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DISCUSSIONS AND REPLIES

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

ON THE CONSISTENCY OF PANTHEISM

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Abstract: Pantheists commonly wish to hold three distinct theses: that God is identical with the universe as a whole, that God is to be found altogether in each part of the universe, and that some features of the universe are more divine than others. However, it might well be complained that these constitute an incompatible set of requirements on any theory. After outlining the three positions in question, this paper considers how successfully the four main species of pantheist metaphysic — the substance monist model, the microcosmic-macrocosmic model, the universal-expressivist model, and the Absolute Idealist model — are able to respond to the problem of their compatibility.

Any acceptable pantheism, that is to say, any pantheistic scheme which is both intellectually believable and capable of grounding a living spirituality, needs to maintain three distinct things: (1) that God is identical with the universe as a whole, (2) that God is may be found wholly in each part of the universe, and (3) that some things in the universe are more divine, and hence more valuable, than others. Moreover, supporting this, any open survey of the broad range of past philosophies which might fairly be called 'pantheistic' will also reveal, admittedly not complete, but certainly very widespread, adherence to these three requirements. However, it might well be complained that they form an incompatible set of requirements on any theory. In this paper I examine first the three positions in question, before turning to consider

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in turn how effectively the four main types of pantheism are able to respond to the problem of their compatibility.

I

At its simplest pantheism is the equation between God and the universe as a whole. The qualifier 'as a whole' is important, for otherwise the term 'God' would be just a synonym for 'everything'.[1] Instead, we are to suppose that the various things we might more naturally think of as distinct combine together to constitute a genuine unity, something which it is appropriate to label with a single noun. This is by far the most common understanding of pantheism, and so in the contemporary literature we often find definitions such as the following: "Pantheism essentially involves two assertions: that everything that exists constitutes a unity and that this all-inclusive unity is divine." Or again, in the same vein: "Pantheists… believe that there is only one being, and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it."[2]

This conception of pantheism is far from modern, however. The thesis that God exhausts the universe is one for which we may find a variety of historical sources. It is, for example, a key idea in the Advaita Vedanta tradition of Hindu philosophy. Shankara maintains that "Brahman alone is real. There is none but He", and that "Brahman fills everything."[3] It is a thought which occurs in classical monotheism too. Anselm says in his *Proslogion* that all things are in God — nothing contains him but he contains all things[4] — while Amalric of Bena reputedly held that all is one and all is god.[5] Similar ideas are to be found in the Islamic Sufi philosopher, Ibn' Arabi, who in developing the Koranic notion of *tawhīd* (God's unity) asserts that there can be no real being

1 This point was famously made by Schopenhauer, *Parega and Parlipomena,* II:99, who complained that "to call the world God is not to explain it; it is only to enrich our language with a superfluous synonym for the word world."

2 MacIntyre, 'Pantheism' 34; Owen, *Concepts of Deity,* 65. See also Levine, *Pantheism.*

3 Shankara, *Shankara's Crest — Jewel of Discrimination,* 69, 110.

4 *Proslogion,* ch.XIX, 140-3.

5 Capelle, *Amaury de Bene,* 108: "*omnia esse unum, et omnia esse deum.*" Supposedly influenced by John Scotus Eriugena, the views of Amalric of Bena / Amaury de Bène (1204-1207) were condemned by synod in 1210 and are known only by report.

other than God; that God permeates through all creatures and *is* essentially all things. Especially among his followers this was developed into a monistic ontology of *wahdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being).[6]

The chief theoretician of this form of pantheism, however, is Spinoza who sums up his own position with the claim that: "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived."7 To Spinoza, the nature of substance is to be wholly independent. This makes it unique and all-encompassing. It also makes it unconditional and hence infinite or perfect. He calls it 'God or Nature.' Some commentators have doubted Spinoza's sincerity, supposing that all he really means is 'nature,' but such readings are not sustainable.

II

It might be supposed that holism is all that there is to pantheism, but if one thinks or reads a little further, it soon becomes clear that there is more. A good way to explore what further there might be to the doctrine is to consider a common objection.

Pantheists are sometimes by hostile critics accused of animism. Do they not worship trees, mountains, rivers, etc? Theorists of pantheism usually reject that charge. Their belief is not that each natural thing has a divine soul. Rather, they venerate *nature as a whole*. But this response is not quite adequate. For pantheism is not *simply* the view that God is the unified totality of things (not even if we add that, in some not-entirely-clear sense, the unified totality of things is 'greater' than the sum of its parts.) For if pantheism is to be any sort of religious view, it must ground some form of religious experience, but none of us can experience the universe *as a whole*. We can only grasp its parts, however sizable those portions may be. Yet, as half a joke is rarely funny, nor half a word meaningful, so likewise a bit of the divine is not

6 "He *is* essentially all things… He permeates through all beings called created and originated, and were it not the case, [relative] being would not have any meaning. He is Being itself" (*Bezels of Wisdom,* 135) "For He will not have aught to be other than He. Nay, the other is He, and there is no otherness." (*Treatise on Being*, 816) More likely the work of one of Ibn 'Arabi's disciples than of the master himself, the *Treatise on Being* (also known as the *Treatise on Unity*) draws out even more strongly the pantheistic implications of his ideas.

7 *The Ethics*, Part I Proposition 14.

even a bit divine. And if there is nothing more to pantheism than holism it would leave finite minds such as ours experientially shut-out from divinity. In short, holism by itself fails to do justice to the experiential root of pantheism, which grows out of a deep *reverence* for the world in which we find ourselves. Epistemically it seems to us that God is not distant but can be encountered directly in what we experience around us. We experience God in everything. The pantheist may not make the crass mistake of thinking God is literally just *this* tree or just *this* sunset or just *this* waterfall, but certainly he or she supposes that we find God in just these things.

In more technical language pantheists have often expressed this point by thinking that God is wholly present in *each* part of the world.[8] As Paul Tillich put it, "Pantheism is the doctrine that God is the substance or essence of things, not the meaningless assertion that God is the totality of all things."[9] Or in the words of an even more recent commentator, "To the notion of God as the unified totality of all things pantheism often, indeed typically, adds the notion of God as the inner life or being of each individual thing. Somehow, for most pantheists, the whole is present in each of the parts."[10]

This way of thinking too has historical precedent. Early examples may be found in the *Enneads* of Plotinus' (for whom each being "contains all within itself" such that "all are mirrored in every other")[11] and in John Scotus Eriugena (for whom God is "both whole in the whole of the universe [and]

8 Theism finds itself facing a version of this thought in its doctrine of the indwelling of God. God dwells in the heart of the believer.

9 Tillich, S*ystematic Theology,* 233-4.

10 Sprigge, 'Pantheism' 192.

11 "all that is not of process but of authentic being they see, and themselves in all: for all is transparent, nothing dark, nothing resistant; every being is lucid to every other, in breadth and depth; light runs through light. And each of them contains all within itself, and at the same time sees all in every other, so that everywhere there is all, and all is all and each all, and infinite the glory. Each of them is great; the small is great; the sun, There, is all the stars; and every star, again, is all the stars and sun. While some one manner of being is dominant in each, all are mirrored in every other." (5.8.4, paragraph one) Against "those who maintain our souls to be offshoots from the soul of the universe [parts and an identity modally parted]" Plotinus insists that reappearing in each case "there is one identical soul, every separate manifestation being that soul complete.(Plotinus *Enneads* 4.3.1 and 4.3.2, see also 5.5.9, paragraph 4; 6.5.1 paragraph 1).

whole in its parts, since He is both the whole and the part").[12] Giordano Bruno distinguishes between two forms of infinity in God, which we might term extensive infinity (*tutto infinito*) and intensive infinity (*totalmente infinito*). The one is mere bounded-less-ness the other absolute or total infinity which is complete involvement in the parts.[13] To explain his meaning Bruno employs the two illustrations of a voice heard in its entirety from all sides of the room, and that of a large mirror which reflects one image of one thing but for which, if it is broken into a thousand pieces, each of the pieces still reflects the whole image.[14] In each of these thinkers, the notion of the whole-in-each-part is largely imagistic or metaphorical. But in the nineteenth-century, in the post-Hegelian idealist tradition which flourished in Britain and America, much work was done to develop the theory of relations upon which this notion might rest. To properly connect terms, it was argued, relations must be 'internal' to them, but in that case it is possible, from any individual term, to read off its standing to the whole universe.[15]

12 *Periphyseon* 228 [IV.759a-b].

13 Bruno, *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds,* 1st Dialogue, Part II, 261: "I call the universe *tutto infinito*, because it has no margin, limit or surface; I do not call the universe *totalmente infinito*, because any part that we take is finite, and of the innumerable worlds which it contains each is finite. I call God *tutto infinito* because He excludes of Himself all limits and because each of His attributes is one and infinite; and I call God *totalmente infinito* because He is wholly in the whole world and infinitely and totally in each of its parts, in distinction from the infinity of the universe, which is totally in the whole but not in the parts."

14 Bruno, *Concerning the Cause, Principle and One*, 50, 129.

15 By way of example we can look at John Watson, *Christianity and Idealism*, 259-60: "No form of reality can be regarded as 'mere appearance,' but only as the more or less adequate manifestation of the principle which is the source and explanation of all reality. When, therefore, we speak of an 'individual' reality, we must remember that its individuality is constituted by its relation to the whole." See also *Christianity and Idealism*, 276: "we have to conceive even this stage of the world as implying an organic unity or system, in which the whole determines the parts, while the parts are essential to the whole. If we treat any part as self-complete in its isolation, we fall into the untenable doctrine of atomic Materialism; if we deny the reality of the parts, we commit ourselves to an equally untenable Pantheism; we have therefore to affirm at once the reality of the parts in the whole, and of the whole in the parts." And *The Philosophical Basis of Religion,* 457-8: "In a living being, we cannot say that the whole is simply the sum of the parts : what we must say is, that each part contains the whole, and yet that the whole could not exist apart from the peculiar activity of the parts. And if this is true of organized beings, it is true in a much higher sense of self-conscious or spiritual beings."

III

Life is characterised by distinctions of value between good and evil, beautiful and ugly, etc. But if all is one within God, it is hard to see how such divisions can be maintained at any deep metaphysical level.[16] Pantheists have a variety of ways of responding to this puzzle. (1) Some have replied by holding that the pantheistic whole is something which exists 'beyond good and evil.' Such differences it might be said are but local variations, or perspectival appearances, on a whole which accommodates them all without difference.[17] This view is consistent enough, but highly unsatisfactory, for it robs the pantheistic position of all religious value. How can we worship that which stands outside all value? (2) An alternative response to the problem of value would be to hold that since God is good, and God is identical with the world, it must in fact be the case that the world is wholly good, and evil merely an illusion or appearance. In so far as the divine light is then taken to illuminate everything, however small or mean, there is something inspiring in this view. To such a pantheism, the glory of God can be seen as all-pervasive and found even in neglected things. But of course, the view has another less attractive side, for it is a denial of the existence of evil which really amounts to a repudiation of all ethics.[18] (3) A third and far more attractive response is the attempt to retain

16 The presence of evil is a problem for theists too, of course.

17 This is a common theme in Hindu pantheism. Shankara for example maintains that while good and evil both appear to exist, in reality both are *maya* (or illusion), and to one who is enlightened nothing is either good or evil (Shankara, *Shankara's Crest — Jewel of Discrimination,* 105, 123).

18 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II, Ch. XLVII, 590: "All pantheism must ultimately be shipwrecked on the inescapable demands of ethics, and then on the evil and suffering of the world. If the world is a theophany, then everything done by man, and even by animal, is equally divine and excellent; nothing can be more censurable and nothing more praiseworthy than anything else; hence there is no ethics." Lewis, *Mere Christianity,* 41: "If you do not take the distinction between good and bad very seriously, then it is easy to say that anything you find in this world is a part of God. But, of course, if you think some things really bad, and God really good, then you cannot talk like that. You must believe that God is separate from the world and that some of the things we see in it are contrary to His will. Confronted with a cancer or a slum the Pantheist can say, 'If you could only see it from the divine point of view, you would realize that this also is God.' The Christian replies, 'Don't talk damned nonsense.' For Christianity is a fighting religion. It thinks that God made the world—that space and time, heat and cold, and all the colors and tastes, and all the animals

distinctions of value within the pantheistic scheme as a whole. Somehow we want to say that while God is present in all things, divinity characterises some features of the universe more than others.

If we look to actual pantheistic systems, this third is probably the most common response. As John Macquarrie notes: "It is sometime said in Pantheism, God is supposed to be equally present in every part of the universe. This may be an implication of the literal meaning of pantheism, that everything is God or God is everything. In practice, however, some things are accepted as more fully manifesting the presence of God than others."[19]

This is very clear if we look at contemporary popular pantheism. Pantheism today is most commonly taken as the view that *nature* is sacred; that God is found in *nature*. The more natural a thing is the more divine it is held to be. This requires us to say that human culture is artificial or unnatural, and in some sense less than holy. In one sense, no doubt, that is deeply problematic — for "Even what is most unnatural is Nature"[20] — but there is another sense in which we can readily sympathise with it. It is not merely pantheists who find natural places highly spiritual, who find God in mountains but not car-parks.

But pantheists are not necessarily nature lovers, for that is not the only way to understand degrees of divinity. For Hegel, the divinity of the world lies in *reason*. On the Hegelian scheme everything is rational, but some things are more explicitly so than others. To Hegel God is revealed in the rationality that underlies human culture and history. The city is more sacred than the grove. The rational state is the march of God on the earth. Such views may be disquieting to nature lovers, but they are not unfamiliar in traditional theism. Nature may be God's handiwork, but if the Church is the body of Christ then its action may be even more divine than that of Mother Nature.

Notions of degrees of divinity are much older than this, however. For their roots we might best look to Neo-Platonism. "Seeking nothing, possess-

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and vegetables, are things that God 'made out of his head' as a man makes up a story. But it also thinks that great many things have gone wrong with the world that God made and that insists, and insists very loudly, on our putting them right again."

19 Macquarrie, *In Search of Deity*, 52.

20 Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, 209.

ing nothing, lacking nothing the one is perfect" maintains Plotinus,[21] but as such it is "unable to remain self-closed"[22] and produces from out of itself a cascading sequence of emanations. "For a tendency dwells in every being to bring forth what follows after him, and to unfold, as from seed… The highest level, however, remains in its own place, while it brings forth, as it were, that which is lower than itself out of an overwhelming power of which it bears the abundance in itself."[23] "To resume: there is from the first principle to ultimate an outgoing in which unfailingly each principle retains its own seat while its offshoot takes another rank, a lower, though on the other hand every being is in identity with its prior as long as it holds that contact."[24] As reality is qualified and diversified, it undergoes diminution in unity and in reality, which is simultaneously a diminution in value. Those who complain that not everything in the universe is perfect fail to see, urges Plotinus, that there is a necessary order of progression from primaries, to secondaries, etc. which is inevitably a dilution of goodness;[25] perhaps somewhat as an electrical charge that becomes smaller each time it is subdivided. Of course, the reverse process — the passage from part to whole, from finite to infinite—traces a steady increase in value. What Plotinus' system shows is that the difference between the monistic reality of The One and the pluralistic appearance of everyday reality need not be all-or-nothing; but may rather be characterised by degrees of truth, reality and value.

IV

The three pantheistic theses, and the cases for them, briefly introduced, we may now turn to consider the charge that they are mutually incompatible. The tension between them is not hard to see. Between 1 and 2: Either God is something which exists separately in each part of the universe, in which case the whole is irrelevant, or God is the whole universe itself, in which case the

21 Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.2.1.
22 Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.4.1.
23 Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.6.
24 Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.2.2.
25 Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.8.13.

parts, taken separately, are each something less than God. Between 2 and 3: If God is wholly present in each part how can some parts be more valuable than others? If some things are worth more than others they cannot all be equally divine. Between 3 and 1: How can the whole be more present in some things than in others? That may make sense for some features or aspects of an object, but what can it mean for the whole?

The tension between these three principles is not intrinsic but derives from our underlying metaphysics, and different metaphysical schemes cast it in a different light. In the remainder of the essay I shall compare four basic metaphysical models for understanding pantheism, drawn from the history of the doctrine, in order to see how well they are able to address and integrate each of the three requirements set out. The perspective taken is a very wide one, for if choices are to made about fundamental metaphysical allegiances, broad brush outlines of the entire domain are necessary. A paper of this compass, however, cannot hope to do more that sketch the main advantages and disadvantages of each path. Only by fully developing one branch or other could a final judgement be made. This I have not attempted.

V

The most straightforward species of pantheism is that of substance monism. A substance is a particular individual, something existing in its own right, and typically we suppose that there exist many such substances. The substance monist maintains, by contrast, that only the totality of these taken all together as one great whole counts as a genuine substance. If such a substance is further deemed to bear the marks of divinity, we have pantheism. Pantheism of this type is to be found, for example, in Spinoza and in F.H.Bradley.

From even so brief an account as this it should be clear that pantheism conceived in this way is well able to manage the unity requirement. To appreciate this it helps to remember that the thesis is not quite that which it is usually taken to be. Put quickly or carelessly the account is often expressed by saying that the things we call substances are really just parts of one great substance. But this is an unfortunate way of speaking. 'Parts' have a relatively

loose and detachable connection, and a mere collection of units is no genuine unity. For this reason in place of the language of merelogical composition Spinoza prefers the locution of a 'substance and its modes' where modes are to be understood as more akin to properties than parts. For Bradley even this designates too loose a union and he rejects altogether relational thought and language. His Absolute is a unitary whole which contains diversity, but does so without in any way being broken up into terms and relations.

How the substance monist model deals with the question of differential value is more complicated. It was noted above that one response would be to say that the pantheistic whole is 'beyond good and evil,' and there is a certain amount of textual support for the view that both Spinoza and Bradley take just this line.[26] But in neither case does this stance represent their last word. In both philosophers we find also the view that the unified totality of all beings termed 'God' or 'the Absolute' may be understood as the culminating step along a notional ladder or chain, in which the whole of creation may be arranged in order of increasing degree of reality or coherence; a chain which, if we are prepared to equate the real and the good, may also be thought of as a hierarchy of increasing value or divinity. To take an imperfect analogy, if the human being is a single integrated whole, the human brain is both a greater and a more unified contributor to that whole than, say, the foot. It bears a greater imprint of the whole. In similar fashion the pantheist may suppose that certain regions or sides of reality reflect more fully than others both the metaphysical and the ethical character of the whole.

However, despite its potential on these two fronts, when we turn to the third condition of an adequate pantheism — the idea of the whole as somehow present in each part — the substance monist conception of pantheism appears to run out of steam. The very essence of substance monist thinking is that whatever contributes to form a whole, considered separately, must be deemed less than or inferior to that whole. In so far as fragments bear traces or marks of the greater whole from which they are drawn, in so far as they point towards whatever is necessary for their own completion, they may be thought to carry with them

26 This conclusion might well be drawn from Spinoza's comments about the subjectivity of value, see for example *Ethics* e3p9s; e3p39s; e4d1; consider also Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 355: "Evil and good are not illusions, but they are most certainly appearances. They are one-sided appearances, each overruled and transmuted in the whole." In *Appearance and Reality*, 363 he also says: "the good is not the Whole, and the Whole, as such, is not good. And, viewed thus in relation to the Absolute, there is nothing either bad or good, there is not anything better or worse."

echoes of their divinity. But that is merely a starting point in any search for the divine, which is something that can only be found insofar as we *transcend* the finite or partial for the infinite and complete.

VI

There is a long tradition of world-views in which human nature is understood as the microcosm of the macrocosm or the universe at large. Such a relationship may be generalised to apply not merely to human beings but to all particular existents, generating a metaphysical scheme in which every part of the universe is structured in such a way as to mirror the whole; in which the finite is the echo of the infinite. Such metaphysical schemes are rare, but certainly not unheard of. Often, as in the case of Giordano Bruno that we considered above, they are cast in highly metaphorical form, but it is possible to construct more rigorous accounts. In his *Monadology* Leibniz presents a world-view in which, because of the interconnection of all created things to each one, each substance has relational properties that express all the others, such that it is a 'living mirror' to the entire universe.[27] Another interesting example would be the American idealist, Josiah Royce's conception of the universe (or as he terms it, the Absolute) as self-representing whole. Drawing on the pioneering mathematical work of Richard Didekind, Royce illustrates his idea by asking us to imagine a map of England so detailed as to include even a representation of itself — one part reflecting the whole.[28]

Leaving for another day the question of what grounds we might have for thinking that the universe is arranged like this, it is clear to see that this scheme meets at least one of our conditions for an adequate pantheism. As would be expected — since that is the very heart of its formulation — it is able to capture the pantheist wish to maintain that we meet with God in the inner essence of each individual thing. If the mapping is perfect, it simply may not

27 *Monadology* §56. The British Idealist J.M.E. McTaggart put forward an interesting development of that idea which he called a 'determining correspondence' scheme, in which the parts of each substance correlate to the group in which it belongs (*The Nature of Existence,* ch.XXIV).

28 *World and the Individual*, 502-7.

be possible to choose between thinking of each part as a reflection of the whole and thinking of the whole as something which reflects each of its parts.

It might be suggested that success won in this dimension can only be at the expense of the dimension of unity. In what sense is an assemblage of reflections — we might recall Bruno's illustration of the shattered mirror here — a genuine whole? It seems to me that this concern is misplaced, however. For if one may find the entire universe echoed in a single speck, that fact in itself gives a real and significant unity to the resulting universe. The nature of any unity lies precisely in the ways that its parts all make reference to each other, and in a case such as that we are considering here, each part carries, in its own nature its connection to every other thing. Leibniz himself understood well how very close this conception brought him to a monism not so different from that of Spinoza. What saved him from this unwelcome fate was in his opinion, nothing in the system of monadic mirrors itself, but rather the assignment of individual causal power to each distinct monad.

However, the microcosmic-macrocosmic model of pantheism is less successful in dealing with the requirement for degrees of divinity. If the whole is present in each part, then will it not be equally so, making all parts equally divine? Leibniz was dimly aware of this problem. For Leibniz each monad sees the whole universe. Because he wishes to *distinguish* monads one from another he maintains that each does so from a different point of view. But further to this we wishes to defend a *hierarchy* among monads — from God, through rational souls, to animal souls, to the 'bare monads' that lie behind corporeal matter — and this he does by introducing differences in the clarity of monad perceptions. As he charmingly puts it, all minds are omniscient, although all (with the exception of God) are to differing degrees confused.[29] Such an answer is too subjective to capture genuine differences in degree, however. On the Leibnizian scheme it remains the case that each thing reflects the whole equally; it is simply that that is clearer in some cases than in others.

29 *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 18.

VII

Further to the substance monist and the microcosmic-macrocosmic models, an alternative framework for conceiving pantheism we might call the universal-expressivist model. According to this scheme the world, in all its detail and variation, is to be thought of as a set of manifestations, or expressions, or emanations of a single underlying principle of divinity. The key thought behind these metaphors is that of the theory of universals; the relation between the eternal nature of God and the temporal world in which it is expressed being modelled on the relation between eternal essences and mutable particulars which are their instances. The two universals at the heart of this way of thinking are 'Being' and 'Goodness'. From the earliest classical theism right through to modern theology it has been maintained that God is not a being, but rather 'being itself.' God is precisely the ground or root of all that is. And a similar pedigree may be traced for the conception of God as 'the Good' itself, as the value which is 'in' all valuable things. Everything, in so far as it has worth, manifests the original worth of the divine nature.[30]

Where the macrocosm-microcosm model struggled with degrees of divinity, the universal-expressivist model of pantheism is at its strongest. For it belongs to the very nature of expression, manifestation, or instantiation that it may be more or less adequate, more or less complete. That the things of this world may be ranked according to the degree to which they manifest Goodness itself is a quintessentially Platonic doctrine, further developed in Neoplatonism, and from there finding its way in to classical theism. The most common metaphor used to express this relation is that of *light*; steaming out from a single source and diminishing in brightness the further it travels from that point of origin.

Taking the theory of universals as a blueprint for understanding pantheism also affords a good model for making sense of the pantheist claim that God may be found at the heart of everything. For it is in the very essence of a

30 The notion of God as 'Being itself' may be found all the way from Aquinas *("Ipsum Esse per se Subsistens" Summa Theologicae*, 1, question 4. Article 2, 52-3) through to modern figures such Paul Tillich. (*Systematic Theology*, volume I, 235-41) That God is 'Goodness itself' occurs from Augustine (*On the Trinity*, Book VIII, ch.III, §4) through to such modern voices as Hugh Rice (*God and Goodness,* ch.5).

universal that it is a 'one in many', a unitary character to be found undivided and wholly present in each of its particulars. The various instances do not get 'a separate bit each.' Now, if God just is 'Being itself' or 'Goodness itself', since the being and the goodness of individual things are no less genuinely existent or good than that of the whole, it is easy to see that this scheme will afford us a mechanism for meeting the pantheist demand that the Divine whole be found in each of its parts. (It is important to make a distinction between 'wholly present' and 'perfectly present' least what is being said here be thought to contradict what was just said above. A universal is not divided up into portions, but that is not to say it is everywhere perfectly instantiated. The slightly curved or kinked line may not perfectly express straightness, but what it fails to express perfectly is straightness itself, not some curious segment thereof.)

Any strength that pantheism taken as a theory of universals may have won in these two fields, however, it appears to have paid for with respect to the third field: holism. For while co-instantiation of a common universal introduces a certain unity among a given set of particulars, this hardy effaces the diversity of the set itself or makes the collection of instances into one greater whole. A collection of instances of a given universal is not in any helpful sense a single thing. It is marked by qualitative unity, but by no sort of numerical unity.[31]

VIII

Metaphysical frameworks for pantheism mostly picture God as something residing within and completely suffusing the world. But there is a different way to look at the matter. Rather than thinking of God as set inside the world in some strange way, it may be better to think of the world as somehow set inside God. Such is the final species of pantheism that I wish to look at, the Absolute Idealist scheme, in which the universe and all of its contents are thought of as existing within the *mind of god.* To a realist, who believes in

31 Although such an analysis *could* be attempted, it is not very plausible to think of a universal as a collection of all its particulars. 'Concrete universals' do better on this, but only because they are really more like Spinozistic or substantial wholes than universals.

existence of independent material being, such a scheme may be inconceivable. But to an idealist, for whom there can be no reality outside of experience anyway, the case may be easier. Although even here there remains the great puzzle of how many different minds might possibly be combined together within one greater consciousness; for *prima facie* individual minds seem each to possess a sort of distinct impermeability unlike that of the myriad drops of water that combine together to form the ocean.

If it is possible to understand the entire universe as a single all-encompassing whole of experience, its unity would be secured by the unity of consciousness which is definitive of mental life itself. Mind is characterised by many different perceptions, conceptions and capacities, but unless they are all bound together in one whole, by one 'I', there is no 'mind' at all. This thought, indeed, lies at the very heart of all pantheistic schemes. Faced with the assertion that 'God = the universe', we naturally read this assertion as telling us, not that God is as diverse and aggregate as the universe, but rather that the universe is as unitary as God, and the reason for this that the we characteristically think of God as a self or mind, and the very essence of mind lies in its unity.

But if my consciousness is a unified whole, it is nonetheless true at the same time that 'I' am wholly and equally present as the subject of each one of my individual thoughts and experiences. The contents of my experience are multifarious, but the subject of them all — their *author* or their *possessor* — is one and the same. It is in this sense that my identity remains constant, even if my thoughts and experiences themselves change. Now, if God stands to the multiple things of the world as I stand to my perceptions and thoughts, it would be possible to think of divinity as wholly present in each individual substance or process. At this point it is interesting to observe how language comes full circle. The desiderata of an adequate pantheism of which I am speaking here is that which was described as the requirement that it be possible to find 'the whole in the part'. But this phraseology has a history. Its origin may be traced back to the Scholastic notion of *totum in toto et totum in qualibet parte* ('the whole in the whole and the whole in each part.') But that form of words, it turns out, is in fact an historical locution for the human mind, coined precisely to capture the way in which we wish to identify

ourselves simultaneously with *both* the whole compass of our mind *and* the subject at the centre of each individual thought.[32]

The third criterion of an adequate pantheism — that it be capable of accommodating degrees of value or divinity — is less obviously amenable to the Absolute Idealist scheme of God as a universal consciousness. However it may be possible to make some steps in this direction. Although conscious mind is not divisible into parts or degrees, it is possible to be more or less truly — more or less fully or genuinely — oneself at any time or other, or in any one thought or another. Not every thought we have is equally expressive of who we are — they range from the sublime to the mundane — but if the contents of the world are just so many thoughts of God the same perhaps may be said of their variety.

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THEISM AND CONTRASTIVE EXPLANATION

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Abstract. I argue that there could not be grounds on which to introduce God into our ontology. My argument presupposes two doctrines. First, we should allow into our ontology only what figures in the best explanation of an event or fact. Second, explanation is contrastive by nature, in that the explanandum always consists in a contrast between a fact and a foil. I argue that God could not figure in true contrastive explanatory statements, because the omnipotence of God guarantees that for any true proposition *p*, God could have made it the case that ~*p* just as much as He could have made it the case that *p*.

I.

I argue that there could not be grounds on which to introduce God into our ontology. My argument presupposes two doctrines:

(A1) We should allow into our ontology only what figures in the best explanation of an event or fact.

(A2) Explanation is contrastive by nature, in that the explanandum always consists in a contrast between a fact and a foil.

I argue that God could not figure in true contrastive explanatory statements, because the omnipotence of God guarantees that for any true proposi-

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EUROPEAN JOURNAL FOR
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
Vol 9, No 1 (2017)

tion *p*, God could have made it the case that ~*p* just as much as He could have made it the case that *p*. I make three further assumptions:

(A3) To be God, a being must be omnipotent.

(A4) For any proposition *p*, an omnipotent being has the power to make *p* true.

(A5) Citing a cause is always explanatory.

A3 is accepted by most philosophers of religion, though a few (e.g., James Keller) reject it.

A4 is rejected by most philosophers of religion. For example, propositions like '2 + 2 = 4' and '2 + 2 = 5' seem to be examples of propositions that cannot be made true even by an omnipotent being. Therefore, I shall restrict A4 to contingent propositions. That is, omnipotence entails the power to make true, at most, all contingent propositions. Indeed, this is true on the best available current theories of omnipotence.[1]

A5, unlike A1-A4, is not essential to the paper's main argument. Instead, I use it in order to answer an objection without making a commitment to the thesis that all explanation is causal.[2]

II.

Since Quine, the following ontological principle has seen much popularity: we should accept as existing only those entities which are postulated in the best explanation of what we accept to be the case. It follows that we have good reason to believe that *x* exists only if *x* has some some explanatory power: only those entities the postulation of which is necessary for explain-

1 Further issues are raised by propositions that are true due to an act of free will. God cannot make such propositions true if there is genuine libertarian freedom. Similarly, propositions about the past: although it is contingent that Germany lost World War II, God cannot now make this false. I shall not pursue these complications here.

2 A possible counterexample to A5 is presented by chance events: in the case of chance events (e.g., a car hits my aunt) we can have a cause (the car with its velocity and the position of Aunty), but we do not have an explanation (at least not one 'of the right kind'). I owe this point to Benedikt Paul Göcke.

ing something should be believed to exist.[3] I will argue that appeal to God is always explanatorily impotent.

For us to be justified in accepting the existence of God, the postulation of God must have some explanatory significance. A common argument for the non-existence of God is that there is nothing the (best) explanation of which requires the postulation of God. This was Laplace's line when he told Napoleon that he did not believe in God because he had 'no need for that hypothesis.'[4]

It has often been assumed that a canonical explanandum consists of a single event or fact. More recently, however, Peter Lipton has claimed that a canonical explanandum is a 'contrastive phenomenon': a pair consisting in a fact and a foil.[5] A fully specified explanatory statement does not take the form '*p* explains why *q*', but rather the form '*p* explains why *q* rather than *r*'.[6] In its minimal form, an explanatory statement would be '*p* explains why *q* rather than ~*q*'.

Let us further assume that *one* way to explain something (e.g., a contrastive phenomenon) is by citing its cause — what brought it about or made it the case. The assumption is that causal explanation is a genuine and legitimate kind of explanation. This is much weaker than holding a causal account of explanation, according to which all or most explanation is causal.[7] The claim is merely that citing of a cause is explanatory.

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3 'Only if' rather than 'if and only if' because the latter would entail that we have eo ipso good reasons to believe that any *x* with explanatory power exists, which is absurd.

4 Strictly speaking, Laplace was here concerned with whether one needs God as a hypothesis in natural science, not whether we need God in other contexts. This is also the vein of Russell's 'teapot atheism': there is no more evidence for the existence of God — no more explananda calling out for the postulation of God — than there is for the existence of a miniature China teapot orbiting the sun. See Bertrand Russell, *'Is There a God?'* in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, Volume 11: Last Philosophical Testament*, ed. J. G. Slater and P. Köllner, (London: Routledge, 1997).

5 Peter Lipton, 'Contrastive Explanation' in D. Knowles (ed.), *Explanation and its Limits*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

6 Lipton's favourite example is the following. Lipton's three-year old son throws the food on the floor. When asked to explain his misdeed, the child says that he was not hungry anymore. This explains why the child threw the food on the floor rather than eat it, but it does not explain why he threw the food on the floor rather than leave it in his plate.

7 David Lewis, 'Causal Explanation' in his *Philosophical Papers, Volume 2*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Some contrastive explanatory statements are therefore causal statements. They are statements of the form '*p* caused *q* rather than *r*', or at least '*p* caused *q* rather than ~*q*', Such a statement may be ambiguous as between '*p* caused *q* rather than causing *r*' and '*p* caused *q*-rather-than-*r*'. That is, there is an ambiguity between a contrast of causation and a causation of contrast. But this ambiguity will not matter for present purposes.

Many theists will reject this approach to explanation in favour of (say) the deductive-nomological or holistic models of explanation. Hence I shall now say a few words on why this approach to explanation is good on independent grounds.

The central thesis of the contrastive approach to explanation is that requests for an explanation are explicitly or implicitly contrastive. They have the form 'Why *p* rather than *q*?', rather than simply 'Why *p*?'. When the contrast remains implicit, it is obvious in the context in which the question is posed. Moreover, what counts as an explanatory cause depends not just on fact *p* but also on the foil *q*. Thus 'the increase in temperature might be a good explanation of why the mercury in a thermometer rose rather than fell, but not a good explanation of why it rose rather than breaking the glass' (Lipton 2001: 48). Not all of *p*'s causes explain *p* in a given context; the foil in a contrastive question partially determines which causes are explanatory and which are not. A good explanation requires a cause that made the difference between the fact and foil. Thus the fact that 'Smith had syphilis may explain why he rather than Jones contracted paresis (a form of partial paralysis), if Jones did not have syphilis; but it will not explain why Smith rather than Doe contracted paresis, if Doe also had syphilis' (Lipton 2001: 49). Contrastive explanations bring out the way in which what makes a difference between *p*'s occurring or not depends on what we mean by *p* not occurring, on our choice of foil. In so doing, it seems also to support the idea that the reason (some) causes are explanatory is that they identify what made the salient difference between the occurrence and non-occurrence of the effect of interest. Theories of explanation (such as the deductive-nomological or holistic models) which leave the contrastive structure of explanation unspecified are therefore greatly incomplete models of explanation.

We are now in a position to see why appeal to God is always explanatorily impotent. Because, by A3, God is omnipotent, there is no possible fact, event,

or state of affairs He would be unable to bring about. And by A4, there is no contingent proposition He could not make true. Moreover, His infinite power implies that differences in the effort required on God's part to bring about different states of affairs are negligible. It follows that for any true contingent proposition *p*, 'God caused *p*' (Or 'God caused it to be the case that *p*') is just as plausible as 'God caused ~*p*' (Or 'God caused it to be the case that ~*p*'). That is, for any true contingent proposition *p*, citing God is just as good a causal explanation of *p* as of ~*p*.

This creates a principled problem for employing God in contrastive explanation. Statements of the form 'God explains why *p* rather than ~*p*' can never be true, because citing God can never account for the contrast between *p* and ~*p*. Ironically, then, it is God's omnipotence that makes Him explanatorily impotent. God's omnipotence entails that for any proposition *p*, God can equally easily make it to be that *p* (rather than ~*p*) and that ~*p* (rather than *p*), thereby explaining it, since, by A5, causal explanation is a variety of explanation. Therefore, for any proposition we might seek to explain, God could serve equally well to explain both it and its contradictory, and so God would never add any explanatory value to a theory. Therefore, by A1, we are not possibly licensed in admitting God into our ontology.

III.

I now turn to consider four objections to this argument.

First, it might be objected that even though appeal to God cannot figure in contrastive *causal* explanation, it can still figure in different forms of explanation.

One reply would be to embrace the thesis that all explanation is causal. But that is unnecessary. Even if *p* can be explained non-causally whereas ~*p* cannot, it remains the case that ~*p* can be explained causally, since everything can be explained causally by appeal to God's doings. So for any proposition, *some* explanation of its negation by appeal to God would be available.

Second, it might be claimed that the argument commits a verificationist fallacy. It may show that we cannot establish whether God actually brought it about that *p* or that ~*p*. From this it does not follow, however, that there is no *fact of the matter* as to whether God brought it about that *p* or that ~*p*.

This objection is an *ignoratio elenchi*. The above argument is not supposed to show that God does not exist. Rather, it purports to show that there is not — or more accurately, could not — be reason to believe that He does. That is, the claim is that belief in the existence of God is epistemically unjustified. The argument does not impose a verificationist constraint on truth or reality, though it may impose a verificationist constraint on justification.

Third, if one grants A1-A4, then the most obvious objection to the argument is that God may have *reasons* to cause *p* rather than ~*p* and he brings about *p* and so some statements of the form 'God explains *p* rather than ~*p*' can be true after all. That is, although God *could* cause anything, it does not follow that He would. God may have good reasons for preferring the obtaining of *p* over the obtaining of ~*p*, and act on those reasons. Another way of putting the point is this: If we are asked 'Why *p* rather than ~*p*?', it seems perfectly proper to answer: 'Because God had preferred *p* to ~*p* and consequently chose to bring about *p*.'

However, in the proposed explanations, the appeal to God does no explanatory work. Instead, the appeal to the *reasons* attributed to God (and his choosing to act on them) does the explanatory work and that appeal just presupposes God's existence and so gives us no reason to introduce God into our ontology.

In reply, it might be said that the reasons God has for preferring *p* to ~*p* do not all by themselves cause *p* to be true rather than ~*p*. So God's existence is surely an essential component of the causal explanation of why *p* is true rather than ~*p*. The reasons God has for bringing about *p* rather than ~*p* do not do any explanatory work on their own; they help explain something *p* only insofar as God *has* these reasons and brings about *p for* those reasons. God's existence is an essential constituent in this explanation. Insofar as *God's acting for reason R* is the result of an inference to the best explanation, this appeal does not seem so much to *presuppose* God's existence as to provide grounds for *positing* God's existence.

However, we must distinguish between the 'what' component of a causal explanation and the 'why' component. In the explanation in question, God is the answer to the question 'What caused *p*?', while the reasons attributed to God (and his choosing to act on them) are the answer to the question 'Why did God cause *p* rather than ~*p*?– So, since explanations are answers to why

questions, it is the reasons (and God's acting on them) that do all the explanatory work. That is, what explains the fact that *p* rather than ~*p* is the fact that God has the reasons He does (and chooses to act on them). But that explanation already presupposes that there *is* a God. What we are still missing is an explanatory context in which God might be introduced into our ontology in the first place. If we are asked 'Why *p* rather than ~*p*?', it is no more acceptable to answer: 'Because God preferred *p* to ~*p* and consequently chose to bring about *p*' than it would be to identify Jane's husband as her murderer on the grounds that Jane's husband preferred Jane dead rather than alive and consequently chose to murder Jane *unless we already have an explanatory context in which Jane's husband is included in our ontology in the first place*. 'Because Jane's husband preferred Jane dead and consequently chose to murder her' has no explanatory power in respect of Jane's death unless it is already justifiably believed that Jane has a husband.

Or to put it another way: when astronomers infer the existence of a planet from a telltale wobble in the star it orbits, it would indeed be bizarre to challenge the explanation on the grounds that it is certain of the planets properties (its mass, orbital path, distance from the star) that do the explanatory work, while the existence of the planet is presupposed — consequently, the proffered explanation gives us no reason to introduce the planet into our ontology.[8] But that is because we already have planets in our ontology and have observed their effects. We already know planets exist. We do not already know God exists. To be a candidate for a cause we must already believe in entities of the relevant sort.

A fourth objection arises in connection with the modified version of A5. Given this restriction on God's omnipotence, the following problem arises. Many theists seek to include God in their ontology on the ground that He explains *necessary* truths. Leibniz, for example, argued that, since mathematical truths were necessary and eternal, they required a necessary and eternal truthmaker, *viz*. God's Ideas. Independent of the plausibility of such an argument, it is not ruled out by my argument when we account for the proper restrictions on Divine omnipotence. Given the possible need for explaining necessary truths, therefore, the argument fails.

8 This is the chief method by which astronomers discover exoplanets.

My reply is twofold. First, many theists seek to introduce God on the basis of contingent considerations alone. Second, it is impossible for an agent (even an omnipotent agent) to bring about a necessary state of affairs (e.g., *that all cubes are shaped*) or make necessary truths necessary. It is possible for an agent, *a*, to make a necessary truth, *p*, necessary, only if possibly, (1) *a* brings about *p* and (2) if *a* had not acted, then *p* would have been false. Because a necessary truth is necessary whether or not anyone acts, (2) is false. Therefore, it is impossible for an agent to make a necessary truth necessary.

IV.

I conclude that appeal to God is explanatorily impotent, and necessarily so, given the contrastive structure of explanation. This means that there could be no grounds on which to introduce God into our ontology. This argument neutralizes all a posteriori theistic arguments from the get-go: none can, in principle, license belief in God.[9]

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THE PRACTICE OF ASSERTION UNDER CONDITIONS OF RELIGIOUS IGNORANCE

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Abstract. The knowledge and attendant justification norms of belief and assertion serve to regulate our doxastic attitudes towards, and practices of asserting, various propositions. I argue that conforming to these norms under conditions of religious ignorance promotes responsible acts of assertion, epistemic humility, and non–dogmatic doxastic attitudes towards the content of one's own faith. Such conformity also facilitates the formation of the religious personality in a healthy direction in other ways. I explore these ideas in relation to the Christian faith tradition, but my reflections generalize.

I. INTRODUCTION

One fundamental dimension of religious practice is communicating one's doxastic attitudes towards religiously significant propositions to others for various purposes. Such purposes include making oneself more fully known in the context of one's spiritual community, engaging in discussion on how to process reality through the lens of one's faith commitments, acting on a spiritually grounded moral conviction, and expressing the content of one's faith in conversations with those who do not share one's own leanings. If we extend the paradigmatic use of 'assertion' we can also recognize a form of

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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
Vol 9, No 1 (2017)

assertion which is a private mental event. Within the context of one's spiritual life one sometimes has occasion to meditate on the propositional content of one's own faith, and declare to oneself propositions which one either believes, hopes, or accepts in an attempt to either achieve clarity regarding such content or to reinforce one's ability to act in accord with such content.[1]

Assertion is of course a sub–species of action. But, unlike most of our actions, when one asserts one has the ability to qualify one's assertions in various ways which enables one to convey not only the content, but also the degree of confidence one has in regards to the content which is expressed. In contrast, many of our actions, spiritually relevant or otherwise, do not clearly reveal either the beliefs which drive those actions, or the degree of confidence we have.

For example, when one attends a church service part of the significance of one's attendance may be a public affirmation of, and identification with, a broadly Christian set of commitments. Yet, it is only in one's speech acts where the subtle nuances of one's commitments can be effectively revealed.[2] This raises a host of questions regarding the habits we ought to form around the practices of portraying our beliefs, hopes, and commitments to others and to ourselves. Should we assert spiritual beliefs which we lack knowledge of without qualification? Or, is it beneficial to get into the habit of qualifying our assertions so that they match the levels of epistemic support which ground

1 I take believing that *p* to be more or less identical to judging that *p* is true. Such a judgment may either be latent and dispositional or occurrent. I take hoping that *p* to entail believing that *p* has a non-negligible probability of being true, and desiring that *p* is true. Hoping *p* is incompatible with both knowing *p* and knowing *p* is false. (Rizzieri 2013) Finally, I think of accepting that *p* along the lines marked out by Jonathan Cohen. Consider, "…to accept that *p* is to have or adopt a policy of deeming, positing, or postulating that p- i.e. of including that proposition or rule among one's premises for deciding what to do or think at a particular context." (1992, 4).

2 Consider these words from C.S. Lewis regarding the significance of his original decision to attend worship services, "As soon as I became a theist I started attending my parish church on Sundays and my college chapel on weekdays; not because I believed in Christianity, nor because I thought the difference between it and simple theism a small one, but because I thought one ought to "fly one's flag" by some unmistakable overt sign. I was acting in obedience to a (perhaps mistaken) sense of honor." (1955, 220-221) The casual observer of Lewis' actions would assume that Lewis had converted to a form of Christianity and not merely to theism. Yet, Lewis had made the choice of declaring his theism by undertaking a course of action which would naturally cause one to suspect he had embraced Christianity.

them? The goal of making an assertion is typically to express whatever hopes, beliefs, desires, and commitments one has. To assert is to speak one's mind. (Bach, 2005, McGrath, 2010) Therefore, we cannot address questions regarding whether it is appropriate to express unqualified assertions such as "God exists", or "Jesus is the son of God" under conditions of epistemic ignorance without also discussing whether it is appropriate to flat–out believe such assertions under conditions of ignorance.

The meaning of the word "appropriate" is indeterminate in this context as one could have in mind questions of purely epistemic appropriateness, or a kind of practical appropriateness which bears a complex relationship to both moral and epistemic appropriateness. Let me state at the outset that the type of appropriateness I have in mind is this practical type which has moral, sub–moral prudential, and epistemic dimensions.[3] I do not desire to provide a rich characterization of this notion of practical appropriateness, but my meaning will be sufficiently clear as we proceed given the types of advantages I allude to in regards to qualifying one's assertions and hence molding one's underlying noetic structure in a particular direction. More specifically, I want to paint a picture of some of the advantages of merely hoping, as opposed to believing outright, that a variety of *unknown* religiously significant propositions are true and regulating one's assertions accordingly. The advantages I focus on surround the fact that such hope guided assertions are likely to develop the spiritual dimensions of one's personality in a healthier, because more realistic and existentially invested, direction. Furthermore, such hope–guided assertions are far less likely to be irresponsible.

3 Terence Cuneo has recently argued that there are distinctly epistemic norms which either are or generate categorical reasons to believe in accord with the levels of epistemic support one has for a proposition. By 'categorical' he has in mind the idea that such norms do not depend on the beliefs, goals or desires of either particular agents or social groups of which they are apart. (2007, esp. ch. 2) I agree with Cuneo regarding the existence of *sui generis* epistemic norms, but I do not have a well-formed opinion on the authority such norms possess in isolation from the prudential and moral norms which they partially constitute, and if aspects of the recent literature on pragmatic encroachment is correct, are partially constituted by. My arguments will focus on the claim that we have good practical reasons to follow the dictates of various knowledge and justification norms of belief and assertion. Hence, I need not take a stand on whatever authority to regulate belief and assertion such norms have as distinctly epistemic norms.

For the purposes of pursuing this exploration of religious hope, belief and assertion let us note the following assumptions:

(A1) Many historically orthodox Christian beliefs which form the core content of many a person's faith are neither known to be true nor known to be false.

(A2) Knowledge is the norm of belief and assertion in the sense that ideally we would only believe propositions which we know to be true when the goal of doing so is to believe or assert that which is true.

(A3) Justification of a broadly internalist type is the norm of belief and assertion in the sense that it is the most effective way to pursue the knowledge norm of belief and assertion.

The first assumption regarding the epistemic status of core Christian beliefs is what motivates this essay. If we were to possess knowledge that God exists, that Jesus rose from the dead, and other religiously significant propositions then the question of what our doxastic attitude towards such propositions should be would be a settled matter. Firm and fixed belief, and the corresponding unqualified assertions of those beliefs, would be the appropriate response in all but very anomalous circumstances. Even though my focus is on propositions which state tenets of the Christian tradition, the points I make about religious assertion should generalize.

Assumption two is a statement of a "knowledge norm of belief and assertion." The epistemological literature on this and related norms is rather robust. (e.g. Hawthorne, 2004, Hawthorne and Stanley, 2008, Lackey, 2007, Williamson, 2000) I do not have space to do anything more than briefly describe the content of such norms by giving examples, and note my own convictions regarding a practical dimension of what motivates norms of this type.[4] Regarding the content of such norms, consider the following statement of a knowledge norm of assertion which is both common in the literature, and is one I find plausible under a variety of widely instantiated conditions which I note below:

4 I have a lot more to say in regards to these norms in my (Rizzieri 2013).

KNA: One should assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*. (Lackey, 2007)[5]

As I have tried to capture in my statement of (A2), the knowledge norm of assertion is a norm only in the sense that knowing is the highest ideal for asserting when the goal is to express what is true. Of course, some of our assertions are geared towards other purposes such as inducing laughter, deceiving a foe, or providing emotional comfort. Yet, when the goal of assertion is to communicate true information, it is an ideal to assert only what one knows for a variety of reasons.

First, as Peter Unger has argued, when one asserts that *p* one typically represents oneself as knowing that *p*. (Unger, 1975) If someone were to ask you where the nearest gas station is, and you respond "just around the corner", they would naturally take you to know it is just around the corner. Second, as Gilbert Harman (1980) has argued, knowledge that *p* marks the cessation of active inquiry concerning the truth of *p*.

Hence, when we assert an idea to others, and are hence presenting ourselves as knowing the idea is true, we are implicitly communicating to that person that they need inquire no further. Hence, asserting what one does not know when one knows one does not know, both misrepresents one's own cognitive state and causes others to rely on information which is not as well–grounded as they may think. This is why asserting without knowing (when one knows one does not know) is deceptive, and when important ideas are in play, negligent. Now, of course one can only judge whether or not one has knowledge that *p* by attending to the level of epistemic justification one has for that *p*. This is why I have labeled KNA a norm which states an ideal

5 Lackey argues that this norm is not quite right as there are cases in which one fails to know that *p* because one fails to believe that *p* even though her evidence supports that *p*. Under such conditions one should assert in accord with her evidence even if one does not believe what one is asserting. I agree with Lackey that if there were to be a split between what one believes and what one's evidence indicates that it would be better to assert what one's evidence indicates. This is one reason why I don't think this norm is regulative. There is a more specific norm, the justification norm of assertion, which both overrides the knowledge norm whenever they come into conflict, and is the proper norm to follow when one is attempting to follow the knowledge norm. Yet, I still hold that it ought to be everyone's goal to assert only what they know when the goal of making as assertion is to convey the truth. This follows from the idea that knowledge is also the norm of belief, and that when one asserts one is making the content of one's mind known.

outcome, and the justification norm to which we will now turn a regulative norm.[6]

Assumption three is a statement of a "justification norm of belief and assertion." We can state the justification norm as a close parallel to the knowledge norm:

JNA: One should assert that *p* only if one is justified in believing that *p*.

As I have stated, the justification norm is what Alvin Goldman has called a regulative epistemic norm in that it guides our behavior (see n. 5). (1978) Given fallibilism about knowledge, one can have knowledge level justification that a belief is true and yet fail to have knowledge because that belief is in fact false. Yet, when this happens, it is still the case that the agent in question has either believed or asserted responsibly if she has done so in accord with her evidence. I am focusing on an internal justification norm here because, especially when we are dealing with questions which we have had the opportunity to reflect on at length, we typically discern whether or not we know the answer to such a question by assessing our evidence for the various possible answers. Hence, the justification norm which I have stated is one which involves an internal rationality requirement.

In what follows I shed some light on why these norms are especially important in spiritual contexts where maximally important questions are being entertained. As we shall see acting in accord with the justification norm of assertion, in pursuit of the knowledge norm, promotes epistemic humility, promotes responsible acts of assertion, and increases one's awareness of the role her passional nature is playing in regards to the various religiously significant commitments one holds.

II. HOPE, BELIEF AND RESPONSIBLE ASSERTION

Consider the following list of statements:

6 The relationship between KNA and JNA is a lot like the relationship between a utilitarian principle which states a good action (ideal outcome), and a related principle which states a right action (responsibly undertaken one). Whereas a good action is one which maximizes good consequences, a right action is one which is most likely to achieve those consequences. Hence, the principle stating the right action would be the regulative one.

(S1) I *believe* God exists.

(S2) I *believe* God is more concerned with the right of the Jewish people to live in Israel than God is with the welfare of the Palestinian people.

(S3) I *believe* God disapproves of homosexuality.

(S4) I *believe* God wants me to serve the world as a doctor in a third world country.

(S5) I *believe* God wants all of us to pursue economic justice for the poor.

Now compare (S1)–(S5) with these parallel propositions:

(S1') I *hope* God exists.

(S2') I *hope* God is more concerned with the right of the Jewish people to live in Israel than God is with the welfare of the Palestinian people.

(S3') I *hope* God disapproves of homosexuality.

(S4') I *hope* God wants me to serve the world as a doctor in a third world country.

(S5') I *hope* God wants all of us to pursue economic justice for the poor.

These two sets of propositions which concern the doxastic attitudes one has towards five different religiously significant ideas feel very different when contemplated. A brief phenomenological comparison reveals that having a spiritual or religious hope essentially involves a personal investment in the form of a desire for what is hoped for to obtain, whereas belief does not. This renders hoping that *p* a more vulnerable and invested state of affairs than believing that *p.* This shouldn't be surprising once we get clear on what hope is. If common speech is to be our guide, hoping that a proposition is true is incompatible with either knowing that proposition is true or knowing that it is false. When one discovers she has just been accepted to the college of her

choice she can no longer hope to be accepted. Similarly, she cannot hope to be accepted once she knows she has been rejected either. Hope also has a desire component. When we hope that either a specific idea is true or that a state of affairs will obtain, we want that idea to be true or desire the obtainment of that state of affairs.

Consider (S2) and (S2') in particular. A North American Christian whom accepts an interpretation of the relevant Biblical passages which entails that Israel belongs to the Jewish people until the second coming may sincerely believe that this is the case, and act and speak accordingly, even if she does not have strong feelings on the matter either way. Alternatively, one may have strong feeling on the matter, but feel fully entitled to such feelings because one is convinced her beliefs are true. If such a person retains an unfettered belief on this topic, it would be easy for her to fail to feel the full import of acting in accordance with such beliefs given what is at stake for both Jewish and Palestinian persons. This in turn could lead to many missed opportunities for peace–making activities, and spiritual growth which often accompanies encountering moral ambiguity. Such unfettered belief can also lead to irresponsible acts of assertion.

Regarding irresponsibility, if one really does not know either that the Bible is generally authoritative or that one's interpretation of the relevant passages is correct due to a deficiency in one's epistemic position regarding the veracity of one's interpretation then one should qualify one's assertions accordingly. Failure to do so could cause one to persuade others to (for example) vote for a political candidate whose agenda is actually harmful to both Jews and Palestinians in that it promotes the goal of total victory for one side and hence encourages an ongoing state of war. Practicing the ancient philosophical art of taking stock of how likely it actually is that one's beliefs are true, and regulating one's actions which stem from that belief accordingly, is a form of acting responsibly when acting on a belief has morally significant consequences. Notice that even if one cannot help but have an over–weaning felt sense of confidence that the belief in question is true, one can still attend to one's evidence and see if there is a disconnect between one's level

of confidence and that evidence. One can then choose to regulate her actions accordingly. Assertion, unlike belief, is under our direct voluntary control.[7]

III. HOPE, AMBIGUITY, AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

When one fails to attend to the warrant they have for acting on spiritually and morally significant beliefs, one misses out on an opportunity to struggle with the moral and factual ambiguities inherent in any complex social justice issue such as those involved in the ongoing Jewish/Palestinian conflict. The sense of having the moral high ground which comes with simply thinking one is right often causes one to fail to struggle with the very sorts of ambiguities which enable us to escape our own dogmatic slumbers. This can lead to complacency and shallowness. Continuing on with our example, it is the recognition of the presence of legitimate competing interests which almost forces one who is operating from within the Christian tradition to bring Christian teachings concerning the importance of reconciliation between divided cultures, and the role of the follower of Jesus as a peacemaker, to bear on how one should respond to this issue.

This move towards compromise and reconciliation is most often instigated by just such a recognition of competing claims. The individual who follows JNA, and over time cultivates an intellectual character which is such that her degrees of belief are more responsive to her evidence, grows in her ability to empathize with those who she is inclined to disagree with on important matters. This humility is one root out of which a peacemaking mentality can grow. If Thomas Merton is correct when he consistently identifies charity as the essential component of the Christian duty to love one's neighbor, and if it is the self–satisfied and triumphalist attitude which a certain type of religious person often has which stifles such charity, then learning to follow the dictates of the justification norm of assertion (which we can control) is

7 Steven Reynolds and John Bishop have argued that we can make sense of judging others for believing what they should not, even though they lack significant voluntary control over such believings, by interpreting such judgments as primarily pertaining to the assertions and other actions which flow from their misguided beliefs. This is because one does typically have control over one's actions in response to her own beliefs. (Bishop 2006, ch. 2, Reynolds 2011) I also argue in defense of this and related ideas in my (Rizzieri 2013).

the strong medicine such a person needs to reform her inner cognitive life (which we have less control over) in the direction of humility. (Merton, 1955)

In a passage of Merton's which I can no longer locate, Merton quotes Karl Jaspers to the effect that one potentially negative consequence of having knowledge regarding an existentially significant proposition is that one can in a sense *hide* behind such knowledge. The relevant sense of "hiding" involves having an objective and impersonal basis for one's convictions which does not require the subject to struggle with that which is believed and does not afford the individual an opportunity to take stock of a non-cognitive ground which reveals significant dimensions of one's personality.

Earlier I mentioned hoping that p entails both believing that p is to some degree plausible, and desiring that p is true. It is this desire component of hope which Merton and Jaspers may have had in mind when they speak of a more subjective (in the sense of deeply personal) ground of one's commitments that reflects deeper dimensions of one's character.

That there are existential advantages, in regards to one's personality development, of living in partial ignorance is predicated on the idea that when we realize our convictions are not grounded by sufficient epistemic reasons, we are forced to attend to non–rational factors which nourish those convictions. This can, and indeed often does, lead to an increase in self–knowledge. More specifically, when we realize we do not believe an idea simply because that idea is true we become aware of the value assumptions, associations, desires, and fears which may or may not be partially responsible for our action guiding beliefs. In contrast, a self–acknowledged mere hope that an idea is true is much more likely to cause one to come to grips with these passional grounds of belief which emanate from deeper parts of the human personality than one's intellect.

Perhaps there are some resources for theodicy, especially in regards to the problem of divine hiddenness, in these comments. To be partially in the dark and partially in the light, and to acknowledge that one is in the shade, is a powerful impetus for the development of a healthy religious personality

which is complex enough to interact with the complexities and ambiguities of our current world.[8]

Similar thoughts apply to (S1) and (S1'). An invitation to explore one's belief that God exists is an invitation to explore reasons which may or may not be deeply personal in the existential sense. In contrast, an invitation to explore one's hope that God exists is an invitation to explore the desires, values, and ultimate set of concerns that one grapples with in relation to the divine.

(S4), (S5) and their counterparts are interesting because they concern attitudes towards propositions and actions which are widely considered to be noble and good whether or not there is a God who is actually leading one to pursue those actions. One's attitude towards propositions of the form 'God wants me to X' can have a profound effect on how one goes about deciding the course of one's life. Once one believes outright God is leading him or her to be a doctor or pursue economic justice in a specific setting, this belief has a way of dominating, psychologically speaking, whatever other reasons and motives one has. One may feel a duty to obey that sense of conviction and run the risk of shutting down reflection on one's other values and experiences which have led to the conviction that one must act in such a specific way. Regarding assertion, if one conveys with full confidence that God is leading one to pursue a specific course of action to others, this has the potential to silence their much needed feedback.

We all too often, especially when we are young, act on strong convictions which may just as easily have arisen in the soul as a compensation for a wounded ego, as they may have arisen from either God's leading or the legitimate discovery of a vocational direction which was latent in one's personality. Premature belief regarding what courses of action in life God wants one to pursue can lead to adopting a pattern of life which is ultimately disillusioning and unfulfilling because it fails to cohere with one's unique personality and skills.

In contrast, if a person has a hope that God may very well be leading her to pursue a specific course of action, she is likely to pursue additional support

8 John Hick's notion of 'epistemic distance' in the context of his own theodicy explores some of the possible roles which ignorance may play in character development (1966). See also Poston and Dougherty (2007).

that this a good decision by exploring one's personal strengths and weakness, getting feedback from other persons, or seriously considering alternative courses of action.

III. CONCLUSION

This contrast between hope and belief in religious contexts in terms of how these two attitudes are likely to affect one's decision making and exploration of the grounds (epistemic and non–epistemic) one has for accepting a religiously significant proposition serves to highlight the importance of various knowledge and justification norms of belief, action, and assertion which have been proposed in the contemporary literature. As we have seen, obeying the justification norm of belief and assertion in regards to propositions which concern both general truths about God and specific truths about one's own vocation can have the effect of promoting the goods of epistemic and moral humility, promoting responsible acts of assertion, and increasing one's level of self–knowledge.

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SKEPTHEISM: IS KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S EXISTENCE POSSIBLE?

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Abstract. In this paper, I sketch an argument for the view that we cannot know (or have good reasons to believe) that God exists. Some call this view "strong agnosticism" but I prefer the term "skeptheism" in order to clearly distinguish between two distinct epistemic attitudes with respect to the existence of God, namely, agnosticism and skepticism. For the skeptheist, we cannot know (or have good reasons to believe) that God exists, since there can be neither conceptual (*a priori*) nor empirical (*a posteriori*) evidence for the existence of God.

I. WHAT IS SKEPTHEISM?

In this paper, I present an argument in support of the view that some call "strong agnosticism." According to Le Poidevin (2010), for instance, "[strong agnosticism] says that we *cannot* know whether or not God exists" (emphasis in original). I will use the term "skeptheism" to refer to the view that knowledge of God's existence is unattainable in order to capture what I take to be an important difference in epistemic attitudes about the existence of God, namely, a difference between agnosticism (or suspending judgment) and skepticism.[1]

1 By "God," I mean a being that, at a minimum, is perfect in terms of power, knowledge, and goodness. In other words, God is supposed to be an omnipotent (all-powerful), om-

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An agnostic is someone who suspends judgment about the existence of God because he or she thinks that there is no sufficient evidence either for or against the existence of God. But an agnostic is open, *in principle*, to further evidence that might come to light and make us revise our beliefs about the existence of God. A skeptheist, on the other hand, thinks that no evidence, of any kind, can show that God exists. As far as we are concerned, the existence of God is beyond our ken. In other words, agnostics think that knowledge of *God's existence is possible*, whereas skeptheists think that knowledge of *God's existence is impossible*.[2]

Skeptheism is also different from atheism, since an atheist thinks that we can know whether or not God exists. According to the atheist, we know (or have good reasons to believe) that God does not exist.[3] But a skeptheist is someone who thinks that, *in principle*, there is no way for us to find out whether or not God exists. In that respect, a skeptheist is a skeptic about God's existence, whereas an atheist denies God's existence. [4]

It is important to note that, although I have distinguished skeptheism from atheism and agnosticism in terms of the possibility of knowing whether or not God exists, the distinction does not turn on the any particular analysis of knowledge. For the same distinction can be articulated in terms of justified belief (i.e., a belief that is based on adequate justification) or reasonable belief (i.e., a belief for which a good reason can be given). That is to say, while the-

niscient (all-knowing) and omnibenevolent (allgood) being. On this conception of God, see Wierenga (1989, 1-6). For more on the divine attributes, see Everitt (2010). On some puzzles concerning the divine attributes, see Mizrahi (2013).

2 Oppy (2006, 15) distinguishes between "strong agnosticism," which is "the view that is sustained by the thesis that it is *obligatory* for reasonable persons to suspend judgment on the question of the existence of an orthodoxly conceived monotheistic God," and "weak agnosticism," which is "the view that is sustained by the thesis that it is *permissible* for reasonable persons to suspend judgment about on the question of the existence of an orthodoxly conceived monotheistic God" (emphasis in original). Unlike Oppy's weak and strong agnosticism, which are theses about what reasonable persons *should* (or should not) do, skeptheism (as I understand it here) is a thesis about what we *can* (or cannot) know (or reasonably believe).

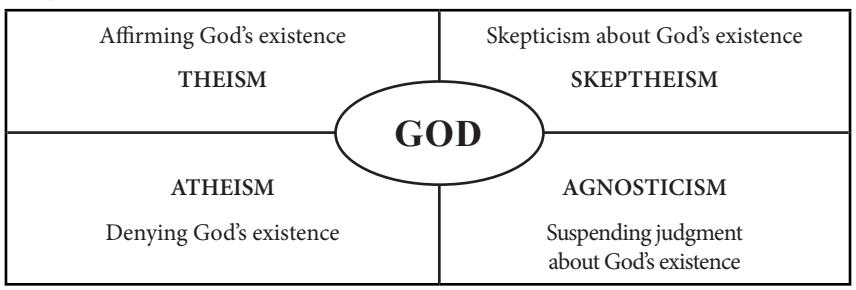
3 On the distinction between "positive atheism," i.e., to affirm the non-existence of God, and "negative atheism," i.e., to lack a belief that God exists, see Flew (1984, 13-30). On atheism as "the position of not believing that a theistic God exists," see Martin (1990, 26).

4 Cf. Miller (2011, 105, footnote 26). According to Miller (2011, 99), "Most atheists are error theorists about theists; they claim that theists have genuine beliefs about the existence and nature of a divine being, but as a matter of fact no such divine being exists."

ists would say that we have good reasons to believe that God exists, atheists would say that we have good reasons to believe that God does not exist, and agnostics would say that we have good reasons to believe neither that God exists nor that God does not exist, skeptheists would say that no good reasons can be had either for or against the existence of God. Throughout this paper, then, each occurrence of 'knowledge' can be replaced with 'justified belief and each occurrence of 'know that' is interchangeable with 'justifiably believe that'.

It is also worth noting that skeptheism is clearly different from both skeptical theism and negative theology. Of course, both skeptical theists and negative theologians do not think that God does not exist. Rather, negative theologians, such as Maimonides (1963, 482),[5] claim that we cannot justifiably make any positive claims about the nature of God, such as "God is omnipotent," whereas skeptical theists, such as van Inwagen (1995, 85-95), claim that our cognitive limitations are such that we can never fathom God's reasons for allowing evil in this world.[6] Skeptheists, on the other hand, claim that it is not only God's nature and his reasons for allowing evil that are forever beyond our ken but also God's very existence. Accordingly, Figure 1 depicts the attitudes one can take vis-à-vis the existence of God.

Figure 1. Epistemic attitudes vis-à-vis the existence of God



Accordingly, theists, atheists, agnostics, and skeptheists would respond to the question "Do we know whether or not God exist?" as follows:

5 See also Seeskin (2005, 89).

6 For more on skeptical theism, see McBrayer (2010) and the essays collected in Dougherty and McBrayer (2014).

Theist: We know (or have good reasons to believe) that God exists.

Atheist: We know (or have good reasons to believe) that God does not exist.[7]

Agnostic: We do not know (or have good reasons to believe) that God exists.[8]

Skeptheist: We cannot know (or have good reasons to believe) that God exists.[9]

Note the key difference between the agnostic's response and the skeptheist's response. The former leaves open the possibility that we might come to know whether or not God exists, whereas the latter amounts to denying the possibility of knowing whether or not God exists. Unlike the agnostic, then, the skeptheist is a skeptic about God's existence.[10]

Now that we have a good grasp of what skeptheism is and how it differs from theism, atheism, and agnosticism, we are in a position to see what an argument for skeptheism might look like. In the next section, then, I sketch an argument for skeptheism.

AN ARGUMENT FOR SKEPTHEISM

2a. Why the existence of God cannot be known a posteriori

In this section, I sketch an argument for skeptheism, the skeptical view that knowledge of God's existence is beyond our ken as a matter of principle.[11]

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7 Cf. Martin (1990, 464) on "positive atheism," i.e., "the belief that there is no god or gods." See also Bullivant (2013, 11-21).

8 Cf. Kenny (2006, 21) on agnosticism, i.e., "the position of one who does not know whether or not there is a God." See also Kenny (2009, 117-124).

9 A skeptheist, then, is not merely a Pyrrhonist about God's existence, i.e., one who suspends judgment about God's existence, but rather an academic skeptic about God's existence, i.e., one who denies the possibility of knowing that God exists.

10 On religious belief and skepticism, see Avnur (2011). For a recent argument that knowledge of God is a cognitive achievement, see Bolos (2015).

11 I should say that what follows is not intended to be an accurate interpretation of the primary texts cited. I only cite Hume and Gaunilo because the arguments I discuss in this sec-

To set the stage for this argument in support of skeptheism, consider what Philo says about the teleological argument in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779):

> A very small part of this great system, during a very short time, is very imperfectly discovered to us; and do we thence pronounce decisively concerning the origin of the whole?
>
> Admirable conclusion! Stone, wood, brick, iron, brass, have not, at this time, in this minute globe of earth, an order or arrangement without human art and contrivance: therefore the universe could not originally attain its order and arrangement, without something similar to human art. But is a part of nature a rule for another part very wide of the former? Is it a rule for the whole? Is a very small part a rule for the universe? Is nature in one situation, a certain rule for nature in another situation vastly different from the former? (Hume 1907, 42-43)

Philo thus objects to the teleological argument by pointing out that we cannot infer that the unobservable cause (i.e., the creator) of the universe is God solely from observable effects. This is so because we do not have the relevant background information that would license such an inference. To see why, consider how the unobservable cause of a viral disease is inferred from its observable effects. In the case of HIV/AIDS, for example, cohorts of patients that exhibit symptoms of HIV infection are tested for the HIV virus and are then compared with control groups of subjects that either exhibit symptoms but do not carry the virus or do not exhibit symptoms but do carry the virus. In other words, several controlled experiments, usually retrospective studies, must be performed before one can reasonably conclude that the unobservable cause of observable effect E is C. This sort of experimental reasoning is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Experimental reasoning from observable effect *E* to unobservable cause *C*.[12]

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tion are inspired by what they say in response to the teleological and ontological arguments, respectively. On Philo's objections against the teleological argument, see Cordry (2011). On the enduring appeal of the teleological argument, see De Cruz (2014).

12 Adapted from Salmon (2013, 174). Compare to Mill's joint method of agreement and difference for establishing causal claims.

Case	Antecedent conditions	Effect
1	*C, X, Y, Z*	*E*
2	*C, X, Y*	*E*
3	*C, X*	*E*
4	*C, Y*	*E*
5	*X, Y, Z*	No *E*
6	*X, Y*	No *E*
7	*X*	No *E*
8	*Y*	No *E*

For example, the unobservable cause C is the HIV virus, which is always present whenever AIDS symptoms are present but is absent whenever AIDS symptoms are absent.

Now, Philo's point is that, in the case of the universe (the observable effect), we cannot perform controlled experiments, retrospective or otherwise, since there are no cases where the effect is absent. After all, we inhabit a small planet in one solar system which is part of one galaxy out of billions of other galaxies. Even if there are other universes, they are epistemically inaccessible to us. Moreover, for all we know, there are no cases where the unobservable cause (which is supposed to be God) is absent, either. In other words, as far as God and the universe are concerned, we lack the relevant background information that would warrant an inference from observable effects to unobservable cause. If this is correct, then the following argument can be made:

(3.1) We can justifiably infer an unobservable cause from observable effects only if we have the relevant background information about the cause and the effects.

(3.2) In the case of God and the universe, we cannot have the relevant background information about the cause and the effects

Therefore,

(3.3) We cannot justifiably infer that God is the unobservable cause of the universe from observable effects alone.

Note that this argument is neither an argument for atheism nor an argument for agnosticism. That is to say, this argument does not show that one should deny the existence of God. Nor does it show that one should suspend judgment about the existence of God. Rather, this argument shows that we cannot infer the existence of God from a certain kind of evidence, namely, empirical evidence. In other words, this argument shows that there can be no empirical or *a posteriori* knowledge of God's existence. As such, this argument is an argument for skeptheism, particular, skepticism about *a posteriori* or empirical knowledge of God's existence.[13]

To be clear, my argument here is not "One argument for the existence of God from empirical evidence (e.g., biological design, fine-tuning, miracles, moral facts, religious experience, etc.) fails; therefore, all empirical arguments for the existence of God fail." Rather, my argument is that the existence of God cannot be known *a posteriori* because *a necessary condition for arguing for the existence of God on the basis of empirical evidence cannot be fulfilled*, namely, the condition of having the relevant background information that licenses an inference from observable effects (e.g., biological design, fine-tuning, miracles, moral facts, religious experience, etc.) to unobservable cause (namely, God).

To this it might be objected that 'God exists' can be known (or justifiably believed) to be true *a posteriori* on the basis of religious experience and that such experiences count as empirical evidence for the existence of God without relying on any inferences from observable effects to unobservable cause.[14] For example, Tucker (2011, 64) argues that religious experience counts as evidence for God's existence on the basis of Phenomenal

13 It is worth noting that this argument for skepticism about empirical knowledge of God's existence does not depend on any Humean skepticism about causation. For the argument does not assume that we cannot infer an unobservable cause from observable effects. Rather, premise (3.1) says that we can justifiably do so just in case we have the relevant background information, so that we do not mistake mere coincidences for causal relations. As far as God and the universe are concerned, however, we do not have the relevant background information.

14 Various versions of the argument from religious experience can be found in Swinburne (1979), Alston (1991), and Plantinga (2000). See also Zagzebski (2011).

Conservatism (PC), according to which "a subject [*S*] has evidence for P if it seems [to *S*] that P."[15]

If PC is true, and *S* has a religious experience where it seems to *S* as if God exists, then *S* has evidence for God's existence, or so Tucker (2011) argues.[16]

Tucker (2011, 65-67) goes on to say that the evidence for God's existence provided by these seemings (namely, religious experiences) will usually be undefeated by other evidence.[17] But I think that this is mistaken. Here is why. For religious experience to count as empirical evidence for God's existence there must be good reasons to believe that God is indeed the unobservable cause of such experiences. The problem is that there are other potential causes for religious experiences, such as psychotropic drugs[18] and weak magnetic fields.[19] So God is not the only potential cause of religious experiences. There are other potential causes. In that case, the question is which of these potential causes is the one that actually causes religious experience? In other words, of these potential explanations for the phenomenon of religious experience, which is the best one?

To answer this question, then, we would have to rely on inferences from observable effects (in this case, religious experiences) to cause (in this case, a supernatural cause, such as God, or a natural cause, such as psychotropic drugs or weak magnetic fields). This is a general point about the use of natural phenomena as empirical evidence for God's existence. That is to say, for any natural phenomenon *P*, such as religious experience, apparently miraculous events, design (either biological or cosmic), and the like, *P* is empirical evidence for God's existence just in case there are good reasons to believe that God is indeed the unobservable cause of *P*. If there are alternative ex-

15 For a useful review of the literature on Phenomenal Conservatism, see Moretti (2015). For objections against Phenomenal Conservatism, see Mizrahi (2013b), (2014a), (2014b), (2014c).

16 It is important to note that, as far as Phenomenal Conservatism is concerned, beliefs that are based on seemings are different from beliefs that are based on faith. See Huemer (2011, 1-13). On faith, see Howard-Snyder (2013, 357-372) and Kvanvig (2013).

17 Cf. Smith (2014).

18 See Griffiths et al (2006), Griffiths et al (2008), Griffiths et al (2011), MacLean et al (2011).

19 See Derr and Persinger (1989) and Booth and Persinger (2009). For a critique of these results, see Granqvist et al (2005). For a reply, see Persinger and Koren (2005).

planations for *P*, then *P* is empirical evidence for God's existence just in case the God explanation can be shown to be better than the other explanations.[20] Showing that the God explanation is the best explanation among competing explanations for *P*, however, requires making inferences from observable effects (*P*) to unobservable cause (God), i.e., showing that God, but not the other causes, is the most likely cause of the phenomenon in question.[21] This is why (3.3) applies to any alleged *a posteriori* or empirical evidence for God's existence.

If this is correct, then, contrary to Tucker's claim that religious experience is typically undefeated evidence for God's existence, there are such defeaters. The fact that there are natural explanations for religious experiences (e.g., in terms of psychotropic drugs or weak magnetic fields) defeats the claim that such experiences are empirical evidence for God's existence, unless it can be shown that God—not natural causes like psychotropic drugs or weak magnetic fields— is the most likely cause of such experiences. In order to show that, however, one would have to rely on inferences from observable effects (religious experience) to unobservable cause (God). For this reason, (3.3) applies to any alleged *a posteriori* or empirical evidence for God's existence, including religious experience.

In other words, there are at least two competing explanations for religious experience and each explanation can be supported by an Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE).[22] The first explanation is a supernatural one in terms of a supernatural entity like God:

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20 This is why the multiverse hypothesis is a common objection against the fine-tuning argument. The multiverse hypothesis provides an alternative explanation for fine-tuning, an explanation that does not appeal to a supernatural designer, and thus fine-tuning does not uniquely support the design hypothesis. See Manson (2009, 274-275). Cf. Juhl (2006) and Roberts (2012). See also Mizrahi (2017) and Harker (2012).

21 Note that, even if we have good reasons to believe that natural explanations are not good enough to account for a given natural phenomenon, all that follows from that is that a supernatural explanation may be the best one. But a supernatural explanation for a natural phenomenon is a far cry from God. After all, God is supposed to be, at a minimum, an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect being. As Philo points out in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, these divine attributes cannot be inferred from phenomena like design in any straightforward way. The same point applies to other natural phenomena, such as religious experience, and the like.

22 On the structure of IBE, see Psillos (2007).

(1) Some people have religious experiences.

(2) The best explanation for (1) is that these experiences are caused by a supernatural entity.

(3) No other hypothesis explains (1) as well as the supernatural explanation does.

Therefore,

(4) Religious experiences are probably caused by a supernatural entity.

Of course, if the conclusion of this IBE is true, then that would be a good reason to believe that a supernatural entity exists.[23] The second explanation is a natural one in terms of natural entities like psychotropic drugs or weak magnetic fields:

(1) Some people have religious experiences.

(2) The best explanation for (1) is that these experiences are caused by natural entities (e.g., psychotropic drugs or weak magnetic fields).

(3) No other hypothesis explains (1) as well as the natural explanation does.

Therefore,

(4) Religious experiences are probably caused by natural entities (e.g., psychotropic drugs or weak magnetic fields).

If the IBE for the natural explanation is cogent, then it counts as an undercutting defeater[24] against the supernatural explanation for religious expe-

23 Though, again, it may be a supernatural being other than God. For even if the best explanation for religious experience is a supernatural one, it doesn't necessarily follow that the supernatural entity is God. After all, God is supposed to be, at a minimum, an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect being. The supernatural entity that is responsible for religious experience may be powerful enough to cause religious experiences, but not all-powerful. Moreover, why should there be one supernatural entity rather than some or many? As Philo points out in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the divine attributes cannot be inferred from natural phenomena like design in any straightforward way. The same point applies to other natural phenomena, such as religious experience, and the like.

24 Pollock and Cruz (1999, 196).

rience. More precisely, the alleged evidential connection between "religious experience" and "supernatural cause" is undercut by the fact that religious experiences can be explained in terms of natural causes, such as psychotropic drugs and weak magnetic fields. For this reason, again, (3.3) applies to any alleged *a posteriori* or empirical evidence for God's existence, including religious experience.

In fact, it may be argued that, when judged relative to generally accepted criteria of selection, the natural explanation in terms of natural entities (like psychotropic drugs or weak magnetic fields) is better than the supernatural explanation in terms of a supernatural entity (like God). Philosophers have offered the following key criteria for selecting between competing explanations (Mizrahi 2012, 134):

Unification: As a general rule of thumb, choose the explanation that explains the most and leaves the least unexplained things (see, e.g., Kitcher 1981).

Coherence: As a general rule of thumb, choose the explanation that is consistent with background knowledge (see, e.g., Kosso 1992).

Simplicity: As a general rule of thumb, choose the least complicated explanation, i.e., the one that posits the least causal sequences and entities, and that goes beyond the evidence the least (see, e.g., Sober 1988, 1994, and 1998).

Testability: As a general rule of thumb, choose the explanation that yields independently testable predictions (see, e.g., Zahar 1973, Kitcher 1983, and Leplin 1997).

In terms of *unification*, the natural (psychotropic drugs or weak magnetic fields) and the supernatural (God) explanations seem to account for the phenomena of religious experience equally well. However, the supernatural explanation raises many unanswered questions that the natural explanation does not. Some of these unanswered questions are the following: Why does God make some people have religious experiences but not others? Many people never have religious experiences. Why is that? Is religious experience the best way for God to make his existence apparent to humans? Being omnipotent and omniscient, God could find a better way to make his existent apparent to humans. After all, "the concept [of religious experience] is vague, and the multiplicity of kinds of experiences that fall under it makes it difficult to capture in any general account" (Webb 2011). Yandell (1993, 25-32) divides

religious experiences by the content of the experiences as follows: monotheistic, nirvanic (Buddhism), kevalic (Jainism), moksha (Hinduism), and nature experiences. Why such diversity?

In terms of *coherence*, the natural explanation is more consistent with our background knowledge than the supernatural explanation is. As far as supernatural entities are concerned, our background knowledge is quite limited compared to what we know about ourselves and the sorts of effects certain drugs can have on us.

In terms of *simplicity*, the supernatural explanation postulates the existence of a being that is different in *kind* from anything else in the universe, whereas the natural explanation says that the causes of religious experience are of the same kind as everything else in nature. So the supernatural explanation postulates the existence of a kind of entity that is not quite consistent with our background knowledge. In general, if "entities [especially unobservable ones] should not be multiplied beyond necessity," then the natural explanation is the simpler one.

Finally, and more importantly, in terms of *testability*, there does not seem to be an independent way to test the supernatural explanation. To choose between these two competing explanations, we need a way to test them independently of the *explanandum* (i.e., religious experience). One might think that there is no way to test the supernatural explanation, even *in principle*, given that it postulates the existence of a supernatural entity, and thus it goes beyond the scope of scientific inquiry, which deals with the natural, not the supernatural. Be that as it may, there does not seem to be a way to test the supernatural explanation independently the *explanandum* (i.e., religious experience).

On the other hand, the natural explanation makes at least one prediction that can be tested independently of the *explanandum*. If the natural explanation is true, then religious experiences can be induced on demand by using psychotropic drugs or weak magnetic fields. As the aforementioned studies show (see footnotes 16 and 17), this is in fact the case.

For these reasons, the natural explanation not only undercuts the alleged evidential connection between "religious experience" and "supernatural entity" but it also outperforms the supernatural explanation when the two are evaluated in terms of theoretical desiderata, such as unification, coherence,

simplicity, and testability. All of this shows that (3.3) applies to any alleged *a posteriori* or empirical evidence for God's existence (e.g., biological design, fine-tuning, miracles, moral facts, religious experience, etc.).[25]

2b. Why the existence of God cannot be known a priori

Now, to set the stage for the second part of the argument for skeptheism, consider Gaunilo's objection against St. Anselm's ontological argument:[26]

> Now, if someone should tell me that there is such an island, I should easily understand his words, in which there is no difficulty, but suppose that he went on to say, as if by a logical inference: 'You can no longer doubt that this island which is more excellent than all lands exists somewhere, since you have no doubt that it is in your understanding. And since it is more excellent not to be in the understanding alone, but to exist both in the understanding and in reality, for this reason it must exist. For if it does not exist, any land which really exists will be more excellent than it; and so the island already understood by you to be more excellent will not be more excellent.
>
> If a man should try to prove to me by such reasoning that this island truly exists, and that its existence should no longer be doubted, either I should believe that he was jesting, or I know not which I ought to regard as the greater fool: myself, supposing that I should allow this proof; or him, if he should suppose that he had established with any certainty the existence of this island (Gaunilo 1962, 158).

Accordingly, Gaunilo objects that, by using St. Anselm's reasoning, one can prove the existence of the perfect island, or any other "perfect thing," for that matter. Gaunilo's objection can be expressed informally by saying that one cannot define things into existence. If defining God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" shows that God exists, then defining the perfect island as "that island than which no greater island can be conceived"

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25 On moral arguments for the existence of God, see Ritchie (2012). Such arguments are often construed as IBEs. For instance, in chapter 7 of Ritchie (2012), one can find an IBE from moral facts to the existence of God that goes roughly like this: there are moral facts; the best explanation for the existence of moral facts is that God exists; therefore, God exists. Putting aside the debate about moral realism, this IBE is strong only if the existence of God can be shown to be a better explanation for moral facts (assuming there are such facts) than alternative explanations.

26 See footnote 9. For a recent reconstruction of the ontological argument, see Matthews and Rudder Baker (2010). On why the Anselmian notion of God is incoherent, see Bohn (2012). On Spinoza's version of the ontological argument, see Lin (2007).

shows that the perfect island exist. That is, using the following argument schema, one can "indirectly prove" the existence of anything whatsoever:

(1) *X* does not exist. [assumption for *reductio*]

(2) *X* is perfect. [definition]

(3) If *X* does not exist, then *X* is not perfect. [from the "Existence in reality is greater than existence in the understanding alone" principle[27]]

(4) ∴ *X* is not perfect. [from (1) & (3)]

(5) ∴ *X* is perfect and *X* is not perfect. [from (2) & (4)]

(6) ∴ It is not the case that *X* does not exist. [from (1) & (5)]

The same problem afflicts the concept of God as a necessary being, which is motivated by perfect-being theology (Bohn 2012). That is, using the following argument schema, one can "indirectly prove" the existence of anything whatsoever:

(1) *X* does not exist. [assumption for *reductio*]

(2) *X* is a necessary being. [definition]

(3) If *X* is a necessary being, then *X* cannot fail to exist.

(4) ∴ *X* cannot fail to exist. [from (2) & (3)]

(5) ∴ *X* does not exist and *X* cannot fail to exist. [from (1) & (4)]

(6) ∴ It is not the case that *X* does not exist. [from (1) & (5)]

If this is correct, then the following argument can be made:

(2.1) We can justifiably infer the existence of something from its definition or conception alone only if the definition or conception in

27 See Plantinga (1998, 52).

question does not allow us to infer the existence of anything whatsoever.

(2.2) Definitions or conceptions of God as "a perfect being," "a necessary being," or as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" allow us to infer the existence of anything whatsoever.

Therefore,

(2.3) We cannot justifiably infer the existence of God from definitions or conceptions alone.

Like the argument that shows there can be no *a posteriori* knowledge of God's existence, this argument is not an argument for atheism. That is, this argument does not show that one should deny the existence of God. Nor does it show that one should suspend judgment about the existence of God. Rather, this argument shows that we cannot infer the existence of God from a certain kind of evidence, namely, definitions or conceptions of God. In other words, this argument shows that there can be no conceptual or *a priori* knowledge of the existence of God. As such, this argument is an argument for skeptheism, in particular, skepticism about conceptual or *a priori* knowledge of God's existence.

To be clear, my argument here is *not* "One argument for the existence of God from conceptual evidence (e.g., perfect or necessary being conceptions of God) fails; therefore, all conceptual arguments for the existence of God fail." Rather, my argument is that the existence of God cannot be known *a priori* because *a necessary condition for arguing for the existence of God on the basis of conceptual evidence cannot be fulfilled*, namely, the condition of having a definition or conception that is neither *ad hoc* nor too broad as to allow us to infer the existence of anything whatsoever.

2c. Why the existence of God cannot be known

With these two arguments in hand, namely, the argument that shows that there can be no empirical or *a posteriori* knowledge of God's existence and the argument that shows that there can be no conceptual or *a priori* knowledge of God's existence, we can now combine them together into a master argument for skeptheism as follows:

A master argument for skeptheism in terms of knowledge (or justified belief)

(1) The proposition 'God exists' can be known (or justifiably believed) to be true either *a priori* or *a posteriori*.

(2) The proposition 'God exists' cannot be known (or justifiably believed) to be true *a priori*. [from (2.3)]

(3) The proposition 'God exists' cannot be known (or justifiably believed) to be true *a posteriori*. [from (3.3)]

Therefore,

(4) The proposition 'God exists' cannot be known (or justifiably believed) to be true.

For present purposes, I take it that premise (1) is uncontroversial, since a proposition can be known (or justifiably believed) to be true either by experience (*a posteriori*) or independently of experience (*a priori*).[28] Now, the aforementioned argument from premises (2.1) and (2.2) to conclusion (2.3) supports premise (2) of the master argument for skeptheism because it shows that there can be no conceptual or *a priori* knowledge of God's existence. The aforementioned argument from premises (3.1) and (3.2) to conclusion (3.3) supports premise (3) of the master argument for skeptheism because it shows that there can be no empirical or *a posteriori* knowledge of God's existence. Now, since *a priori* and *a posteriori* exhaust all ways of knowing that a propo-

28 Of course, to say that the proposition 'God exists' can be known to be true neither *a priori* nor *a posteriori* is not to say that all arguments for the existence of God ever made were either *a priori* or *a posteriori*. The former is an *epistemological* claim, whereas the latter is a *historical* claim. For a division of arguments for the existence of God into *a priori* and *a posteriori* arguments, however, see Richards (2000, 11), Palmer (2001, 2), Nagasawa (2011, 11) and Rea and Pojman (2014, 153). In that respect, it is also worth noting that some arguments for the existence of God may be mixed arguments, i.e., arguments that appeal to both conceptual and empirical evidence. For example, in their "New Cosmological Argument," Gale and Pruss (1999) appeal to the concept of a necessary being as well as to the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

sition is true, it follows that the proposition 'God exists' cannot be known (or justifiably believed), which is precisely the view I have labeled "skeptheism."

Again, note that the master argument is neither an argument for atheism nor an argument for agnosticism. It is not an argument for atheism because it does not purport to show that we should deny the existence of God. It is not an argument for agnosticism because it does not purport to show that we should suspend judgment with respect to the existence of God. Instead, the master argument shows that knowledge of God's existence is *in principle* beyond our ken. In that respect, it is an argument for skeptheism.

As I have pointed out in Section 1, although I have distinguished skeptheism from atheism and agnosticism in terms of the possibility of knowing whether or not God exists, the distinction does not turn on any particular analysis of knowledge. For those who are worried about the master argument for skeptheism being tainted by some implicit analysis of knowledge, however, here is a version of the master argument for skeptheism in terms of evidence rather than knowledge:

A master argument for skeptheism in terms of evidence

(1*) Either conceptual (*a priori*) or empirical (*a posteriori*) evidence can be adduced in support of a proposition such as 'God exists'.

(2*) No conceptual (*a priori*) evidence can be adduced in support of the proposition 'God exists'. [from (2.3)]

(3*) No empirical (*a posteriori*) evidence can be adduced in support of the proposition 'God exists'. [from (3.3)]

Therefore,

(4*) No evidence (of any kind) can be adduced in support of the proposition 'God exists'.

As in the case of the previous version of the master argument for skeptheism (i.e., the master argument in terms of knowledge), I take it that premise (1*) is uncontroversial, since a proposition can be supported either by empirical (*a posteriori*) evidence or by non-empirical (*a priori*) evidence. As before, the aforementioned argument from premises (2.1) and (2.2) to con-

clusion (2.3) supports premise (2*) of this version of the master argument for skeptheism because it shows that there can be no conceptual or *a priori* evidence in support of God's existence. The aforementioned argument from premises (3.1) and (3.2) to conclusion (3.3) supports premise (3*) of this version of the master argument for skeptheism because it shows that there can be no empirical or *a posteriori* evidence in support of God's existence. Now, since conceptual (*a priori*) and empirical (*a posteriori*) exhaust all kinds of evidence that can be adduced in support of a proposition, it follows that there can be no evidence (of any kind) for the proposition 'God exists', which is precisely the view I have labeled "skeptheism."

Accordingly, theists, atheists, agnostics, and skeptheists would respond to the question "Do we have any evidence for or against the existence of God?" as follows:

Theist: We have some evidence (or good reasons to believe) that God exists.

Atheist: We have some evidence (or good reasons to believe) that God does not exist.

Agnostic: We *do not* have evidence (or good reasons to believe) that God exists.[29]

Skeptheist: We *cannot* have any evidence (or good reasons to believe) that God exists.

Note the key difference between the agnostic's response and the skeptheist's response. The former leaves open the possibility that there might be evidence (good reasons) for or against the existence of God, whereas the latter amounts to saying that no evidence whatsoever can be had either for or against the existence of God.

In closing, it is perhaps worth mentioning that skeptheism is compatible with the existence of God. That is to say, it could be the case that God does

29 Alternatively, agnostics might claim that there is no *compelling* evidence either for or against the existence of God. In other words, the available evidence for and the available evidence against the existence of God are equally convincing, or equally unconvincing, and thus we should suspend judgment until further evidence comes to light. Cf. Oppy (2006, 15) on strong versus weak agnosticism.

exist but we can never know (or have any good reasons to believe) that God exists. In other words, skeptheism is an epistemic attitude one has about the existence of God. It is an attitude of total skepticism about the existence of God (i.e., that knowledge of God's existence is impossible) rather than merely suspension of judgment, which may be temporary. Of course, if we cannot know (or have good reasons to believe) that God exists, then it follows that we do not know (or have good reasons to believe) that God exists.

3. CONCLUSION

My aim in this paper has been to advance an argument for the view that we can never know (or have good reasons to believe) that God exists. If this argument is sound, then the proposition 'God exists' can be known (or justifiably believed) to be true neither conceptually (*a priori*) nor empirically (*a posteriori*). I prefer to call this view "skeptheism" rather than "strong agnosticism" to capture a difference in epistemic attitudes, namely, between agnosticism (i.e., suspension of judgment) and total skepticism. For skeptheists, then, the proper attitude to take with respect to the existence of God is neither denial (i.e., we know that God does not exist), as atheists would have it, nor suspension of judgment (i.e., we do not know whether or not God exists), as agnostics would have it, but skepticism (i.e., we *cannot* know whether or not God exists). For skeptheists, there is no way to know (or have good reasons to believe) that God exists.

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WAITING FOR GODO... AND GODAN: COMPLETING ROWE'S CRITIQUE OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

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Abstract. In his critique of Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence, William Rowe introduces the concepts of "magico" and "magican" — defining "magicos" as magicians that do not exist, and "magicans" as magicians that do exist — to help diagnose what may have gone wrong in Anselm's argument. As I made my way through Rowe's intriguing article, I found myself waiting for "Godo" — and for "Godan." I expected Rowe to invoke these counterparts to his "magico" and "magican" — a non-existing God to correspond to his non-existing magician, and an existing God to correspond to his existing magician — to complete his argument. Alas, like Vladimir and Estragon, I waited in vain: neither Godo — nor Godan — ever appeared. In what follows I shall argue that their inclusion in Rowe's argument would have settled the matter against Anselm far more decisively than do Rowe's forays into the murky waters of question-begging.

In his critique of Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence,[1] William Rowe introduces the concepts of "magico" and "magican" — defin-

1 "The Ontological Argument" first appeared in Joel Feinberg, ed., *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Encino, CA: Dickenson, 1973), 8-17. It was subsequently reprinted in condensed form as "The Ontological Argument and Question-Begging," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7 (1976), 425-32. It was also included as Chapter 3 in *Rowe's Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (Independence, KY: Cengage, 2007; earlier editions: Wadsworth, 2001, 1993, and 1978). It was anthologized in at least two additional philosophy of religion readers: Louis Pojman and Lewis Vaughn, eds.

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ing "magicos" as magicians that do not exist, and "magicans" as magicians that do exist — to help diagnose what may have gone wrong in Anselm's argument. As I made my way through Rowe's intriguing article, I found myself waiting for "Godo" — and for "Godan." I expected Rowe to invoke these counterparts to his "magico" and "magican" — a non-existing God to correspond to his non-existing magician, and an existing God to correspond to his existing magician — to complete his argument. Alas, like Vladimir and Estragon, I waited in vain: neither Godo — nor Godan — ever appeared. To the best of my knowledge, despite the many debates spawned by Rowe's contribution,[2] no one who engaged Rowe's argument in the subsequent literature has wondered at the absence of these two; yet, as I shall argue in what follows, their inclusion in Rowe's argument would have settled the matter against Anselm far more decisively than do Rowe's forays into the murky waters of question-begging. I propose in this short paper to show how a strategy that makes use of Godos and Godans might strengthen Rowe's analysis. In so doing I will inevitably also signal the more significant difficulties I discern in Rowe's interpretation of the ontological argument.

I. WHAT DOES ANSELM'S ARGUMENT PROVE?

There is a gap between what Anselm wishes to prove and believes he has proved, on the one hand, and what he does in fact prove, on the other. It is

Philosophy: The Quest for Truth (New York: Oxford 2009); and Steven M. Cahn, ed. *Ten Essential Texts in the Philosophy of Religion: Classics and Contemporary Issues* (New York: Oxford, 2005).

2 The debate with Stephen A. Davis follows Rowe's publication in the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7 (1976): Davis, "Does the Ontological Argument Beg the Question?" 433-42; Rowe, "Comments on Professor Davis' 'Does the Ontological Argument Beg the Question?'" 443-47; Davis, "Anselm and Question-Begging: A Reply to William Rowe," 448-57. This debate spurred Douglas Walton's contribution, "The Circle in the Ontolgical Argument," in the same journal, 9 (1978), 193-218. William Wainwright weighs in there as well: "The Ontological Argument, Question-Begging, and Professor Rowe" 9 (1978), 254-57. Peter J. Loptson challenges Rowe in his "Anselm, Meinong, and the Ontological Argument," 11 (1980), 185-94, to which Davis responds, defending Rowe: "Loptson on Anselm and Rowe," 13 (1982), 219-24. Rowe also conducts an exchange with Georges Dicker in *Faith and Philosophy*. See Dicker, "A Refutation of Rowe's Critique of Anselm's Ontological Argument" 5 (1988), 193-202; Rowe, "Response to Dicker," 203-205; Dicker, "A Note on Rowe's 'Response to Dicker,'" 206.

clear that what Anselm intends to prove and supposes he has proved is that there is a specific being, God, who does actually exist. Yet, although the argument's conclusion, "God exists in reality," does follow in one sense from the argument's permisses, it does not in that sense mean what Anselm intends and consequently falls far short of being the answer to his prayers. Anselm's reductio ad absurdum proof proceeds roughly as follows.[3]

(1) God is understood to be something than which nothing greater can be conceived.[4]

(2) Since whatever is understood exists in the understanding, a being than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the understanding.

(3) Whatever exists in the understanding may exist either (a) in the understanding alone or (b) both in the understanding and in reality.

(4) A thing that exists not only in the understanding but also in reality is greater than a thing that exists in the understanding alone.

(5) Suppose: That than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the understanding alone.

(6) If so, something yet greater can be conceived — namely, something that does not exist in the understanding alone but also in reality.

(7) But then, that than which nothing greater can be conceived is not that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

(8) So, what is supposed in (5) — namely, that that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the understanding alone — is false.

3 There have been numerous formulations of this argument. The reconstruction I propose reflects my understanding of it.

4 *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari posit*. Rowe seeks to rid Anselm's argument of this locution. See the longer version of Rowe's article, in Feinberg (1973), 10. Loptson (1980), 185, challenges Rowe's substitution of "the being than which none greater is possible" for "the being than which none greater is conceivable."

(9) So, that than which nothing greater can be conceived does not exist in the understanding alone.

(10) So, that than which nothing greater can be conceived — namely, God — exists in reality.

Has Anselm succeeded in proving that God exists in reality? Yes — and no. If we grant the controversial premiss (4) and allow that something that exists in reality is greater than something that does not,[5] there is both a way in which the argument works and one in which it fails. In order to see what the argument does prove and what it fails to prove, we will have recourse to the counterparts of Rowe's magico and magican: Godo and Godan.

Let us take Anselm's God to correspond to Rowe's magician; Godo to correspond to Rowe's magico; Godan to correspond to Rowe's magican. According to Rowe, magicians can be either magicos or magicans, that is, they can be either fictive (which Rowe calls non-existing) magicians or real (existing) ones. Rowe offers Merlin as an example of a magico, and Houdini as an instance of a magican. One might say of a magico, then, that it exists in the understanding alone,[6] and of a magican that it exists not only in the understanding but also in reality.[7] Both, however, qualify as magicians.

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5 As has been frequently pointed out (see, for example, Douglas Walton [1978], 198), Anselm cannot have meant that any existent thing is superior to any nonexistent thing. It has been suggested that he must have meant that an existent version of the same thing is greater than a nonexistent one (Walton, 199). My concern here is that surely this would not be true of a bad thing: would not a bad thing be better if it did not exist than if it did? My own view, founded on this and other concerns, is that even a good thing is not greater if it exists than not but that it is better for us *that* it exists. As Norman Malcolm puts it in "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," *Philosophical Review* 69 (1960), 41-62: "One might say, with some intelligibility, that it would be better (for oneself or for mankind) if God exists than if He does not — but that is a different matter" (43). It is for this reason that a bad thing is not greater if it exists than not: it would not, after all, be better for us if it exists.

6 Dicker (1988), 197, finds fault with Rowe's substitution of "some nonexisting thing is God" for "God exists only in the understanding." Rowe concedes (1988), 203, that the substitution produces a slightly different, though similar, argument, which he calls "Son of Anselm's argument," but the new argument, he contends, does not rely on the claim that God exists in the understanding, and yields a valid argument once the premiss, "If X is a possible thing, then X is either an existing thing or a nonexisting thing," is added. This is a premiss that I will challenge in what follows.

7 Rowe will argue in a subsequent paper that magicans cannot exist in the understanding alone. See Rowe (1988), 205. I discuss that idea briefly below. See n. 18.

Transferring Rowe's distinction among magicians, magicos, and magicans to the ontological argument, what emerges as the gist and upshot of Anselm's argument is that God cannot be a Godo and so must be a Godan, and the conclusion of his argument is actually (10'): God is a Godan. One significant disagreement I have, then, with Rowe is that in offering his critique of the ontological argument[8] he proposes, on behalf of an anonymous "someone," an alternative to Anselm's ontological argument in which (10') is not Anselm's conclusion but his first premiss, that is, it is the stipulative definition, "God is an existing, wholly (or supremely[9]) perfect being," that launches the argument.[10] The next premiss of this argument is: "Since it can't be true that an existing, wholly perfect being does not exist, it can't be true that God, as I've defined Him, does not exist." And its conclusion is: "God must exist."[11] For this dubious construction of the ontological argument Rowe is duly taken to task by Stephen Davis in subsequent debates.[12] Davis argues, in my view convincingly, that God's status as an existing thing cannot be the starting point of the ontological argument. Davis refers to the argument that takes this proposition as Anselm's first premiss as the SOA (the simple ontological argument), and contrasts it with the ordinary version of the argument which he calls the OA (the ontological argument).[13] For present purposes, what is important to appreciate is that (10') is actually the OA's conclusion.

Let us assert, then, that "God is an existing, wholly (supremely) perfect being," or, in our new terminology, "God is a Godan," is indeed Anselm's conclusion, the conclusion of the OA. How close is (10') to Anselm's (10): "God [or, that than which nothing greater can be conceived] exists[both in the understanding and] in reality"? As Rowe very helpfully shows, although magicans are defined as existent magicians, there need not be any. Rowe rightly

8 In the article's longer version, Rowe first advances critiques proposed by Gaunilo, Kant, and C. D. Broad and discusses them, and in his final section (Section IV) proposes his own critique.

9 In his response to Davis (1976), 443-47, Rowe substitutes "supremely perfect" for "wholly perfect."

10 To anyone who might object to including existence in the definition of God, Rowe replies on behalf of the someone: "anyone can define a word in whatever way he pleases" (1976), 112.

11 Rowe (1976), 427.

12 Davis (1976), 433-42; 448-57.

13 Davis (1976), 433-42, contends that the SOA is question-begging but the OA is not.

sees that the type magican need not be instantiated. It so happens that it is instantiated by Houdini; but it might well not have been. I should like to argue that if indeed what Anselm proves is that God is a Godan, what he has shown is interesting and important; he has shown that there is something unique about the term God, namely, that it, unlike "magician," can apply only to the existent (real) variety. Whereas magicos can be magicians as Rowe defines them, no Godo, *as it turns out*, can be God as Anselm defines him. So, the only thing that can instantiate or exemplify God, Anselm's argument shows, is an individual thing that also instantiates or exemplifies Godan. Nevertheless, Anselm has certainly not succeeded in showing that there is or must be any actual thing that instantiates or exemplifies Godan, that it is not possible for the set of existent Gods — Godans — to be empty.[14] Note that it is individuals that instantiate the category magicians by instantiating either of its two subcategories, magicans and magicos. So, too, in the case of the category God: only individuals can instantiate it. What the ontological argument shows, however, is that only an individual that instantiates the category Godan can instantiate the category God.

II. WHERE ANSELM GOES WRONG

In Anselm's argument God starts out as undifferentiated with respect to the sub-categories existent (real) or not-existent (merely imagined). The term "God" applies to any thing than which none greater can be conceived,[15] and its reach is broad enough — at first — to include both a real God and a God who is not real — one who is imagined or is, in Anselm's words, "in the understanding alone." In other words, at the argument's inception, both Godans and Godos qualify as God. For "the fool" God is a Godo; he thinks that something than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the

14 As Jerome Shaffer notes, we have at our disposal the expression "exists" as well as "there is," and sometimes the one we choose makes all the difference (though at other times not). In discussions of the ontological argument it is often helpful to keep the two distinct: to use the latter when we wish to say that there is something in the world to which the label in question applies. See Shaffer, "Existence, Predication, and the Ontological Argument," *Mind*, n.s. 71 (1962), 307-25, 319-20.

15 Anselm begins with *aliquid*, something, someone, though he later speaks of "that than which," to refer to that something or someone.

understanding alone. For Anselm, God is a Godan; he believes that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists both in the understanding and in reality. The purpose of Anselm's argument is to prove the fool wrong. If we allow Anselm premiss (4), we see that his argument establishes God as a Godan. The problem is, however, that Anselm wishes to prove more than that God is a Godan. What he wishes to prove is that there is a certain *individual* named God (the counterpart of Houdini), who instantiates Godan. This is an entirely different matter. Anselm has confused (a) the original term God, which is broad enough to include real ones (Godans) and not-real ones (Godos), just as the term magician can include real ones (magicans) and not-real ones (magicos), with (b) God as an individual — the counterpart of Houdini or Merlin — who awaits the label Godo or Godan. It is not that Godos have vanished as a consequence of Anselm's argument; indeed, all God-candidates exposed as fraudulent or imaginary (nonexistent) versions of "the being than which nothing greater can be conceived" are Godos. What we now know as a result of Anselm's argument is that anything that meets the criterion of being a thing than which nothing greater can be conceived will have to be a Godan; were we to call such a thing a Godo we could, with sufficient careful thought, come to recognize that we had erred; we would see the logical impossibility of the nonexistence of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Nevertheless, the fact remains that we do not know if there is any such thing (a being than which nothing greater can be conceived) or what it would mean to encounter it.

To review. For Anselm, the term God initially applies, like terms such as magician or dog, to both real and fictive ones. Furthermore, the concept of a thing than which no greater can be conceived is coherent; everyone, believer or not, understands it. It is, moreover, what everyone means by God, and so it is "in" everyone's — even the fool's — understanding. God is then divided into two kinds: real and fictive, that is, (a) existing in the understanding *and* in reality, and (b) existing in the understanding alone. We called these kinds Godan and Godo, corresponding to Rowe's magican and magico. Anselm now argues that someone who is God can be a Godo only on pain of contradiction: if God were a Godo, then that than which no greater can be conceived would *not* be that than which no greater can be conceived. So, God must be a Godan: the term God, defined as that than which nothing greater

can be conceived, has been found to apply only to real, and not to fictive, gods. (In the corresponding case of magicians, if one could, counterfactually, eliminate the possibility that magicians might be fictive [i.e. magicos], one could conclude that magicians can only be real [i. e. magicans].)

What does it mean to say that Anselm has shown that God must be a Godan? It means that if there is something that genuinely qualifies as a thing than which no greater thing can be conceived, it cannot be merely imaginary; it cannot exist "in the understanding alone." Anything than which nothing greater can be conceived would have to be real. But, whether there is any such being we simply do not know. Many past gods thought to be Godans have ultimately come to be regarded as Godos. And the few candidates who have survived to this day and who have many, perhaps billions of, supporters, do not really know if *their* God is a Godan because they do not really know if there is any such God as theirs.[16]

Presented with the ontological argument, many of us have wondered how it is that this empirical question can be resolved a priori when no other empirical question seems to be resolvable that way. What I hope to have exposed is Anselm's equivocation on "God." For even if Anselm has succeeded in making the case that no genuine God can, in the final analysis, be a Godo, and so, therefore, that any genuine God can only be a Godan, by the time he concludes that God exists in reality, God has become for him a proper name, the name of a particular God. Anselm has not shown, however, that this God, that *any* particular God, is in fact a Godan because he has not provided a way of testing — a posteriori — whether there is any particular God who qualifies as that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

III. POSSIBLE THINGS

Rowe will eventually locate the source of the failure ofAnselm's ontological argument in its question-begging, and will in turn trace its question-begging to an idea that is critical, in his view, to the ontological argument, namely, that God is a possible being. Although Rowe argues that a nonexistent being

16 As Robert McKim points out (*Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity* [New York: Oxford, 2001]), God has done a fine job of keeping himself hidden.

cannot be a magican (a nonexistent being *can* be a magician), he recognizes, correctly in my view, that it does not therefore follow that there must be an existent being who *is* a magican. Rowe seems to think, moreover, at least at first, that this ought to settle the matter as far as God is concerned. For even if we stipulate for God the definition of existent perfect being, he reasons, this no more proves that there is a God than that stipulating for magican the definition of existent magician proves that there are magicans. So far, so good — for Rowe and for us. Yet, Rowe says, things are not so simple. The wrinkle he cannot easily smooth is Anselm's contention that God is a *possible* being, which, as Rowe understands this expression, means that some possible object is God. For if God is a possible being, then he must be either an existent or a nonexistent thing (there is no third option). And the proposition that God must be either an existent or a nonexistent thing, coupled with the proposition that no nonexistent being can be God, seems to yield the conclusion that some existent thing must be God.

In hopes of discrediting this conclusion, Rowe has recourse to the charge of question-begging, imputing to Anselm's notion of God as a possible being a hidden component ("the assertion that some existing being is supremely great"[17]) that amounts to more than the usual sense of "possible" as the attribute of being coherent and not self-contradictory. Rowe argues that magican is coherent and not self-contradictory, yet, when there are no existent (real) magicians, no possible object can be a magican; in other words, in the absence of existent (real) magicians "magican" becomes uninstantiable,[18] since, unlike in the case of "magician," no nonexistent things can instantiate a magican. (This result is hardly surprising: since a magican just *is* an existing magician, there is of course no magican when there is no existing magician. That is to say, there is no magican when there is no magican.) In the same way, Rowe argues, since no nonexistent thing can be God on the assumption that

17 Rowe (1976), 432.

18 This view strikes me as confused. Even if there are no real magicians, there can be magicans — that is, the category of magican remains. If there are no real magicians, there will not be any actual thing that qualifies as a magican, since a magican just is a real magician. So long as it is possible for there to be real magicians (and what but incoherence would prevent that), possible objects can still be magicans. This point is made by Dicker (1988), 197. For this reason, it would seem that, pace Rowe (1988), 205, magicans can indeed exist in the understanding alone, remaining instantiable but uninstantiated.

existence is a perfection, it follows that unless there is an existent supremely perfect being (the counterpart of existent magicians), and not only flawed beings — that is, unless there is an actual God — God is uninstantiable (or, in Rowe's terms, impossible): there is no possible being that is God.[19] So, paradoxically, unless God actually exists, God is not a possible being since no possible object can be God. Hence the charge of question-begging: God may be a coherent concept, but since he is not possible unless he is actual, "possible" when used with respect to God assumes ab initio that he is actual.

In order to see if indeed Anselm is guilty of question-begging, we will try now to sort out the senses in which a thing may be said to be "possible." Rowe defines possible things as things that are coherent and not self-contradictory and so not impossible like a square circle. (He later understands a possible thing to be a thing some possible object might exemplify.[20]) Rowe also says that, as possible, these things might or might not exist.[21] He then constructs two columns to suggest the range of possible things, things that might or might not exist.[22] The left-hand column contains things that do exist but might not have, the right, things that do not exist but might have.[23] The contents of his columns, however, are an odd mix: if dogs (which appear in the left-hand column) and unicorns (which appear in the right) are "possible things" they are surely not possible in the same way as the Empire State Building (left) and the Abominable Snowman (right) are. Dogs and unicorns, like magicians, each have two subcategories: existing ones and non-existing ones, to use Rowe's idiom. (In my preferred mode of expression, they are real ones and fictive, imagined, pretend, fraudulent, or otherwise "not-real" ones.) In a subsequent article[24] Rowe speaks of "unicornexes," existing unicorns (real

19 Rowe (1976, 432) puts the God-matter this way. If no non-existing thing can be God, yet all existing things are imperfect (flawed) and hence not God, then no possible object can be God and God is not a possible (but an impossible) thing.

20 Rowe (1976), 430-31.

21 As we shall see, Rowe will soon define a possible being as something that *must* either exist or not exist. See (1976), 430. (Rowe does also include necessary things among possible things, but for present purposes it is useful to treat possible things as non-necessary or contingent.)

22 These columns appear only in the article's longer version, Feinberg (1973), 8.

23 The left-hand column contains The Empire State Building, Dogs, The planet Mars; the right-hand column contains The Fountain of Youth, Unicorns, and The Abominable Snowman.

24 Rowe (1976), 445.

ones), as a kind of unicorn. I propose that we identify, on his behalf, a more euphonious pair of unicorn subcategories: unicans and unicos, unicans being existing unicorns (real ones) and unicos being non-existing (or fictive) ones. It is particular magicians, dogs, and unicorns that instantiate these subcategories. To take the case of dogs: any real ones — dogans — would be assigned, like Houdini among magicians, to the left-hand column; storybook ones — dogos — would be placed, like Merlin, in the right-hand column. Particular magicians, particular unicorns, and particular dogs, then, will fall into one of the two columns. Whenever an *individual* of any kind presents itself we can ask about *it* into which column it should go. These individuals are possible things: they are either real or not. But magicians, dogs, and unicorns, as well as magicans, magicos, dogans, dogos, unicans, and unicos, are the categories and subcategories into which individuals are sorted.

It would seem that there are at least two ways in which things may be possible. The first, the way in which magicians and dogs are possible, is by being instantiable both by individual real things and by individual not-real things. The second, the way in which such things as the Empire State Building and the Abominable Snowman are possible, is by instantiating either the subcategory containing things that are real or the subcategory containing things that are not-real, but not both, while they might have instantiated the other. The Empire State Building instantiates only the subcategory of real (existing) buildings; the Abominable Snowman only that of mythical figures (non-existing things); each *might* have been in the opposite subcategory.

What, then, is the status of (the subcategories) magicans and dogans and unicans, magicos and dogos and unicos? These, like magicians, dogs, and unicorns, belong *in* neither column since they are instantiated and do not instantiate.[25] It is the things that instantiate them that belong in either of the two columns. Individual magicans, dogans, and unicans belong in the left-hand column; individual magicos, dogos, and unicos, in the right. For any

25 Wainwright (1978), 256, argues that "existence *per se* . . . cannot be a defining feature of a *type* of thing (being, entity)" (emphasis in original), and so concludes that either concepts of existents are incoherent or the concept of God (as a type of being) is not a concept that can have existence as one of its features. I am allowing magican to be a coherent concept, but it is surely not in the same league as magicians and dogs. It picks out a "type" only in the sense that it is instantiable in principle.

particular magician who presents himself, we would have to decide if he is a magican (as Houdini is) or a magico (as Merlin is), and place him in the appropriate column, left or right. So, too, for any particular dog or unicorn.

Are magicans and dogans, magicos and dogos, possible beings? They are certainly not possible in either of the senses we have identified. Neither (a) are they instantiable the way magicians and dogs are, that is, by both real and fictive things: magicans and dogans are instantiable only by real things, and magicos and dogos only by fictive things; nor (b) do they instantiate (like Houdini and Merlin) either subcategory, since they constitute subcategories. Only individual things instantiate; subcategories are categories, not instances. The only sense in which magicans are possible things is, then, yet a third one, (c): they are instantiable in principle — since they are not incoherent or self-contradictory — though they may not be instantiated at all: although magicans are in principle instantiable, there need be no existent thing that is one.[26] (In the case of magicos, they too are in principle instantiable, though oddly, by nonexistent magicians. Of course, there may be no imaginary magician that one would call a magico.) Let us note that it is only things possible in sense (b) that *must* be existent or not: having to be existent or not (real or not-real) is a feature of the individual things that instantiate the categories or subcategories, not of the categories or subcategories themselves. Categories and subcategories *may* be instantiated or not.

IV. WHERE ROWE GOES WRONG

Besides his unfortunate introduction of and attention to the SOA, noted above, Rowe's analysis of the error in Anselm goes awry also, in part because of its failure to keep the various senses of "possible" from running into one another, in part because it conflates God and Godan.

One difficulty in Rowe's analysis may be attributed to his understanding "God is a possible object" as "Some possible object is God," because the sense of "possible" in these two propositions is not the same. We earlier identified three senses of "possible": (a) something (e.g. magician) is possible because it is instantiable by both existent (real) and nonexistent (not-real) individual

26 Rowe (1976), 428.

things; (b) something is possible (e.g. Houdini and Merlin) if it — an individual being — either exists or does not exist (but not both), but might have been in the opposite condition; and (c) something is possible if it is instantiable in principle — it is not incoherent or self-contradictory — though it may not be instantiated at all (e.g. magican). To understand by the proposition, "God is a possible being," that God must either exist or not but not both, is to take the proposition in sense (b), which is appropriate only for individuals. We can say "Houdini is a possible magician (thing)" because Houdini either exists (is a real magician/thing) or does not exist (is a not-real magician/thing) but not both.[27] To understand the proposition, "God is a possible being," as "Some possible object is God," however, is to state that God is (must be) *instantiated* (Rowe prefers "exemplified") either by an existent or by a nonexistent being but not by both. Here, God has become a category or a concept or a type, that is, something instantiated rather than something that instantiates. Indeed, in saying "Some possible object is God," Rowe in effect introduces a fourth sense of "possible," (d): something is possible if there *must* be either an existent thing or a nonexistent thing that instantiates it, but not both.[28]

If we were to retain Rowe's original expression "God is a possible being," and take it in sense (b) — according to which God is an individual that either exists or does not exist but not both — the argument's equivocation on God noted above in Section II (between God as a concept and God as a proper name) becomes quickly apparent. In sense (b), God is possible the way Houdini, Merlin, the Empire State Building, and the Fountain of Youth, are. As

27 When Rowe says that no non-existing thing can be a magican, it would perhaps have been more accurate for him to have said that no non-existing *magician* can be a magican. Perhaps he says "thing" so that when he deals with the case of God he can say that no non-existing thing can be God. But, as we have seen, it is perfectly appropriate to say that no non-existing God (no Godo) can be God. It is precisely this that Anselm argues in his OA.

28 We can see that Rowe thinks of God both as an individual thing and as a category or type that is instantiated. Compare: "But if something is a possible thing then it is either an existing thing or a non-existing thing. The set of possible things can be exhaustively divided into those possible things which actually exist and those possible things which do not exist" (1976, 430), with "the only thing that could logically exemplify his concept of God is something which actually exists" or his parsing of "God is a possible thing" as "some possible object exemplifies his concept of God" (1976), 431. The things that either exist or not are the Houdinis and Merlins; the things that are "exemplified" by Houdinis and Merlins are magicians, magicans, and magicos.

in the case of these individuals, it would have to be determined with respect to an individual, God, if he is either existent or nonexistent, a real or a make-believe one. If it is assumed that this God is the supremely perfect being, the game is over before it begins. The defective argument would look something like this (Argument A):

(1) God is a supremely perfect being.

(2) God is a possible being.

(3) A possible being is either real (existent) or not-real (nonexistent); it may not be both.

(4) A supremely perfect being cannot be a nonexistent (not-real) thing.

(5) God cannot be a nonexistent (not-real) thing.

(6) So, God is an existent thing.

It should be clear that this version of the argument (Argument A) is shot through with equivocation. The God of premiss (1) is a category, concept, or type, whereas the God of premiss (2) is an individual named God. Again, the supremely great being of premiss (4) is a category, concept, or type, but the God of premiss (5) is an individual who may or may not qualify as a supremely great being. What we do not know is whether or not the individual named God in fact satisfies the criteria for the supremely perfect being.

If we go the other route and understand, with Rowe, "God is a possible being," as "Some possible object is God," the argument would proceed as follows (Argument B):

(1) God is the supremely perfect being.

(2) Some possible object is God.

(3) 'God' must be instantiated either by an existent thing or by a non-existent thing but not both (taking "possible" in sense [d]).

(4) No nonexistent thing instantiates God.

(5) Suppose: No existent thing instantiates God.

(6) Then God is not a possible being.

(7) So, what is supposed in (5) is false.

(8) So, an existent thing instantiates God.

This version of the argument (Argument B) employs in premiss (3) the confused sense (d) of "possible." Hence premiss (3) is the offending premiss in this argument. When God is an instantiable rather than an individual instantiator, there are only two senses, (a) and (c), in which he might be possible. As an instantiable, God can only be either like magician or dog, or like magican or dogan. If, on the one hand, God is like magician or dog, he will be possible in sense (a), that is, he will be instantiable by both existents and nonexistents. Just as one would surely not say of possible magicians or dogs that they *must be* instantiated either by existents or by nonexistents but *not* by both, so one ought not say this about the possible being, God. If, on the other hand, God is like a magican or dogan, he will be possible in sense (c): he will be in principle instantiable but may not be instantiated. The argument would then go as follows (Argument C):

(1) God is an existing supremely perfect being (a Godan).

(2) Godans are possible beings (in sense [c]).

(3) Things that are possible (in sense [c]) are instantiable in principle but need not be instantiated.

(4) God is instantiable in principle but need not be instantiated.

(5) So, there need not be a God.

By understanding "God is possible" as "Some possible object is God" (premiss [2] of Argument B), and by taking "Some possible object is God" to mean, in sense (d), that "God" must be instantiated either by an existent

thing or by a nonexistent thing but not both (premiss [3] of Argument B), Rowe abandons the perfectly reasonable sense, sense (c), that applies to "God is possible."

We are now in a position to appreciate the third and most serious difficulty in Rowe's analysis of the ontological argument: his confusion of God with Godan. It is true, let us suppose, of Godans, as it is of magicans, that no nonexistent objects can be them, or, more plausibly, that no merely fictive or imagined objects can instantiate them. If it should happen also to be the case that no existing thing can instantiate them, then, at least in Rowe's new, and faulty, sense (d), they are not possible. But, let us note, it is not of Godan that Anselm predicates "possible." When Anselm says that God is a possible being (what he says, of course, is that God might exist in the understanding alone or both in the understanding and in reality), since the God he is speaking of is the God who is "something than which nothing greater can be conceived" and not yet Godan (an existing one), Anselm would not — and could not — endorse at the start of his argument the proposition that no non-existent (imaginary) thing can be God. On the contrary, since God is the counterpart of magician, non-existent objects (things that exist in the understanding alone) can be God just as non-existent objects can be magicians. Imaginary beings (magicos) can be magicians; a not-real God (Godo) can be God. So, since God is a possible being (in sense [(a]), then even if no nonexistent thing can be a Godan, that would not mean — at least until God is shown to be a Godan — that no nonexistent thing can be God.

Anselm, to be sure, does go on to prove, as we have seen, that God is a Godan, but it is not of Godan that Anselm predicates "possible." Moreover, as we (and Rowe) have said, to be a Godan is to be instantiable — it must be possible in principle for something to instantiate it — but it need not be actually instantiated. It is in this sense, (c), if any, that Godans are possible: there might be a Godan, but only if there is a Godan. Although it is true, of course, that no nonexistent thing can be a Godan, no existent thing need be a Godan — as we have seen in the case of magicans, dogans, and unicans. What Anselm's argument fails to establish is that there is any actual instantiation of Godan.

Consider, then, this fourth version of the ontological argument (Argument D):

(1) God is a possible (supremely perfect) being.

(2) A possible being may be instantiated by both existent and nonexistent things.

(3) God may be instantiated by both existent (supremely perfect) things (Godans) and nonexistent (supremely perfect) things (Godos).

(4) No Godo can be God (on Anselm's assumptions [i] that it is greater to exist than not to exist, and [ii] that God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived).

(5) God is a Godan.

(6) No nonexistent things can instantiate Godan.

(7) Only existent things can instantiate Godan.

(8) So, only existent things can instantiate God.

That only existent things can instantiate God is indeed, as I have argued, what Anselm's ontological argument successfully shows. What it does not show is that there must be any such existent thing. If there need not be any existent thing that instantiates Godan, then there need not be any existent thing that instantiates God; and, if there need not be any existent thing that instantiates God, there need not be a God.

V. ANSELM'S SECOND ARGUMENT

Although Rowe does not deal with Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* 3, an analysis of that argument might help further elucidate the flaw in *Proslogion* 2's argument. In *Proslogion* 3 Anselm argues not simply that if God is to be something than which nothing greater can be conceived it must exist (i.e. must be a Godan), but that it must exist necessarily, or, in Anselm's words, must be something that cannot be thought not to exist. I will call something

that cannot be thought not to exist a *necessarily* existent Godan or a Godan$_n$. Here, too, the problem is not that Anselm has not proved God to be a Godan$_n$ — he has. His error is in his thinking that he has proved a specific God, the God in whose existence he believes, to be God, that is, to be that than which nothing greater can be conceived, and hence to be a Godan$_n$. Thus the problem is not that Anselm begs the question, for he does not begin with the assumption that God exists or exists necessarily; God remains a possible being until he is proved to be a necessarily existent being, a Godan$_n$. In fact, in order for this argument to proceed, as is the case with the argument in *Proslogion* 2, "God" has to start out being broad enough to embrace nonexisting objects no less than existing ones, so that, at first, it is not the case that no non-existing thing can be God. Yet, once Anselm establishes that God is indeed a Godan$_n$, and hence, in the final analysis, that no nonexistent thing can be God, he still needs to prove that there *is* a particular God who qualifies as a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, there is no basis for concluding that there is a God who is also a Godan$_n$. Since the assertion that a necessarily existent being does not exist is indeed self-contradictory, anything that is a necessarily existent being will exist. In other words, any particular God who satisfies Anselm's definition of God would indeed — and necessarily — be a Godan$_n$. Whether there is any God who satisfies Anselm's definition of God is the question that remains unresolved. And it is not a matter that is resolvable a priori.

VI. MALCOLM AND SHAFFER

In the early 1960's two philosophers debated the question of how God's necessary existence affects his actual existence. Malcolm argued that since God is a necessary existent he indeed must exist: only if the concept "God" is incoherent would God not exist, and necessarily so. Malcolm argues as follows.

> If He does exist He cannot have come into existence . . . nor can He cease to exist. . . . So if God exists His existence is necessary. Thus God's existence is either impossible or necessary. It can be the former only if the concept of such a being is self-contradictory or in some way logically absurd. Assuming that this is not so, it follows that He necessarily exists.[29]

29 Malcolm (1960), 49-50.

Jerome Shaffer offered in response the very point I have been making in this paper, namely, that although it is self-contradictory to say that a necessary being does not exist, it is not self-contradictory to say that there is no actual thing that answers to the concept necessary existent. And, so long as we have not identified — a posteriori — such a being, there need be no necessary existent and hence there need be no God. In Shaffer's words:

> To establish that the concept of God has extension requires adducing some additional argument to show that over and above its intensional features, over and above the content of the concept (or the meaning of the word, "God"), the concept of God has extension as well. This additional argument will of necessity have to be an a posteriori argument to the effect that certain evidences make it reasonable to think that some actual existent answers to the concept.[30]

One thing that is of interest in this debate is that it reprises the ancient 11th Century debate between Anselm and Gaunilo.[31] Gaunilo concludes Chapter 5 of his "In Behalf of the Fool" as follows: "For it should be proved first that this being itself really exists somewhere; and then, from the fact that it is greater than all, we shall not hesitate to infer that it also subsists in itself."[32] In other words, Gaunilo is happy to grant that God is a necessary being ("subsists in itself"); indeed he is willing to grant even that God's necessity (self-subsistence) follows from His being greater than all. But what he will not concede without proof — that is, without, presumably, an a posteriori proof (he clearly finds specious the purely a priori proof that Anselm has provided) — is that the world contains such a being. Prove to me that there is such a being, Gaunilo says, and I will grant you your being whose existence is necessary.

30 Shaffer (1962), 325.

31 Malcolm (1960), 48-49, indeed quotes Anselm's *Response to Gaunilo*. He cites Response 1 which is certainly relevant, although I believe that Response 3, which I quote, may be more directly pertinent. Shaffer does not refer to the exchange between Anselm and Gaunilo.

32 St. Anselm: *Proslogium; Monologium: An Appendix In Behalf Of The Fool By Gaunilo; And Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane (with an Introduction, Bibliography, and Reprints of the Opinions of Leading Philosophers and Writers on the Ontological Argument) Chicago: Open Court, 1903; rpt. 1926.

For Anselm, however, as for Malcolm after him, it is not possible for something whose existence is necessary not to exist. Here is what Anselm says at the end of his Response 3 to Gaunilo:

> Hence, if any one says that he conceives this being [a being than which a greater is inconceivable] not to exist, I say that at the time when he conceives of this either he conceives of a being than which a greater is inconceivable, or he does not conceive at all. If he does not conceive, he does not conceive of the non-existence of that of which he does not conceive. But if he does conceive, he certainly conceives of a being which cannot be even conceived not to exist. For if it could be conceived not to exist, it could be conceived to have a beginning and an end. But this is impossible. He, then, who conceives of this being conceives of a being which cannot be even conceived not to exist; but he who conceives of this being does not conceive that it does not exist; else he conceives what is inconceivable. The non-existence, then, of that than which a greater cannot be conceived is inconceivable.[33]

What Anselm is saying, in effect, is that if someone conceives of a being that cannot be conceived not to exist, he cannot also conceive of that being as not-existing. For, if someone could conceive of such a being as not-existing, he would have to conceive of it as having, per impossibile, a beginning and an end, things that a being whose non-existence is inconceivable cannot possibly have. It follows that anyone who conceives of a being whose nonexistence is inconceivable cannot conceive that it does not exist, since to do so is to conceive what is inconceivable.

I suggest the following as an alternate way of understanding Anselm's argument:

(1) Suppose: The being whose nonexistence is inconceivable does not exist.

(2) Then the nonexistence of the being whose nonexistence is inconceivable *is conceivable.*

(3) But, (2) is absurd.

(4) So what is supposed in (1) is false.

33 "Response to Gaunilo," (1903; rpt. 1926).

(5) So, the being whose nonexistence is inconceivable — does exist.

Put this way, what Anselm is arguing is that since, if something does not exist, its nonexistence is conceivable, it is not possible for the being whose nonexistence is *in*conceivable not to exist. For how could it be true of the being whose nonexistence is inconceivable that its nonexistence is conceivable? Anselm in this response to Gaunilo shows himself deaf to Gaunilo's point, which is, quite simply, that if there is a being than which no greater can be conceived, then there is a necessary being whose nonexistence is inconceivable. But if God does not exist, it is indeed conceivable that *there is no* being whose nonexistence is inconceivable. Until someone establishes that there is such a being, we cannot be certain that God exists even if someone who *is* that than which nothing greater can be conceived will exist and will exist necessarily, and will, moreover, exist in such a way that its nonexistence would be inconceivable.

VII. CONCLUSION

I hope to have shown that Rowe is more right than he knows. What Anselm proves — although it is not this that he means to prove — is that God (a being than which nothing greater can be conceived) is a Godan. Whether there are Godans or not is an empirical matter that no definition can resolve. This situation precisely parallels that of the magican: although magicans are defined as existing (real) magicians, whether or not there are any is an empirical matter. The only difference between the two cases is that Anselm provides an ingenious argument in the case of God that could not work in the case of magicians: he proves that no God can be a Godo and so any God must be a Godan, something that cannot be proved in the case of magician, magico, and magican. Nevertheless, just as even if, counterfactually, every magician could be shown to have to be a magican, that would not guarantee that there are any magicans, so too, even though any God must be a Godan, that does not ensure that there are any Godans.

Anselm's failure is not one of question-begging. Anselm never defines the God with which he begins, a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, as existent or, a fortiori, as necessarily existent. It is a magican, not

a magician, that no nonexistent thing can be; it is a Godan or a $Godan_n$, not God, that no nonexistent thing can be. But just as there need not be anything that is a magican there need be anything that is a Godan. Indeed, for Anselm or anyone to prove that drawing out the logical consequences of the concept God yields not simply a conceptually real God but an actually real one, he would surely have to be a magician — or, shall we say, a magican.

CRAIG'S NOMINALISM AND THE HIGH COST OF PRESERVING DIVINE ASEITY

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Abstract. William Lane Craig rejects Platonism (the view that uncreated abstract objects (AOs) exist) in favor of nominalism because he believes Platonism fatally compromises God's aseity. For Craig, concrete particulars (including essences) exist, but properties do not. Yet, we use property-talk, following Carnap's "linguistic frameworks." There is, however, a high cost to Craig's view. I survey his views and then explore the importance of essences. But, next, I show that his nominalism undermines them. Thus, we have just interpretations of reality. Worse, nominalism undermines creation's determinacy. Last, I suggest AOs are created, but in a more fundamental sense than Craig considers.

William Lane Craig rejects Platonism, which he defines as the view that "there are uncreated abstract objects" (AOs).[1] To him, such AOs would exist necessarily and thus independently of the Christian God, thereby also being self-existent and eternal. Therefore, he believes it fatally compromises God's aseity and the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo.*

1 William Lane Craig, "Anti-Platonism," in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 115. See also his "A Nominalist Perspective on God and Abstract Objects," *Philosophia Christi* 13:2 (2011): 305-18.

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Instead of Platonism, he embraces a form of nominalism about such things as properties, propositions, numbers, and truth.[2] He argues that these things are not real, yet we may speak about properties, propositions, and truth by adopting Rudolf Carnap's "linguistic frameworks." But such talk does not commit us to the existence of such things. Instead, concrete particulars are real, which can be immaterial or material, and these are located in space and time. Moreover, for him, these concrete particulars include essences.

Against Craig, I will argue that there is a heavy price his view will exact. First, I will survey Craig's basic views, with particular attention to his own views about essences given his nominalism. Second, I will explore the importance of the existence of essences. Then, third, I will apply those findings to Craig's own views. I will argue that his nominalism will undermine essences, despite his claims to the contrary. Indeed, without essences, I will argue that at best we will be left with just our interpretations of reality, including 1) his own texts, such as his exposition and defense of the *kalam* cosmological argument; 2) key aspects of Christianity, such as Scripture and the gospel; and 3) any aspect of creation whatsoever. Even worse, his nominalism (and even any form of nominalism) will lead to an utter indeterminacy of created reality. That result will undermine not only creation, but also his appeals to brute facts to block Platonists' requests for ontological explanations. Finally, I will rebut his argument against AOs by suggesting AOs are created, but in a more fundamental sense than Craig considers.

I. CRAIG'S NOMINALISM AND ESSENCES

Craig makes clear that he is not denying that all AOs whatsoever exist; rather, he denies only uncreated ones.[3] To him, there are examples of contingent AOs that have been caused to come into being, such as Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*, which is not physical and not identical to any of its printed copies. Other examples could include Beethoven's Fifth Symphony

2 E.g., see William Lane Craig, "Propositional Truth - Who Needs It?" *Philosophia Christi* 15:2 (2013): 355-64.

3 Craig, "Anti-Platonism," 116.

or even the equator. To Craig, these contingent, created AOs are not problematic.

Instead, he thinks that Platonism is inimical to Christianity, for God alone exists *a se* and is the ground of being for all else that exists (which exist *ab alio*). In support, he appeals to terminological distinctions used by the Church Fathers. For instance, there is *agenetos* (unoriginated, uncreated) in contrast to *genetos* (originated, created). While God alone is *agenetos*, "all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:3, NRSV).[4] According to Craig, "the ante-Nicene and Nicene Church Fathers rejected any suggestion that there might exist *ageneta* apart from God alone."[5]

Moreover, Craig states that the ante-Nicene Fathers "explicitly rejected the view that entities such as properties and numbers are *ageneta*."[6] While familiar with Plato's metaphysical views, they refused to ground all reality in an impersonal Form, instead identifying the Hebrew God as the *agenetos*.[7] From these considerations, Craig draws the implication that "there are no eternal entities apart from God"; all creation "is the product of temporal becoming."[8]

So, for Craig, a necessary condition for uncreated AOs would be that they are not located in space and time. Moreover, such AOs would be causally effete. While God is not located in space and time *sans* creation, God is not an AO, since God is particularized and necessarily has causal powers. But, in relation to creation, God is temporal.[9]

4 Ibid., 114, and William Lane Craig, "Response to Critics," in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 137.

5 Craig, "Anti-Platonism," 114.

6 Ibid., 115.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 113.

9 William Lane Craig, "God, Time, and Eternity," *Religious Studies* 14:4 (1978): 497-503. This seems to imply that for Craig, uncreated AOs would exist beyond God's control, which in turn suggests that God would not be sovereign over them.

Instead of Platonism, Craig sees much promise for a nominalist view of properties.[10] He disavows the nominalist options (such as trope theory) that would affirm their existence, yet cash them out as particulars. Instead, he takes the route of denying the existence of properties. Besides God and created, contingent AOs, on his view, only concrete particulars that are located in space and time really exist.

So, there are qualitative facts that exist. For instance, snow really is white, and I really am thinking of my hot chocolate beverage. There can be immaterial essences, too, as qualitative facts of things (such as of a thought, his *kalam* argument, or humans). So, while many today who are nominalists also embrace a form of physicalism, that is not the case with Craig. But, even though for him these essences are immaterial, they still are spatially and temporally located.

Now, contemporary Platonists, such as Paul Gould and Richard Davis, like to appeal to the resemblance facts between various entities and then argue that these facts are best explained by a single, common property *X* (i.e., a universal, which would be a type of AO) exemplified by such entities.[11] This, of course, is the familiar "one-over-many" argument. But, if pressed by a Platonist to give a positive explanation of why resemblance facts obtain between various particulars, Craig simply does not see a need to pursue this. For he thinks "no explanation is required besides an account of why a thing is as described."[12] Perhaps we could employ a scientific explanation why some persons are swift; e.g., we can explain that in terms of one's "musculature, consistent training, healthy diet, and so forth."[13] So,

10 While he remains open to conceptualism, Craig seems intent on pursuing nominalism: "While conceptualism remains a fallback position should all forms of nominalism fail, I think that the alternatives afforded by nominalism are far from exhausted and merit exploration" (Craig, "Anti-Platonism," 115).

11 Paul M. Gould and Richard Brian Davis, "Response to William Lane Craig," in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 129-30. And, as we will see shortly, there is a connection between universals and AOs in relation to nominalism.

12 Craig, "Response to Critics," 140.

13 Craig, "Anti-Platonism," 124-25, note 8. Moreover, that snow is white does not require the existence of an AO, whiteness; it simply is a matter of observation (and scientific explanation) that snow is white.

Craig could say there is no need of a further (metaphysical) explanation; that two things resemble is just a brute fact. Similarly, that snow is white is just a way of talking about white-snow. All we can do is offer a causal story why snow is white, and it is not due to something else (such as a property) more basic.[14] The same could be said of something having an essence – that too is just a brute fact.

Furthermore, following Mark Balaguer, the Platonist's appeal to a universal and essential nature of a supposed property *X* actually does not supply a genuine, informative explanation.[15] Consider a sentence in which *X* is asserted. A nominalist like Craig could understand that sentence as not being ontologically committing to the existence of *X*ness. Instead of being committed to the existence of properties, we can be committed by singular terms (like, "balls," "computers," "persons," etc.), within certain qualifications, and balls simply stand in a resemblance to each other as a brute fact.[16]

Moreover, the Platonist's explanation (by way of appeal to AOs that are exemplified by properties or substances) faces its own challenge. Craig understands AOs to be static and causally effete, since they would not be located in space or time. This belief leads him to ask, for instance, "How does being partly composed of or standing in relation to … [an AO] make an otherwise motionless person fleet?"[17] In sum, these kinds of replies demonstrate Craig's agreement with Balaguer, that today the one-over-many argument for Platonism actually is a "bad argument."[18]

Indeed, Craig simply does not see the question of universals as being important to his considerations for nominalism. For, as he explains, in drawing upon the work of Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, there have been two debates over nominalism in the history of philosophy.[19] The first is an age-old question of universals, in which nominalists deny that there are such things, insisting instead that things like properties are particulars. The

14 Thanks to J. P. Moreland for this insight and example.

15 Mark Balaguer, "Platonism in Metaphysics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spr 2014 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), §3. In turn, he draws from Michael Devitt.

16 Ibid.

17 Craig, "A Nominalist Perspective on God and Abstract Objects," 310 (bracketed insert mine).

18 Ibid.

19 Craig, "Anti-Platonism," 116. Also see Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, "Nominalism in Metaphysics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, revised June 18, 2014, , accessed Oct. 21, 2014.

second, however, is more recent, centering in the philosophy of mathematics. In it, nominalism is the denial that abstract objects exist; instead, all that exists are concrete particulars. Accordingly, someone (such as D.M. Armstrong) may not be a nominalist in one sense, while being one in the other.[20]

But Craig sees the issue of divine aseity as being related to the second debate, about AOs, not universals. As he claims, "in the context of the second debate, this problem is marginal."[21] Thus, he tends to dismiss as misguided arguments against his view that appeal to universals.

Craig's form of nominalism simply does not require an ontological explanation for essences. Instead, he endorses Rudolf Carnap's appeals to linguistic frameworks, and internal and external questions. Internal questions are "about the existence of certain entities asked within a given linguistic framework," while external ones concern "the existence of the system of entities posed from a vantage point outside that framework."[22] With regards to essences, Craig could appeal to a linguistic framework and make assertions about essences consistently from a standpoint internal to that framework, not external to it (such as a Platonist might). So, on Craig's view, to say that essences exist and make a claim about what kind of thing they are would be to do so once a person has adopted an ontological way of speaking which is governed by its own rules. But such talk of essences need not commit us to their existence as abstract objects.[23] The linguistic framework employed, and the overall context in which a speech act is made, help determine how we should understand such sentences.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF ESSENCES

Now, if Craig's nominalism is true, then to be consistent, a whole host of things we experience and use in life would need to be concrete particulars, and not real properties (i.e., AOs). Consider thoughts: they seem to have in-

20 Craig, "Anti-Platonism," 116. While Armstrong is an immanent realist about universals, nonetheless these are located in space and time.

21 Craig, "Anti-Platonism," 116.

22 Craig, "Propositional Truth — Who Needs It?", 360.

23 Craig, "Anti-Platonism," 121, where he criticizes a "picture theory of language."

tentionality, even essentially, or else they could not be thoughts. Now think of something specific, say, a cup of hot tea. That particular thought has intentional contents – it is of that drink, and not something else. Moreover, it does not seem that thought could have been about something else and still have been the thought it is. That is, it seems to have its intentional contents as part of its very nature, and we can know this by paying close to attention to the thought as it is given in conscious awareness.

We also can observe that that thought exemplifies, or owns, its particular intentional contents, and that content seems to be internally related to the thought. That is, that content is what it is in light of its relation to that thought. It is that thought's intentional contents, and, evidently, essentially so. So, it seems that things as mundane as a thought about a certain drink seem to have an essence to them.

Now, notice that this thought's essential, intentional content is not due to how we speak of it, for we can observe, if we pay close attention to what is before us in conscious awareness, that our words used about that thought do not enter into the thought itself. Rather, the thought seems to have its intentional essence intrinsically, and not due to how we speak or conceive of it. The thought's essence seems to be ontologically real, and its content seems to enter into the very being of the thought. If so, then it seems this relationship of exemplification is real, too.

Words used about that thought can, however, be bundled together with it in an external relation. For example, we can express in words our attitude about that thought, as with "I am getting weary of pondering that thought now." In such cases, the relata (the words, and the thought) remain what they are in themselves, and the words do not seem to enter into the very being of the thought, which, again, we can notice by paying close attention to them and their relationship to each other.

Essences also seem to play a key part in defining what qualities some other quality (or substance) can have in it. For instance, due to what kind of thing humans are, it is appropriate for them (at certain levels of development) to have complex thoughts, such as about modus ponens, in their minds. While a dog can have the color brown in its fur, it does not seem able to have more complex thoughts. Or, consider intentionality: as I have argued

elsewhere, due to what it is, it is the kind of thing that observations, concepts, beliefs, and other mental states have, but not physical states.

Other things also seem to have essences. Take Craig's *kalam* cosmological argument for God's existence:

(1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

(2) The universe began to exist.

(3) Therefore the universe was caused.[24]

Now, suppose that someone were to declare that premise one of Craig's argument states that whatever exists has a cause. Besides being incorrect, that misrepresentation of his argument reveals that the argument itself seems to have an essence, or nature, to it. It cannot undergo certain, apparently essential, kinds of changes to it and still be the same argument. Even if someone did not speak from a "Christian" linguistic framework, there still would seem to be certain necessary and sufficient conditions that demarcate what his *kalam* argument is.

Now, I believe Craig would affirm that these examples have essential features. Yet, so far as I have argued, these examples do not seem to require that these essences must be AOs. They still could be concrete particulars. Now, I can have the meaning of his *kalam* argument in my mind, and while my having of it would be particular to me, on his nominalism, it also seems (at least at first glance) that that meaning itself would be a concrete particular. Even so, clearly Craig would say that many can understand and have the meaning of his argument in their minds. To "explain" that phenomena, though, it seems he would have to appeal to brute facts.

These examples suggest that essences play an important role in defining the qualities of reality. Others who also are nominalists seem to realize this, too. Perhaps we may gain some more insights from them. Though he clearly denies the reality of essences, let us consider the naturalist, Daniel Dennett, and his appeals to what he calls the intentional stance. Dennett claims as his starting point "the objective, materialistic, third-person world of the physical

24 William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, Library of Philosophy and Religion (London: Macmillan, 1979).

sciences."[25] In that conceptual framework, there are no real mental entities, including intentionality, or essences. Yet, it is useful to adopt the intentional stance, which is a "tactic of interpreting an entity by adopting the presupposition that is an approximation of the ideal of an optimally designed (i.e. rational) self-regarding agent."[26] Humans would be intentional systems of the highest order on the planet.

However, we could treat others' behavior from the intentional stance, too. For instance, suppose we are trying to catch frogs. The tactic enables us to organize and simplify our expectations of the frog's moves, and they are "compelling and useful."[27] The intentional stance also enables us to be efficient and have power in predicting the frog's behavior without committing ourselves to attributing real beliefs, desires, and the like to the frog. Similarly, we could adopt that stance toward a computer that is programmed to play chess in a match with a person. We could attribute certain beliefs to the computer, with a goal of trying to checkmate its opponent, in order to predict the moves it will make, all the while not holding ontologically that these mental states and intentionality are real.

However, Dennett cautions us that while there are objective patterns in the real, materialistic world, he also draws upon W.V.O. Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of radical translation and extends it to the "'translation' of not only the patterns in subjects' dispositions to engage in external behavior (Quine's 'stimulus meanings'), but also the further patterns in dispositions to 'behave' internally."[28] There always will be gaps between various interpretations, and this phenomenon entails that it is "always possible in principle for rival intentional stance interpretations of those patterns to tie for first place, so that no further fact could settle what the intentional system in question *really* believed."[29] Dennett also notes that for Donald Davidson, this principle

25 Daniel C. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 3rd printing (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1990), 5.

26 Daniel C. Dennett, "Dennett, Daniel C.," *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind: Blackwell Companions to Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Guttenplan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), 239.

27 Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 108.

28 Ibid., 73.

29 Ibid., 40 (emphasis in original).

means that even "when all the evidence is in, alternative ways of stating the facts remain open."[30]

Quine used his thesis of the indeterminacy of translation to conclude that, in Dennett's words, "there was no way of strictly reducing or translating the idioms of meaning (or semantics or intentionality) into the language of the physical sciences."[31] Now, like Dennett, Quine flatly rejected the existence of metaphysical essences or mental entities (or content); both are naturalists. This understanding allows Dennett to use Quine to support his own denial of the reality of mental entities and content, for "Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of radical translation is thus of a piece with his attack on essentialism; *if things had real, intrinsic essences, they could have real, intrinsic meanings*."[32] Alternatively, if there were real, intrinsic essences to real intentional states, then they really could be of, or about, something, and not something else.

Thus, if there were such intrinsic essences, then meanings (along with other intentional states) could be determinate. There could be a single, correct answer to questions such as, "What did he really mean when he said *x*?" But, since there are no essences, there are no "deeper facts" to give a determinate answer to such questions.

Now, as a naturalist, Dennett denies the reality of essences, mental entities, and their content. But, importantly, he realizes that if essences (and not merely essence-talk) existed, they would be the "deeper facts" that would make determinate (at least) mental entities. They would circumscribe and define what something is, even words and linguistic expressions, from what it is not.

However, Dennett also realizes a further implication of a lack of essences. In the context of a discussion of real patterns and deeper facts, and Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, Dennett says that Samuel C. Wheeler draws insightful connections between Jacques Derrida, Quine, and Davidson. Per Wheeler, Derrida provides "important, if dangerous, supplementary arguments and considerations" to the ones that Davidson and other

30 Donald Davidson, "Belief and the Basis of Meaning," *Synthese* Vol. 27 (1974): 322, quoted in Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 41(bracketed insert mine).

31 Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 340.

32 Ibid., 319, note 8 (emphasis mine).

Quinians have put forth.[33] As Wheeler observes, "For Quinians, of course, it is obvious already that speech and thought are brain-writing, some kind of tokenings which are as much subject to interpretation as any other."[34] So even real, physical particulars are subject to interpretation.

Derrida, who also is a nominalist without a place for essences, comes to a very similar conclusion. Everything is a text, in the sense that everything must be interpreted. Why? There simply is nothing that is directly given to us in conscious awareness. Moreover, he also claims that "*there is nothing outside the text*."[35] This does not suggest a license to arbitrariness, for, as Merold Westphal explains, it signifies "textuality as a limit within which we have whatever freedom we have."[36] Instead, he unpacks Derrida's statement epistemologically and metaphysically. Epistemically, it means that "Being must always already be conceptualized," in that we do not have access immediately to things as they really are.[37]

Metaphysically, though, there is another reason why everything is interpretation. This is because things themselves are signs and not what is signified, and as such they "essentially point beyond themselves."[38] Therefore, as Westphal claims, "there is no signified that 'would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign' by failing to refer beyond itself."[39] For Derrida, there is always an absence "to" things, which yet somehow is present. What is not present is somehow essential to what is present. He denies that things,

33 Samuel C. Wheeler III, "Indeterminacy of French Interpretation: Derrida and Davidson," in E. Lepore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 477. See also Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 40, note 2. I would add that the same issue arises for Derrida precisely because he denies that there are any essences metaphysically; no two things are identical, not even the meaning of two utterances of the "same" word. He is a nominalist – two things that resemble each other have something in common *in name only* (which seems to boil down for him to a linguistic abstraction).

34 Wheeler, 492, quoted in Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 40, note 2.

35 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1976), 158, quoted in Merold Westphal, "Hermeneutics as Epistemology," *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 429.

36 Westphal, "Hermeneutics as Epistemology," 430.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 49, as quoted by Westphal, "Hermeneutics as Epistemology," 430.

such as thoughts, facts, or linguistic utterances are wholes that are complete in themselves. Rather, from one re-presentation to another, there always will be *differance*, for nothing has an identity that can be circumscribed, since there are no real essences.

So, both Dennett and Derrida seem to realize that without essences, there are no intrinsic, "deeper facts" in reality that serve to define the various things we find within it. The implication we may see from their rejection of essences is the ubiquity of interpretation. Yet, without real essences, there also is no intrinsic intentionality. Thus, there are no representations that are intrinsically of, about, or represent anything. Furthermore, without essences, it seems there cannot be any "natural signs," something that intrinsically would represent something else. Therefore, as Dallas Willard has observed, Dennett (and Derrida too) seems to be left with just events of "taking as," in which we take, or interpret, some input as something else.[40] There is no room, it seems, for anything in reality, whether physical, mental, moral, or otherwise, as it is to come before us and be known as such, apart from how that input has been conceived and processed.

Moreover, if any particular "taking" cannot intrinsically represent, or be of or about something, then it too must be taken to be something else. Of course, that taking also must be taken as something else, and so on to infinity, it would seem, without any way to get started with these takings or interpretations. As Willard argues, "Either there is going to be at some point a 'taking as' which does not itself represent anything (even what is 'taken') – which certainly sounds like a self-contradiction and is at best unlike the instances of 'taking' featured in Dennett's explanations – or there is going to be an infinite regress of takings."[41]

Moreover, this conclusion applies not just for mental entities, but every bit as much for any other aspects of the real world. If everything that can be known is the result of a process with nothing but takings, since nothing is immediately given to us, then in Dennett's case, it seems there is no room

40 Dallas Willard, "Knowledge and naturalism," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig (New York: Routledge, 1999), 40.

41 Ibid., 41.

for Dennett's "brute facts" to be exempt from Derrida's point: everything is a "text" which therefore stands in need of interpretation.

Dennett's case, along with Derrida's, is instructive because it shows how the lack of essences lands us in an infinite regress of interpretations, without a way to get started in knowing reality. Of course, naturalism is one way to eliminate any place for essences, but Craig is not a naturalist. Still, can Craig's nominalism preserve ontologically real essences? Or, is there a reason why his view, like that of Dennett, also would lead to an inability to know reality, and perhaps even other problems?

III. PRESERVING ESSENCES ON CRAIG'S NOMINALISM?

So far, we have seen that a thought seems to have its intentional contents intrinsically, and they are internally related, due to their natures. Now, that description fits closely with realists' accounts of exemplification, on which a property can exemplify (have present in it) another property, or a substance can exemplify a property, due to their respective natures. Here, it is useful to draw a connection between the two debates involving nominalism which, following Rodriguez-Pereyra, Craig distinguishes. Rodriguez-Pereyra describes two kinds of universals: *in re* universals, which exist "in" their instances, and *ante rem* universals, which exist "outside" their instances.[42] As he observes, "if *in re* universals exist in their instances, and their instances exist in space or time, then it is plausible to think that universals exist in space and time, in which case they are concrete."[43] An example would be Armstrong's immanent universals. Of course, such universals would pose no threat to God's aseity, as Craig sees it.

But, according to, Rodriguez-Pereyra, *ante rem* universals would "exist outside their instances," and so it would be "plausible to suppose that they exist outside space and time. If so, assuming their causal inertness, [*ante rem*] universals are abstract objects."[44] Thus, *ante rem* universals meet Craig's criteria for being AOs. Therefore, they would pose the threat that Craig perceives

42 Rodriguez-Pereyra, "Nominalism in Metaphysics," 4.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid. (bracketed insert mine).

to God's aseity. Indeed, they seem to be prime examples of such AOs. Therefore, Craig is mistaken to claim that the debate about universals is of marginal importance to the issue of the preservation of God's aseity.[45]

However, even though *ante rem* universals are conceivable, they seem implausible to Craig. For him, it seems concrete particulars cannot have AOs present in them, simply because AOs are not located in space and time, whereas concrete particulars are. But this concern seems to overlook a distinction between an *ante rem* universal itself and its instances. J. P. Moreland explains how an *ante rem* universal can be present in a particular instance P as a mode of itself: "When a universal is exemplified, the universal is modified and constitutes the essence of its instances, which, in turn, are complex, dependent particulars."[46] But, as Moreland explains, this sense of a universal being present "in" P is not a spatial one; rather, this relation is that of being an essential property-constituent of P, a way of being in P. So, as an AO, *ante rem* universals themselves would not be located in space and time, but, due to their being modified in the exemplification nexus, their instances are.

Craig also complains that if God exemplifies properties, even his essential ones, then that condition requires that these properties exist apart from him in order for God to exemplify them in his being. That is, if one maintains with "the overwhelming majority of realists that properties are constituents of things or in things only by way of exemplification," then "properties remain objects distinct from God." [47] If so, then God would have to create omnipotence before he could exemplify it. This scenario leads directly to the bootstrapping worry, which he sees as an insuperable problem for Platonism.[48]

But Craig misunderstands exemplification, particularly in its application to God. Craig seems to think that on a realist's view, since created things exemplify properties that exist in their own right apart from their possessors, the same reasoning must apply to God. But that is not so; the theist who is a Platonist can reply that God exemplifies (i.e., has, owns) his essential

45 And it is this kind of view of universals that motivate the critiques given by Gould and Davis.

46 J. P. Moreland, *Universals*, in *Central Problems in Philosophy* series, ed. John Shand (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 99.

47 Craig, "Response to Critics," 137.

48 Craig, "Anti-Platonism," 115.

properties as a brute fact. They just are his attributes, and using the terms "exemplify" or "property" here need not entail that these exist as AOs. Thus, Moreland has argued that "all the properties that God exemplifies as part of his nature – for example, *being loving, being powerful*, and so on – do not exist in a 'realm' outside of God, as do other properties. Rather, as a brute fact, God, along with his nature, simply exists *a se*."[49] This view also seems to align with the biblical portrait of God's nature, where one of God's names is "I AM," or, the eternal One, who does not change essentially.[50]

So, a realist about *ante rem* universals could appeal in these kinds of ways to preserve the reality of essences.[51] Now, however, what about on nominalism? Let us start by considering what nominalists mean when they treat some entity as a concrete particular. For Craig, these could include particular thoughts, snow, an athlete who is fast, a human soul, and, evidently, the *kalam* argument and Scripture, all of which would be located in space and time. Now, he and other nominalists would not mean that these are bare particulars. Rather, any given particular always is a particular *something*; e.g., a particular thought with its particular intentional contents.

Now, though Craig does not treat things such as properties, numbers, or propositions as real, this move still is like the one made by Keith Campbell in his trope theory, whether in his earlier or later versions.[52] On his earlier model, a trope is a located quality, or nature, while on his later view, a trope is a particular nature. Moreover, he claims the members of these pairs differ only by an epistemic distinction, not an ontological one, in order to assay tropes as simples.

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49 J. P. Moreland, in J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 505.

50 E.g., see Ex. 3:14, or many examples in the Gospel of John. Moreover, even if God did need to "add" to himself attributes (such as justice) existing independently of him as AOs, he would not be essentially just. But, on God's not changing in his essential being, see, e.g., Ps. 90:2.

51 And, to borrow the terminology from the two debates, since these universals also would be AOs, such a person also would be a Platonist about them.

52 For the early view, see Keith Campbell, "The Metaphysic of Abstract Particulars," in *Properties*, ed. by D.H. Mellor and Alex Oliver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126, 135-36. Reprinted from *Midwest Studies in Philosophy VI: The Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*, ed. P. French, et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 477-88. On the later view, see Campbell's *Abstract Particulars* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 68-71. Unlike Campbell, Craig's view would not treat these "properties" as real.

However, Moreland surfaces a problem with Campbell's position: "the trope view must assay a basic trope as a simple in order to avoid assigning the individuating and qualitative roles to non-identical constituents in the quality-instance, for this is what realists do (e.g. red_1 has an individuator, say, a bare particular expressed by 1, the universal redness, and a tie of predication)."[53] Since on Campbell's earlier view, the location and nature of a trope differ by a distinction of reason only, either the trope's location can reduce to its nature, or vice versa. Therefore, either the trope nominalist must (a) remove the individuator (the 1) and, consequently, make the identity of the trope's location and nature reflect just its nature. But that move requires that tropes really are metaphysically abstract universals. Or, (b), the trope theorist could make the identity reflect the trope's location, but then properties would be bare particulars, which is incoherent.[54] Likewise, on the later view, a trope's nature can be reduced away to its particularity. Thus, on either of Campbell's trope views, the essence of a trope can be reduced away.

But, Craig's nominalism is not of a trope variety; so, what about his view's prospects? Still, he too subscribes to the view that in creation, there exist only simple, concrete particulars and created AOs. Yet, he never treats or speaks of them as just bare simples, without any qualities. Rather, they do have brute, qualitative facts. But this position seems to take the same route as Campbell, with its same attendant problem, that essences can be reduced away. Furthermore, this result seems to happen because of the general nominalist position that reality consists of particulars. Though Craig would refuse to stop talking of essences, nonetheless there does not seem to be ontological room whatsoever for any qualitative facts, including essences, to exist. Indeed, what should creation be like on his view? It seems that only bare particulars would exist. Therefore, all qualities would be metaphysically indeterminate, leaving us without any ability to exist, much less know creation at all. Clearly, that would not be much of a "creation." Furthermore, that result seems incoherent and utterly unlike our everyday experience.

Now, if this is so, then the other issues we have seen above with a lack of essences flood over Craig's views too. Several examples of results contrary to

53 Moreland, *Universals*, 59.

54 Ibid., 59, 64.

Craig's intentions would follow. For example, it seems that the *kalam* argument would lose its essence, thereby becoming (at best) just a matter of interpretation, and even then, there would be only particular interpretations, and as many as there are interpreters. And if someone has no other good reason to interpret it as Craig does, as an argument for God's existence, then they could interpret its force away, perhaps due to their naturalistic or postmodern commitments. The same would go for the Christian gospel; its essential meaning would be lost, making it too just a matter of interpretation. Indeed, any passage of Scripture would not have a defined meaning that God (or the human author) had in mind, leaving it too as an open question as to its interpretation. Even the biblical claim that Jesus arose from the dead, which Craig has worked hard to defend, also would be just a matter of interpretation.[55]

Moreover, various issues arise in light of creation being metaphysically indeterminate. His views seem to be in serious tension with our everyday experience of creation as determinate (even stubbornly so), not to mention Scripture. This point also is important in rebutting one of his chief objections against Platonists. For Craig maintains that he does not need to give a further, metaphysical account of why things resemble each other, or why an AO exemplified in a substance can give that substance a quality, preferring instead to terminate discussion by appealing to a brute fact of the matter. Now, in various contexts, it is fine to appeal to a brute fact, when something does not have an explanation, but also is the kind of thing we could and should expect to have one.

But to do that presumes that there indeed exists a fact of the matter. However, for Craig, if creation is metaphysically indeterminate, it does not seem there would be any qualities on his view. Even that "fact" would be indeterminate, and thus the view undermines itself. It will not do, then, for him to appeal to bruteness, for doing so presumes there are real facts. The Platonist, however, has recourse to *ante rem* universals, with their essential natures, to give determinacy to created reality. In this important respect, therefore, Platonism has greater explanatory power than nominalism, in that it helps explain why created reality seems determinate. Thus, Balaguer's claim that the Platonist

55 E.g., see his *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus during the Deist Controversy*, Texts and Studies in Religion 23 (Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1985), or "The Historicity of the Empty Tomb of Jesus.", *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), 39-67.

cannot give a "genuine" or "informative" explanation, or simply a better one, is mistaken.[56]

But surely there are some replies available to Craig and perhaps other forms of nominalism as well. For instance, it seems clear to me that Craig would affirm that thoughts have their contents essentially; the Christian gospel essentially includes Christ's atoning death; God is essentially just; and more. He has no intentions of denying essences exist. But notice that these are claims one can make once one has adopted a particular linguistic framework from which to speak. As such, they are not necessarily made from an ontological one, in which we would make ontologically committing claims. So, it would remain an open question here just what these essences would be. Yet, as we have seen, on his view, ontologically they would have to be concrete particulars, yet without any "deeper fact" to them ontologically as to why they have essences. But, since there does not seem to be a basis on nominalism for any qualities of a determinate, created reality to exist, the basis for Craig's reply dissolves.

Consider a second, possible reply, directed against Moreland's critique of Campbell's trope theories.[57] The criticism might go as follows: Moreland's argument is mistaken because, though a trope is ontologically simple, nevertheless it could sustain two different functions at the same time. For example, consider a red trope in an apple, which is placed upon a table. That trope would be higher than the table and, at the same time, would be exactly similar to some other red trope, perhaps in a second apple. But in this case the two functions are based on relations in which the trope stands, which itself does not seem problematic. It does seem that one entity can stand in several relations at the same time.

But that suggestion misses the point of Moreland's critique. Rather, his argument was based upon how one ontologically simple entity (e.g., the color of a trope versus its shape) could ground metaphysically that entity's ability to be just like red and, at the same time, just like shapes. That is, it is not a question

56 This evident loss of determinacy to created reality suggests that nominalism actually is a constructivist view. That is, if "reality" is indeterminate, then somehow it seems we "make" it determinate in some way, perhaps by how we conceive of, or talk about, it. This is an example of what Dallas Willard has called a "Midas Touch" epistemology, in which "concepts are treated in this way — as an activity of mind (language) brought to bear upon something to produce something." See his "How Concepts Relate the Mind to Its Objects: The God's Eye View Vindicated?" *Philosophia Christi* 1:2 (1999), 5-20.

57 Thanks to J. P. Moreland for this suggestion.

of how one, simple particular could stand in various relations at the same time, but instead how it could have two qualities. Indeed, it does not seem possible for an ontological simple (which, ontologically, is what nominalists must endorse) actually to have two qualities (here, color and shape) which would end up being identical to each other (and thereby keep the entity simple) and yet somehow able to qualify that simple itself in two such divergent ways.

Last, Jeff Brower has explored a possibility in which a nature can be individuated by a quality extrinsic to it. If so, that might preserve essences, yet be accounted for within trope theory.[58] He suggests that there can be basic individuals (an individuator) and derivative individuals (a trope). A given trope (or, essence, E) is individuated by the extrinsic relationship it can stand in to some individuator, I. Thus, contrary to the result of Campbell's formulation, there would not be two qualities of the one trope. Together, they would form a complex of both an individuator and a trope.

Now, being extrinsic to E, I is not a constituent of E. While we may "stick" I and E together (like we would stick together two pieces of paper with glue), nonetheless I does nothing to E in itself. This is because I is not internally related to E, nor is it intrinsically related to E as a constituent thereof. This condition is juxtaposed to how I described above the relatedness of a given thought and its content, in which a thought is particularized due to its being internally related to its content. In short, to claim that E is individuated due to I does not seem justified. Instead, it seems that E in itself is not particular and thus is better understood as a metaphysically abstract entity.

Now, consider again how thoughts can have, or exemplify, other properties (such as their intentional contents) in internal relations due to their natures. Compare that with what we have seen nominalists are left to work with. At one level of analysis, without essences to draw upon, the nominalist seems left with just external relations for any such relatedness to take place. But then there is no intrinsic reason why these given qualities are related. But then we have a

58 E.g., on trope theory (in relation to Aquinas), see his chapter, "Matter, Form, and Individuation," in *The Oxford Handbook to Aquinas*, eds. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 85-103. For a development of some related concepts (such as sameness yet without strict identity), see Jeff Brower and Susan Brower-Toland, "Aquinas on Mental Representation: Concepts and Intentionality," *Philosophical Review* Volume 117, No. 2 (2008), 193-243.

situation that flies in the face of what we can observe by introspection. For if these particulars were related externally, then the intentional contents would not enter in the being of the thought. *But, we can observe that they do*.

However, at another level, the nominalist seems left without anything determinate whatsoever to relate together. This finding can help rebut the claims of trope theorists that though there is not numerical identity between two particulars (e.g., two instances of the gospel), they still stand in a relation of exact similarity, and that is just a brute fact. So, they might claim there still could be the "same" essence of the gospel, though they are not literally identical. But this claim does not work, for it simply presupposes what we already have seen is not feasible. That is, it presupposes that there are determinate qualities in existence, which then can be related.

In short, then, it seems that there is a general problem to have essences on nominalism in metaphysics, including Craig's form. Without essences, though, it seems nominalism leaves us with just bare particulars and thus an indeterminate creation. But, we have seen that realists about *ante rem* universals do have resources available to preserve essences.

CONCLUSION

Craig seems to miss the importance of *ante rem* universals as AOs to this debate. This misunderstanding apparently stems primarily from his use of Balaguer, who thinks the nominalists' job merely is to rebut the Platonist. But, for Balaguer, the Platonist must provide a *refutation* of nominalism. Indeed, he thinks the brute facts about "the basic physical nature of elementary particles" can answer satisfactorily the Platonist's requests for further explanations.[59] But what counts as "brute" in one conceptual framework may not in another.[60] For

59 Balaguer, §3.

60 This also helps explain why one person may be ontologically committed by the use of certain terms, while another is not. As Balaguer puts it, "A criterion of ontological commitment is a principle that tells us when we are committed to believing in objects of a certain kind by virtue of having assented to certain sentences" (Ibid.). But, why should we assent to the use of certain sentences? This seems to tie back to larger-scale, conceptual, even worldview commitments.

Balaguer, his appeal to bruteness seems closely related to his apparent embrace of naturalism and, thus, a rejection of real essences and universals.

So, is Craig right that the "one over many" argument is "bad" after all? Hardly; he has relied on an evidently mistaken (and apparently naturalistically influenced) analysis. For it is due to the (assumed) success of Balaguer's criticisms of the "one over many" argument that he (and apparently Craig too) believes Platonists now appeal instead to the so-called "Indispensability Argument." That argument in turn trades upon the (apparent) success of Quine's "criterion of ontological commitment," which Balaguer has used to rebut Platonism's "one over many" argument. Yet, if my responses are correct, then he (not to mention Craig) has failed to rebut that argument and thus the relevance of universals.[61]

But, there still remains Craig's objection to AOs on the basis of the biblical witness and the Church Fathers. Here, I think we can defuse his objections by observing that his primary concern is that God alone exists *a se*, and everything else exists *ab alio*, i.e., in dependence upon him. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Craig seems to be reading into his arguments and references that these points mandate that all AOs came into existence at a point in time. But it does not seem this must be the case. Aquinas distinguished a possibility that Craig seems to dismiss or overlook, namely, that there is another sense of "create" to be distinguished. That is, more fundamental than the sense of coming into existence in time is the sense of metaphysical dependence, in which God sustains something in existence. In this latter sense, God could create an AO (i.e., sustain it metaphysically in existence), yet without having to have created it in time.

Now, Craig might object that this solution is *ad hoc*, but why should we think that? This view does not seem to undermine God's aseity. These AOs would not exist *a se*; instead, they would exist *ab alio* (in dependence upon God as the ground of their being), as Craig insists. So, this view also does not seem to undermine the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

Since God's aseity need not be threatened by AOs, and such a view avoids the serious costs I have explained associated with nominalism, then I think it would be wise as a Christian theist for Craig to abandon nominalism.

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61 Many thanks to Paul Gould for helpful feedback on an earlier draft of this paper.

MIRACLES AND VIOLATIONS OF LAWS OF NATURE

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to spell out the relationship between miracles and violations of laws of nature. I argue that the former do not necessarily entail the latter, even in the case of the type of miraculous event which cannot be brought about by natural operations alone. The idea that they do is based on a deterministic assumption which is too often overlooked. The article also explores the reverse implication, i.e. the question whether violations of laws of nature entail miracles. It turns out that there are conceptual difficulties in defining what sort of events would qualify as such violations in the first place, but that a more general notion of God's action contravening nature is viable. However, there are theological reasons against the assumption that God ever acts in this way.

INTRODUCTION

David Hume's definition of a miracle as "a violation of the laws of nature", from his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*,[1] is often used, and even taken for granted, as a standard definition in much philosophical and theological literature, although this definition has also been questioned by some thinkers.[2] According to it, an event *x*'s being a miracle implies that it is also a

1 Section X, § 12.

2 See e.g. Lowe (1987), Hughes and Adams (1992), Mumford (2001), and Gasser and Quitterer (2015).

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violation of a law of nature (henceforth VLN), although the definition leaves open whether there might also be other, non-miraculous VLNs, i.e. whether the set of miracles is coextensive with the set of VLNs. However, Hume makes his definition more precise later in the *Enquiry,* where he defines a miracle as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent".[3] Hence, the set of miracles and the set of VLNs are clearly not conceptually coextensive, although they may be so as a matter of fact, in case nothing other than the Deity, or some invisible agent, can or does violate the laws of nature.

In any case, the widespread persuasion that the forward implication — i.e. "*x* is a miracle → *x* is a VLN" — holds has undoubtedly had a great historical impact. For example, Rudolf Bultmann's scepticism against the possibility of miracles was due precisely to the idea that they "break through" the ordinary, seamless course of nature.[4] According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* "the Humean in-principle argument has left an indelible impression on modern biblical scholarship … Commitment to something like Hume's position lies on one side of a deep conceptual fault line that runs through the discipline of biblical studies."[5] But Hume's famous argument referred to in the SEP article is based on, and intimately connected to, his definition of the term "miracle", since his argument is one from "the very nature of the fact".[6]

That the forward implication holds has been disputed, rightly in my view, by some philosophers.[7] The principal motive for doing so, as we shall see below, was that miracles are conceivable which bring about what is also in nature's power. But I will adduce different reasons for questioning the forward implication, and argue that, if a miracle brings about what is naturally impossible, it does not on that account imply a VLN. The result is a different way

3 Note K, 1.

4 „Jedenfalls glaubt die moderne Wissenschaft nicht, dass der Lauf der Natur von übernatürlichen Kräften durchbrochen oder sozusagen durchlöchert werden kann. Dasselbe gilt für die moderne Geschichtsforschung, die nicht mit einem Eingreifen Gottes oder des Teufels oder von Dämonen in den Lauf der Geschichte rechnet … Der Mensch von heute baut darauf, dass der Lauf der Natur und Geschichte, wie sein eigenes Innenleben und sein praktisches Leben, nirgends vom Einwirken übernatürlicher Kräfte durchbrochen wird." Bultmann (1984), 144-5.

5 McGrew (2015).

6 *Enquiry,* section X, § 12.

7 See note 2.

of spelling out the relationship between miracles and laws of nature than is usually assumed in the literature. Before proceeding, I should however define the term "miracle":

miracle $=_{def}$ an event in nature directly caused by God.

Note that on this definition:

1. There is no natural cause for the miraculous event itself.[8] However, the causal history of the event can, and in general will, contain natural events, as for example when a material object is miraculously transformed. Also, events or states of affairs caused by something in the world which is of miraculous origin are not themselves considered as miracles.[9]

2. A miraculous event is caused by God, rather than by some other supernatural agent, such as an angel.

3. Finally, the event occurs in nature, rather than in the supernatural realm.[10]

I take it to be essential to a true miracle that it be caused supernaturally (point 1). Hence, astonishing events which can be explained by natural causes are not miracles *proprie loquendo*. The exclusion of supernatural agents other than God (point 2) is a somewhat stipulative element of my definition.[11] The same is true of the requirement that a miracle affects nature, rather than the supernatural (point 3). But this definition will do for the purposes of the following discussion, in which I will be concerned primarily with divine and natural causation, and not with the action of other supernatural agents, nor with action within the supernatural realm.

By contrast, it is notoriously difficult to define precisely what a law of nature is. Hence, I will not attempt to do so here. Instead, different concepts of laws of nature, and hence also of spelling out the relationship between miracles and the laws of nature, will be discussed in the following two sections.

8 Cf. Mumford (2001), 200, and Hughes and Adams, 190.

9 Cf. Hughes and Adams, 197.

10 Cf. Mumford (2001), 192.

11 It is shared by Aquinas (ScG. III, 103), but differs from Hume's definition cited above, which also allows for other invisible agents.

DO MIRACLES IMPLY LAW-VIOLATIONS?

Hume's definition whereby "a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature" comes somewhat out of the blue. He simply states it, without discussing it before or afterwards. That Hume too took a miracle to be due to the direct action of a supernatural agent, as in the definition which I have proposed above, is clear from his amended definition of the term "miracle" as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent". Whence, however, his conviction that miracles constitute VLNs?

I propose that this conviction should be understood before the background of an assumption which Hume argues for in detail in section VIII of the *Enquiry*, and which seems to be often overlooked in the context of discussion of this thought on miracles: an all-encompassing determinism. The classification of miracles as VLNs is intimately linked to this assumption.

My contention that Hume was a determinist may strike some readers as outright false. Determinism is certainly not the view usually associated with him. Yet, Hume's writings leave no doubt that he did in fact, like so many educated people of his day, subscribe to this view, as argued in detail by Hume scholar Peter Millican.[12] To quote only a few passages:

> It is universally allowed, that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force, and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause, that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it. The degree and direction of every motion is, by the laws of nature, prescribed with such exactness, that a living creature may as soon arise from the shock of two bodies, as motion, in any other degree or direction than what is actually produced by it.[13]

This is backed by a passage from Hume's earlier *Treatise of Human Nature:*

> Tis universally acknowledg'd, that the operations of external bodies are necessary, and that in the communication of their motion, in their attraction, and mutual cohesion, there are not the least traces of indifference or liberty. Every object is determin'd by an absolute fate to a certain degree and direction of its motion, and can no more depart from that precise line, in which

12 Millican (2011), which see also for further literature supporting the thesis of Hume's determinism (p. 611, note 4).

13 *Enquiry,* section VIII, § 4.

> it moves, than it can convert itself into an angel, or spirit, or any superior substance. The actions, therefore, of matter are to be regarded as instances of necessary actions.[14]

Determinism moreover applies also to human agency, as Hume argues in detail in the *Enquiry*.[15] Hume's determinism is arguably in line with what would later become known as Laplacian determinism: the future follows uniquely from the past, and the state of the world at a certain time uniquely determines, given the laws of nature, the state of the world for any later time.[16] At any rate, this seems to me the natural interpretation of the above quotes, given their insistence that determinism applies to *every* natural effect, object or motion. In such a deterministic world, the laws of nature can be thought of as a function $\mathscr{L}$ which takes as its input, first, a complete description of the universe at a given time t_0, and second, some other time t. This function spits out a complete, unique description of the world at t.[17]

There remains the rather tricky exegetical issue of how Hume's determinism relates with his 'Humeanism',[18] i.e. with the doctrine that, to use Christopher Hughes' words, "there are no necessary connections between distinct existences — in particular, no necessary connections of any kind, in any direction, between earlier and later events".[19] Was Hume a 'Humean', and are the two views reconcilable? The most plausible solution to this puzzle — which might be called the puzzle of the two Humes — seems to me that the *epistemic* thesis whereby the idea of causal connection is based on nothing other than constant conjunction, developed in section VII of the *Enquiry*, is supplemented, in section VIII, with the *ontological* premise that the world is in fact deterministic. It seems to me, furthermore, that these two apparently contrary views could be reconcilable by reading Hume's determinism as a "functional" rather than a "dispositional" one; that is, by attributing the ne-

14 II.3.1.3

15 Esp. in section VIII, §§ 15-25.

16 For a discussion, see Popper (1991), ch. 2.

17 This picture presupposes the notion of the "world at given time", which was generally taken for granted in pre-relativistic times, but which, given the relativity of simultaneity, has proved to be problematic. On this notion, cf. Saudek (2015), ch. 3.

18 I follow E. J. Lowe (1987) in putting the term 'Humeanism', referring to the doctrine described above, in parentheses.

19 Hughes and Adams (1992), 192.

cessity in nature to its laws, interpreted as constituting a function (as outlined above), rather than to invisible powers or dispositions — which Hume was sceptical of — unfolding in a lawlike manner. On this picture, the statement "if the world is in state w_0 at t_0, then, given the laws of nature, it is in state w_1 at t_1" is equivalent to the statement "the world is in state w_1 at t_1 *because* it is in state w_0 at t_0". The advantage of such an interpretation is that it accommodates both Hume's determinism and his scepticism about the existence of causal links between events, so that there is no longer a conflict between the "two Humes". Whether the interpretation of Hume which I propose is viable is up to specialists to judge. But whatever the solution to the puzzle of the relationship between these two sides of Hume's thought may be — a question beyond the scope of this paper — it is clear from the passages cited above that Hume assumed determinism to be a mind-independent, and indeed indisputable, feature of the world.

Before such a deterministic background, it makes perfect sense to view miraculous interventions in the history of the world as violations of, and as contrary to, rather than just outside or above, the laws of nature. For given determinism, laws and initial conditions fix the state of the world in every detail, for all times. In other words, it is essential to the laws of nature that they determine everything, given initial conditions. If then there is any sort of agency in a robust sense (whether human or divine) i.e. causal activity attributable to an agent, which makes a real difference and leads to states of affairs which would not have come about without such activity, then the complete state of the world after the intervention of the agent is not the one determined by the laws of nature. The latter must then be viewed as contravened or suspended. Hence my claim that Hume's definition of the term "miracle" is linked essentially to his deterministic world view.

Note, however, that the above picture results only if we assume that it is essential for the set of laws of nature to determine everything. Only then does anything other than that determined by the laws of nature violate these laws. This becomes especially clear if we contrast the proposition "the laws of nature determine everything, given initial conditions" with the weaker one "the laws of nature always hold". If only the latter proposition holds, it is quite conceivable for agency to make a genuine difference, and to change the course of the world, without this constituting a VLN. As an analogy, consider a country

whose laws always hold (i.e. are never broken), but do not determine all activities of its citizens. The citizens of such a country are perfectly law-abiding, but some of their activities are simply outside the purview of the law. These activities should then be viewed as additional, rather than contrary, to those determined by the country's laws.

Of course, analogies between normative and natural laws must be made with caution, since they differ in the important respect that the former can be broken (although in the legal sense they "must" or "ought" not to be broken), whereas the latter cannot. Nevertheless, a world where the proposition "the laws of nature determine everything" is false, whereas the proposition "the laws of nature always hold" is true, is at least conceivable. What is more, we seem to live in just such a world, as can be illustrated by a simple example: Suppose that we throw a stone, a cat, and a human being out of the window. All three bodies behave according to Newton's laws (or, more precisely, to the ultimately true laws of physics, which reduce to Newton's laws in everyday circumstances), so that the centre of mass of each body traces out a parabolic path with respect to an observer at rest relative to Earth's surface. It is not that the cat, or the human being, in virtue of their higher capacities, can contravene these laws in any way. But they can nevertheless influence the situation in important ways: the cat can arrange its body so as to ensure a safe landing, and the human being can, in principle at least, deliberate about what to do during the time before impact.

Furthermore, simple acts such as throwing an object into the air can make a genuine difference to the world, but this in no way implies that the laws of nature would somehow be suspended and cease to operate in the region of spacetime where such acts are performed. The laws of classical mechanics, of electromagnetism, or any other laws we might care to think of, clearly remain in force.

In all these examples, there is simply something in addition, not against, the laws of nature occurring, just like in the case of the perfectly law-abiding, indeterministic country. But if agency can in this way exceed the laws of nature without violating them, and can make a genuine discernible difference to the world, there seems to be no reason why divine agency affecting the world should necessarily imply a VLN.

To conclude this section, the forward implication "*x* is a miracle → *x* is a VLN" does not hold in our world, which according to the best scientific evidence available to us is in all likelihood indeterministic,[20] although it would hold if the world were deterministic. A view whereby the laws of nature always hold, and in addition miracles occur, is viable.

DO LAW-VIOLATIONS IMPLY MIRACLES?

What about the reverse implication? Are VLNs necessarily divine acts, or at least supernatural ones? This question is difficult to answer, since it depends on what sort of events qualify as VLNs in the first place, a problem which, in turn, presents itself in different manners in function of the explication of the term "law of nature". But this explication is itself a contested and unresolved issue in the philosophy of science.

The term "law of nature" is sometimes interpreted as a type of universal statement, i.e. a statement of the form "$\forall x: Fx \rightarrow Gx$". As E. J. Lowe specifies, "the most common grammatical form of the sentences used to express statements of natural law is that of the subject-predicate sentence in which the subject is a sortal term and the predicate contains either a dispositional adjective or a verb whose tense conveys dispositionality."[21] Clearly, however, not all statements which meet these requirements are laws of nature, as illustrated e.g. by the statement "all Beethoven symphonies take less than a day to perform". Moreover, as is widely acknowledged in the literature, laws expressed by such universal statements are impossible to violate, since the occurrence of an exception to a universal statement renders the statement itself false. The same is true on a "Humean" view whereby natural laws consist merely in constant conjunctions between different types of events, in such a way that a type-A event is always followed by a type-B event. Again, the occurrence of a counterexample to the purported law changes the basis on which the law is supposed to supervene, thereby ruining its lawhood from the outset.[22] For

20 Cf. the assessment by Briegel and Müller (2014), 4; as well as Popper (1991).

21 Lowe (1987), 274.

22 See e.g. Hughes and Adams (1992), 184; Gasser and Quitterer (2015), 248-251; Lowe (1987), 269; and Mumford (2001), 193.

fundamentally the same reason, we routinely talk of theories being violated, without this implying a violation of a true law of nature: if a particle were observed to travel faster than light, then the statement "nothing travels faster than light" was not a proper law of nature in the first place.

But a view of the laws of nature as mere regularities does not seem to me to capture well their peculiar character of necessity. It is notoriously hard to define what precisely this necessity consists in, but it seems to be linked in a crucial way to the role of mathematics in physical law. This is illustrated by some simple, deterministic laws of classical mechanics, which in Hume's day may well have been considered paradigmatic for the very notion of a law of nature in general. Thus, the law of conservation of momentum follows from simple calculus, together with the definition of the centre of mass of a body.[23] Inverse square laws, such as Newton's law of gravitation and Coulomb's law, obtain a necessary character from the three-dimensionality of space: if bodies are thought of as sources of gravitational or electromagnetic fields, then the density of whatever causes the field (whether particles or some ethereal substance flowing from a body) will diminish with the square of the distance. By contrast, an inverse cube law would not be just as good, but would cry out for an explanation of why the field-causing stuff disappears. In both conservation of momentum and inverse square laws, there is a clear sense in which "it must be so", which has to do with the mathematics involved, and which is lacking in simple universal statements such as "all swans are white". This does not mean that the necessity of physical law must be due to *logical* necessity. For example, space might not have been three-dimensional, in which case the inverse-square law would not hold. Rather, its lawhood seems to arise from the combination of a contingent feature of the world with mathematical necessity.

The existence of such deterministic laws does not, for the reasons given in the previous section, land us in the Laplacian, deterministic *universe*. But it does mean that some subsystems of the universe can and will behave deterministically, as for example is the case with a simple collision experiment in a lab. To explore what it would mean to violate a law of nature, and how miracles are related to VLNs, let's consider simple systems subject to the de-

23 See any undergraduate physics textbook, e.g. Young and Freedman (2012), 258-260.

terministic laws described above, rather than the broader gamut of laws of nature known to us today, where in particular laws which only allow of a stochastic formulation, as opposed to a deterministic one, play an important part. Three types of candidates for law-violations will be considered:

First, we could attempt to "violate" the laws of nature of such a simple deterministic system, and to falsify the predictions about its evolution, by interfering with it in some way, e.g. by inserting extra matter, imparting momentum, or adding any sort of energy to it. But while such interference prevents what would have happened with the system, it clearly constitutes no VLN. Conservation principles are not violated, since momentum and energy are conserved only in closed systems, which the above, by assumption, are not. Also, prevention is not violation, but rather is inextricably bound up with the notion of causal interaction in general.

Suppose, however, that God's creative activity is the source of interference: God creates extra matter, energy, momentum, or charge, inserting it into an already existing system. We would then be faced with a miracle, on the definition given at the beginning of this paper, but would such divine interference amount to a VLN? The new stuff brought into the system by God prevents what the laws of nature would have predicted, and furthermore in general changes the system's total amount of energy or momentum. But just as above, these facts by themselves do not imply a VLN. Rather, there is then, once again, merely something *in addition* to, not against, the laws of nature going on. It could, however, be objected that on this scenario, God violates energy conservation of the *universe*. The energy contained in the universe ought to remain constant over time, but due to divine intervention there is now more energy than there was before. This objection presents itself in a different light to us today than it would have done in Hume's day, since it presupposes the notion of "the universe at a given time", which — as 18th century people could not have known — has turned out to be problematic, given the relativity of simultaneity.[24] But absent such a notion, it seems hard to even formulate the principle of energy conservation for the universe as a whole. Moreover, it is to my knowledge an unresolved issue, in contemporary cosmology, whether we ought to think of the universe as a closed system in the

24 See note 17. Cf. also Dorato (1995) for a detailed discussion of this issue.

first place.[25] In sum, I submit that God's creative activity affecting an already existing system should not be viewed as implying a VLN.

A second candidate for a VLN in a simple deterministic system is God's directly and immediately affecting the motion of matter, that is, without first creating something which interferes with what is already there. To use E. J. Lowe's example of the levitating table,[26] God would then simply hold the table. This clearly amounts to an obstruction or prevention of the course of nature predicted by its laws, but again, this by itself does not imply a VLN. In addition, God's shifting of a body does not violate its natural capacities in the sense of keeping it from unfolding its causal powers. This is because locomotion is not a change which, by itself, affects the nature or dispositions of an object, but only the spatial relations between objects. Hence, it seems that God's moving of matter likewise should not be viewed as a VLN.[27]

The third candidate for a VLN is divine action annihilating, or switching off, a disposition of an object. In the context of the kind of simple deterministic settings considered above, God could for example take the disposition of electrical charge off a charged object, or the disposition to gravitate — the gravitational mass or "gravitational charge" — off a massive object, should this be possible in principle. But divine action could, conceivably, counteract dispositions or powers of all kinds, e.g. by taking the life of living beings or in any other way canceling a disposition which a thing of a given type naturally has. The term "violation" is here much more apt than in the previous two cases, since God's influence here does not add to, but rather takes away from, the causal power of nature. However, even though such events are indeed contrary to, and hence violations of, nature — at any rate, of the nature of the object in question — for a reason pointed out by E. J. Lowe, they cannot be counted as violations of *laws* of nature. If, for example, God causes a table to levitate by taking off its "gravitational charge" m_G, then Newton's of gravitation, $F_G = G\frac{Mm_G}{r^2}$, is not violated, since m_G is zero as a result of divine

25 Cf. Ellis (2008).

26 Lowe (1987), 276-7.

27 Cf. Aquinas' view whereby it is not contrary to the nature of created things to be moved by God, in ScG. III, 100.

intervention.[28] We get the same result in the less exotic scenario whereby God annihilates the electric charge of an object, so that the Coulomb force exerted on it by a neighbouring charge is zero. The upshot of these examples is that divine action contravening, suspending or canceling nature is logically possible and conceptually viable, at least on a dispositional view whereby natural objects possess powers. This contrasts with the notion of a VLN on a regularities view of the laws of nature, which, as argued above, turns out to be conceptually incoherent.

Is to act against nature in such a way the prerogative of God alone, so that all acts against nature are miracles? Finite natural agents too can generally annihilate or cancel dispositions which things naturally have, although in some cases this may be beyond technological reach. Of course, such agents can do so only by employing other dispositions, i.e. by making use of nature's own possibilities, so that Francis Bacon's words apply whereby "nature is overcome only by obeying it".[29] Directly canceling the disposition of a thing is therefore something that only God, or perhaps other supernatural agents, could bring about. In this sense, we might say that only such agents can truly act in a way contrary to nature. However, in the case of God at least, there is a *theological* reason against the assumption that he ever acts in such a way: If things owe their causal powers to God's goodness as their ultimate source, it seems reasonable to doubt that God would ever, so to speak, revoke his original gift and deprive an object of one of its natural dispositions, although he clearly could do so.[30] Should this be true, God could also be viewed as the supreme non-violating cause, in the sense that particular things can and will counteract the dispositions of other things, whereas God never does so, but rather adds to or enhances the powers of nature.[31]

28 In Lowe's words, "no violation of the law that heavy objects fall when unsupported would be involved, since a massless object cannot be heavy." Lowe (1987), 277.

29 "natura non nisi parendo vincitur". Bacon (1620), aphorismus 3.

30 Cf. Book of Wisdom, 11,24: "For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned."

31 Cf. the similar view endorsed by Gasser and Quitterer (2015), 254-6.

CONCLUSION

The investigations in this article have led to three principal conclusions: First, the notion that miracles are VLNs stems from the assumption of a deterministic universe, whereas in an indeterministic one, this implication does not hold. Second, if we give up all-encompassing, Laplacian determinism, but still grant that some systems are deterministic, the very notion of a violation of a law of nature — as opposed to a violation of a *prediction* based on a true or purported law — is difficult to explicate. At least, no plausible candidate for such an event has emerged from the thought experiments discussed in this article. Third, the notion of God violating or acting against nature is conceptually viable on a dispositionalist view. For this reason, we can meaningfully distinguish between violating vs. non-violating miracles. The claim that God never acts against nature — a claim which, I argued, is plausible on theological grounds — is therefore not a vacuous one, as opposed to, for example, the claim that the laws of nature are regularities which are never violated.

It is illustrative to compare these results with those reached by Christopher Hughes, who likewise concludes that miracles do not entail VLNs. I agree with this. However, there is an important difference: Hughes bases his conclusion on events which nature could have brought about by its own powers, but which in fact God brought about, as examples of miracles which don't violate the laws of nature,[32] a move also endorsed by Stephen Mumford.[33] Hughes cites the example of a prophet who, due to divine intervention, escapes through a solid prison wall. Such an event is in principle naturally possible, even if highly unlikely.[34] On the other hand, Hughes classifies divine intervention causing a naturally impossible event as a VLN.[35] I claim that in an indeterministic universe, it is hard to make out what a VLN is, but that we can still distinguish between violating and non-violating miracles,

32 Such events constitute the third type of miracles according to Thomas Aquinas' classification of miracles in ScG. III, 101.

33 "Supernatural interventions in the natural world are not necessarily violations of natural laws. Miracles which are consistent with natural laws are events supernaturally caused which would otherwise have been either (i) naturally caused, (ii) not caused by anything, (or (iii) possibly naturally caused." Mumford (2001), 197.

34 Hughes and Adams (1992), 194.

35 Ibid., 195-6.

or in scholastic terminology, between miracles *contra naturam* and those *praeter naturam*. In particular, instances of God's creative interference with the world fall within the latter, also when it brings about what is naturally impossible. For these reasons, it seems to me that we do not need to look for a non-interventionist view of divine action in order to avoid conflict with the scientific view of a law-abiding nature, even though such an account of divine action appears to me both viable and interesting in its own right.[36] Furthermore, a view which distinguishes between miracles *contra* vs. *praeter naturam,* but holds that the former, though conceivable, do not occur, is in line with the thought of classical theistic thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas[37] and Augustine.[38] These thinkers maintained that miracles exceed, rather than contravene, the ordinary course of nature, although they did not make use of the concept of *laws* of nature in the sense in which we do today.

It may seem unusual to claim, for example, that God's creating a new billiard ball on an existing billiard table does not imply a VLN. But this is because we have become accustomed to identify what is impossible through nature's workings with VLNs, an identification which, as I have argued, stems from the context of determinism, where it is viewed as essential to the laws of nature that they determine everything.

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36 See e.g. Russell (2006) for a discussion of the possibility of non-interventionist divine action at the quantum level.

37 *Compendium Theologiae,* 1,136.

38 *Contra Faustum,* XXIX, 2.

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MORAL EVIL, PRIVATION, AND GOD

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Abstract. On a traditional account, God causes sinful acts and their properties, insofar as they are real, but God does not cause sin, since only the sinner causes the privations in virtue of which such acts are sinful. After explicating this *privation solution*, I defend it against two objections: (1) that God would cause the sinful act's privation simply by causing the act and its positive features; and (2) that there is no principled way to deny that God causes the privation yet still affirm that the sinner causes it. I close by considering a limitation of the privation solution.

I. DIVINE UNIVERSAL CAUSALITY, MORAL EVIL, AND THE PRIVATION SOLUTION.

According to the traditional theistic doctrine of divine universal causality (DUC), necessarily, God causes all being — all entities — distinct from himself.[1] An implication of DUC is that God causes all creaturely actions, since such actions are entities distinct from God. But some creaturely actions

1 For classical proponents of DUC, see Anselm, *Monologion* 7 and 20; Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 2.15.6 and 2.21.3, *Summa theologiae* 1.8.1 and 1.44.2; and Suarez, *Disputationes metaphysicae* 22.1.25. There are many contemporary affirmations of DUC, but for a particularly clear instance, see Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 154-6.

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are sins. So, given DUC, it looks as if God causes sins. And yet most theists wish to deny that God causes sins.[2] Hence, an apparent conflict between two common theistic claims: that God causes all being distinct from himself, and that God does not cause sins.

How might this conflict be resolved? Although classical theists such as Anselm and Aquinas clearly affirmed that God causes the *act* of sin, they denied that God causes sin, for they held that only the sinner, not God, causes the privation in virtue of which such acts are sinful. Thus, in *On the Fall of the Devil*, Anselm writes:

> Insofar as the will and its movement or turning are real they are good and come from God. But insofar as they are deprived of some justice they ought to have, they are not absolutely bad but bad in a sense, and what is bad in them does not come from the will of God or from God as he moves the will. Evil is injustice, which is only evil and evil is nothing. … Therefore, what is real is made by God and comes from him; what is nothing, that is evil, is caused by the guilty and comes from him.[3]

Similar to Anselm, Aquinas holds that

> God is the cause of every action, in so far as it is an action. — But sin denotes a being and an action with a defect: and this defect is from a created cause, viz. the free-will, as falling away from the order of the First Agent, viz. God. Consequently this defect is not reduced to God as its cause, but to the free will … Accordingly God is the cause of the act of sin: and yet He is not the cause of sin, because he does not cause the act to have a defect.[4]

In his reply to the second objection of the same article, Aquinas states his approach this way:

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2 To take two examples, see Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1-2.79.1, and the Westminster Confession, ch. 3, wherein it is denied that God is the author of sin.

3 Anselm, *On the Fall of the Devil* 20, trans. Ralph McInerny, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 223. See also Anselm's *De concordia* 1.7.

4 Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.79.2. Earlier in the same article, Aquinas had remarked that "The act of sin is both a being and and act; and in both respects it is from God. Because every being, whatever the mode of its being, must be derived from the First Being, as Dionysius declares." Aquinas makes this same point at *De malo* 3.2. All quotations from Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* are taken from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Father of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1948).

> Not only the act, but also the defect, is reduced to man as its cause, which defect consists in man not being subject to Whom he ought to be, although he does not intend this principally. Wherefore man is the cause of the sin: while God is cause of the act, in such a way, that nowise is He the cause of the defect accompanying the act, so that He is not the cause of the sin.[5]

What, then, are Anselm and Aquinas proposing?[6]

As I understand this *privation solution*, any sin of action consists of two elements, an act, and a defect in virtue of which the act is sinful and in which the act's sinfulness consists.[7] We can certainly speak of bad or sinful acts, but since the acts are bad or sinful in virtue of defects distinct from (i.e., not identical to) the acts, to cause a sin of action requires causing both the act and the defect. As the universal cause, God causes the act and all its positive properties, since these are entities distinct from God. But the defect is not an entity, and so is not something God must be said to cause just in virtue of DUC. Rather than an entity, the defect is a privation, a lack of something that should belong to the act. Anselm characterizes the privation as a lack of justice. In the passages cited above, Aquinas characterizes the defect as the act's lack of proper order, or subjection, to God. In other places, Aquinas speaks of the act's lack of conformity to the rule of reason or the divine law.[8] In what follows, I will talk simply in terms of the act's lack of conformity to the moral standard, however that standard is understood. The claim, then, is that, while the sinner causes both the act and the defect, God causes the act and its positive properties, but not the defect. Thus, the sinner, but not God, causes the sin.

Consider, more formally, the argument with which we began:

(1) God causes all creaturely actions (an implication of DUC).

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5 Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.79.2 ad 2.

6 Their approach was, in fact, common within the scholastic tradition, and was also endorsed by Descartes, for instance, in his Fourth Meditation.

7 As I am using the term, a "sin of action" is any sin, which consists, at least in part, in a positive act or choice. I use this term rather than the more familiar "sin of commission," because we often contrast as contraries "sins of commission" and "sins of omission." But some sins of omission might include a positive choice on the part of the sinner not to do that which is morally required. That choice would constitute (or partially constitute) a "sin of action."

8 See *De malo* 1.3 ad 13, and *De malo* 2.2.

(2) Some creaturely actions are sins.

(3) So, God causes sins.

We can now see how the privation solution enables a response. There is an ambiguity in the term "creaturely actions." Since a sin of action consists of an act along with the act's lack of conformity to the moral standard, premise (2) is true only if "creaturely actions" means actions along with their lacks of conformity to the standard. Yet, according to this meaning of "creaturely actions," premise (1) is false; for God does not cause acts along with their lacks of conformity to the standard, but only the acts themselves. Premise (1) is, thus, true, only if "creaturely actions" means just creaturely acts, not including any lacks of conformity to the moral standard those acts may have. In short, there is no consistent meaning of "creaturely actions" on which both premises of the argument are true. And, of course, if the premises equivocate on the meaning of "creaturely actions," then the argument commits a fallacy.[9]

If defensible, the privation solution not only enables us to block the inference from DUC to God's causing sin. For those wishing to deny that God causes sin, it also provides a potential way of making sense of passages in scripture that describe God, not merely as allowing or permitting sinful acts, but as actively at work in their production.[10] Given the privation solution, one might say that God *is* actively at work in the production of sinful acts, since he causes every act of sin; yet God does not cause sin, since he does not cause the defect in which an act's sinfulness consists. The solution allows us to say, on the contrary, that, while causing acts of sin, God only permits sin since God merely allows the defects in virtue of which these acts are sinful.

9 We have seen that Aquinas wants to deny that God causes sins. But some readers, sympathetic with the general thrust of Aquinas's solution, may be happy to allow that God causes "sin," where "sin" denotes only what I'm calling the act of sin, and not also the privation in which the act's sinfulness consists. Such readers will argue that there is no problem in God's causing "sin," so understood, provided that God not cause an act's sinfulness, or that in virtue of which it is a sin. While a reader who takes this approach will not find the conclusion of the argument set out above problematic, he will still make use of our solution to reconcile DUC with his denial that God causes that in virtue of which a sin is sinful.

10 See, for example, Isaiah 63:17: "Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?" Obviously, the proper interpretation of such scriptural passages is a controversial matter.

Despite its appeal, some may wonder, initially, whether the solution is even consistent. For DUC claims that God causes all entities distinct from himself. Yet the solution, though it denies that God causes the privation in a sin of action, appears to speak of the privation as if it were an entity. For instance, just above, the privation was spoken of as one of two elements or constituents in a sin of action; and it was spoken of as caused by the sinner. Aren't constituents of things, and objects of causation, entities? And if they are, won't the proponent of DUC be required to say that God causes the privation after all?

Appearances notwithstanding, a proponent of the solution need not admit that privations are entities. Consider Aquinas's distinction, borrowed from Aristotle, between two senses of "to be:"

> Note then that Aristotle says there are two proper uses of the term being: firstly, generally for whatever falls into one of Aristotle's ten basic categories of thing, and secondly, for whatever makes a proposition true. These differ: in the second sense anything we can express in an affirmative proposition, however unreal, is said to be; in this sense lacks and absences are, since we say that absences are opposed to presences, and blindness exists in an eye. But in the first sense only what is real is, so that in this sense blindness and such are not beings.[11]

So, we speak truly when we say that privations, like blindness, exist. But that does not make privations real; it does not make them entities, the sort of things that fall within Aristotle's categories, or within the scope of what DUC says God causes. To say that a privation exists is not to say that there is something real there, an entity, but rather that what should be there is missing.[12] Now, any human act issuing from reason and will should conform to the moral standard. If such an act does not so conform, then what should be there is missing. And, since, according to the privation solution, an act's sinfulness

11 The passage is from Aquinas's *De ente et essentia*, 1. Translation from *Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Trans. Timothy McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 91-2.

12 Accordingly, someone uncomfortable with the language "X exists" or "There is an X," where X does not name an entity, can understand "X exists" or "There is an X" as paraphrases of "There does not exist some Y." For example, "There is a lack of conformity to the moral standard" could be understood as a paraphrase of "There is not a relation of conformity to the moral standard." Of course, to characterize the lack of conformity as not just a lack but also a privation is to say that the relation of conformity to the moral standard ought to exist in the act so deprived (or between the act and the standard).

consists precisely in its lack of conformity to the moral standard, we can say that this lack is an "element" within the sin of action. But that doesn't imply that the lack of conformity is a real entity, like the act itself. Similarly, we can speak of the cause of a privation — as when we say that a man's blindness was caused by too much sunlight — without thereby committing ourselves to the claim that the privation, like the man himself, is an entity. A cause of a privation is just whatever is explanatorily responsible for the fact that the deprived thing we are talking about lacks what it ought to have.

Yet even if we put this initial worry aside, there are formidable objections to the privation solution, objections that require more extended discussion. For starters, the privation solution depends on a privation account of moral evil, according to which the badness of a morally bad act consists, not in the positive act or any of its positive properties, but rather in a privation of conformity to the moral standard. While such an account has its contemporary defenders, it also has a number of critics, whose objections must be answered for a complete defense of the solution.[13]

In the remainder of this paper, I set aside a defense of a privation account of moral evil in order to address two objections that threaten the privation solution even if a privation account of moral evil can be defended. Despite the gravity of these objections, they have not received much attention by contemporary philosophers. But they did find an able spokesman in the early Leibniz.[14] According to the first objection, even if we allow that the badness in a sin of action consists in a lack of conformity to the moral standard, God will be the cause of this lack of conformity simply by causing the act and its positive properties. After all, it is because the act and its positive features are what they are that the act fails to conform to the standard. Moreover, the lack of conformity would seem simply to follow on the act and its positive features. As Leibniz puts it, "The privation is nothing but a simple result or infallible con-

13 I discuss these objections, and attempt to answer them, in my "The Privation Account of Moral Evil: A Defense," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55 (2015): 271-86.

14 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Confessio Philosophi: Papers Concerning the Problem of Evil*, 1671-1678. Edited and translated by Robert C. Seligh, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). For helpful discussion of Leibniz's views on the privation account of evil, see Samuel Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52 (2014), 281-308.

sequence of the positive aspect."[15] Thus, says Leibniz, "It would be a joke to say that [someone] is the author of everything real without … being the author of the privative aspect."[16] Of course, if God is the cause of the privation as well as the act and its positive features, then the privation solution fails.

The second objection is that appeal to privation as a way of blocking the claim that God causes sin will make it impossible to affirm that the sinner causes sin. For if God can cause the act and its positive features without causing the privation, won't the same be true of the sinner? As Leibniz puts it, "I am amazed these people did not go further and try to persuade us that man himself is not the author of sin, since he is only the author of the physical or real aspect, the privation being something for which there is no author."[17] Of course, proponents of the privation solution insist that the privation *does* have a cause, namely, the sinner. But how? As Samuel Newlands asks, "If God does not cause absences, how can we? And if we can, why cannot God?"[18] Without an answer to these questions, the privation solution appears feeble, indeed.

Fortunately, I think both objections can be answered, and I explain how, treating each objection in turn, in sections two and three below. I conclude in section four by pointing out a limitation of the privation solution concerning its usefulness in responding to the problem of evil. As may be clear from the foregoing, my aim is to offer a partial speculative defense of a solution along the lines suggested by Anselm and Aquinas, not to offer an exposition or interpretation of the texts in which they present their solutions.

One final note before continuing. The problem of this paper never gets off the ground without the assumption that DUC, with its implication that our acts are caused by God, is consistent with our having whatever sort of freedom and power is required for us to be morally responsible for our acting or failing to act. Were this assumption false, DUC would be incompatible with our committing sins, since we cannot sin unless we are morally responsible. But if DUC is incompatible with our committing sins, then, of course, there could be no worry that, given DUC, God causes our sins. Since the problem of the

15 Leibniz, 113.
16 Leibniz, 111.
17 Leibniz, 113.
18 Newlands, 288.

paper doesn't get off the ground without the assumption that DUC is consistent with our having the freedom and power requisite for moral responsibility, I will adopt this assumption throughout the paper.

II. THAT GOD DOES NOT CAUSE THE BADNESS IN SINFUL ACTS SIMPLY BY CAUSING THE ACT AND ITS POSITIVE FEATURES.

According to the privation solution, the badness or sinfulness of a sin of action consists in its lack of conformity to the moral standard. This is a crucial part of the explanation of how the sinner alone causes sin, even though both the sinner and God cause the act of sin. Yet, in order for the privation solution to succeed, it must be shown further that, unlike the act itself, the act's privation of conformity to the moral standard is caused by the sinner alone, and not also by God. This may seem a difficult task. For, to begin with our first objection, even though a lack of conformity to the moral standard is not an entity, and hence not something God causes as an implication of DUC; one might, like Leibniz, still think that God at least indirectly causes an act of sin's lack of conformity simply by causing the act and its positive properties. This first objection admits of at least four variations. After offering specific responses to the first three, I will offer a response to the fourth which is effective against all of them.

First Version. An initial version of this objection points out that the moral standard being what it is, it is not possible for, say, an "intentional killing of the innocent" to exist without lacking conformity to the standard.[19] Since, given the standard, it is not possible even for God to cause such acts without their lacks of conformity accompanying, this initial version of the objection maintains that God's causing such acts causes also the privations in which their sinfulness consists.

This initial version appears to rest on something like the following principle:

19 Here I assume for the sake of discussion that all intentional killings of the innocent, in fact, lack conformity to the moral standard. One who disagrees can replace my example with his or her own.

Principle A: If, in the circumstances, it is not possible for *x* to exist (or hold or obtain) without *y*'s existing (or holding or obtaining) and *z* causes *x*, then *z* causes *y*.

Fortunately, I think it pretty clear that Principle A should be rejected; for it has absurd entailments. For example, on the traditional theistic assumption that it is impossible for anything contingent to exist unless God exists, were Principle A true, I couldn't cause anything contingent without thereby causing God. But, surely, it is absurd to hold that whenever I cause something contingent I also cause God. And it is just as absurd even if we add that I am fully aware that it is not possible for the thing I cause to exist without God's existing. So, Principle A should be rejected, and with it this initial version of the objection.[20]

Second Version. A more plausible principle might be the following:

Principle B: If *x* is a logically sufficient (that is, necessitating) cause of *y*, and *z* causes *x*, then *z* indirectly causes *y*.[21]

Now, suppose that an act of sin, such as an "intentional killing of the innocent," is a logically sufficient cause of its lack of conformity to the moral standard. By DUC and Principle B, it would follow that God indirectly causes the act's lack of conformity. Thus, Principle B together with the claim that the act of sin causes its lack of conformity gives rise to a second version of the objection.

Yet, the claim that the act of sin causes its lack of conformity to the moral standard is highly questionable. After all, we do not typically speak this way

20 Of course, an analogous *reductio* of Principle A is available for Platonists about numbers, properties, propositions, states of affairs, etc. Since the Platonist takes these to be necessary beings, it is not possible for anything I cause to exist without their existing, and so, given Principle A and Platonism, I would cause the number 2 any time I caused anything.

21 The adjectival phrase "logically sufficient (that is, necessitating)" is needed in the present context. For, we are considering an objection to the privation account to the effect that the account implies that God indirectly causes sin. But, if we omitted the phrase, then anyone who held to the standard theistic claim that God causes all creaturely substances would be committed by the principle to God's indirectly causing sin, at least given the assumption that creaturely substances cause sin. Such commitment is avoided by including the phrase in question, provided one denies that creaturely substances are logically sufficient (necessitating) causes of sin.

in analogous cases where things lack conformity to their standards. Consider, for example, a newly built house that lacks conformity to the design of its architect. Would we normally think of the house as causing the lack of conformity to its standard, the architect's design? That seems doubtful. Instead, I suspect most would say that the cause of the house's lack of conformity was the builder's failing to follow the design, or perhaps some feature of the house in respect of which it lacks conformity. Since, it seems odd to say that the house causes its lack of conformity to its standard, so also is it odd to say that an act of sin causes its lack of conformity. For this reason, the second version falters.

Third Version. But what if the immediate cause of the lack of conformity were not the act itself, but some property or feature belonging to, but distinct from, the act; say, the property of being done for the sake of harming someone who is innocent, or the property of being opposed to the good of innocent human life?[22] This proposal seems initially more plausible. Consider the example of the house, above. While it is odd to say that the house causes its lack of conformity to its design, it is not at all odd to say that the house lacks conformity to its design *in virtue of* some property, for example, the property of having 7 foot high ceilings when the design calls for 8 foot ceilings. If "in virtue of" is interpreted in such cases as expressing a causal relationship of the property to the lack of conformity, then perhaps there is precedent for thinking that a thing's lack of conformity to its standard can be caused by a property belonging to, but distinct from, the thing. If such a property were a logically sufficient cause of an act of sin's lack of conformity to the moral standard, then by DUC and Principle B, God would indirectly cause the lack of conformity by causing the property in question. Hence, a third version of the objection.

Yet, a proponent of the privation solution can respond to this third version by simply denying that, in such cases, "in virtue of" expresses a causal relationship. To say, then, that an act lacks conformity "in virtue of" its property of being opposed to the good of innocent human life is not to claim

22 I am not asserting that there are such positive properties, understood as entities distinct from the acts. I am only considering the implications were there to be such. One who prefers a different example of such a property may think in terms of his or her preferred example.

that the property *causes* the lack of conformity. Rather, it can plausibly be understood as claiming that the property is that *in respect of which* the act lacks conformity. Similarly, we can deny that the property of having 7 foot high ceilings causes the house to lack conformity to its design. Instead, we can simply say that the house lacks conformity in the height of its ceilings, or in respect of their height.

Fourth Version. While this interpretation of "in virtue of" may be plausible, and while it circumvents the third version of the objection; the move is, arguably, not enough to save the privation solution. For, won't God at least indirectly cause an act of sin's lack of conformity just by causing that *in respect of which* the act lacks conformity, even if that which God causes is not, strictly speaking, a cause of the lack of conformity. With this question we have a fourth and final version of the objection. And the answer to the question will be "yes" if we accept a new principle:

> *Principle C:* If *x* lacks conformity to its standard in respect of feature *y*, and *z* causes *y*, then *z* indirectly causes *x*'s lack of conformity to its standard.

Fortunately, I think there is good reason to reject Principle C. Moreover, this reason constitutes a very general grounds for denying that God causes an act's lack of conformity to the moral standard simply by causing the act and its positive features. Thus, the reason also counts against the earlier versions of the objection.

To appreciate the reason, observe that, in order to get an act's lack of conformity to the moral standard, we need more than the act and the properties or features in respect of which the act lacks conformity. We also need the standard itself. It takes *both* the act with its positive features *and* the moral standard in order for the act to lack conformity to the moral standard. But this point suggests that a cause does not cause the lack of conformity to the standard *simply* by causing the act and its positive features. To cause the act and its positive features is not enough.

The foregoing reasoning is an application of a more general point. To get a relation R between two *relata a* and *b*, or the lack of a relation R between *a* and *b*, or the truth of a relational proposition "*a*R*b*," one needs both *relata*, *a* and *b*, and all their relevant properties. But, for this reason, a cause C can-

not plausibly be thought to cause R, or the lack of R, or the truth of "*a*R*b*" simply by causing one of these *relata* and its relevant properties. Suppose, for example, that Cecilia makes a sandwich and Elizabeth makes an omelet and Elizabeth's omelet weighs more than Cecilia's sandwich. It is, of course, true that Elizabeth has made an omelet that weighs however many ounces. And it is true that she has made an omelet that weighs more than Cecilia's sandwich. But has Elizabeth, simply by causing her omelet and its relevant properties, caused her omelet's *being heavier than* Cecilia's sandwich (or caused the truth of "Elizabeth's omelet is heavier than Cecilia's sandwich")? I think not. Nor, if a spider spins a web and a robin builds a nest, and the spider's web is more beautiful than the robin's nest, does the spider cause its web's being more beautiful (or the truth of "The web is more beautiful than the nest"). The reason for these negative judgments is that to get the relations or relational truths, you need both *relata* and their relevant properties. So, it is implausible to think that Elizabeth or the spider causes the relations or truths simply by causing one of the *relata* and its properties.

Nor would it seem to make any difference if we added that Elizabeth *knows* that the omelet she is making is heavier than Cecilia's sandwich. For that knowledge does not make her any more responsible for the sandwich and its properties, which are needed every bit as much as the omelet, in order to give rise to the relation. Nor would it even matter if we said that Elizabeth made her omelet a certain weight in order that it be heavier than the sandwich. For, while her goal certainly explains *why she made it the weight she did*, that goal, together with her making the omelet the given weight, does not bring about the omelet's actually being heavier, since that relation depends also and immediately on the sandwich and its weight, which Elizabeth plays no role in bringing about.[23]

Perhaps, Elizabeth could plausibly be thought to cause the omelet's being heavier than the sandwich, if she had made the sandwich as well as the

23 Notice also that it is not significant to the judgments about Elizabeth and the spider that the *relata* they don't cause (the sandwich and the nest), and their properties, are caused by something else (Cecilia and the Robin). The spider's web is less beautiful than God. God and God's unmatchable beauty has no cause. But the spider no more causes its web's being less beautiful than God than it causes its web's being more beautiful than the nest. And the reason is the same. All the spider has done is cause half of what gives rise to the relation.

omelet. In such a case, she would have caused all of that on which the relation follows. By the same token, it arguably *would* be enough for God to cause the lack of conformity to the moral standard if God caused not only the act of sin and its positive features, but also the moral standard to which the act fails to conform. But very many theists deny that God causes the moral standard, even if they believe that God shapes the content of that standard in certain ways. For even if a theist thinks, for example, that God brings it about that intentionally killing the innocent is wrong through a command, that command constitutes a moral standard for us only on the supposition that we must abide by God's commands. And it would be a very radical divine command theory which held that this most general norm to abide by God's commands is brought about only by God's commanding it. Suppose, alternatively, a moral theory that understands what we ought to do (or refrain from) to be determined by what's required to flourish given the nature we have. A theist may reasonably deny that the content of human nature is caused by God; human nature may be an idea that God has from all eternity prior to any causal act on his part. And even if a theist holds that the content of human nature is brought about by God, God will not have caused the moral standard unless God also brings about the truth of the very general principle that what a thing ought to do is determined by its nature, a claim which proponents of this sort of theory may deny. In short, very many theists will deny that God causes the moral standard. But, given this denial, just as God doesn't cause the lack of conformity to the standard simply by causing the act and its positive features, neither does he cause the lack of conformity by causing the act and its features along with the standard.[24]

24 How do these considerations bear on the first three versions of our first objection? With respect to the first version, they provide another reason for denying that, if God causes an act that cannot exist without a lack of conformity to the standard, then God causes the lack of conformity. For simply causing the act won't be enough to cause the lack of conformity, since it takes both the act and the standard to give rise to the lack of conformity. With respect to the second and third objections, these considerations give us additional reason to doubt that either the act or some property of the act causes its lack of conformity. For, again, it takes not only the act and its relevant properties, but also the moral standard, to give rise to the lack of conformity. And, of course, if neither the act nor its properties cause the lack of conformity, then God won't, by Principle B, cause the lack of conformity in virtue of causing the act and its positive properties.

The foregoing seems a welcome result. But did it prove too much? The privation solution requires relieving God of causal responsibility for the act's lack of conformity to the moral standard, but it also requires that the lack of conformity be imputable to the sinner. But, presumably, the sinner no more causes the moral standard than God does. So, if causing the lack of conformity requires causing the moral standard, then the sinner does not cause the lack of conformity either, and the privation solution fails.

Here we come up against our second objection. How can one plausibly deny that God causes the lack of conformity without at the same time making it impossible to affirm that the sinner causes it? Are there grounds for imputing the lack of conformity to the sinner and only the sinner?

III. HOW THE BADNESS OF SINFUL ACTS IS CAUSED BY THE SINNER ALONE.

According to the privation solution, in order to cause a sin of action, one needs to cause both the act of sin and the lack of conformity to the moral standard, in which the sinfulness of the act consists. I have argued that God does not cause a sinful act's lack of conformity simply by causing the act and its positive features. While this conclusion is necessary for preserving the privation solution, it also raises a question about the basis for our affirming that the sinner causes sin. For, if the simple fact that God causes the act and its positive features is not enough to make God cause of the lack of conformity, neither is the lack of conformity imputable to the sinner simply from the sinner's causing the act and its features. Moreover, holding that the sinner causes the moral standard will likely seem even less attractive to theists than holding that God causes the standard. Thus, it won't do to say that the sinner causes his act's lack of conformity by causing the moral standard along with his act.

Yet, I have not claimed that causing the lack of conformity requires causing the moral standard. What I have argued is that, to cause the lack of conformity, it is not enough simply to cause the act and its positive features. Causing the moral standard in addition to the act and its features would seem the most obvious and straightforward way for something to cause the lack of conformity. But there is another way. There is a way in which an agent might cause or account for a lack of conformity to a standard despite not causing

the standard. In what follows, I suggest an explanatory framework according to which, indeed, the sinner causes the lack of conformity, but God does not. Let us begin by considering some examples.

Suppose I make a kite for my daughters. The kite doesn't conform to FAA standards for commercial airliners. I built a kite that lacks conformity to FAA standards, and I am well aware of this fact. But have I caused the kite's lack of conformity to the standards? Have I caused the truth of "The kite doesn't conform to FAA standards"? No more, I think, than Elizabeth has caused her omelet's being heavier than Cecilia's sandwich.

Suppose, similarly, that I make a sled for my daughters to go sleigh riding. The sled lacks conformity to the standards for Olympic bobsleds. I have built a sled that lacks conformity to Olympic standards, but I have no more caused the sled's lack of conformity than I cause the kite's lack of conformity in the example above.

But now suppose I have been *hired* to build a sled for use in the Olympic bobsled competition. And suppose, again, that I build a sled that lacks conformity to Olympic standards. Although I did not cause those standards, I am, this time, responsible for my sled's lack of conformity to them. The lack of conformity is imputable to me, because, unlike before, I ought to have built a sled that conforms to those standards. I account for my sled's lack of conformity in virtue of my having neglected to build according to the standards to which I was responsible.

Notice that my claim here is not simply that this time, but not before, I am at fault for having built a sled that lacks conformity to Olympic standards. That much is true, but I want to claim further that this time, but not before, there is a way in which I, or my negligence, explains or accounts for the lack of conformity. The fact that I have an obligation to build according to the standards means that this time, but not before, I have responsibility for *whether* the sled conforms. When the sled does not conform, the lack of conformity is, thus, accounted for by my not having built a sled of the sort I was obliged to build.[25] My responsibility to abide by the standard compensates for my not having caused the standard and substitutes for my having caused it in the role of making me explanatorily accountable for the sled's lack of

25 I assume here a normal case wherein whether the sled conforms is within my power.

conformity to it. Even though I do not cause the standard, I have an obligation to act in conformity with it such that, when I don't, the lack of conformity is imputable to me.

Implicit in the foregoing suggestion is the idea that something can explain or causally account for an effect in virtue of not doing what it ought to have done. We often offer such explanations. "Why did she miss the jump shot?" "Because she didn't 'square up' beforehand." "Why did he fail the test?" "Because he didn't study." "Why did the dough not rise?" "Because she forgot to put yeast in." Such explanations include also the not-doings of non-rational, or non-moral, agents. "Why did he fall?" "Because the rope didn't hold." "Why is the mouse still in the basement?" "Because the cat didn't catch it." In such cases, we commonly impute an effect to an agent on account of the agent's non-performance. *She* caused the dough not to rise by forgetting to add yeast. The *rope* accounted for his fall by not holding. In such cases, it is the fact that the cause, in some sense, "ought" to have performed the act in question that makes its non-performance explanatory. While we might well explain the mouse's continued existence in terms of the non-performance of the cat, we wouldn't explain it by the non-performance of the crickets, hopping happily about the basement. Unlike cats, crickets don't solve rodent problems. Killing mice is not among the things crickets ought to do.[26]

Recognizing causation by non-performance conforms, then, to common explanatory practice. It is also enjoys at least some philosophical precedent. Consider, for example, the following from Aquinas:

> One thing proceeds from another in two ways. First, directly; in which sense something proceeds from another inasmuch as this other acts; for instance, heating from heat. Secondly, indirectly; in which sense something proceeds from another through this other not acting; thus the sinking of a ship is set down to the helmsman, from his having ceased to steer. But we must take note that the cause of what follows from want of action is not always the agent as not acting; but only when the agent can and ought to act. For if the helmsman

26 Perhaps, it goes without saying that the applicable sense of "ought" varies among these examples. Indeed, the variety of examples illustrates that a number of different senses of "ought" can help ground causal explanations by non-performance: moral oughts, prudential oughts, oughts used for the behavior that would be expected of a good or healthy member of its kind in the circumstances in question; oughts used for the activity that a thing has been designed to perform, or that a thing has been adopted as an instrument to perform; etc.

> were unable to steer the ship or if the ship's helm be not entrusted to him, the sinking of the ship would not be set down to him.[27]

Here Aquinas makes especially clear what we have seen already, namely, that whether an agent ought to have done something is causally or explanatorily relevant. In particular, we can explain an effect by an agent's non-performance only when the agent ought to have performed the act in question.

Return, then, to the sleigh building examples. In neither scenario do I cause the standards for Olympic bobsleds, and in both scenarios I build a sled that lacks conformity to those standards. But my sled's lack of conformity is imputable to me only in the second scenario, not the first; for, only in the second scenario is it the case that I ought to have built a sled that so conforms. The fact that I ought to have built a sled that so conforms is what makes it such that my sled's lack of conformity to the standards can be explained by me, even though I built only the sled, and did not also make the standards. The lack of conformity can be explained by me in virtue of my not having built as I ought.

Note, however, that there is a slight ambiguity in the presentation thus far. On one way of putting it, I account for the lack of conformity in virtue of my not having built according to the standards, as I ought. On a second way of putting it, I account for the lack of conformity in virtue of my having built a sled that does not conform to the standards by which I was obliged to build. On the first way, which perhaps more neatly fits the examples of causing by non-performance discussed above, I have a non-performance — my not building according to the standards — that is explanatorily prior to my sled's lack of conformity to the standards. The lack of conformity is imputable to me because of what I don't do. On the second way, there is no explanatorily prior non-performance. Rather, I account for the lack of conformity in virtue of what I do — my building something that lacks conformity to the standards according to which I ought to have built.

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27 Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.6.3. Aristotle also seems to recognize causation by non-performance, albeit less explicitly. In *Metaphysics*, Bk. 5, Ch. 2, Aristotle holds that that which when present is the cause of some particular effect is, when absent, the cause of the contrary effect, and gives as his example a ship's safety being caused when the pilot is present, and its loss be caused when the pilot is absent. Presumably, if the presence of an agent explains some effect and the agent's absence the opposite effect, it is only because, when present, the agent performs and when absent the agent does not perform.

In my view, either way of construing the account provides a plausible explanation of why my sled's lack of conformity is imputable to me, even though I make the sled and not also the standards. And as intimated above, this same explanatory framework can be used to show how the sinner accounts for his act's lack of conformity to the moral standard. The sinner does not cause the moral standard, but he has a responsibility to it. He ought to govern himself in accordance with the moral standard. When he acts in a way that does not conform to the standard, his act's lack of conformity can, therefore, be explained either by his failure to do what he ought (a not-doing) or by his doing something contrary to what he ought (a doing). Either way, his responsibility to abide by the standard compensates for his not having caused the standard and substitutes for his having caused it in the role of making him explanatorily accountable for his act's lack of conformity to it. Suppose, for example, that I lie for the sake of avoiding embarrassment, and that the moral standard includes a prohibition against lying. Since I ought to govern myself in accordance with the standard, I ought to have applied the rule against lying by choosing to refrain from telling the lie in question. My failure to govern myself by the moral standard to which I am responsible makes me accountable for the lack of conformity to the standard in virtue of which my lie is sinful.[28]

Yet, in response to our second objection, this same framework does not imply that God causes the sinful act's lack of conformity to the moral standard, at least not given an almost universally shared assumption about God. For, given this framework, God would cause a sinful act's lack of conformity to the moral standard only if God had a responsibility not to cause any creaturely acts that lacked conformity to the moral standard, that is, only if God ought not cause such acts. But if God has such a responsibility, if he ought not cause such acts, then God has manifestly failed to do what he ought. And yet it is an almost universally shared assumption that God cannot fail to do what he ought. It follows from this assumption that, if God causes a creaturely act that lacks conformity

28 This seems also (at least roughly) to be Aquinas's account of how the sinner causes the privation in virtue of which his act is sinful. Thus, at *ST* 1.49.1 ad 3: "In voluntary things the defect of the action comes from the will actually deficient, inasmuch as it does not actually subject itself to its proper rule." Aquinas predominantly thinks in terms of the first way discussed above, in which the defect is imputable to the sinner in virtue of what the sinner doesn't do, the sinner's non-consideration or non-use of the moral rule.

to the moral standard, then he has not failed to do what he ought; he did not have a responsibility not to cause such acts. But, then, unlike the sinner, our explanatory framework does not imply that God causes the sinful act's lack of conformity to the moral standard.

There is, then, a principled basis for holding that, even though God causes the act of sin and all its positive features, only the sinner, and not God, causes the lack of conformity to the moral standard in which the badness of the sin of action consists. For this reason, both our first and second objections to the privation solution fail.

IV. A LIMITATION OF THE PRIVATION SOLUTION.

In assessing the foregoing response, it is important to keep in mind the dialectical context. I am responding to the objection that, if God causes the act of sin and its positive features, then there are no grounds for saying that the act's lack of conformity to the moral standard is caused by the sinner, but not by God. In response to this objection, I have presented an explanatory framework on which there *are* grounds for saying that the act's lack of conformity is caused by the sinner, but not by God. My response helps itself to the entirely uncontroversial claim that God never fails to do what he ought, from which it follows that, if God causes an act that lacks conformity to the moral standard, it is not the case that God ought not to have caused that act.

One may, of course, raise a different sort of objection. Notice that the privation solution, coupled with my particular defense of it, supposes the truth of the following:

(i) There are creaturely actions that lack conformity to the moral standard;

(ii) God causes all creaturely actions (an implication of DUC); and

(iii) God never fails to do what he ought.

(i) and (ii) are built into the privation solution; the solution can't be expounded apart from them, and without them, there wouldn't even be a need

for the solution.[29] (iii), in addition to being affirmed by virtually all theists, is a critical assumption of my defense of the solution against our second objection.

Now, the different objection one might raise is, in effect, a version of the problem of moral evil to which the conjunction of (i)-(iii) might be thought to give rise. In particular, one might doubt that the conjunction of (i)-(iii) is consistent, thinking that the conjunction of (ii) and (iii), perhaps with some other putatively safe assumptions, implies the falsehood of (i); which, given the evident truth of (i), would suggest the non-existence of a God of whom both (ii) and (iii) are true. Were a goal of this paper to respond to the objection that (i)-(iii) are inconsistent, then it would, of course, be illegitimate to respond in a way that assumes the truth of that conjunction. But that's not the objection to which I'm responding in this paper. I'm responding to the objection that, if God causes the act of sin and its positive features, then we cannot say that the sinner, but not God, causes the act's lack of conformity to the moral standard. In responding to this objection, it is perfectly legitimate to assume all the conjuncts in (i)-(iii), since the truth of their conjunction is not what's at issue in this objection.

Still, the foregoing suggests what may seem a surprising limitation of the privation solution. It might have been thought that the privation solution, in supporting the point that God does not cause sin, assists in responding to the problem of moral evil, helping to explain why moral evil of the amount and type we find in the world is consistent with the existence of an all-powerful God who never fails to do what he ought. But the privation solution coupled with my defense of it, supposes the truth of (i)-(iii). And, as we have seen, one might object to the conjunction of (i)-(iii), along the lines of an argument from moral evil. Unfortunately, since the privation solution (at least on my defense of it) supposes the truth of (i)-(iii), the solution (on my defense) cannot be used in a response to this objection without being guilty of supposing the very claim at issue in the objection. And, so, there is a significant problem of moral evil to which the suppositions of the privation solution (on my defense) give rise, and

29 Strictly speaking, instead of (ii), it would probably be enough for the privation solution to suppose only (ii)* "that God causes some creaturely actions that lack conformity to the moral standard." I set up the problem in terms of (ii) rather than (ii)*, because the stronger (ii) is implied by DUC, and I think it is commitment to DUC that traditionally gives rise to the need for the privation solution.

to which it can be of no help in responding. Indeed, it looks as if an ultimate vindication of the privation solution as accurately describing the way things are will depend on a defense of the conjunction of (i)-(iii) that does not make use of the solution.

Now, the fact that the privation solution can be of no help with the foregoing problem does not mean that there aren't other ways of reconciling (i)-(iii), or, more generally, of reconciling (ii) and (iii) with the amount and types of moral evil we find in the world. While exploring those ways would be a project for another paper, it is fairly clear that what would be needed is some account of how God's causing creaturely acts that lack conformity to the moral standard could be consistent with his never failing to do what he ought. Perhaps, the reason is that God has no obligations of any sort, and so no obligation to refrain from causing creaturely acts that lack conformity to the moral standard. Or, perhaps, the reason is that causing some acts that lack conformity to the moral standard makes other important goods possible. Obviously, such strategies would need further development.

Nor does the fact that the privation solution is useless with respect to answering a particular version of the argument from moral evil imply that the solution is altogether useless. On the contrary, assuming that the conjunction of (i)-(iii) can be vindicated, the solution still has the significant function of reconciling DUC with the important claim that God does not cause sin. Sin is supposed to be something of which God disapproves in its own right, even if he sometimes permits sin for the sake of other goods. Yet, there is at least a significant tension between the claim that God disapproves of sin and the claim that God causes it. It is no surprise, then, that the denial that God causes (or authors) sin has made its way into confessional statements, such as the Council of Trent and the Westminster Confession.[30] Since the privation solution enables the proponent of DUC to concur with these denials that God causes sin, the solution is very much worth defending for anyone wishing to retain the traditional doctrine that God causes all being apart from himself.

30 For the Council of Trent, see the sixth canon concerning justification from the Decree on Justification (1547). For the Westminster Confession (1646), see chapter 3.1 and chapter 5.4. See also the thirteenth article of the Belgic Confession (1561).

A BETTER SOLUTION TO THE GENERAL PROBLEM OF CREATION

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Abstract. It is often suggested that, since the state of affairs in which God creates a good universe is better than the state of affairs in which He creates nothing, a perfectly good God would have to create that good universe. Making use of recent work by Christine Korgaard on the relational nature of the good, I argue that the state of affairs in which God creates is actually not better, due to the fact that it is not better for anyone or anything in particular. Hence, even a perfectly good God would not be compelled to create a good universe.

I. INTRODUCTION

What sorts of alternative possibilities, if any, were available to God in His initial decision to create the universe? Could He have chosen to create some other universe instead, populated by different kinds of creatures, or one with similar creatures in a different arrangement? Or was it necessary that He create the particular universe that He did in exactly the way that He did create it? Could He have chosen to refrain from creating altogether? Or was it necessary that He create at least one universe (even if it was not necessary that He create any universe in particular)? Following Norman Kretzmann, let us refer to the set of questions pertaining to God's creation of some particu-

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lar universe as the "Particular Problem of Creation" and the set of questions pertaining to God's creation of any universe at all as the "General Problem of Creation" (Kretzmann (1990a, 1990b)).

In this paper I will focus primarily on the General Problem of Creation. I will argue that it is plausible to suppose that God did have alternative possibilities in His initial decision to create, such that He could have refrained from creating altogether. It is often suggested that, since the state of affairs in which God creates a good universe is, in some relevant sense, *better* than the state of affairs in which He creates nothing, a perfectly good God would *have* to create at least that good universe. Making use of recent work by Christine Korsgaard on the relational nature of the good,[1] I will argue that the state of affairs in which God creates might not actually be better than the state of affairs in which He does not, due to the fact that it is not better *for* anyone or anything in particular. And if this is the only way that some state of affairs *can* be better, then there is nothing about God's perfect goodness that would compel Him to actualize that state of affairs. I will end by responding to two important objections to my "better" solution to the General Problem of Creation: first, that my solution eliminates any reason that God could have for creating, and, second, that it gives God *too much* freedom in His initial decision to create.

II. TWO RELATED ARGUMENTS FOR NECESSITARIANISM

Consider first the following argument for the conclusion that it was necessary that God create the particular universe that He did in exactly the way that He did create it:

(1) To actualize some possible state of affairs that is less good than some other possible state of affairs is to perform a less than perfectly good action.

1 See Korsgaard (2014, 2013, 2011). It should be noted that Korsgaard is only the most recent philosopher to defend this sort of view. See also: Kraut (2011, 2009); Foot (2003, 1985). The view probably goes back even as far as Aristotle. See, for instance, his rejection of the Platonic notion of the good in Chapter Six of Book I of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Broadie and Rowe (2002, 98-100)). Here I will be treating the work of Korsgaard as representative of this sort of view.

(2) There is a uniquely best possible state of affairs.

(3) God cannot perform a less than perfectly good action.

(4) Therefore, God cannot actualize any possible state of affairs that is not the uniquely best possible state of affairs. In other words, it was necessary that God actualize the uniquely best state of affairs.[2]

Call this argument the *Particular Necessitarian Argument*. Once we formulate the problem this way then it becomes clear that in order to avoid a necessitarian response to the Particular Problem of Creation, one would have to defend at least one of three claims: (i) that God could actualize some other state of affairs besides the best possible state of affairs without thereby surrendering His perfect goodness, (ii) that it is not even possible for there to be a uniquely best possible state of affairs (and so God cannot be faulted for not having actualized it), or (iii) that God can perform less than perfectly good actions (and so He is not absolutely perfect). Clearly one can hold (iii) only if one is willing to abandon the traditional Anselmian conception of God as that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought. If we stick to the traditional perfect-being conception of God, then, we would have to defend (i) or (ii). One notable defender of (i) is Robert Adams, who argues in his (1972) that God would not be failing to meet any of his moral obligations if He were to actualize a state of affairs that is less than the best. However, as William Rowe points out in his critique of Adams's paper, there might be other, non-moral obligations that would arise for an absolutely perfect being due to His perfect goodness (Rowe 2004, Chapter Five). (After all, the first premise of the Particular Necessitarian Argument above does not explicitly refer to any moral obligations.)

Most of the literature on the problem of divine freedom and creation revolves around something like (ii). In his (2004, Chapter Six), Rowe considers nine different attempts to defend this claim that have been proposed. Rowe deems each of these strategies unsuccessful for various reasons, but a common failing for this approach is that succumbs to something Rowe calls "Principle B":

2 For a similar, Leibnizian version of this argument, see Rowe (2004, 2).

> *B*. If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it. (Rowe 2004, 91)

We do not need to go into all of the details of Rowe's argument here, but the general idea is that if there is no uniquely best possible state of affairs, but, rather, there is an infinite series of successively better possible states of affairs, then any state of affairs that God actualizes will be less good than some other possible state of affairs that He could have actualized. Given something like the first premise of the Particular Necessitarian Argument above, we get the conclusion that the most perfect being possible (God) cannot exist and also have actualized any particular state of affairs.[3]

Why introduce all of this material on the Particular Problem of Creation? Two reasons. First, I think that an argument very similar in structure to the Particular Necessitarian Argument is what is driving the intuition that God would be necessitated to create at least one good universe. And, as a result, by reflecting on the sorts of moves that are available to someone who wants to reject the necessitarian response to the Particular Problem of Creation, we will be able to see what sorts of similar moves are available to someone who wants to reject a necessitarian response to the General Problem of Creation.

Consider, then, the following argument for the conclusion that it was necessary that God create at least one good universe:

> (1') To actualize some possible state of affairs that is less good than some other possible state of affairs when one could have actualized the better state of affairs is to perform an action that is less good than an action that one could have performed.
>
> (2') Any possible state of affairs that contains both God and a minimally good universe is better than the state of affairs that contains only God.
>
> (3') God cannot perform any action that is less good than an action that He could have performed.

3 See Rowe (2004, 91). For a more recent defense of something like (ii), see Timpe (2013, 114-118).

(4') Therefore, God cannot actualize the possible state of affairs that contains only God. In other words, it was necessary that God actualize a possible state of affairs that contains both God and some minimally good universe.

Call this the *General Necessitarian Argument*. Similar to the conclusion of the Particular Necessitarian Argument, the conclusion of the General Necessitarian Argument is built on three premises: one concerning the sorts of restrictions that are placed on God by virtue of his absolute perfection (premise 3'), one concerning the sorts of actions that would count as deficient were they to be performed by some agent (premise 1'), and one outlining a very minimal principle for ranking possible states of affairs (premise 2'). Accordingly, in order to resist a necessitarian response to the General Problem of Creation, one will have to defend at least one of three claims: (i') that God could actualize some state of affairs that is less good than some other state of affairs that He could have actualized without thereby surrendering His perfect goodness, (ii') that no state of affairs that contains both God and some minimally good universe is better than the state of affairs that contains only God (and so God cannot be necessitated by his perfect goodness to actualize any of these states of affairs), or (iii') that God can perform some action that is less good than an action that He could have performed.

Once again, the goal will be to try to preserve alternative possibilities in God's initial decision to create without having to abandon the traditional Anselmian conception of God. As a result, (iii') is out, and we are left with either (i') or (ii'). What is interesting about the General Necessitarian Argument in particular is that its second premise does not commit its proponent to the controversial thesis that there is a uniquely best possible state of affairs. All that is required is the seemingly plausible assumption that the state of affairs in which God creates a good universe is, in *some* relevant sense, better than the state of affairs in which He creates nothing at all. Similarly, premise 1' does not place any restrictions on moral agents that are based solely on some external ideal of perfection. Rather, it holds agents to a standard that is sensitive to their own abilities. And so it should be clear that the General Necessitarian Argument is, *prima facie*, a much more formidable argument than the Particular Necessitarian Argument.

If claim (ii) from the discussion of the Particular Necessitarian Argument above is correct, then perhaps God necessarily actualizes some state of affairs that is less good than another state of affairs that He could have actualized. We might, then, see this as a reason to reject the second half of premise 1' of the General Necessitarian Argument – that to do so would be to perform an action that is less good than an action that one could have performed. This would be to defend (i'). I take it that this is the strategy proposed by Sandra Menssen and Thomas Sullivan in their (1995). However, leaving premise 2' intact might still allow Rowe's Principle B Argument to go through, and so preclude the existence of the very entity whose freedom one is trying to preserve! A more promising, though no less controversial, strategy, I think, is to defend (ii'). For as soon as one admits that a state of affairs containing both God and at least one good universe is better than the state of affairs containing only God, I think one is going to be very hard-pressed to explain how God can refrain from actualizing it. But if the former state of affairs is not, in any relevant sense, better than the latter, then it seems that there is nothing about God's perfect goodness that necessitates Him to actualize it. In the next section of the paper, I explain how this strategy might work.

III. A "BETTER" SOLUTION

Much of the discussion surrounding the General Problem of Creation assumes that the state of affairs containing both God and at least one good universe would be better than the state of affairs containing only God. For instance, in the context of his discussion of Menssen and Sullivan's proposed solution, Rowe explains that,

> We are supposing that God is confronted with an infinite number of different choices. Each of these choices, save the first, consists in his creating a world. The second choice is to create a minimally good world, W1. The third choice is to create a slightly better world, W2. The fourth choice is to create a world (W3) that is slightly better than W2, etc., etc. The first choice is simply the choice not to create any world at all, even the least good world, W1. And we will suppose with our authors [Menssen and Sullivan] that the first choice is not a bad choice, although it is not clear from anything they say that there is any reason to believe that it itself is a good choice. But *whether that be so or not, it is clear both that the choice to create Wn is a better choice than*

> *the choice to create Wn-1, and therefore, so it seems, that the choice to create W1 is a better choice than the choice to create no world at all.* (Rowe 2004, 129-130, emphasis added)

Adams, too, who, as we saw, wants to preserve alternative possibilities for God in at least His decision to create some particular universe, casually remarks in a footnote at the beginning of his paper that "the existence of no created world at all would surely be a less excellent state of affairs than the existence of some of the worlds that God could have created" (Adams 1972, 317). And even Menssen and Sullivan themselves reject the possibility that the state of affairs containing both God and at least one good universe might not be better than the state of affairs containing only God:

> It is often said that one can't add to the infinite, and since God is infinite there is no greater value in a W* world than in the state of affairs that consists of God alone…this 'standard' Thomistic approach - which may not have been Aquinas's approach - makes the divine creative action out to be nugatory, and we don't think that it is nugatory. (Menssen and Sullivan 1995, 324)

But what reason is there to think that 2' is true? Is the former state of affairs better because it contains more good things? Is it better because there is more happiness in a state of affairs that contains more happy things? In what follows, I argue that, if we accept what I will refer to as "Korsgaard's Thesis", any attempt to defend 2' is fundamentally misguided. As I will explain below, according to Korsgaard's account of the nature of "the good", the former state of affairs cannot, in any relevant sense, be considered better than the latter, despite our initial intuitions otherwise. Let us, then, consider Korsgaard's account.

According to Korsgaard, "someone's being in a condition of having a good, or something's being good for someone, is prior to the good itself" (Korsgaard 2014, 412). What this means is that "there are good and bad states of affairs *because* there exist in the world beings *for* whom things can be good or bad in a specific way" (Korsgaard 2013, 13). This seemingly innocuous claim about the nature of goodness has surprising repercussions for the present debate. For as Korsgaard goes on to explain,

> what I am suggesting here is that there is a conceptual problem with the idea of what 'does the most good.' If it seems plausible that everything that is good or bad is so in virtue of being good or bad for someone (some person or animal), then it is also plausible that the goodness or badness of experi-

> ences—or of anything else for that matter—is tethered to the subjects *for whom* they are good or bad. In that case, it may be that the goods of different subjects can't be added at all: what's good for me plus what's good for you isn't *better*, because there is no one *for whom* it is better. (Korsgaard 2011, 95-96)

Taking these remarks as representative of her considered view, let us formulate *Korsgaard's Thesis* as follows:

> *Korsgaard's Thesis*: For any state of affairs, *x*, and for any state of affairs *y*, *x* is a better state of affairs than *y* only if (a) there is some entity *z*, which is common to both *x* and *y*, and (b) there is something about *x* such that *x* is a better state of affairs for *z* than *y* is.

If Kosgaard's Thesis is correct, consider what this would mean for the General Problem of Creation. In order to say that the state of affairs containing both God and at least one good universe is better than the state of affairs containing only God, it would have to be the case (a) that there is some entity that is common to both states of affairs and (b) that there is something about the state of affairs containing both God and at least one good universe such that it is better than the state of affairs containing only God for that entity. With regard to condition (a), there is indeed an entity that is common to both states of affairs. But, importantly, there is also only one such entity: God Himself. And so if the state of affairs in which God creates is really better than the state of affairs in which He does not, then it must be the case that the former is better *for God*, given Korsgaard's Thesis.

However, if God really is an absolutely perfect being, then He cannot be perfected by the existence of any further thing. God cannot be made better by creating anything, since His perfect goodness is supposed to be entirely self-sufficient. As Thomas Aquinas puts it, "God's goodness is the cause of things, not as though by natural necessity, because the Divine goodness does not depend on creatures; but by his free-will. Wherefore…without prejudice to His goodness, He might not have produced things into existence" (Aquinas 1981, I, Q. 104, A. 3, ad. 2). And so, unless we abandon the Anselmian conception of God as the most perfect being possible, God cannot be said to gain anything by creating. The state of affairs containing both God and at least one good universe, then, fails to meet condition (b), which is required for some state of affairs to count as better than some other. As a result, Korsgaard's

Thesis, paired with the traditional Anselmian conception of God, gives us grounds for saying that the state of affairs containing both God and at least one good universe is actually not better than the state of affairs containing only God.

Interestingly enough, Korsgaard herself considers this sort of implication for her view. In her treatment of the issue, she responds to the sort of worry introduced by our initial intuitions that some created universe is better than no universe at all:

> Isn't it better if the world is full of happy people and animals, because it is better *for* those people and animals? …The trouble with… [this claim]– that the world is better if it is full of happy people and animals because it is better for those people and animals – is that it is unclear that the world would be the worse for *those* people and animals, if they did not exist at all. Are all of the people and animals who never existed, and never will, in an unfortunate condition? Is that a bad thing for them? What a miserable place the world must be, if that is the case! But surely, you will reply, it is better if the world is full of happy people and animals than of miserable ones? But for whom is it better? If we are comparing two worlds containing the *same* inhabitants, in one of which those inhabitants are miserable and in one of which they are happy, the second world is clearly better for *them*. But suppose we are not comparing two worlds with the same inhabitants. If you are miserable, would it be better *for you* if you were replaced by someone who is not? (Korsgaard 2014, 406)

I propose, then, that a promising way of avoiding the necessitarian conclusion of the General Necessitarian Argument is to defend precisely this: not (i'), but (ii'), and so thereby reject premise 2'.[4]

4 Menssen and Sullivan also briefly consider this sort of solution to the General Necessitarian Argument before settling on their own rejection of premise 1'. In their article, they write, "If there were a better world, it seems either it would have to be better *for* someone, or better *simpliciter*. But who could it be better for? Not God, and not the creatures that can't appreciate it. And if it is claimed to be better *simpliciter*, then in the first place one needs to give an account of what the claim means (how can something be "better," but not "better for something or someone"?)" (Menssen and Sullivan (1995, 336)). Though Menssen and Sullivan ultimately abandon this strategy later on in their paper, their reasons for doing so are unclear. The quotation from Menssen and Sullivan above would seem to suggest that their main worry for this strategy is that it would make "the divine creative action out to be nugatory". But on my proposed account, God's creative action can still result in something good, even if that result cannot be said to be better than that of having not created anything at all. And so I do not think it makes God's creative action out to be nugatory. I consider this issue in more detail below.

IV. CREATING FOR NO REASON?

The first objection to my proposed solution to the General Problem of Creation that I will consider here pertains to the rationality of God's decision to create, given Korsgaard's Thesis. If, as I have proposed, the state of affairs that contains both God and some minimally good universe is not, in any relevant sense, better than the state of affairs that contains only God, what reason could God possibly have for actualizing the latter rather than the former? In other words, what can explain the fact that God decided to actualize the state of affairs that contains both God and some minimally good universe (assuming that that is what He did) rather than actualizing the state of affairs that contains only God? It seems that all of the reasons that God could have for creating some particular universe are consistent with His creating some other (minimally good) universe or creating no universe at all. But then God's decision to create is entirely arbitrary.

One way a defender of my proposed solution to the General Problem of Creation might reply to this objection is to insist that it begs the question against his or her view. To see why the objection might be construed as begging the question, let us begin with the following distinction between contrastive and non-contrastive explanations.[5] A contrastive explanation is one that includes explicit reference to the specific alternative possibilities available. It is this type of explanation that one is looking for when asking the question, "Why does this universe exist rather than another possible universe or no universe at all?" A non-contrastive explanation, on the other hand, gives a plausible reason for the existence of some actual object or state of affairs, but it need not provide any details as to why other possible objects or state of affairs are not actual instead. An example of a question demanding only a non-contrastive explanation is the one Timothy O'Connor sets out to answer at the beginning of his (2012): "Why do the particular contingent objects there are exist and undergo the events they do?" (xii). Notice that O'Connor's question does not make any reference to any other objects that could have existed but do not. For that reason his question and the explanation it requests are of the non-contrastive variety.

5 In what follows, I track the distinction made by Timothy O'Connor in his (2012, 80, 84).

Anyone who wants to preserve God's free choice, either in His act of creation or in any other action that He performs, ought to reject the possibility of fully contrastive explanations for His actions. For, on the Anselmian conception, God is understood to be an omniscient, omnipotent, maximally rational being. And an omniscient, omnipotent, maximally rational being would, without fail, act on the best reasons that are, or could ever be, available. A fully contrastive explanation for any of God's actions would, then, provide a sufficient explanation for that action to the degree that that action becomes, in some significant sense, necessary. If there are sufficient reasons to prefer one state of affairs over another, God, because he is omniscient, omnipotent, and maximally rational, must act on those reasons. To demand that such fully contrastive explanations be given for His free actions, then, is to beg the question against the very possibility of God's choosing freely.

As a result, my own response to the first objection to my proposed solution to the General Problem of Creation is to point out that to demand an answer to the question, "Why did God actualize the state of affairs that contains both God and some minimally good universe rather than actualizing the state of affairs that contains only God?" is to demand a fully contrastive explanation for God's free decision to create. And to demand a fully contrastive explanation for God's free decision to create is to preclude the very possibility of God's having free choice at all.

Importantly, this does not mean that no explanation can be given for God's decision to create. A perfectly good God might actualize the state of affairs that contains both God and some minimally good universe precisely because it would be a good state of affairs for the inhabitants of that universe. Alternatively, He might choose to actualize the state of affairs that contains only God because it would be a good state of affairs for Him. Either way, the fact that the state of affairs that God freely chooses to actualize is good for those entities that it contains serves as a non-contrastive explanation for His decision. And, if the goal is preserve God's free choice in his initial decision to create, then that sort of explanation is, in principle, all that can be given.

V. TOO MUCH FREEDOM?

The second objection to my proposed solution to the General Problem of Creation pertains to the scope of God's freedom in His initial decision to create, given Korsgaard's Thesis. To see how this objection might go, let us begin with the following slightly modified version of Korsgaard's Thesis (hereafter referred to as "Korsgaard's Modified Thesis"):

> *Korsgaard's Modified Thesis:* For any state of affairs, *x*, and for any state of affairs *y*, *x* is a worse state of affairs than *y* only if (a) there is some entity *z*, which is common to both *x* and *y*, and (b) there is something about *x* such that *x* is a worse state of affairs for *z* than *y* is.

With Korsgaard's Modified Thesis in place, we can now formulate the objection as follows:

> (1") If Korsgaard's Modified Thesis is true, then some possible state of affairs (*x*) that contains both God and some particularly bad universe that is full of suffering and death without any chance of redemption is worse than some other possible state of affairs (*y*) that contains both God and some particularly good universe that is full of happiness and flourishing only if there is some entity, *z*, who is common to both *x* and *y*, and for whom *x* is worse than *y*.
>
> (2") God's absolute perfection is entirely self-sufficient, and so there is no universe that could make some state of affairs worse for God than some other.
>
> (3") Assume: there is no other entity, *z*, which is common to both *x* and *y* (or at least no entity for whom *x* or *y* could be bad).[6]
>
> (4") Hence, if Korsgaard's Modified Thesis is true, then *x* is not worse than y.

6 If there are any necessary beings besides God, then these will be common to both *x* and *y* (and to any other states of affairs, for that matter), but I take it that the only other necessary beings there could be would be something like Platonic Forms. And it is not clear to me how the existence of some universe could be good or bad for a Platonic Form.

(5") If *x* is not worse than y, then, given the choice between actualizing *x* and actualizing y, God could actualize *x* without surrendering His perfect goodness in any way.

(6") Hence, if Korsgaard's Modified Thesis is true, then given the choice between actualizing *x* and actualizing y, God could actualize *x* over *y* without surrendering His perfect goodness in any way.

(7") But surely if God actualizes a universe that is full of suffering and death without any chance of redemption, then He is less than perfectly good.

(8") Therefore, Korsgaard's Modified Thesis is false.

The main worry here is that Korsgaard's Modified Thesis would seem to allow a perfectly good God to actualize some possible state of affairs that contains both God and some irredeemably bad universe when He could have actualized some other state of affairs that contains both God and some minimally good universe instead, as long as we stipulate that the two universes have nothing in common (besides God). This would seem to give God too much freedom in His decision to create some particular universe. Surely if a perfectly good God chooses to create, then He will have to create a universe that is not irredeemably bad! Since Korsgaard's Modified Thesis seems to have this implausible result for the Particular Problem of Creation, we ought to reject it. And without Korsgaard's Thesis or its modified equivalent, we will need some other way of avoiding the necessitarian conclusions for both the Particular Necessitarian Argument and the General Necessitarian Argument.

A defender of my proposed solution to the General Problem of Creation could bite the bullet and deny premise (7") of the argument above, but I think a better strategy would be to deny premise (5"). According to premise (5"), if some state of affairs, x, is no worse than some other state of affairs, y, then, given the choice between the two, God could actualize *x* over *y* without surrendering His perfect goodness in any way. However, there might be other ways in which God's perfect goodness constrains His decision to actualize some particular state of affairs besides the fact that the considered state of affairs is worse than some other. Recall that according to Korsgaard, "there are good and bad states of affairs *because* there exist in the world beings *for*

whom things can be good or bad in a specific way" (Korsgaard 2013, 13). What this means is that an irredeemably bad universe, whatever it is that makes it irredeemably bad, is only that way because it is irredeemably bad *for* some or all of the inhabitants of that universe.[7] Now, plausibly, a perfectly good God would have certain moral obligations (pertaining to justice perhaps) such that, if He creates some universe, that universe must be at least minimally good (or at least not bad) *for* some or all of the inhabitants of that universe.[8] And so we might say that a perfectly good God cannot actualize the state of affairs in which He creates some irredeemably bad universe, not because that state of affairs is worse than some other state of affairs that He could have actualized instead, but because He cannot create any irredeemably bad universe while at the same time upholding His moral obligations to the inhabitants of that very universe. In other words, God cannot create any irredeemably bad universe and still be perfectly good.

As it turns out, then, a perfectly good God and an irredeemably bad universe might very well be incompatible. And so there would be no possible state of affairs that contains both God and some irredeemably bad universe; the choices that God considers in His decision to create some particular universe would not include any state of affairs in which He creates an irredeemably bad universe. There could be, however, infinitely many good possible states of affairs in which God creates at least one minimally good universe (in addition to the state of affairs containing only God). And, given Korsgaard's Thesis and the modified version of that thesis above, none of these states of affairs would be any better or worse than any of the others. So when deciding between any of the good states of affairs that He could actualize, God would have a remarkable number of alternative possibilities, even if none of those alternative possibilities involves His creation of an irredeemably bad universe.

7 What exactly a universe would have to be like in order to count as good or bad is not something I spell out completely here, but, given my commitment to Korsgaard's account of goodness, this would have to fully explicable in terms of the state of affair's goodness or badness for its inhabitants.

8 For a similar analysis of why God would have to choose a happy universe over a miserable one, see Korsgaard (2014, 426-427).

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have tried to sort through some of the puzzles concerning God's freedom with regard to His initial decision to create in order to defend a particular response to what is known as the "General Problem of Creation". Admittedly, my conclusion is a conditional one. I have argued that it is plausible to suppose that God had alternative possibilities available to Him in His initial decision to create *if* we accept Korsgaard's account of the nature of the good. I have not given here a full defense of Korsgaard's Thesis. There might be other reasons for Christians (or even theists more generally) to reject it.[9] I have only tried to show the kind of work that it can do in this (seemingly orthogonal) debate. If Korsgaard is right about the nature of the good, then this opens up a new and interesting way of preserving God's freedom in His act of creation. What this shows is that it might not have been entirely necessary that God create at least one good universe, despite what the current literature on the topic would suggest.[10]

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9 For instance, we might worry that Korsgaard's Thesis leaves us unable to say that God is the best possible being.

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AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CORRECTIVE TO DOCTRINES OF ASSURANCE

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Abstract. Many Christian traditions affirm a doctrine of assurance. According to this doctrine, those who are saved have assurance of their own salvation; that is, the doctrine of assurance tells us that the elect can know their status as elect. In this paper, I explore two developments of the doctrine of assurance by theologians (i.e. John Calvin & Kenneth Keathley) and argue that they fail to accommodate the fallibilistic nature of human knowing. I then develop a fallibilistic doctrine of assurance, which makes such assurance available to most Christians, and respond to an objection from the camp of pragmatic encroachment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Many Christian traditions have affirmed variations on a doctrine of assurance. According to this doctrine, those who are saved have *assurance* of their own salvation; that is, the doctrine of assurance tells us that the elect[1]

1 The term 'elect' can be either referential or attributive, and both senses are used here. The noun 'elect' picks out the set of persons who, roughly, possess the property of having been elected by God to reap the benefits of some sort of salvation. *Salvation* in Christian theology tends to be taken to refer to some sort of rescue from the evils of this world to a heavenly paradise. Variations on soteriology (i.e. doctrines of salvation) then will differ with respect to (i) what evils God's creation will be rescued from, (ii) the mechanics of such a rescue, and (iii)

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can *know* their status as elect. Historically, however, Christians who have belonged to traditions affirming the doctrine of assurance have testified to the seemingly fleeting nature of such assurance. Consider, for instance, John Bunyan's self-description in his own struggle to find assurance:

> So I continued [this search for assurance] at a great loss; for I thought, if they only had faith, which could do so wonderful things, then I concluded that for the present I neither had it, nor yet for the time to come were ever like to have it. *I was tossed betwixt the devil and my own ignorance, and so perplexed especially at some times, that I could not tell what to do.*[2]

Bunyan certainly seems dissatisfied in this passage with the state of his so-called assurance. He doesn't know what to do; that is, how to acquire knowledge of his salvation. And he has not been alone. Such dissatisfaction has commonly reemerged for many professed Christians who have hoped to acquire a settled knowledge of their eternal security. Such persons covet the conviction of the Apostle Paul who wrote:

> I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me (2 Timothy 1:12 ESV)

How did Paul arrive at such assurance in this passage?[3] Perhaps he had high-quality evidence for his own salvation which far surpasses the quality of evidence possessed by most believers today. However, while I would be willing to concede that Paul's evidence was of a better quality in general than most Christian believers, I doubt the difference in the quality of evidence is a significant obstacle to acquiring assurance of one's status as a member of God's family. In fact, I think such assurance is widely available

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the nature of the heavenly realm, whether it be simply a renewal of the earthly and heavenly realm, something more ethereal akin to a Plato-like world of spirits, or a minimal view that takes perfect union with the divine as interchangeable with heaven.

2 John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, 26. Italics mine.

3 Although there are other passages, such as Hebrews 6:4-6, which indicate the possibility of losing one's salvation, I will not be discussing them here. There are important and interesting questions concerning the possibility of losing one's salvation, as well as whether these possibilities may nevertheless be all non-actual. See Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010) chapter 6 for an accessible discussion of various positions in this debate.

to most Christians. What really stands in their way is an epistemic, rather than a moral or practical, hurdle.[4]

In this paper, I will argue that assurance of salvation is available to professing Christians. What I will mean by assurance, however, will reflect the current state of analytic epistemology. Assurance is, after all, an epistemic concept since it concerns *knowledge* of one's own salvation. I will argue, then, that the best understanding of a doctrine of assurance operates on the assumption that one's knowledge is *fallible*, rather than infallible or absolutely certain.

While my construal of the doctrine of assurance will explain *how* it is possible for us to have knowledge of salvation, it will not by itself explain the phenomenon highlighted above; namely, that many Christians consciously *worry* about their status as elect or non-elect. Fortunately, I have a plausible and brief explanation for this. I think the sort of existential crisis of faith exhibited by those who fret about their salvation is just a special instance of the existential crisis one faces when one realizes infallible knowledge is unattainable for creatures like us. Learning of the epistemic limitations of humanity in this way, especially when faced with skepticism, can be worrisome. But on the whole, a healthy dose of skepticism is good for the human soul.

I will proceed as follows. In section 2, I will introduce some important concepts and distinctions in contemporary epistemology that will be necessary for understanding the doctrine of assurance. Once I have done this, we will look briefly in section 3 at John Calvin's understanding of assurance,

4 Philosophy of religion, with which many contemporary readers will be familiar, has largely embraced the camp of *Reformed Epistemology*, the best-known defense of which can be found in Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). What I have to say in this paper is consistent with much of Plantinga's account, if for no other reason than that Plantinga's religious epistemology focuses on questions of *warrant* (i.e. that property enough of which turns true belief into knowledge) while I want to discuss the status of our epistemic *justification* or *rationality* subsequent to our reflection on our evidence and epistemic standards. Though not entirely unrelated, these two projects are importantly different. For the most thorough development of the sort of view I'm interested in defending, see Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Rationality and Reflection: How to Think About What to Think* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). To see the fruit of such an epistemology applied to issues in contemporary philosophy of religion (e.g. skeptical theism and the problem of evil), see Jonathan Curtis Rutledge, "Commonsense, Skeptical Theism, and Different Sorts of Closure of Inquiry Defeat," *Faith and Philosophy* 34.1 (2017), 17-32.

followed by a more recent statement of the doctrine by theologian Kenneth Keathley. Both of these statements, the classic and the contemporary, similarly suffer from a failure of attention to distinctions in the theory of knowledge. I will take them, then, in section 4 as a foil for my own understanding of assurance that corrects this oversight. Once I have presented my account, I will conclude in section 5 by responding to an objection from the epistemological camp of *pragmatic encroachers*—i.e. philosophers who claim that there is a condition on knowledge dealing with pragmatic stakes. In short, such philosophers argue that (roughly) as the practical *importance* of knowing something increases, the more difficult it will be to know. And since salvation is of *infinite* importance, knowledge of one's salvation is pretty much impossible. As I will argue, this objection fails because it incorrectly locates the epistemic effects of practical stakes in the *nature* of knowledge. Pragmatic concerns do not have to do with whether or not one knows, but rather, with whether such knowledge is *actionable.* Let us, then, turn first to some important distinctions in epistemology.

II. FALLIBILISM AND LEVELS CONFUSION IN EPISTEMOLOGY

The standard view of the nature of knowledge is that knowledge is composed of *justified true belief*.[5] In other words, for something to count as a state of knowing, it must be a *belief*, it must be *true*, and it must be *justified.* While each of these conditions on knowledge could profitably be expanded upon, I will constrain my discussion to the best construal of justification.

Justification of the sort necessary for knowing *p* requires that (J1) one's evidence supports *p* to some significant extent and (J2) one bases one's belief that *p* on the evidence one has for *p*. The first significant epistemological distinction for our purposes rests on the degree of support required by (J1) above.

Descartes notoriously places the degree of support necessary to satisfy (J1) incredibly high by requiring that the connection between one's evidence

5 See Richard Feldman, *Epistemology* (NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003). Also, despite this being the "standard" view, it's well-known amongst philosophers that JTB is insufficient for knowledge. I'll assume doxastic justification is necessary for knowledge and simply note that a no-defeat condition and non-Gettiered condition will get us the rest of the way to knowledge.

and the propositions one justifiably believes on the basis of that evidence to be *infallible*.[6] The search for a foundation of knowledge which infallibly *guarantees* a connection with truth, however, has unfortunately remained elusive. And even if there were some small set of propositions (e.g. *thinking entails my existence*) for which such infallibility might be attainable, that set would be so small as to make infallible knowledge in general a vain pursuit. Thus, epistemologists, by and large, have moved on from the Cartesian project of infallibility and adopted a fallibilist conception of knowledge, which corresponds with a fallibilist construal of justification.

The fallibilist notion of justification famously proceeds on the assumption that while the following sentence expresses an impossible proposition,

I know *for certain* that *p,* although I might be wrong about *p*.

sentences such as,

I know that *p,* although I might be wrong about *p*.[7]

are entirely coherent. The difference between these two Moorian sentences is that the former claims the presence of *infallible knowledge* by way of the locution 'for certain', whereas the latter makes no such claim. The intended point, then, is that it is possible for us to be justified in our beliefs, even if it is possible for us to be mistaken. In fact, since there is no requirement on this fallibilistic understanding of justification that one rule out all possibilities of error, there will be many cases in which one *knows* that *p* while realizing, in addition, that epistemic possibilities incompatible with one having knowledge that *p* remain.

In addition to this fallibilistic construal of justification, epistemologists have stressed, in response to skeptics, that it is not required that one know that one knows *p* before one can simply know *p.* After all, whether or not I know that *p* depends on my satisfying whatever the correct analysis of knowl-

6 See Jonathan Kvanvig, "Why Should Inquiring Minds Want to Know?" *The Monist* 81.3 (1998), 426-451 & Richard Foley, *Working Without a Net* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). We find Descartes' infallibilism undergirded by his use of the Dream and Deceptive Demon Hypotheses in the *Meditations*.

7 See G. E. Moore, "Certainty" in Sosa, Kim, Fantl, and McGrath, eds., *Epistemology: An Anthology*, 2nd edition, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), 31-34.

edge might be. I surely do not need to, in addition, *know* that I satisfy such an analysis. Consider an analogy from William Alston:

If the object I am eating is made of cardboard, it will not nourish me. But suppose I do not know it is not made of cardboard; it by no means follows just from this lack of knowledge that the object will not nourish me. Its nutrient power, or the reverse, depends on what it *is*, not on what I do or do not *know* about it.[8]

And likewise, whether or not we know that *p* depends on what knowledge *is,* not on what we do or do not *know* about it. This insight belongs to the class of problems of levels-confusion in epistemology, and this particular confusion can be found in skeptical arguments of various sorts.[9] Consider the following:

(1) If I know that I have hands, then I have ruled out the possibility that I am a brain-in-a-vat.

(2) But I have not ruled out the possibility that I am a brain-in-a-vat.

(3) Therefore, I do not know that I have hands.

Though there are many things one might say about the premises of this argument, what's important for our purposes is that the necessary condition on knowing that one has hands, expressed by the consequent of premise (1), exhibits the levels-confusion described earlier. That is, the condition itself requires that one *know* one satisfies the conditions of knowing. Or yet again, it requires that one *know* that one knows in order to have knowledge. But the degree of confidence we have that *knowing that one knows* is required for knowing is very low. In fact, it is much lower than the degree of confidence we have in our belief that we know we have hands. Thus, our confidence in the conclusion's falsity should be much greater than our confidence in the truth of premise (1).

8 William P. Alston, "Levels-Confusion in Epistemology" *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5.1 (1980), 146.

9 See Peter Klein, *Certainty: a Refutation of Skepticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981) for a nice taxonomy of different types of skeptical arguments.

So to take stock, there are two fundamental points of general consensus, insofar as there is consensus in philosophy[10], concerning a good understanding of the nature of knowledge. First, knowledge and the type of justification which contributes to knowledge is *fallible*. That is, it is consistent with one's *knowing* that *p*, that one might be wrong. The second point of consensus is like unto the first; namely, that unless one desires to court skepticism, no condition on knowledge which requires someone to first *know* that they satisfy the conditions on knowledge is permissible. We will call these points of consensus, then, our epistemological desiderata for an adequate doctrine of assurance. But before using our desiderata to construct a plausible doctrine of assurance, let us consider two statements of that doctrine from which we will eventually diverge.

III. CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY STATEMENTS OF ASSURANCE

As one peruses discussions of assurance in historical theology[11], it is clear that the concept of assurance is tied closely to the concept of saving faith.[12] John Calvin's treatment of these concepts was no different, as illustrated in

10 Take the camp of contextualists (Keith DeRose, *The Case for Contextualism: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Context, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) or Peter Unger, *Ignorance: a Case for Skepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) for examples of those who happily demur with the way I have construed fallibilism as epistemically central.

11 See JR Beeke, "Does Assurance Belong to the Essence of Faith? Calvin and the Calvinists" *Masters Seminary Journal* 5.1 (1994), 43-71 for a more in-depth discussion of this point. My debt to his work should be clear in this section.

12 A brief note on the concept of *saving faith*. This is a particular species of faith in the same way that swing dancing is a particular species of dance. Not all dance numbers count as instances of swing, and likewise, not all instances of faith count as instances of *saving faith*. In general (and this diverges in some ways significantly from the concept as it is used by Calvin and Keathley), faith is the orientation of one's life around the pursuit of some sort of ideal or project that is grounded in an underlying cognitive state(s), such as belief, acceptance or even hope (e.g. the belief that God exists and desires to be united with me). I'm undecided on the precise boundaries of this concept. For a helpful discussion which informs the proto-definition of faith just given, see Jonathan L. Kvanvig, "Affective Theism and People of Faith," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 37, ed. by Howard Wettstein (2013), 109-128. Now *saving* faith in Christian theology, very roughly, consists in the orientation of one's life in accordance with the will of the Christian God. Now what counts as having such an orientation, and how con-

his formal definition of faith and treatment of the expected behavior of a true believer.

> Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and *certain knowledge* of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.[13]

> No man is a believer, I say, except he who, leaning upon the assurance of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death…We cannot otherwise well comprehend the goodness of God unless we gather it from the fruit of great assurance.[14]

Now, while Calvin indeed tied the notions of assurance and saving faith closely together, it is worth noting that he sets aside a place for such concepts as 'weak faith', and other varying degrees of quality for faith.[15] Allowing for such variation is important since room for serious doubts must be made for any psychologically realistic doctrine of assurance.

If one begins with Calvin's formal definition of faith, however, it becomes clear that an immediate roadblock for any doctrine of assurance is that it is grounded in a "firm and *certain* knowledge". While the description 'firm and certain' applies perfectly to the promises of God, it is odd that Calvin would apply it to the quality of our human knowledge. And as illustrated with the Moorian sentences in section 2 above, there is an important difference between our concepts of *certainty* and *knowledge* more broadly. Certainty (i.e. infallible knowledge) is simply beyond us, and so, it would be best to avoid a requirement of certainty in our doctrine of assurance.

More recently, however, Kenneth Keathley has suggested the following understanding of the relation between assurance and saving faith:

> *…assurance is the essence of saving faith*. The very nature of conversion and regeneration guarantees that certain knowledge of salvation is simultaneous

sistently must one's life fit with the ideal around which one's life is oriented to have *saving faith*? That is a discussion I could not reasonably weigh into here.

13 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1960, 3.2.7. Italics are my own.

14 Ibid. 3.2.16.

15 Ibid. 3.2.17-21.

> with being saved. Subsequent doubts and fears may come, but a core conviction about one's relationship with God will remain.[16]

While Keathley's definition explicitly denies the *continuation* of certainty, and thus, is an improvement over Calvin's statement, certainty still remains as the initial sign of saving faith. And thus, Keathley's understanding of assurance falters for similar reasons to Calvin's. First, the definition of assurance given requires that there be a point of *certain knowledge* in the life of the genuine believer, and such a requirement is a non-starter given the epistemic limitations of humanity. But second, they seem to have confused the perfect faithfulness of Christ's promise of salvation with our epistemic access to that promise. Such a confusion explains why the language of 'certainty' is so compelling, for who would want to claim that God's faithfulness is less than certain? However, one is not committed to such a blunder upon admission of one's *own* cognitive fallibility, and thus, the language of 'certainty' is here misguided.

IV. AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CORRECTIVE

So we have two different articulations of the doctrine of assurance from Calvin and Keathley. Both emphasize a requirement of certainty for the believer, which is problematic, and both confuse a conviction in the absolute faithfulness of Christ to fulfill his promises to require unwavering certainty of salvation. But clearly, uncertainty regarding one's salvation is *consistent* with Christ remaining faithful to fulfill his promises, and thus, the second requirement is unnecessary. With this and our fallibilist epistemological desiderata from section 2 in mind, we have the following as our doctrine of assurance:

> *Fallibilistic Doctrine of Assurance (FDA)* – S has assurance that S is saved *iff* S has at least fallible knowledge that S is saved—where S's fallibly knowing *p* requires that (i) S believe *p*, (ii) *p* is true, and (iii) S has at least fallible justification for her belief that *p*.

So, according to *FDA*, it is possible for someone to have assurance of their salvation. In fact, it is likely that many Christians have assurance of salvation according to *FDA*. After all, Christians will have introspective evidence

16 Keathley 2010, 188.

that they desire the things of God, they will have evidence that their life and projects have been oriented around the things of God in the past, and they will have good evidence to think it would be surprising for their life to lose its Christocentric orientation.

Of course, having good evidence for one's salvation will not *guarantee* salvation. This is consistent with *FDA*, and this is a good thing. Any doctrine of assurance that presumes certainty requires a *guarantee* that one has the truth. But there are no epistemic guarantees (or at least, optimism for such guarantees seems naïve). And so, this counts in favor of *FDA* rather than against it.

One road to certainty, highlighted in section 2, is to learn what the conditions on knowledge are, and then to see whether one satisfies all such conditions with respect to some proposition. Thus, an advocate of *Certainty Views of Assurance* might object to FDA as follows:

> Well, come now, we can identify some sufficient conditions for knowing one is saved. Here's one: *God tells you "you will be saved"*. Suppose then that Mel has a mystical experience in which the angel of the Lord tells her *"you will be saved!"* She surely knows this is a sufficient condition for salvation. And it seems like she knows she satisfies that condition, so surely, she can have *certain* assurance of her own salvation.

Even if we grant that God's telling you *"you will be saved"* is a sufficient condition for salvation (which doesn't seem like too much of a stretch), the above scenario would not be sufficient to grant certain assurance to Mel. What's crucial is that the sort of knowledge Mel has concerning whether or not she *satisfies* this condition on knowledge of salvation is *fallible*. To have *certain* knowledge that she satisfies the condition on knowledge in play, she would further have to rule out any possibility consistent with her having the same evidence but entailing that her mystical experience was non-veridical. For instance, she would need to rule out the possibility that she was dreaming. Of course, she wasn't dreaming, but this doesn't mean she has, or even could, rule out the possibility that she was dreaming. Indeed, her evidence of what transpired would be indistinguishable in the dream scenario from her evidence in the veridical scenario. But then, even in the case where her mystical experience was veridical, she would not able to attain certainty. Thus, because *FDA* does not carry with it troubling implications of skepticism, I

conclude that *FDA* is a superior understanding of the Christian doctrine of assurance (as compared to those considered in section 3).

V. OBJECTION – PRAGMATIC ENCROACHMENT & THE STAKES OF SALVATION

There are several possible responses open to anyone with reservations concerning *FDA*, though most of those objections can, I think, be met. A fairly interesting objection, which I will consider here, originates from philosophers enamored with *pragmatic encroachment*. According to this philosophical view, knowing is not an entirely epistemic activity. For as the practical stakes of getting things right increase, the requirements for achieving knowledge increase as well.[17] For illustration, consider the following two cases:

> *Low Stakes:* Bethany is traveling from LA to Rome in a few days. Her mother, who will be giving her a ride, asks her when she will be flying out. Consulting her memory from a week ago, Bethany tells her mother, "Oh, I know the time. The plane leaves at 6:30 P.M." Bethany's mother accepts what Bethany states as correct without question, and they prepare for the flight.
>
> *High Stakes:* Bethany is traveling from LA to Rome in a few hours. Her mother, who will be giving her a ride, asks her what exact time she will be flying out. Consulting her memory from a week and a few days ago, Bethany tells her mother, "Oh, I know the time. The plane leaves at 6:30 P.M." Her mother responds, "Have you double-checked? The last thing you want is to be late for an international flight like this one. You'll have to wait at least a day for another one-way trip, but that would throw off your conference plans." Bethany replies, "I guess you're right. I should double-check my ticket before claiming to *know* the time. It's too important to get it right."

17 There are contextualist variations on this line of thought. I won't deal with every version of pragmatic encroachment here, but my response will be applicable to the general family of views. For a representative sample of pragmatic encroachers, see (i) Jason Stanley, *Knowledge and Practical Interests* (Oxford: Oxford University Publishing, 2005), (ii) John Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), (iii) Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath, *Knowledge in an Uncertain World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Also, for an interesting objection from belief-desire psychology, see Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa, Benjamin Jarvis and Katherine Rubin, "Pragmatic Encroachment and Belief-Desire Psychology," *Analytic Philosophy* 53.4 (2012), 327-343.

In these two cases, the only altered factors were pragmatic ones. While I changed the context, I did so without changing either the source or content of Bethany's assertions of knowledge. In Low Stakes, since memory is normally sufficient for knowledge, Bethany knew that her flight would leave at 6:30 P.M. But when in High Stakes she realized she wouldn't have time to check her itinerary again, she ceased to know. And this happened despite Bethany's reliance upon the very same source of knowledge in both contexts. Thus, assuming that our intuitions match Bethany's expressed intuitions in the two cases, it seems that changes in *practical stakes* lead to changes in *knowledge*.

Given the above motivation for adopting the view of pragmatic encroachers that knowledge is constrained by *pragmatic stakes*, the following argument can be made which undermines my claim that *FDA* (i.e. the *Fallibilistic Doctrine of Assurance*) is superior to the *Certainty Views of Assurance* found in section 3:

(1) If *Pragmatic Encroachment* is true, then the higher the practical stakes for getting the truth of some proposition, *p*, the less likely knowledge of *p* will be for any agent (Premise)

(2) The practical stakes for knowing *that one is saved* are as high as practical stakes can possibly be (Premise)

(3) Thus, if *Pragmatic Encroachment* is true, knowledge *that one is saved* will be at least as unlikely as knowledge of any other proposition (from 1 & 2)

(4) If knowledge of a proposition is at least as unlikely as knowledge of any other proposition, then no one knows that proposition (Premise)

(5) Therefore, if *Pragmatic Encroachment* is true, then no one knows *that they are saved* (from 3 & 4)

(6) *FDA* will be an improvement on *Certainty Views of Assurance* only if the number of people with assurance increases on *FDA* (Premise)

(7) *Pragmatic Encroachment* is true (Premise)

(8) Therefore, *FDA* is not an improvement over *Certainty Views of Assurance* (from 5-7)

What are we to make of this argument? The core of the argument is this: if *Pragmatic Encroachment* is true, then no one will have assurance, even on a *Fallibilistic Doctrine of Assurance*. Thus, *FDA* will not be any better than *Certainty Views*. Why? Because the entire motivation for adopting *FDA* was based on a problem for *Certainty Views*; namely, they rule out the possibility of assurance for everyone. But *FDA* will share this problem if *Pragmatic Encroachment* is true. Thus, the proponent of *FDA* must provide a plausible explanation of the interplay between practical stakes and knowledge that (i) serves as an alternative to *Pragmatic Encroachment* explanations & (ii) does not allow practical stakes to preclude knowledge, even when the stakes are high. In doing this, then, they will provide a reason to reject, or at least doubt, premise (7).

The first thing to notice about *Pragmatic Encroachment* is that the view purports to be the best explanation of the sorts of intuitions involved in the Low Stakes and High Stakes cases above.[18] That is, pragmatic encroachers think the best explanation of Bethany's reported change in knowledge is that pragmatic stakes are part of the *nature* of knowledge. And since the stakes are very high in the second case, Bethany ceases to know *that her flight leaves at 6:30 P.M.* I will offer two responses to this interpretation of Bethany's predicament.

Clearly, the above cases are entirely *consistent* with the falsity of *Pragmatic Encroachment*. An alternative explanation is fairly close at hand, for even if Bethany knows *that her flight leaves at 6:30 P.M.* in both cases, she may not be *warranted in asserting* that she knows this. Perhaps she *knows* but, in addition, there are higher grades of knowledge which are necessary for warranted assertability. Thus, she may have knowledge, just not a high enough *grade* of knowledge to pass it on to her mother via testimony.[19] And thus on this interpretation, practical stakes will only increase the necessary grade of knowledge for warranted assertability. They will not prohibit knowledge itself.

18 Stanley 2005, 3-4.

19 See Jessica Brown, "Contextualism and Warranted Assertability Manoeuvres" *Philosophical Studies* 130.3 (2006), 407-435 for a discussion of some views along these lines.

My preferred response to premise (7), however, is more general.[20] In ordinary contexts, regular English speakers make two false assumptions about knowledge. The first false assumption, which we've already seen, concerns the nature of knowledge; namely, that knowledge requires certainty. The second false assumption concerns the *value* of knowledge. The assumption is this: the value of knowledge is largely exhausted by the fact that it always enables one to act.

But why should we think that knowledge is always *actionable* in this way? Indeed, apparently pointless truths seem to lack actionability even though they are quite knowable.[21] Consider the following example of an apparently pointless truth: there are, very roughly, seven quintillion five hundred quadrillion grains of sand partially composing the earth.[22] This information is interesting, but even if true, it is not actionable. Or at least, it is not actionable in any obviously uncontrived sense. And thus, it has little to no instrumental value.

With this observation in hand concerning why we think we value knowledge, I can offer a plausible alternative explanation for the intuition changes involved in *Low Stakes* and *High Stakes*. We tend to seek out knowledge that we can act on. Thus, it is common for us to develop myopia to the idea that there is non-instrumental value one might assign to knowledge; that is, value that is independent of what it gets us. But then, we buy into the idea that knowledge is *by its nature* actionable, and thus, if we are unable to act on the content of some apparent knowledge, we intuitively judge that we must not really know what we thought we knew. Thus, at bottom, the *Pragmatic Encroachment* intuitions involved in the cases above exhibit a confusion for what *we* value in knowledge as essential to knowledge (i.e. part of its *nature*). And thus, we take this misconstrual of the nature of knowledge as indica-

20 See Jonathan Kvanvig, "Against Pragmatic Encroachment" *Logos and Episteme: An International Journal of Epistemology* 2.1 (2011), 77-85.

21 Ernest Sosa, "For the Love of Truth?" in Zagzebski and Fairweather, eds., *Virtue Epistemology: Essays on Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 49-62.

22 Robert Krulwich, "Which is Greater, the Number of Sand Grains on Earth or the Number of Stars in the Sky?" (*National Public Radio*, September 18, 2012). <http://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2012/09/17/161096233/which-is-greater-the-number-of-sand-grains-on-earth-or-stars-in-the-sky>.

tive of a failure to know, which in the cases above is false. In both instances, Bethany knows. She just can't act on that knowledge in both cases.

While a more thorough response to *Pragmatic Encroachment* is desirable, the two replies described above—i.e. the one relying on warranted assertability and the other relying on a confusion of what gives knowledge value with what knowledge is—are sufficient to call premise (7) into doubt. As a result, the argument from *Pragmatic Encroachment* against the superiority of a *Fallibilistic Doctrine of Assurance* over *Certainty Views of Assurance* remains unconvincing.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I argued that, given a plausible *Fallibilistic Doctrine of Assurance (FDA)*, knowledge of salvation is attainable for Christians. To that end, I presented some anti-skeptical motivations for adopting fallibilism, and after looking at two different formulations of a doctrine of assurance by John Calvin and Kenneth Keathley, I presented an alternative formulation of the doctrine of assurance, *FDA*, informed by those preceding epistemological considerations. Once I did this, I presented and responded to an objection from pragmatic encroachment. While this objection purported to demonstrate that *FDA* was no better than the *Certainty Views of Assurance* represented by Calvin and Keathley, the intuitions in favor of *Pragmatic Encroachment* could not be reasonably sustained. Consequently, as it stands, *FDA* provides sufficient grounds for the elect to indeed have knowledge of their status as elect, in order that they might assent to the witness of the author of Hebrews, who writes,

> Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith…Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:22-23 ESV).

A POSSIBLE-WORLDS SOLUTION TO THE PUZZLE OF PETITIONARY PRAYER

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Abstract.[1] If the thing he prays for doesn't happen, then that is one more proof that petitionary prayers don't work; if it does happen, he will, of course, be able to see some of the physical causes which led up to it, and 'therefore it would have happened anyway', and thus a granted prayer becomes just as good a proof as a denied one that prayers are ineffective.
C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a familiar puzzle in the philosophy of religion regarding petitionary prayer.[2] Start by assuming the traditional divine attributes — omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect goodness. Then ask what kind of actions God performs. Presumably the very best ones he can, because of his perfect goodness. He knows which actions are the very best ones he can perform, because of his omniscience. And he can perform those actions, because of his omnipotence. Continue by assuming that we human persons lack those

1 Division of labor footnote: The main idea and the power plant illustration was Ryan's, and the possible worlds framework was Bradley's.

2 See Aquinas (1274), Stump (1979), and Basinger (1983).

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traditional divine attributes; we are neither omniscient nor omnipotent nor perfectly good.

But sometimes we ask God to do something. And when asking, we assume that our asking will have some effect on God's decision to perform the action. But it's hard to square that with the above. Formally:

(1) For any action A, either God ought to do A or God ought not to do A.

(2) For any action A, if God ought to do A, then God knows that God ought to do A and God will do A.

(3) For any action A, if God ought not to do A, then God knows that God ought not to do A and God will not do A.

(4) For any action A, if God knows that God ought to do A and God will do A, then your asking God to do A has no effect on whether God does A.

(5) For any action A, if God knows that God ought not to do A and God will not do A, then your asking God to do A has no effect on whether God does A.

(6) Therefore, for any action A, your asking God to do A has no effect on whether God does A.

There are various responses in the literature. We are dissatisfied with them, and in this paper, we offer a new one.

II. THE OLD RESPONSES

There are several responses that locate the worth of petitionary prayer in something other than its effectiveness in prompting God to act. One such response is that prayer is good for those who pray, to align their desires with God's, or to be more aware of God's ability to act in the world.[3] Another says they are good for God, because God appreciates creation asking for things.[4]

3 See Murray and Meyers (1994) and Davison (2011).

4 See Aquinas (1274) II, Q83, 2.

Another says they are good for both us and God (but mostly us), because they improve our relationship.[5] Yet another says that petitionary prayer is good because there is an implicit vow of partnership between the petitioner and God, and it is a better world when God responds to the prayers where such vows are made (more sincere or intense vows are more likely to be recognized and rewarded by God).[6] These may very well be true, but they do not show that prayer is effective in influencing God's actions. We hope for something stronger.

Dan and Frances Howard-Snyder give two responses that maintain the effectiveness of petitionary prayer.[7] The first response is that sometimes it's better for God to do something in response to a request than it is for God to do the same thing on his own. They give an example of a child who likes spiders. They've purchased many spider books for the child, and are considering purchasing another one. They decide it would be better to show the child the books and give him the opportunity to take some initiative in his intellectual pursuits. Similarly, God might wait until someone asks him to do something so that he can respond to the request because it's better for the person; they recognize their need for God's help, and get more comfortable asking for it.

The second response the Howard-Snyders give is that being asked to do something can change the moral landscape. If you see me by the side of the road, you may stop to offer me a ride, or you may drive on. You're not morally obligated to stop. But once I start waving my arms and running after you, it gives you a reason to stop. There may still be countervailing reasons to you stopping, but they have to be more weighty than my request. Similarly, when we ask God to do something, that gives him reason to do it.[8] It's a factor that he considers when deciding whether or not to do A.

We dislike the first response because either it doesn't work, or it collapses to the second response. Either doing something in response to a request changes the moral landscape, giving one a more moral reason to do something, or it doesn't. If it does, then the first response collapses to the second. If it doesn't, then God will do whatever God's going to do, regardless of the

5 See Stump (1979).
6 See Smith and Yip (2010).
7 See Howard-Snyder (2010).
8 Gellman (1987) advocates a similar response to the puzzle.

request. The action may be made better by the request, but the request won't change whether or not it is performed, and therefore will have no effect.

We dislike the second response because it will apply in too narrow a range of cases. If asking does give God a more moral reason to act, it doesn't give him *much* of one. It is difficult to imagine that a significant request for God to act has such a moral effect that he grants the request, instead of acting as he already intended to. Recall that this effect is specifically the good that comes *just from the request being granted*, not what comes from the event that is requested. Suppose someone asks God to cure her father's cancer. There are a great many goods that will accompany that removal, for her family and people outside it. Perhaps there are also some bad things – if there weren't, then presumably God would cure it. So in the scope of all those goods and evils, how much good does her asking allow for? We can't see that it would be much. So this response allows for our prayers for small things to be effective, since there isn't much good or evil on each side, but not big things. It's reasonable to pray that I find my keys quickly, or a parking spot, but not that a friend survives or that my child is healthy.

III. OUR RESPONSE

We'll present our response using the heuristic of possible worlds. The problem of the effectiveness of petitionary prayer assumes that God always has to do what's best; if he didn't, then our prayers could be effective in that they dissuade God from performing the best action. The simplest way to think of this is to think that God has to actualize the best possible world. If there is more than one world that's tied for the best, God has to actualize one of them. And if there is no best world because there's an infinite chain of better worlds, God has to actualize one of the really good ones (this is purely for simplicity, and can be jettisoned and the solution recast in terms of individual actions). So, the problem has it that God has already decided which world to actualize — either the best, one of the best, or a really good one. Our asking him to do something is either a part of that world that God will choose, or not. If it is, our prayers are ineffective because he already knows the best world to choose. If our request isn't part of the best world, our prayers will be unable to keep God from choosing the best world. So much for background.

Here's our solution. Our prayers that God perform an action A are effective if there are two worlds that are equally good: one in which God does A, and one in which God doesn't do A. When we ask God to perform A, we assume that there's some A-world that God would actualize. That's either because the best world is an A-world, because there's an A-world that's as good as any non-A-world, or because there's an A-world above the threshold of goodness for God to actualize.

In the first case, our prayers are ineffective; if the best world is an A-world, then our asking for God to perform A does nothing, because he's going to actualize that world anyway. But in the latter two, our prayers may be effective. And as long as we don't know whether the best world is an A-world, our prayers are rational, because for all we know, they'll be effective.

Consider an analogy involving a power plant operator. The operator knows that her job is to produce as much power as the plant can, which is, say, 3,500 MW per day. She is a capable operator, and will do this. But there are many ways to do produce as much power as possible. So if she needs to increase steam flow to the turbines (adjust knob A), then she knows she can (and must) raise average coolant temperature as well (adjust knob B) in order to keep producing 3,500 MW per day. If adjusting knob A by itself would cause power to dip below the plant's limit, and there are no compensating actions she can take to maintain the power level, then she won't adjust knob A. Adjusting knob A is possible for the operator because knob B can be adjusted to maintain her objective of max power. The power plant operator is analogous to God. God can grant our request to actualize an A-world and still maintain the objective of his creation by making adjustments elsewhere.

If there are multiple worlds that are tied for the best, our prayers are effective. When we ask God to perform A, we are hoping that one of the worlds that's tied for the best is a world in which God performs A. But we also are thinking that there might be a world that's tied for the best in which God doesn't perform A, and we think he might be intending to actualize that world. We know that he has to actualize one of the best worlds, but if two are tied then he can pick either, then we encourage him to pick the one in which he performs A.

If there is no best world, just an infinite chain of slightly better worlds, our prayers are still effective. In this case, there presumably is a "goodness line"

such that God can permissibly actualize any world above that line. When we ask God to perform A, we are hoping that one of the worlds above the line is one in which God performs A. But, we also are thinking that there might be worlds above that line in which God doesn't perform A, and we think he might be intending to actualize one of those worlds. We know that he has to actualize a world above the line, but he can pick any of them, and we encourage him to pick one in which he performs A.

This is where our analogy is relevant. The operator can tweak the dials in a variety of ways – there are a variety of dial-setting combinations – to produce the maximum power per day. Suppose we request that the turbines be slowed 10%. In that case, we are hoping that one of the sets of dial values that will produce the maximum amount of power corresponding to those turbine values. And we know that there are sets of dial values that will produce the maximum amount of power where the turbines are faster, and we think the power plant operator might be intending to use those dial settings. We know that she has to make as much power as she can, but if faster turbine settings and slower turbine settings allow for the same amount of power, other relevant values being changed, then she can slow down the turbines in response to my request.

IV. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Objection: When we encourage God to pick an A-world over a non-A-world, we assume that if there is an A-world as good as any non-A-world, he will grant our request. But sometimes, it seems, we can just see that there is an A-world that's as good as any non-A-world, and we pray that God perform A, and yet God does not. So, our prayers are ineffective.

Reply 1: We have not said that all petitionary prayers are effective, or that the majority are, or that all or most prayers where the goodness of the worlds in which they're granted versus not granted are tied are effective. We're responding to an argument that petitionary prayer is never effective, because the notion is incoherent. We've given situations where prayers can be effective without inconsistency.

Reply 2: But if we wanted to say that God grants all prayers to A when an A-world is as good as any non-A-world, we would say that, contrary to the

way it seems, if we pray that God perform A and he doesn't, then there is a non-A-world that's better than every A-world. That's the only reason God denies prayers.

Reply 3: But if we concede that there is an A-world that's as good as any non-A-world, and we pray that God perform A, and yet God does not, then it must be because more people prayed that God not perform A.

Objection: So sometimes God grants requests, and sometimes God denies requests. We must explain the difference between the times he grants the requests and the times he denies them. If he grants them, then he has some reason for granting them. If he denies them, then he has some reason for denying them. So he grants or denies our prayers for those reasons, and not because of our prayers. So our prayers are ineffective after all.

Reply: Sometimes God is ambivalent between world X (where he performs A) and world Y (where he performs B), because both are equally as good or could be made equally as good. But sometimes he is not, because one of the worlds is better. When God denies our prayers that he perform A, it's because he can't make any A-world as good as the best non-A-world. And he denies our prayers for that reason. When the worlds are tied, he has to just pick one. And our prayers influence which one he picks.

CONCLUSION

There is a persuasive argument that an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God cannot respond to petitionary prayer, because God has already decided what to do. There are some responses to this argument, but they don't allow us to pray for important things. We have offered a response whereby all of our petitionary prayers are reasonable, as long as we think that: (i) what we're asking God to do is part of a world that God could create, (ii) there's some other world God could create such that what we're asking God to do fails to be part of that world, (iii) God might be intending to create a world in which he doesn't do what we're asking, and (iv) our asking God might cause him to actualize a world in which he does what we're asking. Our petitionary prayers can be effective if (i)-(iv) is true.

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DIVINE HIDDENNESS AND PERFECT LOVE

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At the onset of an online debate with John Schellenberg years ago, I offered this judgment about his divine hiddenness argument:

> John Schellenberg has presented an argument noteworthy in several respects. One interesting respect is that his 'Divine Hiddenness' argument is a philosophically interesting innovation in a debate that has raged for millennia. Innovation in philosophy, especially an interesting innovation, is not an easy task, but Professor Schellenberg has accomplished it.[1]

Well, it has been some twenty years since *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* was published and much philosophical ink has been spilt in attacks and defences of the Hiddenness Argument (HA). With his most recent book, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's new challenge to belief in God* (Oxford University Press, 2015), Professor Schellenberg seeks to export the HA to a wider audience by making the argument accessible to those with little exposure to philosophy and even less tolerance for the technical jargon employed by academics. While not as noteworthy as his 1993 book, *The Hiddenness Argument* provides an accessible and up-to date presentation of Professor Schellenberg's Hiddenness Argument.

1 See our 2007 exchange in 'God or Blind Nature: Philosophers debate the evidence (2007-2009)' edited by P. Draper, available at: <http://infidels.org/library/modern/debates/great-debate.html> (accessed 23 March 2016).

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There are a few changes between the 1993 version of the HA and the 2015 version. One change is that the 2015 model employs the idea of finite persons rather than humans. The theistic God, Professor Schellenberg thinks, could have brought about persons other than human persons. The idea here is that any need for divine hiddenness due to the nature of humans could have been avoided if God had brought about another kind of finite person. A second change has to do with the explicit introduction of what Professor Schellenberg calls 'pre-doubt' – the lack of theistic belief among those who lived in the distant past, long before the advent of monotheism – as a case of non-resistant doubt.[2] Another change is that Professor Schellenberg's idea of ultimism now plays a role in the discussion, which it did not in 1993. Ultimism is the idea that there is a reality which is ultimate as regards the nature of things and the nature of value, which is of supreme importance for humans. If ultimism is the case, then metaphysical naturalism is false. The HA is an argument contra one version of ultimism: theism. Theism is an elaboration of ultimism, which implies that the ultimate reality is a personal reality. God is a person according to theism. One discussion missing in *The Hiddenness Argument* concerns how a reality could be ultimately valuable without involving personhood. Among the most basic and important distinctions in ethical theory is that between persons and mere things. The former has a morally exalted status, which is lacking in the latter. I would find it surprising that the religiously ultimate fact about the universe, assuming there is one, would be impersonal, even while acknowledging that millions of Buddhists may not find it so surprising. At places Professor Schellenberg employs the Anselmian manoeuvre of arguing that God, qua perfect being, would have a certain property as instantiating that property is great-making.[3] It is hard to see that personhood is not a great-making property.

While the new book is about half as long as his first book, the latest version of the HA is a bit more complex:

> (1) if a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person. And,

2 I thank Professor Schellenberg for bringing these points to my attention.

3 See, for instance, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's new challenge to belief in God*, 39, 99 & 106.

(2) if there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then no finite person is ever non-resistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. And,

(3) if a perfectly loving God exists, then no finite person is ever non-resistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. But,

(4) some finite persons are or have been non-resistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. So,

(5) no perfectly loving God exists. And,

(6) if no perfectly loving God exists, then God does not exist. Therefore,

(7) God does not exist.[4]

In its 1993 incarnation the HA ran:

(i) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving. And,

(ii) if a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur. But,

(iii) reasonable nonbelief occurs. So,

(iv) no perfectly loving God exists. Therefore,

(v) there is no God.[5]

Both versions employ as premises propositions about a perfectly loving God. And with that constancy, I argue below, the latest version of the HA, as well as the earlier one, is unsound. Any premise asserting or implying that God is perfectly loving in the sense required by Professor Schellenberg is

4 *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's new challenge to belief in God*, 103.
5 *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 83.

false for the simple fact that the idea of a being perfectly loving, like that of an omnipotent being controlling the actions of an agent who enjoys significant freedom, is a concept impossible to exemplify. To see this, let's first get clear on Schellenberg's concept of perfect love.

ALL WE NEED IS LOVE

Professor Schellenberg nowhere provides an analysis or definition of his concept of perfect love. But among the various scattered remarks he provides about the concept, one can glean three characteristics that Professor Schellenberg attributes to divine perfect love. The first is that:

(A): perfect love is the greatest and deepest kind of love.

As he writes, 'Perfect love… is here taken to be the best, the greatest, the deepest love that could possibly be realized in God. It's ultimate love.'[6] Proposition (A) implies that God's love for humans is the deepest possible. It is not a shallow or generic love. A perfect love is as deep or as intense as possible. It is not just a surface feature but extends down to the marrow. So, God loves all other beings in the deepest way possible. The second is that:

(B): perfect love implies impartiality and love for all finite persons.

As Professor Schellenberg puts it: 'the truth of *a perfectly loving God exists* brings with it the truth of *there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person*' (39 and 44). Proposition (B) implies that God loves all humans equally and manifests no preferential concern or love directed toward some, but not others. It follows from (A) and (B) that a perfect love requires loving all finite beings in the deepest way possible. The third is that:

(C): the parent and child relation provides an appropriate model for the divine love of persons.

Again, 'if… God has brought into the world finite persons capable of relationship with God and indeed fulfilled only by it, then something very like

6 *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's new challenge to belief in God*, 39 & 42. Citations to this work are hereafter in textual parentheses.

the parent-child relation exists between God and finite persons' (99; see also 109).[7] This proposition asserts that we can understand God's love for persons via the relation between loving and exemplary human parents and their children. According to (A)-(C), God perfectly loves, so God equally loves every human, and loves them in the deepest way possible. With (A)-(C) as our guide, we might capture the Schellenberg concept of perfect love with the following principle:

> (L): If God exists then God's love must be maximally extended and equally intense.

According to (L), God's love must be directed toward every human as its object; and must be as deep as possible with every human an equal recipient. Every human, then, is loved by God to the same significant degree. So, the divine love must be maximally extended, maximally intense, and maximally deep. But even with these dimensions in hand, we still need to know something of the nuts and bolts of divine love. Thomas Aquinas understood love as a uniting and binding force:

> … to love a person is to wish that person good. Hence, inasmuch as we love ourselves, we wish ourselves good; and so far as possible, union with the good. … And by the fact that anyone loves another, he wills good to that other. Thus he puts the other, as it were, in the place of himself; and regards the good done to him as done to himself. So far love is a binding force, since it aggregates another to ourselves, and refers his good to our own. [8]

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7 *Summa Theologica*, Iae, Q 20, A. 1. See also, *Summa Theologica*, Iae, Q. 20, A.3.

8 A word about the claim that the human parent-child relation is an appropriate model of the divine-human relation. Not all theistic traditions accept the idea that God may be considered the universal father of all. For instance, Islam, I am told, rejects the idea that God could be the heavenly father of humans. My correspondent, Abdulkadir Taniş, a Philosophy doctoral student at Ankara University, reported via email (2/3/2016) that: 'Islam doesn't accept the analogy because the oneness of God/Allah is very significant for Islam. First, the analogy implies God can have a son or so on. Second, Muslims knew the importance of Father idea in Christian tradition in Muhammed's time. For these reasons, Islam rejects the Father analogy. And in many verses of *Qur'an*, it has been emphasized that God cannot have a son, or that He cannot be a father. For example, the *Qur'an* says: 'Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah is eternal, absolute. He begetteth not, nor He is begotten and there is none like unto Him' (112:1-4).' Quoted with permission.

Taking our cue from Aquinas, we will understand the relevant sense of love as having at least two conceptually necessary features: the first is the lover desires good for her beloved. This feature we might understand as the lover having a disinterested or selfless concern for her beloved – that her beloved flourish or do well. In short, the first feature might be seen as a deep desire that the interests of one's beloved are advanced, not for one's own sake but for the sake of the beloved. Indeed, we should think of this first feature as not just desiring that those interests are advanced but also as seeking to advance those interests when feasible.

The second feature is the lover putting the beloved, as Thomas says, 'in the place of himself'. This we might understand as taking the beloved's interest as one's own, or identifying with the interests of the one loved.[9] Of course, given the first feature, it follows that the lover would identify with no interest incompatible with the beloved's well-being. The first feature, then, serves as a check on the second, since love does not require identifying with interests harmful or destructive or immoral. There may be other features characteristic of love, desiring a relationship with the beloved perhaps, or willing the best for one's beloved, but these other features, if such there be, are not relevant to our discussion.

Recognizing those two features of love reveals a third feature: the more interests one identifies with, and the greater the concern for one's beloved, the deeper one loves the beloved. Identification and concern provide a kind of proportional matrix for measuring the depth or intensity of love, as an increase in identification and concern generates a deeper love. A deep love implies a great concern for the beloved and an extensive identification with the beloved's interests. An interest of a person is something the person cares about, or something the person should care about.[10] Identifying with an interest we might understand as, roughly, caring about what one's beloved cares about because one's beloved cares about it, or caring about what one's beloved

9 This characterization of love is influenced by the analysis of love found in Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 79-80.

10 Could there be interests a person should care about even though they are not among her best interests? If there could be, then understanding best interests as interests one should care about would be a necessary but not sufficient property.

should care about because one's beloved should care about it.[11] Different persons, of course, have different interests some of which are incompatible. Two interests are incompatible just in case attempts to bring about one of them require that the other be impeded.

Of course, not all of one's interests are equal. Some interests one has are rightly counted as one's best interests – what a person should care about, whether or not she knows those are her best interests, and whether she even in fact cares about those interests. Best interests are those one would acknowledge if one were fully rational and fully informed.[12] But persons have interests which are not counted among their best interests – what one cares about even though full information and full rationality would not necessitate their acknowledgment. A person might care that A.S. Roma win even though that interest is not ranked among one's best interests. These less than the best interests we might call a person's mere interests. Mere interests are real interests but are not properly counted among a person's best interests.

With Aquinas' characterization in hand, two aspects of Professor Schellenberg's idea of perfect love seem especially salient (see propositions (A) and (B) above). The first is equality – that every person is the object of the love. So, a perfect love is directed to each and every person. The second is the depth or degree of the love. Now, think back to the two conceptual features of love: the more one identifies with the interests of another, and the more concern one has for that person, the deeper one's love for that person. A perfect love, in the sense required by Professor Schellenberg, then, is characterized by maximal concern and identification with all and for all. Flowing out of perfect love would be divine impartiality – God would treat his beloveds the same. Of course, arguably, if a certain finite person had a need warranting deviation from impartial treatment, a loving God would presumably meet that need if he could. But perfect love provides the rationale for why God would be open

11 Does intensity of the identification play a role more critical than mere identification – wholeheartedly taking as one's own as opposed to just taking as one's own? It is far from clear that identifying with an interest is a degreed concept, as one either identifies with an interest or not. In any case, I set this worry aside.

12 Could a person be fully rational and fully informed and yet have warped or skewed desires? If so, then one's best interests are those one would have if one's desires were as they should be.

to a personal relationship with any and all finite persons, as God would love and desire good for each, and would thereby be open to a personal relationship with each.

While many theists employ the language of perfect and unsurpassable love, it is far from clear that theism requires the concept of a perfectly loving God as Professor Schellenberg understands the concept.[13] Does theism entail proposition (L)? It seems clear that it does not since if *p* & *q* do not imply *r*, then *p* does not imply *r*; and expansions of theism, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, need not entail (L).[14] For instance, a venerable Christian theological tradition populated with names like Paul, Augustine, Thomas, Luther, and Calvin, asserts that divine love and grace are divine gifts, which are not uniformly distributed.[15] In addition, it is a common claim of theists that God is perfectly good, and by that they mean not just that God loves, but that God is morally just. God's love, then, would have to be calibrated to a degree compatible with the other properties essential to divine perfection. Calibration suggests a degree less than maximal. But set aside these worries, as there is reason to think that the HA is unsound.

13 For an example, see Thomas Talbott, 'The Topography of Divine Love: a response to Jeff Jordan', *Faith & Philosophy*, 30 (2013), 302-316.

14 William Rowe has a helpful distinction between restricted theism and expanded theism, which provides an idea of how we might understand an expansion of theism:

> 'Expanded theism is the view that [God] exists, conjoined with certain other significant religious claims, claims about sin, redemption, a future life, a last judgment, and the like. (Orthodox Christian theism is a version of expanded theism.) Restricted theism is the view that [God exists], unaccompanied by other, independent religious claims.'

See his 'The Empirical Argument from Evil' in *Rationality, Religious Belief, & Moral Commitment*, eds R. Audi and W.J. Wainwright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 239.

15 Professor Schellenberg comments on a different aspect of this tradition in his *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 74-82. In *The Hiddenness Argument*, Schellenberg asserts that perfectly loving is great-making (see 106), and worship-worthiness requires then that God be perfectly loving.

WHY THE HA IS UNSOUND

Premise (6) is an indispensable premise of the HA, as is premise (i) of the 1993 version. Both are also false. To see this, consider that each of premises (6) and (i) must entail (L) if their respective versions of the HA are valid. Premises (1)-(4) make claims about all finite persons who ever have lived, or will live, or could have lived, so it is clear that a maximal extension to all is needed. Premise (1) makes clear that the divine love is deep as God would seek a personal relationship with every finite person. Finally, no variation in that love is permitted if the reasoning of (1) - (6) will result in (7). Proposition (L), then, is the mortar helping to hold the bricks of (1) – (6) in place.

But (L) is false. Why is (L) false? Different people have different interests; and, since love has as a necessary constituent identifying with the interests of one's beloved, then there will be an in-principle obstacle to loving equally and maximally all people, as no rational agent can identify with, or take as his own, interests known to be incompatible. If love includes identifying with the interests of the beloved, then it is not possible to love every person equally and maximally given that persons have incompatible interests. If Jones takes as his own your interests, he cannot identify with any known interest incompatible with yours. Suppose Smith's interests conflict with yours. It would not be possible for Jones to identify equally and maximally with your interests and with the interests of Smith, so Jones cannot love Smith as much as he loves you. And this is not just a practical matter, or a matter of limited resources. If God were to love certain persons, and thereby identify with their interests, then God could not identify with any known incompatible interests had by others. In other words, even God cannot love every human in the deepest way.

In response, one might invoke the distinction between best interests and mere interests, alleging the former as the relevant consideration. With that distinction in hand, perhaps we could pare the stock of relevant interests persons have down to a compatible few. Yet, even with the distinction between best interests and mere interests, we find an obstacle still, as whatever compatibility this paring provides is achieved at the cost of plausibility. If God loves individuals as regards their particularity and singularity, and not just as bearers of universal features, then advancing or identifying with a thinned set

of best interests found among all hardly seems a sufficient fit, as neither our beloveds nor their cares are fungible. So, if divine love relevantly resembles even if it far surpasses the love characteristic of the best of human parenting, then simply meeting only those best interests of a beloved child interchangeable with those of any other child falls short of the mark. Indeed, human parenting at its best involves not just caring about what one's child should care about, but also caring about what one's child cares about because he cares it. We would expect, then, like a loving human parent seeking to advance not only the best interests of a beloved child but also the child's mere interests, that God would seek the same. But, again, different people have different interests and it is not possible for a rational agent to take as her own interests known to be incompatible.

But let's set aside the issue of whether the best interests of all persons are compatible as it is dispositive to note that any love which identified with only those interests of its beloved interchangeable with those of every other person would treat its beloved as a fungible.[16] Suppose, for example, that being happy (in Bentham's sense) is the sole best interest of every person, and that seeking that for all was possible. Could one identify with this single best interest of every person? Perhaps so, but if that is the only interest one identifies with, then it is hard to see how one could be said to deeply love others, since, arguably, the more interests one identifies with and the greater the concern for one's beloved, the more deeply one loves that beloved. So, if one identified only with interests common to all, one would not love others in the deepest way.

Additionally, any love which only identified with interests common to all faces another problem. To see this, suppose that God identified only with those interests common to all finite persons. If this were so then God would not love those individuals as regards their particularity. In effect, God would treat those individuals as interchangeable if God identifies only with those interests identical with the interests of all others. So, if God identifies only

16 The problem being developed here differs from the 'fungibility objection' to appraisal accounts of love (Concisely put: an appraisal account holds that love is an appreciation of the valuable qualities exemplified by one's beloved – which seems to suggest that others could exemplify those qualities to the same or even greater degree). On the fungibility objection to appraisal accounts, see B.W. Helm, *Love, Friendship, and the Self* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 24-34.

with those interests common to all, then God does not deeply love persons, or God does not love individuals as regards their particularity.

Moreover, recall that human parenting at its best involves not just caring about what one's child should care about, but also caring about what one's child cares about. The best human love identifies not just with the beloved's best interests but also with the beloved's mere interests. The two constituent features of love, as noted, entail that love does not require identifying with interests harmful or destructive to the beloved. But, of course, one can have interests which are not among one's best interests and which are neither harmful nor destructive. Suppose a parent had two children both of whose best interests the parent seeks to identify with, as best he can, and seeks to advance. But the parent also identifies with and seeks to advance the mere interests of one child, but not the other. This favoritism or deeper identification with one child over the other could not be squared with the claim that the parent equally loves both. So, holding that the deepest love identifies only with the best interests of others, and that the best interests of each are fungible with those of every other, has the odd result of the deepest love falling short of that love characteristic of the best of human parenting. And, further, no one can credibly hold that the mere interests of persons do not conflict, as there clearly are zero-sum situations the winning of which is among the interests of persons – going to the event is a mere interest of both Smith and Jones, let's suppose, but as there is only one ticket remaining, they both cannot attend.

But could one treat the interests of others as fungible while at the same time not treating those individuals as fungibles? Could God, for instance, love individuals as regards their particularity, while identifying only with those interests common to all persons? Not if we understand love as, in part, identifying with the beloved's interests. No one could identify only with those interests of Jones common to all others and yet love Jones as a particular individual. One could of course deny that love has as a conceptual part the identification by the lover with the interests of her beloved, as one could love another without knowing the particulars of the beloved: 'I love my baby' a newly pregnant woman might truthfully say, even though the pregnancy is but a month along.

Even if it is true that one could love without identifying with the interests of the beloved, it is hard to see how one could deeply love another without

knowing and identifying with her interests, as deep love implies an intimate acquaintance with the beloved. In short, love involves identifying with the beloved's interests and not just with the beloved's best interests only, even though one's best interests are of greater import than are one's mere interests.

That a deep love focuses, at least in part, on the particularity and singularity of individuals explains why a universal and impartial love, with no variance, cannot be the deepest kind of love. The deepest love involves a kind of exclusivity and does not devalue the beloved by treating her, in effect, as a fungible. So, even God cannot love every person in the deepest way, as no one in-principle can fully identify with every person's interests.

One might object that the foregoing may work if we understand persons as human persons but God surely could have created finite non-human persons, such that those non-human but finite persons have no interests, best or mere, which conflict. This objection assumes much that is far from clear. Could there be finite persons in any rich or interesting sense, capable of personal relationships, which have no interests, mere or best, which could conflict? It is far from clear that there could be as the idea of complex finite persons who are interchangeable or fungible in every relevant sense seems dubious. Perhaps it is my impoverished imagination but I just do not see how that could be. Indeed, improvising on a comment made by J.S. Mill in another context captures the problem with this objection: finite persons are not like sheep; and even sheep are not indistinguishably alike — is it easier to fit finite persons with a life than with, say, a pair of shoes? Or, are finite persons more like one another in their whole physical and spiritual conformation than in the shape of their feet?[17]

With the foregoing, we have good reason to deny (L). And with good reason to deny (L), we have good reason to reject premise (6) of the 2015 model of the HA as well as premise (i) of the 1993 model. The HA, whether old or new, is unsound.

17 See J.S. Mill's chapter III, 'Of Individuality, As One the Elements of Well-being' in his 1859 book, *On Liberty*.

SALVAGE OPERATIONS

One might seek to salvage (L) by objecting that humans surely identify fully with their own interests; yet some of an individual's interests have to be traded-off in light of the individual's inability to fully realize them all in the actual world. So the fact that a divine being could be constrained such that that being could not realize everyone's interests seems no less a challenge to God's ability to identify with everyone's interests than the fact that a human cannot fully realize all of her interests and yet she can fully identify with all of her interests; or so one might argue.

This objection however equivocates on the idea of fully identifying with an interest. In one sense it is true every human fully identifies with each of their own interests. But that sense is hardly relevant. In the relevant sense it is not true that every human fully identifies with each of their best interests, let alone with all of their interests. One should care about one's health, for instance, but there are smokers. Given the wide phenomena of self-destructive actions and self-hatred, it is clear enough that many humans do not fully identify with each of their interests.

A variant of the former objection would hold that one can fully identify, in the relevant sense, with each of several conflicting interests. So, for instance, one may fully identify with the interests of being a conscientious scholar and of being a loving parent; but there are times when those interests conflict. Even so, one might argue, deciding on this occasion to play with one's children rather than reading a philosophy paper does not mean that one no longer fully identifies with both interests. And if that is so, then God's inability to realize everyone's interests seems no more a challenge to God's ability to fully identify with everyone's interests than the fact that a human cannot concurrently realize all of her interests and yet she can fully identify with all of them; or again, so one might argue.

The problem with this objection is that it mistakes not being able to realize interests on certain occasions, with those interests being incompatible. The failure to realize certain interests on this occasion or that may be due to practical limitations such as insufficient time or resources or knowledge and not due to a logical limit. Practical limitations however do not generate logical incompatibilities. Two interests are incompatible just in case attempts to

bring about one require that the other be impeded; and it is clear enough that realizing the interest of being a loving parent does not require that one not be a conscientious scholar.

Perhaps one might agree that no being can love all other beings in the deepest way, and so even a perfect being's love must vary if the perfect being were to love any finite person in the deepest way. But, one might argue, whatever the variation, a perfect being would nonetheless seek a personal relation with every finite person. So, the HA retrofitted with a concept of love different than that employed by Professor Schellenberg might still support the charge that non-resistant non-belief provides strong evidence contra God, or so one could argue.

Retrofitting does not rescue the argument since the impossibility of God loving every other being in the deepest way means a loss of impartiality as well. If there is variation in the degree of divine love – if God loves some more than others - then our reasons for supposing that God would seek the same for each finite person evaporate, as lovers do not act impartially between their dearests and others.[18] Professor Schellenberg has given us no reason for thinking that a variable divine love must always be open to a personal relationship with every finite person, apart from the now discredited claims of (A)-(C) associated with the Schellenberg sense of perfect love. Additionally, one cannot just jettison premise (6), and in its place offer a principle along the lines of (M) as a patch on the HA:

> (M): for any perfect being B, if B is loving then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person.

Such a substitution is unavailable as the characteristic claim of Professor Schellenberg's HA involves his concept of perfect love (as Professor Schellenberg puts it, his HA starts 'from above' and not below, see 74-75). To replace perfect love with some other sense of love, or, for that matter, with perfect

18 In contrast to classical paganism, the claim that God was loving was an innovation of early Christianity (see Larry Hurtado, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016), 124-26). The further idea that God might love some more than others is not novel. In the Christian tradition, for instance, Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*, Iae, Q. 20, A.3. & A.4, argued that a loving God can love some more than others. Of course, even before Thomas, Paul held that God's love was not equally distributed to all humans. See his *Epistle to the Romans*, chapter 9.

justice or perfect morality, would forfeit what Professor Schellenberg sees as the indispensable original insight of his version of the HA.[19]

Finally, we might ask: if God lacks perfect love in the Schellenberg sense would that diminish the worship-worthiness of God? It is hard to see that it would, as the argument is not just that God does not perfectly love, but that it is impossible for any being to love every other being in the deepest way possible. If the 'failure' of God to control the actions of those who enjoy significant freedom implies no diminishment of worship-worthiness, then likewise the 'failure' of God to love all maximally and equally seems just as benign. These 'failures' are not genuine defects as they are not incompatible with perfection. Could a perfect being love some more than others? Well, since no being can love all finite beings in the deepest way, then, if God is to love in the deepest way, God must love some more than others. And, arguably, the failure to love in the deepest way would be a genuine defect incompatible with perfection and worship-worthiness.[20]

A CONCLUSION

One might wonder if the intrinsic value of being in a personal relationship might rescue the idea that God would always be open to a personal relationship with any finite person? This wonder dissipates with the realization that we do not act impartially between those we love best and others whom we love.[21] So, if there is variation in the divine love, then, for all we know, re-

19 For an extended argument on this last point, see Jeff Jordan, 'The Topography of Divine Love', *Faith and Philosophy*, 29/1 (2012), 53-69.

20 It may be that the aggregate of the extrinsic value, as well as the intrinsic value, of relationships with those loved deeply could outweigh the aggregate value of being in a personal relationship with any finite person. Or, for all we know, the variability may result in God not now being open to a personal relationship with those he deeply loves in order to facilitate a personal relationship with others.

21 Professor Schellenberg offers an intriguing last chapter ('Coda: After Personal Gods') in which he remarks on the grandeur of deep time and human progress. While reading it, a passage from another non-theistic writer about similar themes came to mind, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (1881), eds M. Clark & B. Leiter; trans. R. J. Hollingdale; (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 32: "Formerly one sought the feeling of the grandeur of man by pointing to his divine *origin*: this has now become a forbidden way, for at its portal stands the ape, together with other gruesome beasts, grinning knowingly

lationships with those deeply loved could require that God not now be open to personal relationships with those not deeply loved. Or, for that matter, if there is variation in the divine love, then, for all we know, relationships with those not deeply loved could require that God not now be open to personal relationships with those deeply loved. The takeaway here is that, apart from the now discredited claims of (A)-(C) associated with the Schellenberg sense of perfect love, we have been given no reason for thinking that a variable divine love must always be open to a personal relationship with every finite person.

Since 1993 the HA, as developed by Professor Schellenberg, has relied upon a premise that either God must love all humans, or love all finite beings, in the deepest way possible. While the presentation of the HA in 2015 differs from that of 1993, it is still reliant on the Schellenberg sense of perfectly loving: the theistic God must love all others beings in the deepest way possible. But, clearly, even if we cannot know everything that perfect love would or would not do, we can see via a simple argument that it is impossible for any being to love all finite beings (human or not) in the deepest way possible. The HA, whether new or old, is no more successful than an argument which required that a perfect being must be so omniscient as to tell us the value of the greatest positive integer.[22] Theists have little to worry about any argument involving claims about omniscience of that sort. Likewise, there is little to worry about arguments reliant on proposition (L)

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as if to say: no further in this direction! One therefore now tries the opposite direction: the way mankind is going shall serve as proof of his grandeur and kinship with God. Alas this, too, is vain! At the end of this way stands the funeral urn of the last man and gravedigger (with the inscription *'nihil humani a me alienum puto'*). However high mankind may have evolved—and perhaps at the end it will stand even lower than at the beginning!— it cannot pass over into a higher order, as little as the ant and the earwig can at the end of its 'earthly course' rise up to kinship with God and eternal life. The becoming drags the has-been along behind it: why should an exception to this eternal spectacle be made on behalf of some little star or for any little species upon it! Away with such sentimentalities!"

RESPONSE TO JORDAN

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I am grateful to Professor[1] Jordan for his kind words and for his comments on my work, and also to the editors of this journal for inviting me to respond. Professor Jordan makes a point of emphasizing love's sensitivity to the particularities of its object. I think this particularities point is a good one. I'm saddened, however, that I must infer from it, together with what's in the rest of his article, that Professor Jordan did not *love* my book. For he does not address many of its particularities, instead focusing on what – despite my not using the word – he sees as its emphasis on the *impartiality* of love, which emphasis appears to him to make the hiddenness argument vulnerable to an approach he wrote about in 2012.[2] Now, it could be that it's not just because he thinks he has this knockdown counterargument but because Professor Jordan thinks very little in the new book is really new that he discloses to the reader so little of its contents. But in that case I would note that other reviewers, looking closer, have thought differently.[3]

1 It is presumably politeness or respect that leads Jeff Jordan to call me 'Professor Schellenberg'. I shall follow his lead, intending both.

2 Jeff Jordan, 'The Topography of Divine Love', *Faith and Philosophy*, 29 (2012), 53-69.

3 See, for example, Adam Green's NDPR review, available at: <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/64186-the-hiddenness-argument-philosophys-new-challenge-to-belief-in-god/> (Accessed 24 January, 2017)

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However let's set such concerns aside, to focus on Professor Jordan's case against the hiddenness argument. I really do like his particularities point, which is central to that case. (I was not just saying that, a moment ago, to set up my own point.) But nothing he has said shows that I can't have that point and a successful hiddenness argument, too.

Professor Jordan starts his argument for a contrary view with Aquinas. We might wonder why we should assume that Aquinas got it right when talking about the nature of love, and also whether Professor Jordan has *read* him right. Eleonore Stump, at any rate, appears to disagree with Professor Jordan's exegesis here.[4] And I myself have gone a somewhat different way, developing a view that emphasizes openness to personal relationship along with benevolence. This view is closer to Stump's view – and so, ironically, if Stump is right, closer to Aquinas's actual view – than the one Professor Jordan uses. Professor Jordan apparently assumes either that I'm mistaken in what I say about the nature of love or that the force of the alternative view, which he uses, is obvious. To avoid accusing him of begging the question against me, let's suppose that it is the latter rather than the former.

Let's suppose, further, that Professor Jordan is right about the force of his view about the nature of love, in order to see what follows. On his view, love includes *identifying* with at least many of the particular interests of the one loved. Since we should expect the relevant particular interests of created finite persons to be (at least to some extent) opposed to each other, we should conclude that God could not love *maximally* and *equally* all finite persons, as the hiddenness argument requires. That would entail identifying with *all* of their relevant interests, which, if some are opposed, can't be done. Or so says Professor Jordan.

Here some thought needs to be given to what exactly it is to identify with the interests of someone you love. Must someone who identifies with the interests of another in the relevant sense seek the *satisfaction* of those interests? Must she *care* about the satisfaction of those interests, and, if so, does *this* mean that she must seek their satisfaction? Must she *empathize* with the one who has these interests, and does *this* mean seeking their satisfaction? It ap-

4 See, for example, her detailed work on this topic in *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

pears that Professor Jordan would reply here with a string of yeses, since he takes identification with the interests of another to require treating them as one's own. But the notion of 'identifying' with the interests of another can be taken in different ways, and even if intuition has us nodding when we hear it said that love involves such a thing as identification with the interests of those whom we love, it may leave us unsure when it comes to particular interpretations of this behaviour such as Professor Jordan's. I myself think it's not at all clear that his interpretation is the best or right one. I would say, for example, that you can express the attitude of caring about the opposed interests of two people if you're *sad* that they can't both be realized. And such caring seems to suffice for the love-relevant sort of identification. But then any of us, and any God as well, can identify with opposed interests, and Professor Jordan's problem is solved.

But let's go a little further with him, assuming that no such move can work. The first point I am inclined to make on that assumption is that it would be good to have more examples than he provides of what identifying with someone's interests, treating them as one's own in the way he emphasizes, would involve, so we can see more clearly just what is required here, and what is allowed. What, for example, do parents do in various relevant cases? If at time t a parent finds the relevant interests of her several children opposed, might she be moved to interact with her children, offering input that she hopes may generate *revised* and *compatible* interests at some time after t? (Notice how openness to relationship is presupposed here.) Might she seek to make up for one child's loss, if the interests of several really are incompatible, at some time after t (notice that God has eternity), or make a decision favouring another child next time? And if she does one of these things, has she been identifying equally and maximally with the interests of all her children during all this time? It's far from obvious that our answer should be no.

But all such considerations are really beside the point. When formulating his proposition L, which says that God's love would be maximally extended and [for each recipient] equally intense, and attributing it to me, Professor Jordan forgets about the *possibility constraint* rightly included in all his previous references to what I have said about divine love. L, again, says that God's love would be maximally extended and equally intense, period. That is why it leads into the trouble Jordan is trying to stir up. But if L is to state a view

to which I am committed, it should say that God's love would be as fully extended and as unvarying in its intensity *as possible*. (This is still not something I've ever said, but let's overlook that for the moment.) Now, if Professor Jordan is right about love, then, given the possibility constraint included in it, it does not follow from the revised L that God's love would involve identifying in *complete* equality with everyone's interests, for, if he's right, this isn't possible! The revised L therefore isn't problematic in the way L is. So I am not committed to a defective idea of love, and Professor Jordan's criticism fails. Moreover, the revised L, even with the possibility constraint it includes, *will* imply that God would be open to relationship with everyone, since no similar impediment stands in the way of God satisfying this description, and God's love is more fully and equally extended if this description is satisfied than otherwise. The 'openness' condition is of course what the hiddenness argument emphasizes, and — now leaving even the revised L behind — is in fact all that it needs to emphasize about God's love to succeed.

What I've already said provides a sufficient condition for the failure of Professor Jordan's critique. But another, independent sufficient condition is also worth mentioning. This responds to the reasoning advanced by Professor Jordan when he considers whether the hiddenness arguer might solve the problem he has raised by focusing on the *best* interests of those whom God loves. What he says here, again – and even more conspicuously – wielding what I have called his particularities point, is that this approach (call it the best interests approach) treats the relevant interests of finite persons as *fungible* or interchangeable, and that real love, attentive to the particularities of the beloved, would never view them in this way. The best interests approach, we are told, is therefore inadequate.

I think this reasoning in response to the best interests approach is unsound because its first premise is false. The assumption behind that premise, notice, is that everyone's best interests are the same. Maybe they aren't. But suppose they are. Here is the really important response: best interests will be the same and so interchangeable *only at the level of type*. The best interests of every finite person might include, say, certain opportunities for happiness and virtue in the context of an ever-growing relationship with God. Consider again the latter, a relationship with God. When we speak of it, we speak of a certain *type* of thing. We're not talking about how such a relationship

would be experienced, at the token level, by Cheuk or Sonia, John or Jeff. So *let's* move to the token level. What we'll see, if we do, is enormous variation. For what a relationship with God would be for persons should be expected to *vary with their idiosyncrasies*. For example, Cheuk, practical and socially concerned, might feel God's stable encouraging presence while helping others. Sonia, more dreamy and introverted, might feel a connection to God while producing art, or have rich and dramatic mystical experiences. And so a sensitivity to particularities is after all possible if God wishes to stick to the best interests of finite persons when expressing love for them. God's love can vary from person to person at the token level even if not at the level of type, if we think of it in a way that is restricted to best interests. It follows that even were the response to Professor Jordan's critique I made above, in connection with the possibility constraint, unsuccessful (which I don't believe it is), his critique would still fail because of the applicability of this type-token distinction within the context of the best interests approach.

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

SERGIO SORRENTINO
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(Translated by Maggie Fritz-Morkin, University of the South, USA)

Robert MacSwain: *Solved by Sacrifice: Austin Farrer, Fideism, and the Evidence of Faith*. Studies in Philosophical Theology 51. Peeters 2013.

The work of Austin Farrer (1904-68), an important figure in twentieth-century English theology, was of particular intellectual complexity, for it ranged from Biblical exegesis to theoretical philosophy to theology. MacSwain thus weaves his presentation with multiple lines of investigation. His interpretive key is not Farrer's metaphysical thought but rather his epistemological apparatus. The backbone of his synthetic overview of Farrer's mature thought is this central thesis: Farrer's conception of religious faith is to be understood as spiritual praxis, i.e. the performative efficacy of religious faith present in the lives of 'saints'. This efficacy serves as the evidence that renders genuine religious faith possible.

This thesis allows MacSwain to stake out a perspective that is simultaneously extremely interesting and also incisive, since it incorporates all the various stages of Farrer's approach to religious faith. MacSwain's monograph reveals that Farrer's cultural horizons are broad enough to encompass all of the most salient lines of philosophical debate that emerged throughout the twentieth century. Within this horizon, all the themes developed are filtered through a mental disposition typical of Farrer, which serves as a unifying force in MacSwain's wide-ranging investigation. This is the notion of *fideism*, which MacSwain first defines with precision and then adopts as the interpretive key to explicate the philosophical system put in place by the English theologian. That mental disposition is delineated thus: when faced with the great problems posed by both religious faith and human experience, MacSwain underlines Farrer's conviction of 'the need to act *without* complete certainty, combined with a sense that

some knowledge can only be gained from *within* a certain perspective or tradition, rather than "looking at things from outside'" (p. 104).

MacSwain begins by problematizing fideism and offering critical insight into its possible variants. Fideism is the view that posits faith as a necessary precondition for evaluating the rationality of those beliefs that delineate this horizon. Thus it is unsurprising that the resulting variants are so disparate. On one side there is extreme fideism (religious faith demands the acceptance of beliefs that are contrary to reason: *credo quia absurdum*); on the other side there is moderate fideism (to which the author essentially traces Farrer's epistemological system). Moderate fideism holds that reason is not opposed to faith, but rather has an auxiliary role in ascertaining the truth in one's own belief. Intrinsic to this way of imposing the theme of the relationship between belief and knowledge is the emergence of another question concerning the intrinsic intelligibility of religious faith. That is to be ascertained not only within the horizon of belief but also on a universal level, according to criteria of intelligibility that are shareable among all.

Now, in an attempt to situate Farrer's epistemological apparatus, MacSwain introduces a sort of middle road between the rationalism of natural theology and the irrationalism of extreme fideism. Farrer's is presented as a sort of 'soft rationalism', characterized by three criteria: 1) religious faith should be judged as a global theory, or as a worldview; 2) the judgment of that global theory is never the object of simple demonstration or strictly demonstrative reasoning; and 3) such a judgment, of an unquestionably rational character, presents its argumentative structure as deriving from an accumulation of evidence (cumulative-case argument).

Moving then from fideism as such to Farrer, MacSwain shows that Farrer was convinced that knowledge of the divine is accessed not through demonstrative procedures, but rather through 'contemplation', i.e. a kind of appreciative intuition (direct apprehension) that grasps not only the simple givenness of an entity (the divine), but also its value for the existence of him who is drawn to it. Essentially, the way to access the divine is more like the model of apprehension than of inference. And that is not an isolated case for Farrer, limited to religious knowledge, but is rather his typical epistemological approach.

In this vein, Farrer is able to pose the following question in his *Saving Belief* (1964): can a rational mind think theologically? The question is approached first of all from the perspective of reason. But even this occurs from within the adherence to belief, which is a performative commitment to a reality that becomes accessible through a gift of salvific import. Essentially, faith in general is an attitude of the human mind that precedes critical reflection on the attitude itself and on the belief prompted by it. What is specific in religious faith is that it contains the belief in the existence of its object; which, when properly understood, can only be obtained by approximation to its incidence in the real world of life. Only in the wake of such an explication is it possible to work critically on the epistemic credentials of religious faith.

To this end Farrer undertakes a careful examination and distinguishes between 'initial faith' and 'saving faith', or better, between implicit and mature faith. The former is ultimately an image of the world, a sort of existential attitude. But this attitude remains sterile until one develops salvific faith, the very one that determines its own world of life. Hence Farrer stipulates the priority and the necessity of faith as an epistemological screen without which the evidence of God is not convincing (in one's mental life) and is not operational (in the world of life). Nonetheless, faith of salvific kind still needs evidence, needs rational exercise that is equipped to provide reasons for its intelligibility. It is from this perspective that MacSwain qualifies Farrer's perspective as moderate fideism, and defines his epistemology of religious faith as interactional. All this signifies that theistic evidence is not to be located in the sphere of pure reason, but rather in the life of 'saints' or in the efforts one makes in living one's own faith.

What then, MacSwain asks at the book's conclusion, is the significance of Farrer for contemporary religious epistemology? On one hand, a rigorously empirical criterion used to ascertain factual truth does not have a place in theistic belief. But the empirical requirement must be satisfied. Actually, physical objects are not how they appear, but rather how they act on us. To know God means to know something real with which we are in a relationship of interaction. Because, in order to know real beings, we must enjoy an effective relationship with them. Now, into what sort of relationship can be entered, when we are concerned with God? To obey, responds Farrer, i.e. to open ourselves to his action that we hold he discloses to us. This is the

experiential proof or verification in religious faith. In other words, we can touch God only by opening ourselves to him, we can enter into an interactive relationship with God only by willing his will. If then we want an experimental knowledge of God, argues Farrer, we must submit our will to God. The familiarity needed for interaction represents the extension of the empirical principle applied to spiritual realities. The way to reach God is through obedience, not through logical argumentation. Interaction and estimation lead to the affirmation of the existence of God as a personal reality with whom we have to do. And this, perhaps, is the synthesis that gathers up all of the philosophical work of a thinker of the stature of Austin Farrer.

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Kevin Timpe: *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*. Bloomsbury 2014.

Kevin Timpe's *Free Will in Philosophical Theology* is an impressive and scholarly book that ought to be read by all those with an interest in free will and philosophical theology. The premise of the book, as the title suggests, is to investigate free will in philosophical theology. Somewhat disappointingly the book only concerns free will in Christian philosophical theology. Timpe is explicit that his book will only be concerned with *Christian* philosophical theology, but it seems that the title of the book could easily have include this qualification without becoming cumbersome. This doesn't take away from the fact that Timpe's book is still very much still worth reading. It is, as far as I know, the only book to focus exclusively on the role that free will plays in Christian philosophical theology. It is not only of interest to scholars of free will and philosophical theological, but might also serve as a good introduction for those who wish to know more about free will in (Christian) philosophical theology.

Timpe's goal in the book is to 'tell a theological story philosophically' (p. 3) — that is, he wishes to show how a particular understanding of free will helps to solve certain puzzles in Christian theology. These are: primal sin (the first sin or act of evil), the role and nature of God's grace, freedom in heaven and hell, and divine freedom.

Timpe uses the methodology of *clarification* in this book. According to this methodology, one need not argue for one's central assumptions; rather, the goal is to show that the claims made by Christian theology are consistent with one another. So this work does not attempt (for the most part) to *argue* for its central assumptions; it rather takes them for granted with the aim of showing that they form a consistent set. Thus this book is not a work of natural theology — that is, it doesn't attempt to argue for (or against) the existence of God.

In what follows, I'll start by setting out the main themes and arguments of Timpe's book. After that, I'll present one main criticism. I shall argue that Timpe hasn't succeeded in showing that the claims of Christian theology form a consistent picture; that is, his clarification project is unsuccessful.

Timpe's account of free will is an incompatibilist one; that is, he reject the claim that free will is compatible with either causal or theological determinism. He calls his account *virtue libertarianism*. As with other libertarian accounts of free will, it requires that free actions are not causally or theologically (divinely) determined. And as with other libertarian accounts, it requires that an agent is able to do otherwise than she actually does — that is, she has access to modal alternative possibilities. But Timpe's account is a *source* libertarian one. It does *not* require that every free action is one that the agent is able to have not performed. All that is required is that an agent is able to do otherwise *at some point* in her causal history.

We can divide free actions into two sorts, on this view: direct and indirect free actions. The former sort require than an agent can do otherwise in a robust sense — viz. that she can choose between good and evil courses of action, i.e. she can choose whether to sin or not. The latter sort do not require that an agent be able to choose between good and evil; but they must stem back to an action (or actions) where an agent chose between a good over an evil course of action. Actions where an agent lacks alternative possibilities must stem from a free action where the agent had alternative possibilities (a directly free action) for those former actions to count as (indirectly) free actions. What is distinctive about Timpe's form of libertarianism is that it claims that moral responsibility depends on whether our actions stem from genuine moral virtues or vices.

So the picture we get on Timpe's view is this: we start off with the (robust) ability to do otherwise — that is, to choose between good and evil courses of action. By choosing between these courses of action we thereby come to 'set'

our characters. Those who choose good actions become good people — that is, they become morally virtuous. And those who choose bad actions become bad people — that is, they become morally vicious. Eventually, it is possible for a person to only choose to do bad things or to only choose to good things, and still come out as free and morally responsible.

With this account in hand, Timpe applies it to several puzzles in Christian theology. Timpe's approach is to tackle these puzzles according the order Christian theology says that persons come into contact with god. These four stages are:

- Before the Fall (status integritatis)
- As Fallen (status corruptionis)
- Under Grace (status gratiae)
- In Glory (status gloraie) (pp. 14-15)

The first puzzle that Timpe considers is at the stage of status integritatis. This puzzle concerns *The Fall*. There are two Falls in Christian Theology: the Fall of Lucifer and the Fall of Adam and Eve. Timpe focuses on the former because this results one of the biggest puzzles for Christian Theology (and perhaps for any perfect being theology): *primal sin* — namely the introduction of evil into the world. Primal sin presents a difficult problem for Christians: given that God is supposedly perfect, how could the imperfection of sin have entered the world?

Timpe considers two responses to the problem of primal sin. The first is Katharine Rogers', and the other is Scott MacDonald's. As Timpe sees it, Rogers' is a *voluntarist* account, and MacDonald's is an intellectualist account. The central difference is that Rogers says that evil results purely from Lucifer's misuse of his free will, whereas MacDonald attributes the introduction of evil into the world to an intellectual failing on Lucifer's part. Timpe finds both accounts wanting, and for good reason. Rogers explicitly accepts that there is no explanation for primal evil. But, as Timpe notes, on Rogers' account, '[primal sin] is not just unexplained, but inexplicable.' (p. 41) MacDonald's account doesn't fare much better. All it does is push back the problem. On Rogers' account, we have to accept that primal sin is unexplained and inexplicable at

the level of actions. On MacDonald's account, we have to accept that primal sin is unexplained and inexplicable at the level of the character. According to MacDonald, Lucifer performed an evil action because he didn't consider all the reasons and information available to him. But that's a failure of his character. If he had a better character, he *would* have considered all the reasons and information he had available to him. So now we have to ask who created his character. It can't be God because that would make God responsible and blameworthy for evil; God can't be responsible and blameworthy for evil in the world because he is perfectly good. But if God's not to blame for Lucifer's character flaws, then who is? If we don't have an answer, then we don't have an explanation for the introduction of evil into the world. Unfortunately, it seems there is no answer; so there's no explanation for the introduction of evil in the world. Indeed, it seems, as with Rogers' account, there can be no explanation for primal sin on MacDonald's account. Hence both accounts of primal sin are unsatisfactory.

In the end, Timpe accepts that perhaps any account of primal sin will feature the inexplicability that haunts Rogers' and MacDonald's accounts. But he hopes that this problem will be balanced by the further features of his account. This, however, is a major problem of Timpe's whole consistency project. I will return to this issue later.

From status integritatis we get to status corruptionis — existence as fallen and separated from God. The puzzle now is how persons go from beings separated from God to being on the way to being in union with God. The nature of this process depends on a longstanding debate about the concept of God's *grace*. Timpe helpfully distinguishes between four possibilities. The first two are deterministic accounts of grace. On the first of these accounts, divine grace is necessary and sufficient for the human response of faith in God; on the second, divine grace is sufficient but not necessary for the human response of faith in God. The second two are non-deterministic accounts. On the third, divine grace is neither necessary nor sufficient for the human response of faith in God; and on the fourth, divine grace is necessary but not sufficient.

Because of Timpe's commitment to incompatibilism, he rejects both deterministic accounts. As he sees it, God can't simply will that person have faith in him; if he did, the person's faith would not be authentic, in some sense. So Timpe

favours a non-deterministic account — namely the fourth account, according to which divine grace is necessary but not sufficient for the human response of faith in God (that is, for a human to become aligned with God again, and so be on the road to redemption). The third account amounts to Pelagianism — a view deemed heretical by the Catholic Church because it claims that a person could come to have faith in God *without* God willing it. This, it seems, is deemed to undermine God's perfection in some way because it implies a person could save themselves — that is, enter heaven — without God willing that this be so. Timpe thus contends that any satisfactory account of grace must satisfy an 'anti-Pelagian constraint':

> (APC) No human individual in the status corruptionis is able to cause or will any good, including the will of her coming to saving faith, apart from unique grace. (p. 57)

'Unique grace' here means the grace offered by God, and not the grace offered through creation. APC entails, contra Pelagianism, that a person cannot save themselves; they always require God's help. This leaves a puzzle for grace: how can we accept God's grace without it either determining our wills or us determining that God wills that we receive it.

Timpe develops an interesting account of divine grace in response to this puzzle. He bases his account on Eleonore Stump's. On her view, we can accept grace without God forcing it upon us by making our wills *quiescent*. If our wills are quiescent, then we neither assent nor reject grace; we become passive, and this allows grace to influence us without either determining us or us determining that God provides us grace. Timpe develops this account by endorsing the thesis that omissions can't be causes. On a standard event-causal view, the relata of causation are events. But omissions are not events; they are absence of events, if anything. But we can still be said to control whether or not we omit something; so it seems there can be control *without* causation. This, in turn, helps to show how we can accept — or as Timpe puts it 'refraining from resisting' — grace without causing it to be the case that we receive grace. The idea, I take it, is that God provides everyone grace, but we don't always accept it. Once our wills become quiescent, however, we stop refraining to resist, and come to accept grace without causing God to give us grace.

Before considering the afterlife for agents who have realigned themselves with God, Timpe considers what the afterlife is like for those continue to resist grace until they die. Such persons, according to Timpe, are consigned to hell. Timpe

avoids committing to all aspects of what he calls the 'traditional doctrine of hell'; in particular, he avoids committing himself to theses that hell is a place of punishment and suffering, and that punishments in hell are retributive in nature. Instead, he focuses on the following three theses:

a. once a person is in hell, it is not possible for that person to escape,

b. hell is not empty and among its inhabitants are contingent creatures, and

c. those in hell retain their free will. (p. 70)

These three theses are what Timpe calls the 'Minimal Traditional Doctrine of Hell'. These three theses seem prima facie inconsistent. How can a person in hell be unable to escape if they have free will? Doesn't having free will mean that one is free to change oneself, and thereby come refrain from resisting God's grace? Timpe's virtue libertarianism is applied explicitly here. On Timpe's view, persons in hell have, through repeated directly free actions throughout their ante-mortem lives, 'set' their characters such that it is not psychologically possible for them to align themselves with God; they have even apparently set their characters such that it's not psychologically possible for them to change themselves such that they might then consider realigning themselves with God. Thus, even though persons in Hell cannot change their characters, they still have free will according to Timpe; that is, persons in Hell can perform indirect free actions. Moreover, it's not the case that God doesn't offer the damned grace; it's rather that the damned have set their characters such that they are blind to God's grace. This thereby shows that c, d, e are jointly consistent.

Timpe then turns the freedom of the redeemed — that is, of persons in Heaven. The traditional view of heaven, according to Timpe, is encompassed by the two following claims:

(i) the redeemed in heaven have free will, and

(ii) the redeemed in heaven are no longer capable of sinning. (p. 84)

These two claims generate the Problem of Heavenly Freedom, however: if people have free will in heaven, then it seems they are capable of sinning. In response to this problem some reject either (i) or (ii), or they endorse com-

patibilism. Timpe aims to provide a response that is neither concessionary — that is, doesn't reject (i) or (ii) — nor compatibilist.

Again, Timpe applies his virtue libertarianism, which is a development of his previous response to this problem in joint work with Timothy Pawl. On this view, the redeemed have set their characters such that they cannot sin. But even though they cannot perform evil actions, the redeemed retain their free will as they are still capable of performing indirectly free actions. Thus, on Timpe's view, the redeemed have free will and they are incapable of sinning; so Timpe has rescued the traditional view of heaven. One additional feature that is worth noting is that Timpe appeals to the notion of purgatory. He invokes this partly because it is Catholic dogma, but partly because it helps to explain how person who, while they have aligned themselves with God, died before they have perfected themselves. It is in purgatory, according to Timpe, that persons are completely sanctified and, thus, transformed into perfected beings worthy of heaven

Finally, Timpe shows his account of virtue libertarianism can make sense of divine freedom. There seems to be prima facie tension between human and divine freedom. It seems that because God is perfectly good, he cannot do other than choose the good. Humans, however, are not perfectly good and so can choose to do evil. This seems to imply that humans have more freedom than God does. Timpe disagrees. As he sees it, God has the truest freedom there is. For God, evil is not even an option. This doesn't restrict his freedom, according to Timpe, because God has his moral character necessarily and it doesn't depend on events or factors external to God. Humans, on the other hand, do not have their moral characters necessarily. It is because of the difference in nature between humans and God that the former must forge their own characters through directly free actions, and the latter enjoys freedom without having developed his own character.

I will now develop one main line of criticism in what follows, one which I think undermines Timpe's entire project. Again, I want to note here that I think Timpe's book is impressive. While I'm neither a libertarian nor a classical monotheist, his attempt to make Christian theology consistent through his virtue libertarianism is admirable. But it seems to me that the entire consistency project he attempts hinges on his account of primal sin — namely the explanation of how evil first entered in the world, despite the world being created

by a perfectly good being. As I discussed earlier, Timpe finds both Rogers' and MacDonald's accounts of primal sin wanting because they leave it unexplained and, moreover, inexplicable how Lucifer sinned — that is, how evil entered into the world. I agree with Timpe. But Timpe doesn't have a better account to offer. Rather, he simply accepts that, 'It looks then as if a Christian account of primal sin cannot avoid all arbitrariness', and then tries to render this position more palatable, 'Whether or not this amounts to an insurmountable objection to the philosophical respectability of Christian accounts of free will and sin will depend, among other things, on the positive merits that those accounts can offer' (p. 48). I certainly think that there are positive merits to his own Christian account of free will and sin, but this isn't enough to save the day.

The problem is that Timpe leaves primal sin unexplained. Thus how or why primal sin occurred remains mysterious. Moreover, Timpe seems to accept that it is inexplicable. Thus he seems to accept that primal sin is *always* going to be mystery. The trouble with mysteries is that they can pop up elsewhere. If something mysterious or inexplicable occurs at t1, then what's to stop the same mysterious or inexplicable thing occurring at t2? Given that the mystery cannot, perhaps in principle, be explained, there's nothing a priori that can rule out that mystery occurring at another time, or elsewhere.

This is currently quite abstract. But let's make things more concrete. Timpe's account of heavenly freedom states that the redeemed *cannot* sin. These claims are true, according to Timpe, because the redeemed have set their characters such that it is not psychologically open to them to sin. But if it's mysterious and inexplicable how or why *primal sin* occurred, then it seems that it's possible that those in heaven could sin. That is, the possibility of mysterious and inexplicable *heavenly sin* hasn't been ruled out. Timpe might contend that they have set their characters such that they cannot sin. But mysteries and the inexplicable can just happen; they are, after all, mysterious and inexplicable.

It also makes no difference that the redeemed are in a different stage of their relationship with god; again, mysteries and the inexplicable can just happen — that's what makes them mysterious and inexplicable! So, the problem can't be avoided by simply labelling the stages that people are at in their relationship with God, and that's all Timpe has at this point. Consider an analogy. We know that old people can't grow new teeth. But suppose it were mysterious and inexplicable how babies grew teeth. If this were true, we wouldn't be able

to rule out old people growing new teeth; after all, the process by which babies grow teeth is (we have assumed) mysterious and inexplicable, so we can't rule it occurring with old people. It simply doesn't help to point out that babies and old people are at different stages of development.

Thus, Timpe's account of primal sin actually undermines his account of heavenly freedom. He cannot accept the traditional view of heaven, because he cannot accept the redeemed can both have free will and be incapable of sinning. As I've argued, the process by which sin enters the world is mysterious, so there's no way to rule that it could enter the world again even via apparently perfected human agents. It won't help to distinguish between good and perfected human agents, and then to claim that humans are created good but not perfected in the hope that this will ensure that 'perfected' human agents can't sin. This, again, just labels the stages of development. Without an account that renders primal sin non-mysterious and explicable, there is nothing to rule out the possibility of even 'perfected' human agents sinning in heaven. As I've argued, the mysterious and the inexplicable can pop up anywhere; they do not play by our rules; they are unpredictable by nature. Since heavenly sin is just as mysterious and inexplicable as primal sin, it remains possible that it occurs.

This problem also infects Timpe's account of damned freedom. This account runs parallel to his account of heavenly freedom. On Timpe's account, the damned have free will, but cannot escape hell because it is not psychologically possible for them to turn back towards God. But if it's mysterious and inexplicable how sin and evil entered the world, then it seems plausible that goodness can enter the world in an equally mysterious fashion. So it seems possible that one of the damned choose to perform a good action, choose to turn herself back towards, chooses to refrain from resisting grace, or some such. Hellish goodness, then, seems possible, even if it is mysterious and inexplicable. Given this, Timpe cannot accept the Minimal Traditional Doctrine of Hell — something has to go.

This objection isn't devastating for Timpe qua Christian or qua monotheist. There is ample room for him to modify his account of heaven or hell to accommodate the possibility of people leaving heaven and hell. But this will run counter the traditional doctrine and views that he sets out to show is consistent. So this objection is devastating to this consistency project.

Despite his project not being successful, Timpe's book is still worth reading. There is no other source that so expansively catalogues a wide variety of literature in both free will and philosophical theology.

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Aaron Rizzieri: *Pragmatic Encroachment, Religious Belief and Practice*. Palgrave 2013.

Consider a person with strongly held religious convictions. Suppose these convictions are based, to a large extent, on religious experiences that this person has undergone — experiences that he finds difficult to articulate or explain, but in which he took himself to be in direct contact with God. Suppose this person puts these convictions into action — stridently expressing them, urging others away from alternative religious views, acting in ways that seem intolerant, judgmental, self-righteous, etc. While we might condemn such actions as immoral, we may also criticise them for being *epistemically* irresponsible or negligent; this person doesn't know that his religious experiences are genuine, or even have any evidence for thinking so. As such, he ought to be less *presumptuous* — perhaps in his beliefs, certainly in his actions.

When we criticise such actions as epistemically negligent, though, we typically take it for granted that the believer's experiences are not genuine or, at the very least, are unlikely to be genuine. Now suppose, for a moment, that there really *is* a God, that this person really *has* been in direct contact with God and that his religious beliefs are all *true*. In a world like this — which may be very different from how we take the actual world to be — would it still be negligent for this person to act as he does? Or, to ask this in another way, are this person's actions negligent *even by his own lights*? The answer, I think, is not straightforward. This is one of the questions that Aaron Rizzieri addresses in *Pragmatic Encroachment, Religious Belief and Practice*. He answers with an emphatic 'yes'.

'Pragmatic encroachment' in epistemology is the idea that whether a belief counts as knowledge or as justified can depend on pragmatic factors

such as what is at stake for the believer, even if all other factors are held constant. Despite having pride of place in the title, what is central to Rizzieri's book is not this idea *per se*, but another that is closely related to it: That there are intimate links between justified belief and rational, non-negligent action. Rizzieri dubs the following principles EA and ENA (for 'epistemic action' and 'epistemically negligent action' I think):

– If S justifiably believes P then S is rational to act as if P is true.

– If S justifiably believes P then S is not negligent in acting as if P is true.

(they are introduced on pages 18 and 63 respectively and mentioned in the introduction on page 2).

Rizzieri attempts to wring various consequences from these kinds of principles, both for epistemology in general and for the epistemology of religion in particular. In the first chapter, Rizzieri sets out a case for EA and for other principles linking justification to action. In chapter 2, EA is used to furnish a new argument against the possibility of justifiably believing in the occurrence of miracles. In chapter 3 Rizzieri uses EA and ENA to criticise externalist approaches to justification. These criticisms, along with others, are turned against Plantinga's generous, externalist epistemology of religion in chapter 4. In chapter 5, Rizzieri sets out the kind of internalist approach to justification that he takes EA and ENA to mandate. In the final chapter, he argues against the permissive, pragmatist epistemology of religion associated with William James. As this summary suggests, the general lesson that emerges is somewhat discouraging for the epistemology of religion — for Rizzieri, these justification-action principles ultimately make it more difficult to maintain that religious beliefs are justified. But there is a more positive message here too — even if we lack justification for believing religious propositions, Rizzieri suggests that *hope* may be a reasonable attitude to adopt towards them, and may form the basis for a more open, less prepossessed, kind of religious faith.

I will focus here on Rizzieri's arguments against externalist approaches to justification, and to the justification of religious beliefs in particular. Consider a very simple externalist theory — a version of process reliabilism according to which a belief is justified iff it is formed by a process that reli-

ably leads to true beliefs. According this theory, in order for a belief to be justified, one doesn't need to *know* that the process by which it was formed is reliable or to have *verified* that it is reliable etc. — it is enough that it actually *be* reliable. One standard complaint against theories of this kind is that, even if a belief is formed by a process that is actually reliable, it seems irresponsible or negligent to hold on to the belief if one has not gone to the trouble of verifying that the process is reliable. One standard response to this complaint is to insist that notions of responsibility or negligence cannot be legitimately applied to beliefs, since beliefs lie beyond our voluntary control. It is here that Rizzieri's justification-action principles come into play. Whether or not beliefs can be described as negligent, actions certainly can. According to Rizzieri, even if a belief is formed by a reliable process, it may be negligent to act upon it if one has not gone to the trouble of verifying that the process is reliable. It then follows, via ENA, that the belief is not justified, contrary to the reliabilist theory under consideration (see chapter 3, partic. sections II and IVA, chapter 5, section IID). This is an intriguing way of arguing against externalism — and it does, I think, succeed in circumventing one kind of externalist comeback.

As I noted, the externalist theory I'm considering here is a very simple one and most externalists would wish to defend theories that are a good deal more complicated and nuanced. In a way, though, the precise externalist conditions that are placed on justification are of little consequence for present purposes — provided it is sufficient that these externalist conditions simply are met, and one need not know or verify that they are met, the dialectic plays out in much the same way.

How does this bear on questions about the justification of religious beliefs? If a person's religious experiences are genuine, and they do reliably reveal truths about God then, according to externalists, religious beliefs based on these experiences could be justified. For Rizzieri, though, this cannot be right — unless a person has evidence that his religious experiences are genuine and reliably reveal truths about God, it would be negligent for him to act on his religious beliefs in which case, by ENA, they are not justified. It's not difficult to think of situations in which we would condemn, as epistemically negligent, actions resulting from religious beliefs based upon religious experiences. But, in order for Rizzieri's argument to work, this

condemnation must survive even the supposition that these religious experiences are genuine and do reliably reveal truths about God — otherwise there is no conflict with what externalist theories predict. This brings us back to the question with which I opened: If we suppose, for a moment, that this religious believer really has been in contact with God, and his religious beliefs are true, would it *still* be right to condemn him as negligent when he acts upon these beliefs?

While principles like ENA clearly do have significance for debates over externalist approaches to justification and to the justification of religious beliefs in particular, Rizzieri may, in the end, overplay his hand here. Contrary to what he suggests, ENA does not force us to give up on externalism about justification — it merely forces us to be consistent in our treatment of justification and of epistemic negligence. More precisely, it forces us to adopt a picture on which facts about whether religious beliefs are justified and facts about whether it is negligent to act on religious beliefs are tethered to the same underlying factors, be they internal or external.

While I am not convinced that justification-action principles have quite the significance that Rizzieri finds in them, it is clear that exploring the epistemic and religious consequences of these principles is an intriguing and worthwhile project. There is much in this book that deserves careful thought and discussion. It should be of considerable interest to those working in the epistemology of religion and to many working in mainstream epistemology.

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Brian Leiter: *Why Tolerate Religion?*. Princeton University Press 2013.

Reasons for tolerating religion are not specific to religion but apply to all claims of conscience. Such is the central thesis that underlies Brian Leiter's book. The practical conclusion that he draws from that principle is that individuals with claims of religious conscience have no special right to request exemptions from generally applicable laws. In fact, unless their claims are

not burden-shifting, they should be rather subject to the No Exemptions approach, alongside the individuals with the 'merely' secular claims of conscience. In brief, Leiter's answer to the title question is that, if the state is to *tolerate* religion at all, it should do so only due to the ability of a particular claimer to prove his or her entitlement, not based on anything that has to do with religion as such.

The book is arranged in five sections. Chapter 1 examines the nature of the moral ideal of principled toleration as opposed to merely pragmatic ('Hobbesian') compromise, on the one hand, and indifference or neutrality, on the other. The author also outlines moral and epistemic arguments for such an ideal and the limits of toleration indicated by harm to others and damage of the public order. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to the question, 'What makes religious claims of conscience distinctive?' Leiter comes up with the two key-marks of religion, namely categoricity of religious commands and religious belief's insulation from evidence, and argues that none of these features warrants singling out religion for toleration. What is more, he cautions that favouring special legal solicitude towards religious beliefs and practices may encourage precisely this conjunction of categorical fervour and its basis in epistemic indifference, which he obviously disapproves. In chapter 4, the concept of *respect* for religion, conceived as the moral foundation of religious liberty, is considered as an alternative to the ideal of toleration. Leiter makes a distinction between a mere 'recognition respect', which he basically identifies with toleration, and 'appraisal respect', tantamount to esteem or reverence, and he concludes that the religious belief system can hardly justify the latter attitude. Finally, chapter 5 argues that, regardless of the nature of the claims of conscience (religious or irreligious), there should be no exemptions to general laws with neutral purposes if shifting burdens or risks onto others is involved. In addition, Leiter maintains that a tolerant state could, in principle, be either a religious or antireligious one.

This provocative book provides the reader with comprehensive framework for probing the phenomenon of preferential treatment of religion in both law and public discourse. Those interested in political philosophy and constitutional theory will certainly find it stimulating. However, as a philosopher of religion and theologian, I cannot remain uncritical of Leiter's reflection on the features that distinguish religious belief from other kinds of belief

potentially warranting toleration. Before turning to my critique of his reductionist — as I will argue — approach to religion, let me first acknowledge both the general strengths and shortcomings of his analysis.

Once labelled 'the most powerful man in academic philosophy' (mainly due to his famous rankings), Leiter guides us steadfastly through the jungle of definitions, distinctions, and controversies surrounding the concept of principled toleration. As an illustration one could mention his criticism of the ideal of neutrality as being inconsistent with an inevitable state's commitment to a (however understood) 'Vision of the Good', and thus illusionary. He masterfully depicts the discrepancies between legal practices characteristic of different states, with an emphasis on American 'viewpoint discrimination', British establishment of a religious Vision of the Good (Anglicanism), and French laïcité. Those who have read Leiter's previous books — notably *Objectivity in Law and Morals* (2001) and *Nietzsche and Morality* (2007) — will certainly appreciate the same critical insight, wry humour, and remarkable clarity with which he grasps the challenges faced by Western democracies. *Why Tolerate Religion?* undeniably witnesses to his philosophical acuity and impressive background in legal scholarship.

Minor limitations of Leiter's work, in terms of a broadly understood methodology, can be found in slight inconsistency in defining toleration ('putting up with the *existence* of the other, differing, group' [p. 8] in contrast to, actually purported by the author, 'putting up with [*beliefs and*] *practices* of which one disapproves' [p. 3]) as well as in the lack of terminological distinction between 'tolerance' and 'toleration' (the latter is understood by certain scholars as tolerance backed by law or judicial precedent, while Leiter happens to use the terms interchangeably [cf. p. 19]). It is also regrettable that the author does not refer to other, more diverse, case studies, leaving us basically with the textbook example of the Sikh boy who was allowed by the Canadian court to wear his *kirpan*, a dagger symbolising religious devotion, in the public school.

However, the major deficiency of Leiter's argumentation, I would say, consists in his reductionist and arbitrary treatment of the distinguishing features of religious belief. While reading chapters 2 and 3, one can sense that Leiter is no longer *in his field*. The reasons he gives to prove that there is no principled argument for tolerating religion qua religion are likely to strike the

critically thinking, impartial reader (if such a thing exists!) as theoretically weak and ideologically biased.

Leiter seems to impose on religion the criteria relevant, strictly speaking, only to science; in this sense, his interpretation of religious belief's insulation from evidence brings to mind the early Wittgenstein and logical positivism. To realise that there is a wealth of philosophical alternatives, suffice it to mention John Hick's concept of rational proof *without evidence* or the late Wittgenstein, for that matter, whose theory of language games maintains that there is something special about the very linguistic framework of religious believers (and scientifically understood evidence definitely does not belong to it). The author correctly assumes that a *metaphysics of ultimate reality*, involved in religious beliefs, neither claims support from empirical evidence, nor purports to be constrained by such. That leads him, however, to the oversimplifying conclusion that metaphysics of ultimate reality is but a 'variation on the idea that religious belief is insulated from evidence' (p. 47). By deeming religious views on the 'ultimate nature' of things insignificant for his enterprise he deprives it of a promising candidate for a distinguishing feature of religious belief that could, at least potentially, grant it a special claim for toleration. If he took that aspect of religious belief for what it is, instead of wrongly reducing religious metaphysics to its epistemological ramifications, he might have found it more meaningful for his investigation. Several of Leiter's remarks suggest that *rational* cannot be conceived of differently than in conjunction with *verifiable* (i.e., empirically provable). If that was the case, religious belief would indeed have to be deemed *irrational* and, as the author puts it, epistemically indifferent. But what about categories such as *trans-rational* or *non-empirically provable*? They seem not to fit his somewhat positivist outlook.

The only challenge to his view that Leiter acknowledges in his book (and rightly so!) is that posed by Thomism and natural theology in general. Unfortunately, he is highly dismissive of both of them reducing them to 'post-hoc rationalization' which fails to follow the evidence where it really leads, manipulating it instead to fit preordained ends (p. 40). One may wonder whether the author of this accusation has actually read *Summa Theologica* or simply repeats the stereotypes functioning in certain academic circles. He also states that 'it is doubtful… whether these intellectualist traditions capture the char-

acter of popular religious belief, the typical epistemic attitudes of religious believers' (p. 39). Even if he is right (which I am not too sure about, after all — whether someone likes it or not — Thomism is constitutive of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition which can hardly be reduced to 'high' academic theology), bracketing the classical theism should by no means follow. The fact that popular faith tends to be more 'fideistic' than 'rationalist' in no way prevents Catholics (to stick with the example) from defending the view of the compatibility and complementarity between faith and reason. In his criticism of John Finnis's Thomistic interpretation of 'norm of rationality' (pp. 86-90), Leiter raises a few accurate objections, but again it seems that he discards its relevance to the issue of toleration/respect of religion all too hastily. Expressions such as 'irrational' and 'long-discredited' or 'everyone outside the relevant sectarian group' indicate clearly where his philosophical sympathies lie.

To sum up, it has to be established how Leiter's view of religious belief is related to his central thesis. In many cases one is inclined to agree with the disapproval of singling out religious liberty for special legal protections. But, as the author himself points out, fair legal solutions require case-by-case judgments in light of the prevailing cultural norms of the communities affected, since often we deal with the differences of degree, rather than those of kind. On the one hand, the selective application of toleration to the conscience of *only* religious believers is not morally defensible. On the other hand, religious claims of conscience, when juxtaposed with the secular ones, appear generally as more deeply integrated into the cultural and normative practices of societies and therefore provide a potentially richer evidential base for assessing their genuineness. When it comes to matters of religion, one can appeal to the *regulatory core* of religious doctrine to rule out certain claims as inconsistent with it or even manipulative, i.e., attempting to manoeuvre religion into justifying practices that are de facto unjustifiable. The evaluation of the individual or group claim that is not backed by the tradition and community of faith seems to involve more vagueness and relativism. In any case, Leiter's conclusions — however seemingly plausible — are unconvincing due to the major flaw in his argument. As he admits, there is no reason to think that principled toleration demands tolerance of religious beliefs in particular *provided* he is right about the features that distinguish religious belief (p. 54). If he is not (or if his reflection on what makes a claim of conscience distinctively 'religious'

is fragmentary and inconclusive), then the question that he tackles: 'Is there any *special* reason to tolerate belief whose distinctive character is defined by the categoricity of its demands conjoined with its insulation from evidence?' (pp. 60-61) must be simply considered irrelevant.

The above critique is by no means aimed at discouraging potential readers from taking interest in Leiter's book. Quite the contrary, it is highly recommended to all those interested in the relationship between religion and the state. It will certainly leave its readers with much to ponder.

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Patrick McNamara: *The Neuroscience of Religious Experience*. Cambridge University Press 2009.

The emerging literature on neuroscience and religious experience is thought-provoking, to say the least, and may well revolutionize our understanding of religious experience. The focus in this review will be on religious experiences and the relevant neuroscientific structures and processes, as well as the central claims made about religious experience itself and its relationship with such structures and processes; important work in the book on the 'self', practices and rituals, various concepts of God, ecstatic states and so on, and the things that may be external to, or *follow or flow from*, religious experience, will not be the focus of this review, due to necessary restrictions on length.

McNamara argues that religious experience highlights the relationship between oneself and God: 'self and God are intimately connected at the cognitive and psychological levels' and the 'level of experience can be measured to some extent by looking at brain and cognitive mediation of religious experience' (p. 80). If this is correct, and if religious experience can be understood in terms of this kind of relationship, then neuroscience might illuminate the nature of this relationship. Moreover, if certain regions of the brain are 'implicated' in religious *experience*, then one might find some clues about the functions of religious experience also (p. 81). Now much depends on the question

that is being addressed here. For example, is the highlighting of this relationship an answer to the question of what religious experience is (the nature of religious experience) or an answer to the question of what comprises religious experience or an answer to the question of the functions of religious experience. Much depends too on what *implicated* means; if religious experience involves brain (neural) processes and some thinking, and if brain regions are *implicated* in thinking, then these regions of the brain will be implicated in religious experience, to some extent. But what would be true of the neural processes associated with thinking would not necessarily be true of the religious experience as a whole, since it is an experience that a person reports (not merely an act or process of thinking). Attention to potentially tricky language is crucial.

A number of cases are presented. The suggestion is that the right prefrontal and temporal lobes are 'indeed involved in religious expression' (pp. 87-88). This may be true. But there is some ambiguity again: 'involved' in what sense? (Thinking is a part of religious experience as a whole, possibly, in so far as neural and brain structures are associated with thinking and inasmuch as thinking occurs at some stage in a religious experience; but even so, a religious experience is not the same thing, logically or empirically, as 'religious expression'.) So what is true of 'religious expression' (such as someone uttering the words, 'I love God and God loves me!') need not be necessarily true of 'religious experience', as an experience of this kind often goes well beyond mere 'expression'.

McNamara argues that 'the sense of Self, language meanings, and abstract visual analysis are all handled by the same region of the neocortical networks that gives rise to religious experience' (p. 88). So it would seem that our sense of who we are, the things we say and mean when we speak about this, and 'abstract visual analysis' correspond with (the meaning of 'handled' is not entirely clear here) 'the same region' that 'gives rise' to religious experience. But in what sense does this region 'give rise' to an experience, let alone a religious one?

If 'gives rise' means 'causes' then there seems to be a confusion here between *the* cause of an experience in a subject (which is religious) and a cause of some kind of signalling and processing in relation to the thought processes that may occur when the subject is having the experience itself, if one grants that such an experience can be a genuine one. However, it is difficult to see how observing increased oxygenation or activation in certain brain regions or neural

circuits can show that the signalling and processing are actually, and on their own, 'giving rise' to the experience itself.

The problem here is the slipperiness of 'experience' which the book rarely, if ever, slows; 'experience' normally means encountering or seeing or hearing or perceiving (and so on) something, such as an external object or phenomenon (of course not all religious experiences are like this, but many are, especially in the Judaeo-Christian tradition); the fact that one is having such an experience then does not necessarily mean that neural processes and structures in the brain alone are 'giving rise' to religious experience, and certainly not in the sense of generating the religious experience, for the imaging technologies do not actually *show* this relation in any kind of obvious or clear way. The observer, to be sure, does not *see* one thing *giving rise* to another thing (that is, a religious experience) in this context; what the neuroscientist sees is a pattern of oxygenation or activation (and other such things) for example, in a region of the brain, and then interprets the correlation or correspondence in a certain (pun not intended!) kind of way.

But the precise nature and meaning of the correlation or correspondence is open to more than one interpretation. One cannot deduce from the existence of such a correlation or correspondence that neural signalling and processing, and *only these*, are causing or creating ('giving rise' to) religious experience. A lot more care needs to be taken with the inferential and interpretive steps here in order to avoid leaping to unjustified conclusions. It is important to be more precise and clear at this stage.

McNamara argues that 'the literature on TLE-related religiosity gives us an initial clue as to brain circuits that normally handle religious material — namely, the right sided temporal and prefrontal networks as it is these networks that attach religious concepts to the impulses originating in the amygdala' (p. 93). This may be true but there are significant problems. The question of who, or what, 'attaches' concepts to impulses needs to be explained clearly. One might argue that it is the thinking, reflective subject who 'attaches' concepts to things, or better, employs concepts to make sense of things, even if this is not the whole story about the relation between concepts and impulses or, better, perceptions and more broadly, experience (consider these three difficulties: what do our *observations* tell us about the connection between impulses and concepts in certain networks in the brain, how exactly does a

network in the brain 'attach' a 'concept' to an 'impulse', and what sorts of observations would show this to be the actual process, and the only one or the main one in terms of religious experience?)

McNamara makes an analogous claim: he notes 'the extent and role of the hippocampus and the amygdale in *creating* religious content' (p. 93). This is ambiguous; it suggests either that these structures are crucial in 'creating religious content' (emphasis added) or that they are primarily responsible in some sense for 'creating' such content. But it is not clear what the relation is between 'religious content' and 'religious experience' (the former could conceivably go well beyond the latter). The question of what 'creates religious content' is also unclear: religious experience is 'created' in the sense, perhaps, of being brought into being by the unfolding relation between a subject, generally conscious, an event or an encounter (or some such thing) and a grasp or an understanding of this relation, as well as (conceivably) a change in one's understanding. It is difficult to see how all of this (and more!) can be accounted for only in relation to brain structures and circuits, and neural phenomena. So an important question arises: are the amygdale and hippocampus active because they are 'creating' religious content or are they active because 'religious content' of some kind is a part of the subject's unfolding (religious) experience and thinking, or indeed, because (for the purposes of argument) an experience of a religious kind is taking place? In our *observations*, do these structures and their activation correlate with the unfolding of an experience of this kind? This question is not an insignificant one.

McNamara is refreshingly open about the fact that the issue here is 'hyperreligiousness' and in 'patients' with 'brain disorders' (p. 105). After considering religious delusions, mania and so on, McNamara concludes that the limbic system and other structures (for example, parts of the basal ganglia and prefrontal cortex) are 'the crucial nodes in a brain circuit that mediates religiosity' (p. 105). There is no attempt here to link rigorously the phenomena of hyperreligiousness associated with some brain disorders, on the one hand, with the phenomena and content of religious experience more generally, which is reported not by patients or by subjects with brain disorders; there is no necessary logical or empirical identity between a patient suffering from a neurodegenerative disease and delusions (who reports having a religious

experience) and a person whose brain functions and circuits are functioning normally, and who reports a religious experience.

A similar question arises a little later. Though it may be true, as McNamara argues (p. 105), that when this circuit 'is stimulated in the right way, you get religious ecstasy' nonetheless the implied analogy between religious experience and religious ecstasy is not demonstrated. So, when the 'circuit is overactivated, you get various forms of religiously tinged aberrations' and 'when limbic and basal ganglia sites play the leading role, you get changes in ritual behaviors as well as increased interest in religious practices such as prayer and other rituals' (p. 106). There is at least one question that arises and it does seem to be part of an emerging but problematic picture: 'religiously tinged aberrations', 'changes in ritual behaviours', 'prayer and other rituals' are not necessary parts of religious experience. To his credit, McNamara seems to be aware of some of the limits here: 'beyond this meager summation, little more can be said with any degree of confidence' (p. 106). Indeed.

McNamara then turns to 'healthy' individuals. He discusses functional imaging techniques (SPECT, PET, fMRI and so on) and the study of brain function in 'normal, living humans' so they might shed further light on 'phenomena considered unique to human beings, like religious behaviours' (p. 107). The studies 'converge on the conclusion that the circuit of brain sites that we identified as crucial for religiosity from the clinical data (orbitofrontal, right temporal, limbic system… the serotonin and dopamine systems, etc.) also appear consistently in the neuroimaging findings of healthy persons performing religious practices. This is a remarkable fact' (p. 127). Such structures 'all appear to undergo increased levels of activation during the religious practice' (p. 127). One can see why this 'fact' seems to be 'remarkable', though it should be noted that the 'fact' concerns 'religiosity' and 'practice', a very broad set of terms, and not specifically, religious experience. One would indeed expect activation levels to increase if one is *practicing* something intently and one's brain circuits are functional (for example, a ritual). But what needs to be established is that such *practicing* is necessarily related to, and is a necessary part of the nature of, religious experience.

McNamara offers a welcome 'tentative synthesis' (p. 127). He claims that 'there is a network of brain regions that consistently are activated when a person performs a religious act' (p. 127). There is a 'circuit that mediates reli-

giousness' and McNamara seems to think that there is a correlation between this kind of work and the work of authors who study 'potential brain correlates of religiosity' (p. 129). Their work is based on an 'impressive' body of data on 'temporal lobe epileptics who exhibit hyperreligiosity' (p. 129). These provide models of 'brain correlates of religious experience' and they are all helpful (p. 130). Yet McNamara adds, wisely, 'we need additional data gathering… and model building efforts in this area' (p. 130). We also need a stronger focus on the precise nature of the relationship, if any, between 'religious acts', 'religiousness', 'religiosity', 'hyperreligiosity' and religious experience.

He argues justifiably that 'we have no way of knowing, therefore, whether the clinical and neuroimaging data are giving us a biased picture of the true state of affairs with respect to brain mediation of religiosity' (p. 130); but it is also difficult to see how even a better picture could demonstrate that what is true of religiosity in general is also true of religious experience, especially if the study is focussed on brain circuitry and function in epileptics. McNamara repeats a key point (and a key ambiguity re-emerges): there is a 'consistent set of brain structures that modulate religiosity' and when these structures are 'chemically addressed' they may act as a 'single functional unit' (p. 130). But do they 'modulate' 'religiosity' in general, 'mediate' it in general, or just provide evidence of neural correlates of something which may or may not be genuinely 'religious'? There is much to be disentangled.

McNamara turns to the neurochemistry of 'religiosity'. The 'religion circuit' is regulated by chemicals and the activity of neurochemicals in the brain is influenced by a number of things ('Mind', emotion, cognition and so on, p.137). So 'it would not be surprising to find that manipulating brain levels of selected neurochemicals in selected brain sites would yield religious experiences' (p. 137). 'Chemically activating' this 'circuit', then, '*produces*' (emphasis added) religious experiences (in susceptible individuals) that are quite similar to religious experiences 'induced by other means such as devotional practices, ascetical practices, traditional religious practices and so forth' (p. 137).

Well, it is not clear here that it would be unsurprising. 'Traditional religious experiences' do not seem to be 'produced' by chemical activation *alone*. 'Produces' is quite ambiguous here: one could mean some kind of essential causal efficacy or that it is because of chemical activation, amongst other things, that religious experience unfolds; or that chemical activation plays a

fundamental role in its emergence. Not all who have a 'religious experience' claim that their 'religious circuit' is 'producing' it, in the sense of 'causing' it; there is a fundamental confusion here between some external object that acts as a cause (for example, a vision people see or a voice people hear) and some internal (neural) circuit that becomes (more) active during this kind of experience. The question that needs to be addressed here is whether the 'religious circuit' is 'producing' the experience or whether the experience and the corresponding activation of the circuit constitute a demonstrative and *sufficient* causal relationship.

Things are made more problematic when one considers that someone (whose brain circuits are functioning normally) who has an authentic 'religious experience' would not generally say 'the chemical activation of a brain circuit is producing this religious experience that I am now having'. This would sound odd. And they would probably not say: 'to explain and understand this religious experience that I have had, it is sufficient to explain and understand the chemical activation going on inside me at the same time'. This too sounds odd. Such utterances would not mean that they are right, but would mean rather that an understanding of the whole content of the experience and its meaning would go well beyond an understanding of images of their brain or of neural networks and activity. The *conscious*, *experiential* and *meaning-making* dimensions of the experience combined, if it is authentic, would tend to take us beyond physical structures, neurons, chemicals, chemical activation and brain circuits, and talk of only these kinds of things. In the case of a genuine religious experience, which we, say, witness with functioning imaging technologies, it would also sound odd if that person said: 'this is what I am experiencing now and these are the chemical interactions and neural circuits that are producing it'. There is a risk of committing the fallacy of composition.

Of course, strictly speaking, they/we cannot always know, and the neuroscientist also cannot always know, what a person's 'religious circuit' is doing when some religious experiences occur (for example, on a mountain) or what the precise nature of the relationship is between activated circuits, chemicals and the content of the experience as a whole. If religious experience is, to some extent, an *experience of* something, and if one cannot have an experience of one's own 'religious circuit' under the influence of chemical activa-

tion, then it seems perplexing to claim that religious experience is 'produced' (only or essentially) by mere chemical activation.

The point can be reinforced: if we have a person who has had an authentic religious experience (say, on a mountain in relation to an object, on Sunday), and if we could chemically activate their 'religious circuit' now, it would certainly be surprising to find the same 'religious experience' unfolding. This would suggest that there is more to the initial experience than the mere conjunction of certain chemicals, neural networks and brain circuits. In short, these neurophysiological phenomena would play a role, conceivably, but would not be sufficient for us to give a sufficiently comprehensive causal account of what is 'producing' the experience or what it is that is contributing to the emergence of the experience as a whole. The precise nature of this kind of causality cannot, strictly speaking, be *observed or observed wholly* at the neural or biochemical level, neither by the neuroscientist nor by the person who is having the experience, nor by a witness nearby, when an authentic religious experience is taking place, or even when it is being replicated. So, the proposition that 'the chemical activators themselves in conjunction with certain brain circuits are "producing" the experience' seems not only a little imprecise, but also genuinely underdetermined.

If all of this is correct the role played by chemical activators becomes quite questionable if the focus is on the things that 'produce' the experience. One could argue that the chemical activators are producing an effect (of some kind at the neural level or in a brain circuit) but that effect and the (authentic) religious experience need not be one and the same thing. The effect in question here is a *chemical and physiological* one. It presumably *accompanies* an experience (that is to say, when one observes brain or neural circuits in a subject who is undergoing an authentic *religious* experience, there is some clear evidence of chemical activation taking place though there is no physiological evidence at that moment necessarily that the experience is being understood in a certain way, for example, as a religious experience rather than as a merely irregular one) without a range of external (non-chemical) things (objects, phenomena, relations, communication, and so on), coming into play. It is therefore difficult to see how we can get from the mere fact of a chemical activation to a full-fledged religious experience. If chemical activators alone

are sufficient to *produce* religious experiences, there would presumably be no need for such external factors at all.

McNamara offers a 'provisional model of neurochemical regulation of religious experiences' (p. 143): a religious experience begins with a 'reduction in intentionality or a turning over of the will to God' (p. 143), this reduction is 'transient in normal religious experiences'; after this reduction or suspension, 'images and affects' follow. Their meaning is grasped and 'insight and gratitude/joy' occur (p. 143). He 'contends' that many religious experiences do contain all of these elements, but fails to note that some non-religious experiences do too. It may be true that this kind of model can help one 'link religious experiences with brain sites' and processes, but then again, other (non-religious) experiences can also, so long as they are genuine experiences, have some sort of 'reduction in intentionality', some order of 'images and affects', some meaning and some insight or joy or gratitude, and so on. The elements in the model do seem to be insufficient, and some may be unnecessary. Further work needs to be done to produce a more rigorous model and a deeper understanding of religious experience and the things that make it distinctive.

The reduction in intentionality may have clear neurochemical pathways (for example reduced 'serotoninergic activity in the prefrontal and anterior temporal cortices', p. 143) and the suspension of intentionality may correspond with transient reductions in dopamine activity in prefrontal structures 'at the onset of religious experiences'. The task however is not to show that this reduction happens in some cases; the task is to show that it happens in cases where religious experience begins to occur (p. 144). He contends that when the physiological changes are 'extreme', the condition 'mimics psychosis' (p. 144). The strangeness of this observation does not attract deep analysis. The analogy between psychosis and religious experience is not examined with sufficient clarity or rigor; as a consequence a number of questions arise, for example, the suggestion that the difference is a question of degree rather than of kind is quite problematic. Taken literally, it implies that there is a continuum between religious experiences and psychosis in so far as these physiological changes are concerned. But it is clear — and McNamara grasps this point — that not all who have a religious experience have psychosis. (Certainly, the analogy is not demonstrated.) This much is clear because psychotic

states tend to entail a disjunction between the subject and reality (as we know it), and McNamara himself observes the distinction between 'normal, living humans' (p. 107) and their understanding of reality, on the one hand, and psychotic patients and the way in which their understanding of reality differs markedly from the understanding of 'normal, living humans', on the other hand.

Finally, the studies cited by McNamara (from 1975 onwards) often leave something to be desired; for example, they often have less than 35 subjects; many have less than 10 subjects (hardly a sufficient sample from which to draw convincing conclusions about religious experience). Some studies do not examine a religious experience at all, or only a meditative state, or listening to a biblical text or to a 'religious statement', or a recollection (for example, of a 'mystical state'); some examine schizophrenia or 'hyperreligiosity', or prayer. There is some potential for confusion here. There are important philosophical questions that are not really explored: for example, the extent to which a subject can believe that they are having a certain kind of experience, and say so, and yet be mistaken; or the question of whether the subject's experience (and description of it) can be *entirely* a question of bodies, chemicals, (neuro-)physical circuits and structures; and so on. That said though, this is an important book and one of the most engaging and thoughtful studies of its kind. It is to be hoped that a further volume, in which these questions and others can be addressed, will be forthcoming.