loves logic' is 'There is an x such that x is Kurt Gödel and x loves logic and for all y (y is Kurt Gödel) entails (y=x)'. And in those possible worlds this form is indeed false since there is no x in those possible worlds that satisfies the first condition. Yet, as said, the proposition 'Kurt Gödel loves logic' is first-order since in those possible worlds it (albeit incorrectly) still presupposes that Kurt Gödel exists.

Consider, as a second example, the counterfactual proposition 'If the Loch Ness Monster would have existed, it would have been discovered'. This proposition is not first-order. For it doesn't presuppose the existence of the Loch Ness Monster. As a third example, the counterfactual 'If John would have left Amsterdam, he would have become a musician' is first-order. For the proposition presupposes that John exists in the world in which the proposition is evaluated. The proposition simply attributes a quality to John, namely that he would have become a musician if he would have left Amsterdam. The proposition doesn't specify John's existence as being merely hypothetical. In general, counterfactuals are first-order only if they deal with changes to entities that are presupposed to exist. That is to say, first-order counterfactuals consider an entity that is presupposed to exist and assert what would have been the case if that entity would have been different in some way.

Now, the first of the four above substitutions of (4) – i.e., 'If Kripke exists, then Kripke would (libertarianly) freely do action A in circumstances C' – doesn't presuppose that Kripke exists. It merely specifies a hypothetical situation in which, if it is true that Kripke exists, it is true that he would do action A in circumstances C. Given the above-mentioned presupposition underlying first-order propositions, proposition 4^1 is thus not a first-order proposition. For it lacks the presupposition that Kripke exists. Therefore $(4.5)^1$ is not first-order either and thus not a successful counterexample to P_1.

The same holds for the other three alleged counterexamples $(4.5)^2$, $(4.5)^3$, and $(4.5)^4$. For also 4^2, 4^3, and 4^4 do not presuppose that Kripke exists in the possible worlds in which these propositions are evaluated. Each of them either specifies a merely hypothetical situation in which Kripke exists or claims something about possible worlds in which Kripke exists without asserting that the possible world in question is among them. As a result propositions 4^2, 4^3, and 4^4 are not first-order propositions either, and therefore the same holds for $(4.5)^2$, $(4.5)^3$, and $(4.5)^4$. But then $(4.5)^2$, $(4.5)^3$, and $(4.5)^4$ are also not successful counterexamples to P_1.

I conclude that Wintein's third criticism to my first counterexample fails as well. Since this is his last criticism to my first counterexample, it follows that my counterexample from CLFs remains successful.

5. The Second Counterexample to (⋆): What it is Like to be Propositions

My second counterexample to (⋆) draws inspiration from Thomas Nagel's (1974) famous *What Is It Like to Be a Bat*. I maintain in Rutten (2022, p. 779) that at least part of what it is like to be a bat can be expressed by a proposition q. Moreover, I argue in Rutten (2022, p. 779) that only (beings sufficient similar to) bats can know$_R$ q. Since a personal first cause of reality is not (sufficiently similar to) a bat, it follows that q is unknowabe$_R$ by a personal first cause. So proposition q is a counterexample to (⋆). Wintein (2022, pp. 6-8) offers four criticisms of my counterexample from 'what it is like to be' propositions.

First, Wintein (2022, pp. 6-7) aims to show that it is possible that a personal first cause is (sufficiently similar to) a bat:

> Now, consider a possible world *w* that is populated only by bats and bat-like creatures. It seems perfectly possible that this world *w* has a personal first cause who created 'all bats in his image'. Such a personal first cause then, would arguably be sufficiently similar to a bat.

This goes too quickly, though. A personal first cause is the absolute origin of reality. It is the direct or indirect cause of everything else. Since a personal first cause is the ultimate source of being, it is also the source *of* space and time. But then a personal first cause is *not* an object *within* space and time. Since material objects are plausibly located in space and time, it follows that a personal first cause is not a material object. To make the point slightly differently, since a personal first cause is the direct or indirect cause of space and time, and since nothing causes itself – indeed, in order for something to cause itself, it would already have to exist, which leads to a contradiction – it follows that a personal first cause exists *beyond* space and time and thus immaterially. A personal first cause is therefore an uncaused, a-spatial, a-temporal and immaterial being. As such it is not subject to the limits of space and time. It's eternal. Bats, on the other hand, are caused material beings located in (a small region of) space and time. While a personal first cause is *infinite* in the sense that it transcends space and time, bats are *finite* beings in the sense that their immanent existence is limited by (a small region of) space and time.

Moreover, since a personal first cause is uncaused, it exists independently or 'in and of itself'. That is to say, a personal first cause exists by virtue of its own nature or by virtue of a brute fact, and thus inherently, while bats depend on an external cause for their existence. Finally, as material, spatial and temporal beings, bats are subject to change through time, while a first cause is timeless and therefore plausibly also changeless or immutable.

Considering all these substantial metaphysical differences between a personal first cause and bats, it follows that bats are not sufficiently similar to a personal first cause. These differences are entailed by the very definition of 'first cause' rather than by some contingent conception of 'personal first cause'. Therefore, the aforementioned holds plausibly true for all possible worlds, implying that Wintein's world *w* is not a possible world. For in *w* the personal first cause is supposed to be a bat or a bat-like creature, thereby (as being a first cause) incorrectly representing a material object in space and time. Wintein's (2022) first criticism thus fails.

Second, Wintein (2022, p. 7) criticizes that I bluntly assume that only (beings sufficiently similar to) bats can know$_R$ proposition q. This is not a blunt assumption though. Quite to the contrary. For it is *prima facie* surely plausible to assert that only a (being sufficiently similar to a) bat can know$_R$ what it is like to be a bat. Indeed, one needs the perspective of a bat to know$_R$ what it is like to be a bat and reasonably only bats have the perspective of a bat. Precisely this was the central claim of Nagel's famous paper.

I would add that it even seems analytically or conceptually true that only bats can know$_R$ what it is like to be a bat. Beings that are not a bat can perhaps know$_R$ what it is like *for them* or what it is like *from their perspective* to be a bat. But even then there is an unbridgeable epistemic gap between said knowledge and knowing$_R$ what it is like *for a bat* to be a bat. This applies as well to a being that is a personal first cause. A personal first cause may know$_R$ what it is like *for a personal first cause* to be a bat. Yet, since a personal first cause is not a bat, there is no epistemic pathway from such knowledge to knowing$_R$ what it is like *for a bat* to be a bat. So, even if a personal first cause is able to grasp what it is like to be a bat from its infinite point of view, the personal first cause would still not know$_R$ what it is like to be a bat from the finite point of view of a bat. In order to know$_R$ that latter, the personal first cause would have to become identical to a bat – which is plausibly metaphysically impossible.

Third, Wintein (2022, p. 7) aims to argue that a personal first cause could know$_R$ proposition q:

> A personal first cause may be completely dissimilar to a bat as it is so much more than a bat. But exactly because it is so much more than a bat, a personal first cause may, in contrast to fish, birds, humans and other beings that are dissimilar to bats, know$_R$ q […] on the basis of its unique, indisputable bat-creating experience or intuition.

This does nothing, though, to invalidate my previous argument for the claim that a personal first cause cannot know$_R$ q. It merely emphasizes my point that the transcendent perspective of a personal first cause is indeed notably different from the immanent perspective of a bat. My previous argument departs precisely from this difference in order to argue that a personal first cause cannot know$_R$ q.

Moreover, there is no compelling reason to believe that indisputable experience of *creating* bats also reasonably results in knowing$_R$ what it is like to actually *be* a bat. And his appeal to intuition amounts to nothing more than mere stipulation. My previous argument – that even if a personal first cause could understand from its infinite viewpoint what it is like to be a bat, it still wouldn't have the specific knowledge from the finite perspective of a bat – is thus not affected by Wintein's suggestions.

In addition to both ineffective suggestions, Wintein points out that Zagzebski (2016) has argued that God is omnisubjective. Here, as Zagzebski (2016, p. 435) describes it, omnisubjectivity is 'the property of consciously grasping with perfect accuracy and completeness every conscious state of every creature from that creature's own perspective, a perspective that is unique.' Now, (i) if Zagzebski indeed provides a successful argument for an omnisubjective God to be possible, and (ii) if this argument entails that it is possible for a personal first cause to know$_R$ what it is like to be a bat, and (iii) if this argument is epistemically more forceful than my previous argument, then I would have to concede that it is possible for a personal first cause to know$_R$ q. My counterexample from 'what it is like to be' propositions would in that case have been refuted. In what follows I shall assess Zagzebski's argument and show that it is not successful.

It thus does not satisfy condition (i). Hence her argument doesn't refute my second counterexample.

Zagzebski describes specific conceptions of omniscience, omnipresence and prayer that require God to be omnisubjective. But even if these conceptions necessitate an omnisubjective God, it, of course, does not follow that an omnisubjective God is possible. Theists in favor of those conceptions, such as Zagzebski, clearly desire an omnisubjective God to be possible. But this desire surely does not make it true that such a God possibly exists. And if an omnisubjective God is impossible, they have no choice but to abandon those conceptions in favor of other senses of omniscience, omnipresence and prayer.

However, Zagzebski also aims to argue that an omnisubjective God is in fact possible. She imagines that our experiences of partial and imperfect empathy can be expanded to total perfect empathy or to a complete and accurate representation of all conscious states of all creaturely beings. This would demonstrate that God is able to grasp all those states perfectly. And since direct acquaintance with them is what omnisubjectivity amounts to, it would follow that an omnisubjective God is possible.

But this argument fails. It doesn't bridge the earlier mentioned epistemic gap. In order for God to know what it is like to be a creaturely being – say, a bat – God must know what it is like to be a bat from the perspective of the bat. God must assume the first-person perspective of a bat. Zagzebski takes it that by virtue of grasping the bat's conscious states – since those states are from the bat's first-person point of view – God does grasp those states from the bat's point of view. This does not follow though. God acquires copies of conscious states of a bat in God's own conscious space. Those copies thus exist within a different transcendental perspective, namely God's point of view instead of the bat's point of view. Plausibly, God cannot escape or surpass God's own perspective. For God cannot refrain from being God. But then God cannot ascertain whether acquiring copies of conscious states from a bat's perspective within God's own perspective is accompanied or associated by qualitative differences between the original and copied states, and if so, to what degree. What it is like to be a bat is thus not accessible with a level of accuracy and completeness required for omnisubjectivity.

Moreover, the acquired copies of the bat's conscious states co-exist in God's conscious space with conscious states that are unique to God – such as God's self-awareness of being God. And since God cannot transcend God's first-person perspective, God cannot detect whether this co-existence does or does not lead to qualitatively different conscious states in God's consciousness compared to the original states in the bat's consciousness. So God cannot establish completely and accurately what it is like to be a bat and Zagzebski's argument fails. This line of reasoning mirrors my previous argument.

Let me make the point also in a slightly different way. Contrary to conscious states, a first-person perspective or a point of view is not a thing that can be grasped. One needs a point of view in order to be able to grasp anything at all. A point of view is thus epistemically prior to the phenomenal activity of grasping and therefore inherently elusive between different subjects. It is precisely this transcendental nature of points of view that makes it impossible for subjects with different points of view to grasp them. The conscious states of a subject are thus always already bound to the point of view of that

subject and therefore not sharable. For it is impossible to ascertain whether something happens – and if so, what – when such states are transferred to a different first-person perspective.

Fourth, Wintein (2022, p. 7) claims that my second counterexample q to (★) is *prima facie* self-undermining. For this criticism he considers the following proposition:

(6) There are no bats or bat-like creatures.

According to Wintein, the conjunction of q and (6) – denoted by him as (q.6) – is an unknowable$_R$ possibly true proposition and therefore a counterexample to P_1 in case (q.6) is also a FoCons proposition. He suggests though that I might argue that (q.6) is not consistently believable, so that it is not a FoCons proposition and his fourth criticism doesn't hold water. Wintein (2022, p. 7) adds that such a refutation would require me to clarify how I understand the notion of *proposition* within the context of my MEA. In fact, as Wintein (2022, p. 8) concedes, 'without such understanding, it is hard to properly evaluate whether appealing to proposition q is self-undermining'. But then Wintein's fourth criticism is not effective. For Wintein (2022, p. 8) admits that he has actually not shown that my second counterexample is self-undermining. Whether this is so seems to depend on my account of the notion of proposition as it figures in my MEA. It is not needed though to unpack my account of propositions. For, as I shall show now, Wintein's fourth criticism even fails if (q.6) is consistently believable. My refutation of his fourth criticism is broadly similar to my refutation of Wintein's third criticism of my first counterexample. I demonstrate that (q.6) is not possibly true.

Proposition (6) and thus (q.6) is false and hence not true in possible worlds where there are bats or bat-like creatures. Now consider possible worlds in which there are no bats or bat-like creatures. If there are no bats or bat-like creatures, there is reasonably also no fact of the matter about what it is like to be a bat. Without bats or bat-like creatures, there is no experience of being a bat that makes q true. In those possible worlds q is thus arguably not true, so that (q.6) is not true either. Furthermore, proposition q can be understood as attributing one or more qualities to experiences of being a bat. But if there are no bats or bat-like creatures, and thus no experiences of being a bat either, then, following again Russell's famous logical analysis of the bald kind of France, q is in fact false and therefore indeed not true. Besides, if the notion of 'what it is like to be a bat' is inherently tied to the existence of bats or bat-like creatures, as it is based on their qualia or subjective experiences, then, in possible worlds where bats or bat-like creatures – and therefore also experiences of being a bat – do not exist, q might not even be a meaningful proposition. But if proposition q is meaningless in those possible worlds, q is certainly not true in those worlds.

From these three closely related considerations it follows that in possible words without bats or bat-like creatures q is not true. Thus proposition (q.6) is not true in those possible worlds either. But then (q.6) is not possibly true. Consequently, (q.6) is not a successful counterexample to P_1 and Wintein's fourth criticism of my second counterexample to (★) indeed fails.

Note that a move from proposition q to a counterfactual proposition $q^\star$ of the form 'If there were (or would have been) bats or bat-like creatures, then q' does not help Wintein either. For it can be argued that also $q^\star$ is reasonably not true and even meaningless in possible words without bats or bat-like creatures. But even if this cannot be argued, such a move fails. For, in any case, proposition $q^\star$ is not a first-order proposition

and thus not a FoCons proposition – so that ($q^\star$.6) is not a FoCons proposition either and thus not a successful counterexample to P_1. The reason $q^\star$ is not first-order is the same as the reasons I gave for propositions 4^1, 4^2, 4^3, and 4^4 not being first-order. A counterfactual is first-order only if it is about an entity that the counterfactual correctly or incorrectly presupposes to exist in the possible world in which it is evaluated. This condition is not satisfied by proposition $q^\star$.

So, then, Wintein's fourth criticism of my second counterexample to (⋆) is indeed unsuccessful. Since this is his last criticism of my second counterexample, it follows that my second counterexample is and remains successful. I therefore conclude that Wintein's criticisms of both counterexamples do not succeed. Both counterexamples to (⋆) are still successful.

However, even if both counterexamples would be unsuccessful, Wintein's Core argument objection or objection (c) is still flawed. For as I explain in Rutten (2022) and above, I am in fact not committed to (⋆). Indeed, acknowledging that there are *many* knowable$_R$ FoCons propositions that are knowable$_R$ by a personal first cause doesn't force me to accept that this applies to *all* such propositions. And, as said, this 'many is not all' response is not addressed by Wintein (2022) at all. I've argued above as well that the Core argument is not clearly circular. Thus, Wintein's objection (c) is also unsuccessful if I would have been committed to (⋆). I conclude, then, that Wintein's criticisms of my refutation of his Core argument objection fail. Therefore, also Wintein's objection (c) is and remains unsuccessful.

6. The Objection that Premise P_2 is False

Objection (b) is Wintein's (2018, pp. 318-319) personal co-creator counterexample to premise P_2 of my MEA. As he argues, given that I am committed to the possibility of there being a personal first cause that knows$_R$ to be a personal first cause, I am also committed to the possibility of there being exactly two personal co-creators of the world, of which (at least) one of them knows$_R$ to be a personal co-creator. Being a personal co-creator entails that there is no personal first cause. A personal co-creator that knows$_R$ to be a personal co-creator thus also knows$_R$ that there is no personal first cause, so that it follows that premise P_2 is false.

In Rutten (2022, pp. 782-784) I show that this counterexample to P_2 fails. Contrary to a personal co-creator, a personal first cause is the single source of *all* being. Only a personal first cause sits at the root of reality. Not just a part of reality, but *everything* that exists ultimately originates from a personal first cause. From this fundamental ontological difference between a personal first cause and a personal co-creator, I argue that while it is possible that a personal first cause knows$_R$ to be a personal first cause, it is not possible for a personal co-creator to know$_R$ that it is a personal co-creator. More specifically, in Rutten (2022, pp. 783-784) I discern seven seemingly epistemic ways for a personal co-creator to obtain knowledge$_R$ of being a personal co-creator; and I demonstrate that all seven ways fail. Moreover, these ways are reasonably collectively exhaustive. Therefore, Wintein's (2022) personal co-creator counterexample is unsuccessful.

In response to my analysis, Wintein (2022, p. 8) merely asserts, without presenting any supporting arguments, that it comes across to him as if double standards of knowability$_R$ are being applied. Wintein's response is dialectically inappropriate, as he does not explain why his accusation of seemingly double standards is warranted.

Wintein continues his criticism of my refutation of his personal co-creator counterexample though. He argues that my refutation is self-undermining. If a personal co-creator cannot know$_R$ to be a personal co-creator, then, as Wintein (2022, p. 8) correctly points out, no subject can know$_R$ that there is a personal co-creator. Therefore, the proposition 'There are exactly two personal uncaused causes that co-created the world' – denoted by Wintein as (ii) – is unknowable$_R$. Additionally, as Wintein states, since proposition (ii) is a possibly true FoCons proposition, it is a successful counterexample to premise P_1.

However, (ii) fails as a counterexample to P_1. To demonstrate that (ii) is a dialectically ineffective counterexample to P_1, it is necessary to briefly revisit the dialectical situation. The MEA is an argument concluding that it is necessarily true that there is a personal first cause. So, the debate revolves around the veracity of the MEA's conclusion. In other words, what is under discussion is whether the MEA's conclusion is true or false. A dialectically effective defense of the MEA's premises – such as P_1 – may thus not presuppose the truth of the MEA's conclusion in advance. Similarly, any dialectically effective counterexample to P_1 should not assume the falsehood of the MEA's conclusion from the outset.

Proposition (ii), however, already assumes that the MEA's conclusion is false. For (ii) – stating 'There are exactly two personal uncaused causes that co-created the world' – essentially amounts to a direct denial of the MEA's conclusion – 'There is exactly one personal uncaused cause that created the world.' Consequently, (ii) is not a cogent counterexample to P_1, as it inherently assumes the MEA's conclusion to be false. Just as valid reasons for accepting the MEA's premise P_1 must not rely upon the MEA's conclusion being true upfront, a valid counterexample to the MEA's premise P_1 must not rely upon the MEA's conclusion being false upfront. Only a dialectically *independent* counterexample to premise P_1 – i.e., a counterexample that does not already presuppose that the MEA's conclusion is false – could epistemically compel a proponent of the MEA to concede that premise P_1 is false.

Indeed, proponents of the MEA aim, of course, to establish the truth of the MEA's conclusion. They will thus not upfront already accept that this conclusion is false. However, (ii) as a counterexample to P_1 asks them to do precisely that. It asks proponents of the MEA to accept from the outset that the conclusion of the MEA is not true. So, (ii) is a dialectically ineffective counterexample to P_1. It's not properly independent from the point of dispute or issue under contention. Whether we must accept that proposition (ii) is possibly true, thereby rendering the conclusion of the MEA false, remains to be seen and depends on the strength of the independent premises of the logically valid MEA. Indeed, the thesis that it is necessarily true that there is a personal first cause is not so easily rejected.

Moreover, in Rutten (2014, pp. 390-391), I present multiple fundamental and independent grounds for P_1. These justificatory reasons carry sufficient weight to affirm P_1 as a well-founded premise. Now, (ii) is clearly a FoCons proposition. Therefore, I infer from P_1 and the unknowability$_R$ of proposition (ii) that (ii) is, in fact, necessarily false, rather than being a possibly true FoCons proposition and, thus, a successful counterexample to P_1. To reinforce this additional consideration, I shall offer, in addition to the aforementioned grounds, three supplemental considerations for accepting P_1 as a premise.

First, P_1 follows from a weak version of the well-known principle of sufficient reason, namely the principle that all possibly true FoCons propositions are explainable. For if all possibly true FoCons propositions are possibly explained, and if all explanations are cognitively intelligible and thus possibly known$_R$, then it follows that all possibly true FoCons propositions are knowable$_R$.

Second, P_1 is naturally and strongly suggested by a diverse range of quite fundamental philosophical perspectives, such as neo-Aristotelianism, (metaphysical) idealism, phenomenalism, internal realism, and verificationalism. Adherents of these fundamental philosophical views can reasonably uphold P_1 and infer from (ii) being necessarily unknown$_R$ that (ii) is in fact necessarily false.

Third, the relation between perfectly natural foundational concepts is plausibly maximally natural. For example, everything material is spatial, everything material is temporal, and nothing abstract is causally efficacious. Within the material realm, there is no split between what is in space-time and what is not. And within the abstract realm, there is no split between causally efficacious and causally inefficacious entities. Now, the relation between the knowable$_R$ and the real – being both perfectly natural fundamental concepts – is reasonably no less natural. Therefore, there is plausibly no split between what is knowable$_R$ and what is not. Either everything is knowable$_R$ or nothing is knowable$_R$. The latter is false since some truths are knowable$_R$. Hence all possible FoCons truths are knowable$_R$.

I conclude that the dialectical situation is such that (ii) is not a successful counterexample to P_1. A further criticism of this conclusion is raised in Wintein (2018, p. 318) and reiterated in Wintein (2022, p. 9):

> Given the notion of metaphysical im(possibility) to which Rutten appeals, (ii), must be considered as a possible truth.

To clarify, Wintein criticizes that since (ii) is logically consistent and conceivable, I must, according to my account of metaphysical possibility, admit that (ii) is possibly true. However, this objection is invalid. As I point out in Rutten (2022, p. 785):

> In any case I do not hold that all logically consistent and conceivable propositions are possibly true. My view is that our modal intuitions only warrant us to adopt the following *defeasible* rule: In the absence of evidence to the contrary, we may infer, about any logically consistent and conceivable proposition that it is possibly true.

Now, to be clear, in Rutten (2022, pp. 785-787) I demonstrate that another counterexample to P_1 proposed by Wintein – namely the one that figures in his objection (a) – does not succeed *even if* I, for the sake of argument, accept the principle that all logically consistent and conceivable propositions are possibly true. But from this demonstration, of course, it does not follow that I am committed to said principle.

I accept only a defeasible reading of it. That is to say, I accept the principle as a default or exception-permitting rule. A logically consistent and conceivable proposition is possibly true unless a positive reason can be given for thinking that the proposition in question is an exception to the rule. The non-trivial fact of (ii) being unknowable$_R$, established in Rutten (2022, pp. 783-784) after comprehensive deliberation, serves as positive evidence for thinking that (ii) is an exception to the rule. Therefore, Wintein's further criticism of my conclusion that (ii) is an unsuccessful counterexample to P_1 fails.

Finally, Wintein (2022, p. 9) reiterates Wintein's (2018, p. 318) counter that my response invalidates the MEA's presupposition that a personal first cause is metaphysically possible. For, as Wintein argues, if proposition (ii) is not possibly true, why would it then be possibly true that a personal first cause exists?

But this counterargument is dialectically ineffective. Since I offer an argument for the claim that it is necessarily true that a personal first cause exists, it is not unreasonable for me to presuppose that it is at least possibly true that a personal first cause exists. This presupposition is compatible with both the truth and falsehood of the MEA's conclusion – and thus dialectically appropriately independent from it. Proposition (ii), on the other hand, quite to the contrary, amounts to an immediate rejection of the conclusion of the MEA argument, clearly indicating the dialectical asymmetry between the two. That (ii) is a dialectically ineffective counterexample to P_1 because it directly rejects the MEA's conclusion is, in fact, precisely my first refutation above of Wintein's (2022, p. 8) accusation that my refutation of his personal co-creator counterexample to P_2 is self-undermining. Indeed, the MEA is an argument for the conclusion that it is necessarily true that there is a personal first cause. And if this argument is epistemically successful, it, all things considered, reveals that (ii) is not possibly true.

Moreover, the presupposition that a personal first cause possibly exists, doesn't render the MEA dialectically insignificant. For, by deploying premises that are – contrary to (ii) – independent of the MEA's conclusion, and presupposing only the possible existence of a personal first cause, the MEA arrives at a substantial conclusion, namely that it is necessarily true that a personal first cause exists.

Furthermore, as I explain in Rutten (2014, p. 395), my conception of a personal first cause does not include necessary existence as an essential property, so there is no implicit commitment to a personal first cause's necessary existence via an ontological argument of sorts.

Finally, I conclude, then, that Wintein's (2022) criticisms of my refutation of his personal co-creator counterexample to premise P_2 fail. Wintein's objection (b) is and remains unsuccessful.

7. The Objection that Premise P_1 is False

Wintein's (2018, pp. 314-317) objection (a) is that the proposition 'The only conscious beings are naturally evolved animals and humans' – denoted by Wintein (2022, p. 9) as (i) – is a successful counterexample to premise P_1. In Rutten (2022, pp. 784-787), I argue that this objection fails. As long as it is inconceivable how matter could generate consciousness, I am not committed to accept proposition (i) as a possible truth. Therefore, (i) does not successfully counter premise P_1. I also anticipate and refute, in Rutten (2022, pp. 787-788), the objection that it is likewise inconceivable how consciousness could generate matter. As I point out in Rutten (2022, p. 787):

> I do not appeal to a possible world in which matter arises from consciousness in order to defend the [MEA's] premises or to refute objections against the [MEA].

Wintein (2022, pp. 10-11) aims to show that my refutation of objection (a) is unsuccessful. Wintein (2022, p. 10) correctly points out that the FoCons proposition 'There is exactly 1 material object' – denoted by him as (8) – is possibly true and therefore, according to premise P_1, knowable$_R$. Wintein (2022, pp. 10-11) subsequently reasons as follows:

In order to ensure the knowability$_R$ of (8), we may appeal to a possible world in which a personal first cause exists and decides to create exactly 1 material object. In this world, the personal first cause knows$_R$ that there is exactly 1 material object in virtue of its experience of creating exactly 1 such object. Hence, (8) is knowable$_R$. So to ensure the knowability$_R$ of propositions such as (8), we are bound to appeal to a personal first cause who decides to create (exactly 1) material object(s). Hence, pace Rutten, a cogent defence of the MEA's premises needs to appeal to possible worlds in which matter arises from consciousness.

Wintein's reasoning is flawed though. In order to ensure the knowability$_R$ of (8), I do not need to appeal to a possible world in which matter arises from consciousness. Consider a possible world where the gravitational force acts as an omnipresent force and is so extremely strong that it binds and compresses from eternity all matter, time and space together into a single spatial, temporal and material atom. In this world, there are immaterial subjects. As being immaterial, they are not subject to the gravitational force and thus not pulled into the atom. Suppose, moreover, that their theory of gravity is so advanced and well-founded that the extreme gravitational pull of all matter into a single singularity has been established beyond reasonable doubt. In this world, it is known$_R$ that there is exactly 1 material object. And this possible world does not involve an appeal to the possibility of matter arising from consciousness.

As a second example, consider a possible world in which there is exactly 1 material object. This world contains immaterial subjects that exist beyond the constraints of space and time. Since they exist beyond spatial and temporal limits, they are omnipresent. By virtue of their omnipresence, these subjects are always already in immediate proximity to each spatially and temporally located material object. In this world it is also known$_R$ that there is exactly 1 material object. For a second material object would have been instantly recognized by these subjects through direct observation. This world also lacks an appeal to the possibility of matter arising from consciousness.

Both examples of possible worlds thus show that I do not have to appeal to matter arising from consciousness in order to render (8) knowable$_R$. Since both examples are logically consistent and do not involve unreasonable appeals to inexplicable ontological gaps, they qualify, defeasibly, as possible worlds. Furthermore, a commitment to the possibility of both examples is dialectically not inappropriate since both possibilities are independent from the conclusion of the MEA argument. That is to say, none of them presuppose the truth or falsehood of the MEA's conclusion upfront.

Furthermore, even if, for the sake of argument, I were to assume that both examples are dialectically problematic, Wintein's (2022, pp. 10-11) attempt to discredit my refutation of objection (a) remains unsuccessful. This is because, in Rutten (2022, pp. 788-789), I do in fact present a reasonable model of how matter could arise from consciousness, enabling me to legitimately appeal to possible worlds in which matter arises from consciousness in order to defend my MEA. Wintein (2022, p. 11) references this model and subsequently asserts, without providing any argument, that my claim of its reasonability is flawed since it allegedly amounts to 'applying double standards of conceivability'. However, without any explanation of why this accusation is warranted, Wintein's refutation amounts to mere stipulation and therefore fails.

Finally, I conclude, then, that Wintein's (2022) criticisms of my refutation of objection (a) are unsuccessful. Wintein's objection (a) remains properly refuted.

8. The Actualized Modal-Epistemic Argument

As I explain in Rutten (2022, p. 789), even if I assume, for the sake of argument, that Wintein's objection (a) succeeds – rendering the MEA's premise P_1 untenable – I can still deploy my MEA's line of reasoning to specifically argue for the existence of a personal first cause in the actual world. To deductively establish the actual existence of a personal first cause, I substitute in Rutten (2022, p. 789) premise P_1 of the MEA with the following weaker premise, denoted by Wintein (2022) as $P_1^{@}$:

$P_1^{@}$ For every FoCons proposition p that is true in the actual world $w_@$ there is some possible world w' (such that p is true in w' and) such that there is a subject in w' that knows$_R$ that p.

Indeed, $P_1^{@}$ only requires that actually true FoCons propositions are knowable$_R$. It is thus no longer required that all possibly true FoCons propositions are knowable$_R$. Together with the MEA's premises P_2 and P_3, it logically follows that there is a personal first cause in the actual world. Wintein (2022) refers to my adjusted MEA as the Actualized MEA or MEA$^{@}$. The MEA$^{@}$ is a cogent argument for the existence of a personal first cause in the actual world. Whether a personal first cause exists in all possible worlds is left open by the MEA$^{@}$.

Wintein (2022, p. 12) acknowledges that it is 'much harder to present counterexamples to $P_1^{@}$ than it is to present counterexamples to P_1'. Yet, Wintein (2022, p. 12) purports to give a successful counterexample to $P_1^{@}$:

> Consider any subject, say Gödel, that is deceased. Let CLF_G be any (actually) true *CLF* specifying that Gödel would, when in circumstances *C*, (libertarianly) freely perform action *A*. According to Rutten, Gödel knows$_R$ CLF_G in possible worlds in which he is alive and kicking, whereas CLF_G is unknowable$_R$ for subjects other than Gödel. As Gödel is deceased, the conjunction of CLF_G with the proposition that Gödel is deceased is an actual truth. Yet clearly it is unknowable$_R$, as neither a deceased Gödel nor anyone else can know this conjunction. Hence, $P_1^{@}$ is false.

This counterexample to $P_1^{@}$ closely mirrors two earlier counterexamples provided by Wintein (2022) to P_1, namely proposition (4.5) and (q.6). So, in what follows I shall refute his counterexample to $P_1^{@}$ by following the same line of reasoning I used to refute (4.5) and (q.6) as counterexamples to P_1.

I denote the conjunction of CLF_G with the proposition that Gödel is deceased as *R*, and I denote the proposition that Gödel is deceased as *D*. To refute *R* as counterexample to $P_1^{@}$, I demonstrate that *R* is not actually true. Proposition *R* is clearly false in case Gödel (still) exists. Now consider a situation in which Gödel does not exist (anymore). In that case, CLF_G is false. This follows from Russell's analysis.

The logical form of CLF_G is 'There is an x such that x is Gödel and x would (libertarianly) freely do action *A* in circumstances *C* and for all y (y is Gödel) entails (y=x)'. Since no x satisfies the first condition, CLF_G is indeed false. It follows that *R* is false as well. I conclude that *R* is false in all circumstances and therefore not actually true. So, *R* does not succeed as counterexample to $P_1^{@}$.

Wintein may again try to restore his counterexample by substituting CLF_G with $CLF_G^{\star}$, where $CLF_G^{\star}$ would be a counterfactual proposition of the form 'If Gödel (were to) exist(s), then CLF_G'. But this will not help Wintein for the same reasons I discussed when refuting propositions $(4.5)^{1\text{-}4}$ and proposition ($q^{\star}$.6) as counterexamples to

P_1. Proposition $CLF_G\star$ is not a first-order proposition and therefore not a FoCons proposition because it lacks the presupposition that Gödel (still) exists in the context in which the proposition is evaluated. It merely specifies a hypothetical situation in which Gödel (still) exists. It follows that the conjunction of $CLF_G\star$ and D is not a FoCons proposition either and therefore not a successful counterexample to $P_1{}^@$. So, the attempt to restore Wintein's counterexample to $P_1{}^@$ fails.

Moreover, even if, for the sake of argument, I were to assume that Wintein's counterexample does succeed, no problem would arise for my MEA$^@$, as Wintein (2022, p. 12) already correctly points out:

> In order to get rid of the presented counterexample to $P_1{}^@$, Rutten could […] restrict his first premise by excluding CLFs from its scope. That is, he could trade in $P_1{}^@$ for a premise which says that all first-order, consistently believable, non-CLF involving propositions that are actually true are knowable$_R$.

Wintein (2022, p. 12) refers to the resulting argument as the amended version of the MEA$^@$ and asks whether it should compel us to accept the actual existence of a personal first cause. Initially, Wintein (2022, pp. 12-13) answers:

> Well, as the [amended version of the] MEA$^@$ exploits the false P_2 and is still subject to the problems discussed in the 'The Parody Argument' and 'The Core Argument' sections, we clearly shouldn't.

However, this response has become untenable in light of the sections 'The objection that premise P_2 is false', 'The Core argument objection', and 'The parody objection' in the present paper. For I have demonstrated that Wintein's (2022) criticisms of my refutations of his objections (b), (c), and (d) are unsuccessful. Therefore, these objections remain unfounded and must be rejected.

9. Another Parody Objection

In addition, Wintein (2022, p. 13) puts forth a second criticism of the amended version of the MEA$^@$. In order to discredit the amended MEA$^@$, Wintein presents a parody argument to it. This parody argument is referred to by him as the Spaghetti$^@$ argument:

- S_1 For every (non-CLF involving) FoCons proposition p that is true in the actual world $w_@$ there is some possible world w' (such that p is true in w' and) such that there is a flying Spaghetti Monster in w' who knows$_R$ that p.
- S_2 It is not the case that there is a possible world in which there is a flying Spaghetti Monster who knows$_R$ that there is no flying Spaghetti Monster.
- S_3 The proposition that there is no flying Spaghetti Monster is a [(non-CLF involving)] FoCons proposition.
- C_S In the actual world $w_@$ there is a flying Spaghetti Monster.

As Wintein (2022, p. 14) writes:

> It is odd to accept the actual existence of a flying Spaghetti Monster on the basis of the Spaghetti$^@$ argument. Similarly, it is odd to accept the actual existence of a personal first cause on the basis of the [amended version of the] MEA$^@$.

Now, his parody objection to the amended MEA$^@$ is flawed because – contrary to the first premise of the amended MEA$^@$ – the first premise of the Spaghetti$^@$ argument is obviously false. Here is why. Let N be the number of elementary particles in the ac-

tual world. Consider the (non-CLF involving) FoCons proposition 'The number of elementary particles is *N*', denoted by *E*. Plausibly, a flying Spaghetti Monster is a material being that inhabits a space-time or universe. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that it cannot know$_R$ that *E* is true. Given that, at each point in time, a flying Spaghetti Monster occupies a specific location in space, it is reasonably unable to simultaneously and indisputably observe all elementary particles in the universe as a whole. Moreover, relative to these extremely small microparticles, a Spaghetti Monster is an immensely large material object, reasonably rendering it even unable to indisputably and simultaneously observe all elementary particles in its spatial vicinity.

A flying Spaghetti Monster thus cannot establish with near-certainty the number of elementary particles in the universe. And even if it could, its confinement to its own universe poses a limitation. For it cannot know$_R$ whether there are other universes in the actual world that contain elementary particles. Only an immaterial, spaceless, and timeless knower, which is furthermore omnipresent by virtue of existing beyond space and time, could be in an epistemic position sufficient to know$_R$ *E*.

I conclude, then, that Wintein's (2022) second parody objection fails as well because – contrary to the amended MEA$^{@}$ – the Spaghetti$^{@}$ argument relies on a premise – namely, S_1 – that is clearly false, given the inherent epistemic limitations associated with material knowers located in space and time. So, Wintein's (2022) further attempts to discredit my refutation of objection (a) do not succeed either.

10. Closing Remarks

In Rutten (2022), I present detailed refutations of the objections (a), (b), (c) and (d) raised by Wintein (2018) against my MEA, which I develop in Rutten (2014). Wintein (2022) contends that my refutations are unsuccessful and proceeds to propose criticisms of each of them. In this paper, I've demonstrated the inadequacy of Wintein's (2022) criticisms. Consequently, Wintein's (2022) criticisms fall short, thereby reinforcing the unsuccessfulness of Wintein's (2018) four objections. This, in turn, supports the cogency of the MEA. Dialectically, the MEA still stands.

11. Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jeroen de Ridder, Rik Peels, Gijsbert van den Brink, and Mark Shaw for their thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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Abstract · In a recent paper, Stefan Wintein criticizes my responses to the objections he raised to my modal-epistemic argument (mea) for the existence of God. In this paper, I continue our debate and respond to Wintein's criticisms of my previous responses. I argue that Wintein's criticisms are unsuccessful. As a result, the mea still stands.

Keywords · Modal-Epistemic Argument, God, Personal First Cause, Wintein.

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Gennaio 2025

(CZ 2 · FG 3)