

Christian Materialism and Demonic Temptation

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Some Christian philosophers are materialists about the human person.¹ They think that human beings are best characterized as fundamentally material beings. In opposition, Christian substance dualists suggest that (however important the body may be) human beings are best characterized as fundamentally immaterial beings.² But how might we state the commitments of these opposing schools of thought more precisely? One plausibly essential commitment of materialism about human beings is the nomological supervenience of human mental states on human physical states, as follows:

(N) For any human mental property *M*, it is nomologically necessary that if any human individual *x* has *M* at time *t*, then there exists a physical (subvenient) property *P* such that *x* has *P* at *t*, and it is nomologically impossible for any human individual to have *P* at a time and lack *M* at that time.³

Nomological impossibility is impossibility relative to the laws of nature. There are possible worlds at which an object accelerates from below

ABSTRACT: Demons have the power to cause temptations in us, and Christian materialism implies the supervenience of temptations on brain states. This in turn implies that demons bring about temptations by causally interfering with our brains. But if they have such an ability to affect the physical world, it is mysterious why they do not wreak more havoc than they do both to our brains and in the world more generally. Substance dualism provides an elegant solution: demonic temptation is not a species of soul-to-brain causation, but soul-to-soul, and we don't need to suppose demons have the power to directly affect the physical world. Materialist solutions, in contrast, are *ad hoc*.

1. Nancy Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Hud Hudson, *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001) are notable instances.

2. Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); *Mind, Brain, and Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); and J. P. Moreland, *The Soul* (Chicago: Moody, 2014) are recent defenses. See also R. Keith Loftin and Joshua R. Farris, eds., *Christian Physicalism? Philosophical Theological Criticisms* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018).

3. Cf. Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 9.

to above the speed of light, but no nomologically possible worlds—worlds at which the actual laws of nature hold—at which this is so.⁴ Now, some Christian materialists might wish the relationship between the supervening and subvening properties to be stronger than the merely nomological. If the Christian materialist is a type-identity physicalist, for example, then he will say it is impossible by the necessity of identity for an instance of a certain type of brain state to be anything other than an instance of a pain state. But such a materialist will, precisely because they hold to the stronger claim, hold to the weaker one: if there are no metaphysically possible worlds at which the physical property obtains without the mental property obtaining, then *a fortiori* there are no nomologically possible worlds at which that is so. So, (N) remains a good candidate for being necessary for materialism (even if it is not sufficient) and for capturing something essential to almost every plausible variation of materialist doctrine.

And substance dualism? We can take the central contention of substance dualism to be this:

(SD) Human persons are substances capable of existing independently from the body and from any part thereof, and our mental lives (thoughts, feelings, and so forth) are instantiated in these substances.

Moreover, given that the substances we are (if (SD) is true) are not readily discoverable *via* routine medical investigation of our bodies and brains, then it appears we are immaterial substances, or souls.⁵ I do not wish to commit myself to any detailed account of the soul, though I take it that the soul, even if substantively simple (not composed of more fundamental substances), is nevertheless structured by various faculties (the sensory modalities, the capacity for thought, the capacity for emotion, and so on), which one might consider to be modes of the soul.⁶ But, relevant to my purposes, I *will* take the Christian substance dualist to be committed to at least the following. That we, *qua* immaterial substances, occupy the spiritual realm, and that demons, immaterial occupants of the spiritual realm themselves, perceive us as presences there, and causally interact with our souls at the spiritual level. This, I shall assume, is how demonic temptation takes place on the substance-dualist picture. Christian materialists, on the other hand, must understand demonic temptation as involving demons causally interacting with the brain—or so I shall argue.

Now, (N) and (SD), as I have defined them, are not inconsistent. But I proposed (N) merely as a necessary condition for materialism, and for a substance dualist to hold to (N) looks like an unmotivated move. At any rate, I

4. Or so current science leads us to believe.

5. I don't intend this to rule out the soul possessing some physical properties, such as spatial location and extension.

6. See Moreland, *The Soul*, 137–41, for a discussion of the soul's faculties.

intend to do two things in this paper. First, to show that the understanding of the mind-body relationship that motivates materialist adherence to (N) gives rise to problems when it comes to modelling demonic temptation. Second, to show that substance dualism neatly avoids these pitfalls, and that it thereby offers us the most satisfactory account of the process of demonic temptation.

1. *Demonic Temptation*

I believe that most Christians from conservative to moderate would hold to the following proposition:

- (D) Demons (fallen angels) are at least sometimes causally responsible for the temptations to sin that human beings experience.⁷

Of course, if one is a Bultmannian, then one will have “demythologised the lot”⁸; I have nothing to say to the theological liberal who denies the existence of angels and demons—this argument will pass him by. It is only the Christian materialist sufficiently conservative to hold to (D) that comes within my sights.

But what does temptation involve? And which parts are demons responsible for? I think it important to distinguish between two elements in temptation: *desires* and *contemplated scenarios*. Suppose a man is tempted to steal. He is a bookish skinflint and he has espied a first edition of *The Hobbit* in a local bookshop. He realizes it would be oh-so-easy for him to slip it under his coat and make for the door. We should distinguish between his *desire* to possess that particular first edition, and the *contemplated scenario*, in this case a prospective course of action, that enters into his head: he might steal it.

What are contemplated scenarios? I don’t think a contemplated scenario has to be a prospective course of action, as it is in the above example. I think a demon may bring about a thought or idea of any sort that the human subject has the conceptual apparatus to understand. I also think it is possible for there to be a pictorial element in what the demon brings about. Suppose a man has a tendency to brutality and violence. A demon might tempt that man by bringing before his imagination pictures of the gladiatorial butchery of ancient Rome. Contemplated scenarios will therefore include at least one of these two elements: *thoughts* (which carry a propositional quality) or *images* (which are pictorial).

I think it unproblematic to claim that demons bring about contemplated scenarios thus understood. But what about the desires that well up inside us in response to sinful contemplated scenarios? Do demons bring those about

7. Another important aspect of demonic activity is demon possession. I treat (briefly) of that in section 5.

8. The reference here is to Eric Mascall’s stirring alteration of *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* to make it a vessel of Bultmann’s thought; see <http://www2.asa3.org/archive/asa/200212/0301.html> (accessed March 19, 2018).

too? Matters are more complicated here. Any answer must be compatible with the scriptural witness. James, commenting on temptation, writes, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin . . .” (James 1:13–15).⁹ I think this verse does show that demons aren’t in the business of *bringing about* desires, for if they were, it would be too hard for James’s blanket claim that each person is led astray by *his own desire* to stick. It could be objected with some plausibility that, on some occasions, the desires are given by demons, and therefore not one’s own.

However, I don’t think this passage rules out demons from *exacerbating* desires *already present* in the human subject. One can agree that demons cannot introduce *new* desires into a human mind, but nevertheless think they can inflame (or diminish) desires that are already there. I believe such a position is both consistent with James 1:13–15 (it may well be part of what is involved in “luring and enticing”) and also comports well with Christian experience.¹⁰

Accordingly, the causal responsibility for temptation ascribed to demons in (D) (and in what follows) should therefore be chiefly understood as causal responsibility for the contemplated scenarios that occur to the mind, but also with a mind to the possible inflammation (and diminution) of desire.

2. The Causal Powers of Demons

But why is holding to (D) a problem for Christian materialism? The problem arises from what the supervenience of the (humanly) mental on the physical implies about demonic capability. Every contemplating of a scenario (by a human being) is a human mental state, and therefore materialism implies the supervenience of such states on physical states. Consider an actual temptation to steal a book. By (N) it follows that there is a physical property P such that whenever P obtains, then, by nomological necessity, the

9. All scripture quotations are from the ESV.

10. It is arguably difficult to see some of the saints’ self-reported wrestling with temptation as merely a matter of the devil introducing thoughts and images into their minds. John Bunyan writes, “For, about the space of a month after, a very great storm came down upon me, which handled me twenty times worse than all I had met with before; it came stealing upon me, now by one piece, then by another: First, all my comfort was taken from me; then darkness seized upon me; after which, whole floods of blasphemies, both against God, Christ, and the Scriptures, were poured upon my spirit, to my great confusion and astonishment” (96); and “While this temptation lasted, which was about a year, I could attend upon none of the ordinances of God, but with sore and great affliction. Yea, then I was most distressed with blasphemies. If I had been hearing the word, then uncleanness, blasphemies and despair would hold me a captive there” (106) in his *Grace Abounding*, 1765, accessed Sept. 3, 2018, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/654/654-h/654-h.htm>. I suspect Bunyan would aver that his desires and mood were demonically altered.

temptation to steal a book will also obtain. This physical property we can assume is a neurological property of some kind, a brain state. Thus, we have the supervenient mental property of being tempted to steal a book, M_B , and a subvenient physical brain state, P_B .

The important claim I want to demonstrate in this section is that, if Christian materialism is true, then demons bring about temptation by bringing about one of the subvenient brain states sufficient for it. The Christian materialist has to say that it is the brain that demons causally interact with in temptation, that it is by neurophysiological interference that they accomplish their wicked work.

Showing this will depend on the sort of materialist in view and why they hold to the supervenience of the mental (N). Some are type-identity materialists: they think *a posteriori* identity claims hold between human mental properties and brain-state properties.¹¹ Such materialists hold to the supervenience of the mental on the physical because it is implied by their identity claim. Given such a materialism it is not hard to show that demons accomplish temptation by causally interacting with the brain. For type-identity theorists, M_B will be identical to P_B , and therefore the demon's bringing about M_B will just be the same thing as its bringing about P_B .

Opposed to type-identity theorists are multiple-realizability materialists (this will include nonreductive materialists and token-identity theorists).¹² Part of the great appeal of taking supervenience to capture something important about materialist doctrine is that, while still anchoring things to the physical, it permits the multiple realizability of mental states. (N) says that it is impossible to have P without M , but it doesn't say that it is impossible to have M without P . There might be many brain states which are sufficient to bring about M ; maybe P_1 , P_2 and P_3 are each individually sufficient for the job.

This opens up one argument to show that demonic interference must go *via* the brain to the mental, and not *vice versa*. For if mental states are multiply realizable, then we can assume many temptations for which demons are responsible are multiply realizable. M_B is perhaps such a multiply realizable state. In that case, I think we can see that we can't characterize the demon's activity as that of bringing about M_B and letting nature do the rest,

11. U. T. Place, "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?," *British Journal of Psychology* 47 (1956): 44–50; and J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): 141–56, give classic statements of this view. See Christopher Hill, *Sensations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) for a more recent defense.

12. Hilary Putnam's paper "Psychological Predicates," in *Art, Mind, and Religion*, ed. W. H. Capitan and D. D. Merrill (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1967), 37–48, was largely responsible for introducing multiple realizability into the philosophy of mind. Jerry Fodor, "Special Sciences (Or: The Disunity of Science as a Working Hypothesis)," *Synthese* 28 (1974): 97–115, and Donald Davidson, "Mental Events," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 207–25, both offer influential statements of nonreductive, token-identity materialism.

because that would leave it indeterminate which subvenient physical property was brought about. If the demon brings about M_B , and takes his “hands off” thereafter, then that leaves it entirely undetermined which brain state is brought about. Was it P_1 or P_2 or . . . ? We know (at least) one of them must be present—the existence of M_B demands it—but it would be entirely mysterious why one of these states (or one collection of them) came to be rather than another one. But if we characterize what the demon did in physical terms—he brought about P_1 , or he brought about P_2 , and so on—then the mystery vanishes. Bringing about P_1 , say, would indeed, given the supervenience of the mental, be enough to fix the existence or presence of M_B . The bringing about of brain states is therefore the better way to characterize demonic activity in temptation—it eliminates a pertinent mystery in cases of multiple realizability. We should understand the demon as causing a brain state which he knows will be sufficient (relative to the laws of nature or of metaphysics) to bring about the temptation he desires, for it is only in that direction that a satisfactory explanation can always go: from demon to matter to mind, not from demon to mind to matter.

There is a further argument. It involves appeal to the nature of the supervenience relation. Consider Jaegwon Kim’s remarks:

I take supervenience as an ontological thesis involving the idea of dependence—a sense of dependence that justifies saying that a mental property is instantiated in a given organism at a time *because*, or *in virtue of* the fact that, one of its physical “base” properties is instantiated by the organism at that time. *Supervenience*, therefore, is not a mere claim of covariation between mental and physical properties; it includes a claim of existential dependence of the mental on the physical.¹³

This asymmetrical dependence is not explicit in (N), and it is perhaps hard to spell out what it involves exactly. Nevertheless, I take it that every multiple-realizability materialist will want to make this sort of claim. The physical, in addition to fixing the mental in the way (N) describes, is also explanatorily or ontologically prior to it, whatever such a relation ultimately amounts to.

But there is an important consequence to accepting this understanding of supervenience. Kim puts it this way: “if *Supervenience* is assumed, mental-to-mental causation entails mental-to-physical causation.”¹⁴ This is relevant for our purposes because demonic temptation presents itself to us as a case of mental-to-mental causation. It is uncontroversial that demons (if they exist) are immaterial substances, disembodied spirits or souls. Thus, the demon’s mental states (his wicked intentions and so forth) cause our experience of temptation. Hence mental-to-mental. But if Kim is right, we

13. Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism, Or Something Near Enough* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 34 (italics in original).

14. *Ibid.*, 40 (italics in original).

cannot leave things there. If mental state M_1 causes mental state M_2 , and M_2 supervenes on the physical, then we must suppose, according to Kim, that M_1 causes P_2 , where P_2 is M_2 's subvenient physical state, and that this is how M_2 is brought about.

Why think this? Here is a fuller statement from Kim:

the following principle seems highly plausible: *In order to cause a supervenient property to be instantiated, you must cause one of its base properties to be instantiated.* In order to alter the aesthetic properties of a work of art, you must alter the physical properties on which the aesthetic properties supervene; in order to do something about your headache you must causally intervene in the brain state on which the headache, supervenes. There is no other way¹⁵

I think this is intuitively right. I also think it follows from the explanatory dependence the mental is supposed to have, given the fuller account of supervenience. For if we are to suppose the demon causes the human mental state M_2 and the obtaining of M_2 explains the obtaining of its subvenient brain state P_2 , then the relation of explanatory dependence is not asymmetric. M_2 explains P_2 and P_2 explains M_2 . But the relationship was specified as being asymmetric. If it is objected that the two senses of explanation in play here are not univocal, that isn't sufficient to remove the difficulty. For how could it be true that M_2 explains the obtaining of P_2 , yet also be true that M_2 ontologically depends on P_2 in the way that these materialists suppose? If the demon brings about M_2 , then, because of the ontological dependence of the mental on the physical, that mental state will obtain in virtue of the subvenient brain state P_2 . But then in what meaningful sense could the demon be said to bring about P_2 by bringing about M_2 ? If M_2 obtains in virtue of P_2 , then P_2 must be "already there" in order to explain the existence of M_2 . But then how could M_2 explain the existence of P_2 ? It comes too late, not in the temporal sense, but in the order of explanation, to accomplish that. The demon must therefore be understood as "horizontally" causing the subvenient brain states with those brain states then "vertically" determining the supervenient mental states. To suppose that the demon "horizontally" causes the supervenient mental states which then "vertically" determine the subvenient brain states is to suppose the absurd.¹⁶

To sum up, materialism implies that demons bring about temptation by interacting with the brain. In the case of type-identity materialism, because the temptation states are identical with the relevant brain states. In the case of multiple-realizability materialism, I gave two arguments; one from indeter-

15. *Ibid.*, 20 (italics in original).

16. The arguments directed against multiple-realizability materialists I give in this section should also hold with equal force against property dualists, who typically likewise hold to the ontological priority of the physical over the mental, and therefore to principles such as (N). David Chalmers would be an example of this. See David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 125–6, 248–9.

minacy in multiple realizability, and the other from explanatory order; both designed to show that demons must interact with the brain in order to “get at” the mind. Demonic temptation therefore appears to be a species of soul-to-brain causation, if materialism is true. The demon’s soul will be prodding the tempted individual’s brain in order to bring about the desired evil thoughts. I shall assume this understanding hereon.

3. Some Puzzling Consequences

Christian materialism therefore issues in the surprising conclusion that demons have the power to tamper with the human brain—that is, as we have seen, how they accomplish temptation. Now, bear in mind that there are a great variety of tempting scenarios. The sinful things human beings have been tempted to do throughout history are of an enormous variety, and often different in only very subtle ways. But this has proven no obstacle to our demonic adversaries; they know just what they are doing; they know just where to “touch” the brain to bring about exactly the sort of temptation they are after. Their understanding of the brain and their mastery of its workings must be great indeed. Thus, the Christian materialist must take himself to be in daily battle with spiritual beings that possess a detailed knowledge of his brain and who can tinker with it in a myriad of different and subtle ways. But with that conclusion in hand, a lot of puzzles ensue.

(i) I said above that it is the contemplated-scenario aspect of temptation that we are inclined to hold demons chiefly responsible for, and that they don’t introduce original desires into the subject, but now it is mysterious why demonic activity should be restricted in this way. Instead of restricting themselves, by and large, to altering the brain so that the tempted are confronted with various ideas or suggestions, why don’t demons also bring about brain states sufficient for new and raging desires for evil? A demon might change the most profound ascetic to a lascivious deviant overnight merely by altering the relevant brain states. There are surely a hundred and one ways to change a man’s brain so that he comes to desire evil things.

(ii) For another thing, if demons can tinker with our brains in this way, then why are their activities always restricted to the tedious and uncertain process of temptation? If they want us to sin, then why don’t they cause the action directly? To proceed at once to the limit case: why don’t they cause the Christian to reject Christ? Perhaps this would make the action unfree. Nevertheless, they might do it in any case to cause despair and misery. Moreover, a hatred of Christ is a mental state, and so it will have, if materialism is true, at least one subvenient brain state the presence of which is sufficient for the presence of the hatred. Why don’t demons alter people’s brains so that one of those states is brought about? How long could a Christian refrain from apostasy in such a state?

(iii) For a third thing, why don't they try to disrupt the function of our brain more generally? If they have the power to alter our brain in various ways, then why don't they try to destroy the parts of it responsible for speech and thought? They could so disrupt someone's brain that they became dyslexic, or deaf, or blind, or any number of a multitude of harmful brain conditions. Worse than that, it isn't clear why they couldn't kill us in such a way. Surely they could tinker with the brain's central nervous system in such a way that it no longer functioned and life ceased.¹⁷

(iv) For a fourth thing, if demons have the capacity to meddle with the brain, then this shows that they have the power to alter the physical world. But if they can alter physical reality, then it is puzzling why they should restrict their activity to the human brain. Why don't they try to hinder the gospel in more direct ways? They might tip boulders onto the road in front of influential preachers as they drive to preach before great crowds. Or they might cause obscene graffiti to appear on walls. Or we might sometimes read about prominent Christians found dead in mysterious circumstances—their heads crushed in but without any possible way for a human being to accomplish it—all the sorry victims of demonic assault. They don't need to restrict their attention to Christians: demons might decide to push people off cliffs and tall buildings when they get too close to the edge, perhaps to prevent them from becoming Christians, or maybe for sheer delight in death and suffering.¹⁸

It might be responded that pushing a boulder or scrawling graffiti are alterations of the physical world that are too great for demons to bring about. Such doings look like doings of a very hefty sort, and it might be thought that demons are only capable of bringing about very small alterations in the physical world, and that is why they so often restrict themselves to tampering with the human brain—an organ where minor changes can have major effects.

There might be something to such a response. But there still would remain much havoc that could be wreaked even by exerting a small amount of force. A small spark in a tank of petrol should be all it takes for a big explosion. Many human lives depend nowadays on a wide array of sensitive

17. New Testament cases such as the demon-possessed epileptic boy (Matt. 17:15) I deal with in section 5.

18. It might be thought that demons are active in such ways and we see this in cases of poltergeist activity. However, I am more inclined to read the phenomena as psychokinetic activity from the human individual involved (typically a pubescent child). This interpretation of poltergeist activity is not uncommon. The Society for Psychical Research's own encyclopedia, the *Psi Encyclopedia*, states that "The view of the 'living agent' [as opposed to a disembodied one] as the cause of poltergeist effects, involuntarily employing RSPK [Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis] to exteriorize repressed internal feelings of anguish, is favoured by many, if not most professional parapsychologists today" (Barrie Colvin, "Poltergeists" (Overview), *Psi Encyclopedia*, 2015, accessed Aug. 28, 2018, <https://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk/articles/poltergeists-overview>).

electronic apparatus. The guidance system of an aircraft, for instance. Surely a modest amount of force in those systems exerted at just the right spot could have disastrous consequences. But I don't think many Christians want to think that demonic activity is a plausible explanation of aircraft disasters.

Another response might be this: there are certain properties peculiar to brain matter that permit demons to causally interact with it, and it is the absence of these properties in the physical world more generally that prevents them from causally interacting with that. I think this a very *ad hoc* maneuver, and it wouldn't help with points (i)–(iii). It wouldn't help explain why demons don't affect the brain in ways beyond that of merely bringing about temptations. If demons can “poke” the brain here and bring about a temptation, then why don't they “poke” it there and bring about a stroke? The inference here is one we recognize as good: if I can lift a heavy rock in London, then I can lift another heavy rock in Paris. Likewise, if demons can alter the brain here, then they can alter it there. To suppose that the portion of the brain responsible for temptation has special properties the rest of the brain lacks is even more *ad hoc*.

4. Substance Dualism

How does substance dualism avoid these problems? It avoids them because the substance dualist is not committed to understanding demonic temptation as a case of soul-to-brain causation. The substance dualist will take it to be a case of *soul-to-soul* causation, after the fashion I explained at the beginning of the paper. Because temptations belong, not to the brain, but to a separate substance, the soul, demons don't need to bring about temptations *via* bringing about certain brain states, they can instead bring about the temptation directly in the tempted person's soul. In this way all the puzzles concerning why it is that demons don't act in the physical world more pronouncedly can be easily resolved. All that demons have the immediate causal power to do, the substance dualist has the luxury of supposing, is to interact with souls and other spiritual realities. They cannot interfere directly with people's brains nor with the physical world more generally.¹⁹

It might be thought that the substance dualist still faces the same problem, however. For if we know that demons can bring about a temptation by “poking” the soul here, then why can't they “poke” the soul there and cause a seizure? But substance dualists can block this inference in two ways. First, the substance dualist can point out that the architecture of the soul, unlike

19. To be sure, the alterations which the demons make to the soul might have knock-on effects on the brain, and therefore demons might have an indirect ability to alter the physical world. But there is no need to suppose that the psycho-physical laws which govern such psychosomatic activity have to issue in the possibility of there being some mental state that, were the demons to bring it about, would have disastrous consequences for the brain or anything like that.

that of the brain, is a thing largely unknown to us, and we cannot, therefore, have any confidence about an inference from an ability to directly affect the soul in one area (or to alter it with respect to one of its modes) to an ability to directly affect it in another area (or to alter it with respect to a different mode).

Secondly, it is the great advantage of the substance dualist here that he can individuate demonic causal powers with reference to irreducible mental types. When a demonic soul makes “contact” with a human soul (however that is accomplished), the substance dualist can suppose that the relevant powers of the demonic soul can be characterized, at a fairly fundamental level of description, as simply powers to bring about thoughts and images (and perhaps to inflame or diminish desire), and leave matters there. The materialist, in contrast, cannot do this. For the Christian materialist, a demonic ability to bring about thoughts in human beings would have to be “cashed out” as an ability to bring about various brain states (for the reasons given in section 2), and this would lead to the puzzling consequences noted in section 3—why don’t demons interfere in ways beyond mere temptation? But the substance dualist is under no pressure to “cash out” powers to alter human minds as powers to alter human brains, and in this way he not only avoids the puzzles that beset the Christian materialist, but is under no pressure to think that a demonic ability to bring about one type of mental state is going to imply an ability to bring about a different type of mental state.

5. *Objections from Scripture*

The Christian materialist might object as follows. Don’t we *all*, he might say, have to acknowledge the power of demons to alter the physical world on *scriptural* grounds? Didn’t Satan afflict Job with boils and destroy his friends and family (Job 1–2)? Didn’t Paul say that he was prevented by Satan from coming to the church at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:18)? Didn’t Paul also say that a messenger from Satan was a thorn in his *flesh* (2 Cor. 12:7–9)? And aren’t the gospels replete with stories of demonic possession where the powers of demons appear sizeable and as having great physical effects? It is of no consequence, therefore, that it is easy for the substance dualist to restrict demons’ natural powers to the spiritual realm. It is the testimony of the scriptures that demonic power is not so restricted, and we are all, materialist or dualist, saddled with the fact that demons have the power to alter the physical world. The best thing for us all to say is simply that God has forbidden demons from using their powers to directly affect the material world in any way (save, if one is a materialist, for the brain alteration necessary to bring about temptation).

In response, let me deal with the scriptural issues first. I cannot be comprehensive, but I can treat of the aforementioned examples. I don’t think that

when God says to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand” (Job 1:12), God is giving Satan leave to use powers that he has by nature, powers that he is normally prevented from using. Rather, I think God is granting Satan with new powers in excess of his natural ones, and I think a close reading of the text supports this. In Job 1:16 the destruction of the sheep and servants is described as follows: “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them.” Surely Satan does not, by nature, have the power to summon the fire of God; but then it becomes clear that Satan’s powers have been extended for this occasion, and there is therefore no pressure to admit that Satan (or any demon) has any of the powers described in Job naturally. As for Paul’s being prevented from travelling to Thessalonica, Satan would not need to interfere directly with the physical world to accomplish this. All Paul may mean here is that he saw Satan’s hand in the wicked actions of men, and it was these wicked actions that prevented Paul’s passage. As for Paul’s “messenger of Satan,” two things can be said. First, it is not clear that it was a demonic agent at all. It might have been a human adversary opposing Paul and the gospel, and in that sense “of Satan.”²⁰ Second, even if a demonic agent is referred to here, we don’t have to infer that the demon had the power to interfere directly with Paul’s flesh. It may just be that the thoughts and ideas the demon put in Paul’s mind were such that certain passions were roused in Paul’s flesh in response to them, or that the demon inflamed desires that the flesh produced in Paul’s mind.

The gospel narratives require more detailed remarks. It is my belief that, in the period leading up to and including the life of Jesus, God granted to demons in that region of the world, as a special dispensation, unusual and enlarged powers. That is why we see in the gospels such things as demon possession, demons infusing a man with great strength (Mark 5:4), demons entering into a herd of swine (Mark 5:11–13), demons causing a young boy to have fits (Luke 9:38–42), and causing bodily deformity in a woman (Luke 13:11–16)—all things which go beyond what we expect from demonic forces in our own day and age. The hypothesis of a special dispensation wherein demons were granted pronounced powers so that Christ’s power might be more visibly seen in their being vanquished accommodates this disparity.²¹

Indeed, Dunn and Twelftree speak of

the relative silence regarding exorcism in the post-Easter church and its mission. In contrast to the commission given to his disciples when they shared in his pre-Easter mission (Mark 6:7/Matthew 10:1/Luke

20. Cf. Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim. 4:14).

21. C. H. Spurgeon held to the same position: “in our Savior’s day it was very common for devils to take possession of men and torment them greatly. It would seem that Satan was let loose while Christ was here below that the serpent might come into personal conflict with the appointed seed of the woman, that the two champions might stand foot to foot in solemn duel, and that the Lord Jesus might win a glorious victory over him” (*The Devil’s Last Throw*, 1883, accessed September, 2018, <http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/1746.htm>).

9:1), Jesus' final commission makes no mention of exorcism (Matthew 28:18–20; Luke 24:46–9; John 20:21–3; Acts 1:8). Acts mentions exorcisms of the first Christian missionaries only twice (Acts 8:7, 16:16–18, cf. 19:11–20). And exorcisms are never given specific mention in any of the other New Testament documents.²²

That interest in demonic activity should drop so sharply after Jesus's resurrection is further evidence that there was special dispensation given to demons and that it came to a close during the lifetime of the apostles.

Whatever the testimony of the scriptures, might the materialist nevertheless simply suppose that God has forbidden demons from using their powers to affect the natural world in general, and only permitted them to affect human brains (and then only in particular ways)? Wouldn't that be enough to explain why demons aren't acting in the physical world in a more striking fashion? It would. The problem is that, by saying that, the materialist makes his view *ad hoc* in a way that the substance dualist doesn't have to. For if the scriptures do not clearly testify that demons can affect the material world as a matter of course, then the independent motivation for positing these divine forbiddings is undermined, and it remains a live option for the substance dualist to suppose (with no clear opposition from scripture) that demons are limited by the nature of their natural powers to causally interacting with other immaterial substances, and that is why they don't act more visibly in the material world—they can't. In such case there would be no need to have recourse to special divine prohibitions to explain why demonic behavior appears limited in the way that it does.

Thus, it is costly to the materialist view that it appears to require such prohibitions, and this in two ways. First, as mentioned, to the extent that scripture doesn't make it clear that such prohibitions are necessary, to that extent positing these prohibitions will be independently unmotivated, and therefore *ad hoc*. Second, positing these prohibitions reduces the theoretical economy of the materialist position. The substance dualist can accommodate the way in which demonic activity is limited to temptation through appeal merely to the nature of the demons' causal powers. But the materialist, it appears, has to posit something extra: a command from God (or perhaps a cluster of commands) prohibiting demons from acting in the physical world in any way save for the brain interactions necessary for temptation.

22. James Dunn and Graham Twelftree, "Demon-Possession and Exorcism in The New Testament," *Churchman* 94 (1980): 221.

6. *One Last Verse*

There is, however, one last verse that threatens to undermine my argument.²³ Consider 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” This verse appears to make all of the previous interpretative possibility of no avail. For here Paul seems to make it plain that what demons end up doing to human beings *is* a matter of divine permission or restraint. Paul says that God will not *let* the church be tempted beyond what it can bear. But if what demons do to human beings is limited only by the demons’ natural powers, then a stronger modality would surely have been used: Paul would have said that demons *can’t* tempt you beyond your ability. The picture implied by the language of 1 Corinthians 10:13 is that demons have the power to tempt people beyond their ability, but that God forbids them from exercising this power. Thus, both substance dualist and materialist have to accept that demonic activity is limited by divine fiat, and all the materialist does is extend that fiat to the material world, supposing that, by and large, demons are forbidden from interfering with it directly.

Here is my response: I grant that demons have the natural power to tempt us beyond what we can bear, but I think that what God is assuring us of in 1 Corinthians 10:13 is not that he has forbidden demons from tempting in excess, but rather that he himself will intervene to provide the “way of escape” when our temptations threaten to be too great. How might this happen? Given the appeal to God’s faithfulness in the verse, I suspect this assurance is restricted to Christians. But every Christian has the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit works to move and change and protect the believer. So, we can understand God’s promise here to be that whenever a Christian is under demonic attack that would, naturally speaking, overwhelm him, the Holy Spirit will graciously act to provide a way of escape, and thus prevent the temptation from being irresistible. Indeed, this seems to fit best with the content of the verse. Paul doesn’t say that God prevents the temptation from being overwhelming by forbidding it from getting to that point; he says God prevents it by providing a “way of escape” *alongside* the temptation. God does not oppose himself to the demonic work directly, but adds his own work that undercuts the demonic one.

Therefore, temptations beyond what believers can bear aren’t ruled out by a special divine prohibition, they are ruled out on account of the way the Spirit works in believers’ lives. But that the Spirit actively works in believers’ lives bestowing various graces would be acknowledged by all parties to

23. I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing it to my attention, and also for suggesting the way out.

the debate. Thus, it is hard to see the substance dualist as taking on any extra theoretical commitments that would put him at a disadvantage by preferring this understanding of the verse.

Finally, even if one remains persuaded that special divine prohibition on temptation follows from 1 Corinthians 10:13, that wouldn't enable the Christian materialist to entirely evade the force of my argument. True, the substance dualist and the materialist would appear to be on a par in terms of theoretical economy insofar as they are both committed to special divine prohibition on demonic activity, but only the latter goes beyond the scriptural witness and suggests that God has commanded demons to refrain from not only tempting beyond what can be endured, but also from interfering with the material world generally. That further suggestion still lacks scriptural warrant, and therefore remains *ad hoc*.

7. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I strike a concessive note: I concede that these weaknesses in the materialist modelling of demonic temptation I have brought to light in this paper are not decisive points against Christian materialism. They are merely costs to it, notches against the belief that must take their place on the final tallying, the grand scorecard listing the advantages and disadvantages of both Christian materialism and Christian substance dualism. The Christian materialist may well take it on the chin and say, "I do think that demons have the natural power to work in the material world, but I believe that God has simply forbidden demons from doing so (apart from temptation). Certainly, it is a cost to my view to complicate matters by positing such a forbidding, and it is also *ad hoc*, but I trust that the positive case for materialism will be strong enough to justify my belief here."

Let me finish with a parting shot against such a materialist. I think the cost to such a position is sterner than it first appears, for I feel it paints a very unsatisfactory picture of demonic life. To suppose that there are immaterial beings out there with a great hatred for humanity, desiring to, and capable of, tearing us in pieces and causing in us all manner of harm, but that they are restrained from doing so by divine fiat save for one important exception—God permits them to prod portions of the brains of human beings so that they suffer temptations—is to suppose something profoundly dissatisfying. The gulf between what demons are capable of doing and what they are permitted to do is so great that the resulting picture is almost comedic.

The substance dualist has the more reasonable position: demons do not have vast, titanic powers that they are forbidden from using; rather, temptation can be understood as the *best that demons can muster* as they strain with all their might, using all their native powers, to corrupt a human soul. As I noted in section 4, the substance dualist, in addition to restricting demonic

ability to the spiritual realm, can also restrict demonic ability with reference to irreducible mental type. The types of mental state involved in temptation might be the very best that demons can get at. Such a view removes the absurdist flavor that Christian materialism threatens to give demonic life.

I have therefore made three objections against Christian materialism in this paper. The first and chief objection is that the Christian materialist is committed to an *ad hoc* explanation for why it is that demons don't act in the world in ways beyond mere temptation—the obvious explanation for materialists to reach for being divine proscription. Secondly, such explanations reduce the theoretical economy of the materialist position. Thirdly, insofar as materialists hold to a large disconnect between native demonic capability and what God permits demons to do, their picture of demonic life will border on the comic.²⁴

24. I'd like to thank Daniel Hill, Betty Talbert, and an anonymous reviewer for various helpful remarks.