

Statement on Misquotation of My Views on the Multiverse (10/27/14)

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I discovered in early October 2014 that since 2007 a statement I made about the multiverse hypothesis has been misquoted several times by Bernard Carr in print. It has subsequently been repeated online. This statement documents the misquotation. I have discussed the matter in private communication with Dr. Carr. He agrees it was a misquotation and says it was unintentional.

I was misquoted as saying “The multiverse hypothesis is the last resort for the desperate atheist.” What I actually said was “The multiverse hypothesis is *alleged to be* the last resort for the desperate atheist.” The misquotation makes it seem as if I am personally opposed to the multiverse hypothesis and that I seek to undercut atheists. This is not the case.

Here is what I actually wrote.

As the papers by D.H. Mellor, William Dembski, William Lane Craig, and Roger White indicate, there is considerable hostility towards the multiverse hypothesis. Perhaps the most common reactions to it are that it is *ad hoc* – “a sort of backhanded compliment to the design hypothesis,” as Craig claims – and that it is metaphysically extravagant. The only motivation for believing it, goes the first complaint, is to avoid the obvious religious implications of the discovery of fine-tuning. **The multiverse hypothesis is alleged to be the last resort for the desperate atheist.** According to the second, the multiverse hypothesis violates Ockham's Razor, the philosophical injunction not to multiply entities beyond necessity when giving explanations. Assuming two hypotheses have the same explanatory power, Ockham's Razor dictates that we pick the simpler one. Swinburne and Craig claim the design hypothesis involves postulating a relatively simple entity. A multiverse, on the other hand, is (they claim) a vast, jumbled, arbitrary mess.

“Introduction,” *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science*, edited by Neil A. Manson (Routledge, 2003)
(from a section entitled “The much-maligned multiverse”)

As you can see, I wrote what I did in the context of representing the positions of the anti-multiverse authors included in my book. I then go on to respond to each of the objections to the multiverse. It is clear from the introduction that I, Neil Manson, do not believe the multiverse is the last resort for the desperate atheist. To the contrary, in the introduction I defend the multiverse hypothesis against several criticisms of it, but otherwise remain officially agnostic about it. I never profess agreement with it or rejection of it.

Here is where Carr misquoted me.

Nevertheless, the multiverse poses a serious challenge to the theological view, so it is not surprising that it has commended itself to atheists.

Indeed, Neil Manson has described the multiverse as ‘the last resort of the desperate atheist’.

Bernard Carr, “Introduction and Overview,” *Universe or Multiverse*, p. 16 (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

In fact, this dichotomy between God and multiverse is clearly simplistic. It may be true that any physical mechanism for creating our Universe will create others. But if one has a sausage-making machine, one still needs to ask who made the sausage-making machine. So while the fine-tunings certainly do not provide unequivocal evidence for God, nor would the existence of a multiverse preclude Him. For if God can create one universe, He can presumably create many. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that the multiverse proposal has commended itself to atheists.

Indeed, Neil Manson (2003) has described the multiverse as “the last resort for the desperate atheist”. For if ours is the only universe, then one has a problem explaining the fine-tunings and might well be forced into a theological direction. If there is a multiverse, at least one is not *compelled* to invoke God.

Bernard Carr, “LeMaitre’s Prescience: The Beginning and End of the Cosmos” in *Georges LeMaitre: Life, Science, and Legacy*, ed.s Rodney Holder and Simon Mitton (Springer 2013), p. 168

Without a multiverse one may be forced to adopt a non-physical explanation like a fine-tuner, which is why **Neil Manson (2003) claims that “the multiverse is the last resort of the desperate atheist”.**

Bernard Carr, “Defending the Multiverse” *Astronomy and Geophysics*, April 2008, vol. 9

In the context of the first two, I am being made out as critical of atheists. And the last one is just flat-out wrong. It is not true to say I claim – that I assert that it is the case – that the multiverse hypothesis is the last resort of the desperate atheist.

By leaving out “alleged to be,” these misquotations leave the impression that I, Neil Manson, am a theist who opposes the multiverse hypothesis and who is criticizing atheists. The truth is, I am officially agnostic and when I write about this topic I try as hard as I can to be fair to all sides.

The misquotation appears to have taken on a life of its own. It has been repeated in other books. Indeed, on some web sites, I am mistakenly characterized as a theologian or a philosopher-theologian. Again, this is not true. I am an analytic philosopher with a specialization in metaphysics and philosophy of religion. I have no formal theological training and no theology degree. I am merely a philosopher.

