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GUEST EDITORIAL: ANALYTIC THEOLOGY AND THE NATURE OF GOD

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In 2017 we organized an international conference in Munich on the topic: "Analytic Theology and the Nature of God — Advancing and Challenging Classical Theism", which was generously sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation. For practical reasons, some of the talks given at this conference had to be placed in the previous issue of this journal (Bishop, Bracken, Perszyk, Ventimiglia)[1], but all nine of them are meant to form a thematic unity. The five papers in this issue explore various alternatives to classical theism. Alternative concepts of God have rarely been discussed in analytic philosophy of religion. By classical theism we mean the view that God is a substance that exists totally independent of creation and is characterized by the predicates of perfection: perfect power, perfect goodness, perfect knowledge. Neo- or non-classical versions of theism include panentheism, process theology, and theories developed in the tradition of German Idealism, and more. They often reject substance ontology and re-interpret the perfection predicates.

Panentheism, for example, is the view that the world is not totally separated from God but is actually "in" God. The exact definition of the "en" (or "in") in the concept "Panentheism" has sparked a lively debate. Panentheism has been challenged by the claim that the position is ill defined. Philip Clayton defends panentheism as a research program. He argues that there are three distinct ways of demarcating panentheism, and that, accordingly, distinct "sub-programs" of panentheistic research can be distinguished. Clayton develops a specific answer to the question in which sense the world exists "in" God. If metaphysical space is an attribute of God, then God must be present at all points in space. If metaphysical space is God's space, then the physical space is not 'outside him' but by definition within him. God remains the absolute framework for all talk of space and time, thus allowing the world to be in God and God to be immanent in the world.

1 Cf. *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 4 (2018). doi:10.24204/ejpr.v10i4.

Anna Case-Winters argues that most problematic habit of thought in classical theism is the assumption that God is radically separate from the world. This separation leads to a desacralization and objectification of nature. According to Case-Winters a more extended conversation between Christian theology and process thought can be seen to be fruitful in rethinking the relation of God and the world and the deeper meaning of incarnation. This alternative understanding of God "in all things" has the potential to radically reshape our thinking about the natural world, its value, and the role of human beings in it and thus opens up the possibility of overcoming anthropocentrism. Also, Whitehead's "dipolar theism" allows for reconceiving divine perfection as embracing two poles, manifesting each Divine attribute in dual ways of perfection. God can, for example, be both changing and unchanging without being less perfect. Finally, she also argues that God's being related to the world internally leads to a version of panentheism. The whole of Whitehead's metaphysics is an attempt to understand how one entity can be in another one without losing its alterity.

Johannes Stoffers argues that Cusanus relativizes classical divine attributes in order not to substantialize God, nor to describe him as an entity among others. Cusanus is able do so because he conceives the absolute as an all-encompassing reality, but does this in a way that remains more traditional or "orthodox" than the more recent systems of neo-classical theism (like process theology). Cusanus argues that God does not need to be diminished ontologically in order to be intimately related to other entities. The idea of divine receptivity, central according to neoclassical theists as, is alien to Cusanus. He stands fast with God's aseity. The absolute, as *non aliud*, is transcendent to everything finite that is to be characterized as *aliud*. Stoffers argues that Cusanus is a panentheist, and that his panentheism is occupying a fruitful middle ground between classical and neoclassical concepts of God.

While Klaus Müller assumes that the solutions of classical theism, especially in the question of theodicy, are not convincing, he sees the most challenging problem for a panentheistic paradigm in the Christian context of God-talk in integrating the trait of personhood in the monistic horizon of this approach. According to him, using the concept of imagination and its logic of an "as if" proves to be a helpful strategy for this challenge. Müller takes reflections by Jürgen Werbick, Douglas Headley, and Volker Gerhardt into

account in order to substantiate the philosophical and theological promises of this solution.

Thomas Schärtl compares the non-standard theistic notion of God as presented by John Bishop and Ken Perszyk in their so-called "euteleological" concept of God with idealistic, especially Hegelian and post-Hegelian, concepts of the Divine. Both frameworks not only share striking similarities, based on their guiding intuitions, but also share notable problems that have already been discussed in 19th century speculative theology. The article offers some proposals to strengthen the euteleological concept of God ontologically — based on insights originating in post-Hegelian discussions. Schärtl sees the question of subjective immortality and the associated metaphysical modifications of the concept of God as a litmus test for Perszyk's and Bishop's approach.

PROSPECTS FOR PANENTHEISM AS RESEARCH PROGRAM

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Abstract. Panentheism is best understood as a philosophical research program. Identifying the core of the research program offers a strong response to the demarcation objection. It also helps focus both objections to and defenses of panentheism — and to show why common objections are not actually criticisms of the position we are defending. The paper also addresses two common criticisms: the alleged inadequacy of panentheism's double "in" specification of the relationship between God and world, and the "double God" objection. Once the research program framework is in place, topics like these become opportunities for panentheists to engage in the kind of careful constructive work in theology and philosophy — historical, analytic, and systematic — that is required for making long-term, positive contributions to our field.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most readers will know the experience of working intensely on a particular philosophical or theological issue over a long period of time — the ontological proof, say, or temporality. What is interestingly different about publishing on panentheism, however, is that one frequently encounters the objection that one's position does not exist. Unlike personal theism or materialist atheism, one is sometimes told, the term panentheism does not actually represent a distinct stance on the nature of the divine. According to the objection, panentheism cannot be sufficiently demarcated from its neighbors to the left and right — often labeled pantheism and classical theism — to stand as a position in its own right.

Of course, it can be perplexing to publish defenses of a position for several decades while having to argue continuously that there is even a position there to defend. Still, the "Demarcation Objection" is an important one, and

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panentheists are well advised to take time to address it. The strange feature of traveling the world as a panentheist, however, is that one spends the other half of one's time addressing the objection that panentheism is deeply wrong. In 2018, for example, a lecture "Against Panentheism" delivered by the analytic theologian Oliver Crisp at multiple universities (as yet unpublished) gave rise to vocal demands that panentheists respond to the Crisp challenge. It would be somewhat paradoxical to be told both that one is not asserting anything and that one is at the same time mistaken.

In the following pages I attempt to address both kinds of objections. I first suggest that panentheism is best understood as a philosophical research program. Identifying the core of the research program offers the best possible response to the demarcation objection. It also helps opponents to formulate more relevant objections and defenders to sharpen their responses to important challenges — and to show why certain claims are not actually criticisms of the position we are defending. Finally, I turn to two of the most frequently heard objections: challenges to the adequacy of panentheism's double "in" specification of the relationship between God and world, and the "double God" objection. Once the research program framework is in place, these two topics become opportunities for panentheists to engage in the kind of careful constructive work in theology and philosophy — historical, analytic, and systematic — that is required for making long-term, positive contributions to our field.

Put differently, my goal is not merely to criticize the critics' claims and offer arguments in its defense (though I will do both), but also to step back from the current debate, better understand why the two sides seem to be talking past each other, and find ways that the two might be able to debate constructively. The demand that panentheism be more sharply defined is closely associated with the demand for a principle of demarcation that will better distinguish panentheism from its closest neighbors. Responding allows us to specify what *kind* of a research program, or *programs*, panentheism is, to name the key interests and goals of its proponents, and to focus on profitable philosophical debates to which our publications give rise. I may or may not convince all readers to play a productive role in criticizing or defending the research program. But I do hope to convince at least some that the term *panentheism* specifies an important region along a continuum, a region well worth the attention of theologians, philosophers of religion, and analytic theologians.

II. HOW NOT TO ARGUE AGAINST PANENTHEISM

It's interesting that many of the more recent critiques focus almost exclusively on the demarcation problem: how is panentheism different from its neighbors? Less often does one find arguments that panentheism is false. The closest approximation are treatments that maintain that panentheism is inconsistent with the scriptures or with the creeds. John Cooper's book is a good example of the former. Cooper argues that any panentheistic God is an "other God," the "God of the philosophers," who is incompatible with the biblical God, and he rejects panentheism for this reason.[1]

If one then assumed that appeals to scriptures are sufficient for adjudicating metaphysical debates, one would have a valid argument for the falsity of panentheism. But for those who dispute this premise, as I do, Cooper's book hardly constitutes a convincing proof.

A more common attack on panentheism is that it is not a position at all. It fails to clearly define its terms, or it fails to be consistent, or the methods for defending it are unacceptable, or it fails to differentiate itself adequately from one of a number of other metaphysical options. If panentheism fails in one or more of these respects, critics claim, it does not constitute a discrete enough position — or perhaps not a position at all! — and can therefore be set aside.

Let's look at two interesting examples in this genre: "The Difficulty with Demarcating Panentheism" by R.T. Mullins, and "Panentheism and Classical Theism" by Benedick Paul Göcke.[2] Both authors are clear that their goal is demarcation not refutation. Göcke writes that "the aim of this paper is not to decide between classical theism and panentheism,"[3] and Mullins closes with the question, "Is panentheism actually a position at all?"[4]

In light of the actual structure of these two articles, however, one might well find their argumentative strategies a bit surprising. Mullins structures his *Sophia* article around an implied rhetorical question — *Can* panentheism

1 John Cooper, *Panentheism — The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Baker Academic, 2006).

2 R.T. Mullins, "The Difficulty with Demarcating Panentheism", *Sophia* 55, no. 3 (2016); and Benedick Paul Göcke, "Panentheism and Classical Theism", *Sophia* 52, no. 1 (2013). See also Göcke, "There Is No Panentheistic Paradigm", *The Heythrop Journal* (2015).

3 See the final paragraph of Göcke, "Panentheism and Classical Theism."

4 This is derived from Mullins' penultimate sentence.

be demarcated from theism and pantheism? — and clearly expects a negative answer. Yet the main contribution of his article is to defend what he takes to be a *successful* proposal for demarcating panentheism from theism and panentheism, a proposal that I think is significant and fruitful. Göcke, who also brackets the truth question, likewise offers his own "modal" answer to the demarcation problem. Note that this is good news for panentheists: if both authors believe that they have found an *actual* satisfactory criterion for demarcation, then clearly it must be *possible* to demarcate.

But another important task arises here that does not seem to be addressed. Both authors acknowledge that multiple versions of panentheism are to be found in the literature. Isn't the challenge then to *find* effective criteria for distinguishing stronger from weaker versions and then to *apply* the criteria in order to separate the sheep from the goats? (Isn't this what philosophers do for a living?) It's therefore somewhat puzzling that the two authors set up their discussion of the issue in such a way as to imply that the plurality of options is in and of itself bad news. Rather than proceeding to apply their criteria to a range of panentheisms — cleaning up the mess, as it were — they treat the diversity of options as if it were already a presumptive defeater for panentheism. But multiplicity is no more problematic for one who possesses a selection criterion than a wall of books is for the one who knows which book she wants to read.

There is a second problematic argument lurking just below the surface in these two articles. It is the implication that "a position is as bad as its worst defender." Not surprisingly, one finds terrible presentations and defenses of panentheism in the philosophical literature. Authors misdefine the term, misstate its sources, publish invalid arguments, contradict themselves, and in general wreak havoc upon the world. But arguing poorly is not a virus that spreads only among panentheists; embarrassingly weak versions of classical theism and pantheism abound as well. The fact that there are sloppy advocates for a position does not prove it false — or, for that matter, un-demarcatable.

In fact, the antidote is not difficult to administer. One selects the strongest options that she can find in the literature, explains to her readers why they are the most promising contenders, and then assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each one. Just as one would not conclude that, say, atheism as a whole fails because some of its proponents are lacking in philosophical sophistication, so also here we make the most long-term progress by focusing our critical attention on the strongest, most promising contenders.

II. WHY THERE IS NOT JUST ONE NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT CRITERION FOR PANENTHEISM

In the sciences there is often more than one theory that is consistent with the sum total of the available data. In philosophy, and especially in the philosophy of religion, the under-determination of theory by data is even more pronounced. Philosophers of science have long argued that even scientific explanations are interest-relative.[5]

What is true in the empirical disciplines is even more true in matters of religion. Clearly one's view of the status of Scripture will affect her view of the nature of the God-world relation. But the connections are actually much more fine-tuned; even one's particular hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture will influence her results. Kevin Vanhoozer's divine speech act theory and emphasis on the multiple genres of Scripture yields different results than does a propositionalist approach; a salvation-historical (*heilsgeschichtliche*) hermeneutic yields different results than a liberationist approach; and so forth.

The contemporary social, spiritual, ethical, ecclesial, or political issues one wishes to address will also influence one's preferences for describing the relationship between God and world. One's theological location likewise matters. Niels Gregersen understands panentheism differently because of his commitment to "Deep Incarnation"; Marjorie Suchocki comes to panentheism from her location as a process theologian; and Moltmann's espousal of panentheism in *God in Creation* is influenced by kenotic theologies (and, interesting, also by Jewish Kaballah).[6] Certainly one's preferences among the schools of philosophy — Continental, analytic, deconstruction, postcolonial thought — will function as selection criteria. Finally, not only do differences between Jews, Christians, and Muslims influence one's response, but one's location in a specific denomination or school of thought *within each religion* is equally influential. Add South Asian and Southeast Asian religious and philosophical options to the range of options, and the complexity explodes even more dramatically.

5 Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation, Second Edition* (Routledge, 2004).

6 Niels Gregersen, ed., *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology* (Fortress Press, 2015); Marjorie Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology, New Revised Edition* (Crossroad, 1989); Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (SCM, 1985).

Given such a large number of interests, commitments and options, one *should* be skeptical about whether we will be able to identify a single set of necessary and sufficient conditions for deciding whether *any* given proposal about the God-world relationship is a sheep or a goat. Whose list of necessary and sufficient conditions should one use: Hegel's? Peirce's? Feuerbach's? Barth's? In facing the difficulty of assessment, panentheism is in good company. Unfortunately, it's often only *within* a specified tradition that one is able to agree on criteria of assessment — say, when one is among Thomists only, or Barthians only — and often not even then! Mullins' article tends to paint the three "theisms" as if a single set of criteria allows him to construct a single continuum along which each theism takes its rightful place.

The result of this range of panentheisms is not relativism, however; it is an invitation to more sophisticated analysis and more constructive work. One can identify the families of panentheisms and analyze the contributions and weaknesses of each one. Consider three examples. (1) In the Vedantic traditions, Ramanuja's "qualified non-dualism" is foundational for panentheisms that emphasize the reality of individuals on the one side and their existence within the all-encompassing Spirit (*Brahman*) on the other.[7] (2) Panentheisms that rely on dialectical philosophies exhibit interesting similarities. But it's not enough to say "I have a 'both/and' view of God"; one must specify *which* understanding of dialectic one has in mind, why it's required here, and exactly how it addresses and resolves the problem at hand. (3) Finally, in cases where philosophical theologians claim that their panentheisms are helpful for interpreting Scripture, their claims can be tested against the work of biblical scholars. In each of these individual cases, the analysis brings common themes to the surface, specifies shared criteria, identifies irreducible conflicts, and requires one to defend her preferred option over its rivals.

In short, rather than seeing the grey areas as a reason to give up on panentheism, I have found them to be the most philosophically interesting. Consider two brief examples. On one side, open theists have debated extensively with process panentheists. Both sides acknowledge significant common ground, which has allowed them over time to hone their disagreements and to develop sharper arguments. Although beginning on the process side

7 Philip Clayton, "Panentheisms East and West", *Sophia* 49, no. 2 (2010), 183–191.

of the fence, I have actually found many of the open theists' arguments to be compelling.[8]

On the other side, the borderland region between panentheism and Spinozism is equally fascinating. Spinoza's monism of the one substance, it has been argued, is philosophically more parsimonious, offers a reason-based theory of God (*deus siva natura*), and does not depend on a theological tradition. Yet I have argued in return that it lacks an adequate theory of agency for finite entities (Spinoza's "modes") and that Spinoza's account of the consciousness of God is inconsistent with his own metaphysical system.[9] Does Spinoza advance a form of panentheism in the *Ethics*? I think not, but I also admit that the question is sharp enough to allow for fruitful debate. I have to acknowledge the force of the arguments on the other side, and the possibility that they will eventually win. (By the way, the same is true of my ongoing debate with Keith Ward about whether the famous Advaitan, Shankara, is a panentheist or whether only Ramanuja is.)

IV. PANENTHEISM AS A RESEARCH PROGRAM

The philosopher of science Karl Popper is famous for arguing that hypotheses can be conclusively falsified. Mediating between this view on the one hand and the relativism of T.S. Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend on the other, Imre Lakatos argued that schools of thought are "research programmes."[10] The "hard core" of a research program (RP) consists of its most central affirmations, like the center of W.V.O. Quine's webs or T.S. Kuhn's paradigms. Note that Göcke repeatedly uses the term "research programs",[11] and Mullins uses the Lakatosian term "hard core" no less than 21 times in his paper. I agree with these two philosophers that the research program framework is the most adequate one for

8 See Philip Clayton, "'Open Panentheism' and Creation as *Kenosis*", in *Adventures in the Spirit* (Fortress, 2011), 175 – 184.

9 Philip Clayton, "Spinoza's Religious Monism: Recognizing the Religious", in *The Enlightenment and Religion*, ed. Nathan Jacobs (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Philip Clayton, "The Hiddenness of God in Spinoza: A Case Study in Transcendence and Immanence, Absence and Presence", in *The Hiddenness of God*, ed. Ingolf Dalferth, (Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

10 Imre Lakatos, *Philosophical Papers*, 2 Volumes (CUP, 1978); see also Philip Clayton, *Explanation from Physics to Theology: An Essay in Rationality and Religion* (YUP, 1989).

11 See Göcke's "There Is No Panentheistic Paradigm," especially as stated in the abstract. Göcke uses "research program" four times in this article.

discussions of panentheism. In this section I will argue that leads in some other, more positive directions.

The "hard core" of a RP can only be derived by studying the publications of scholars working in the field and attempting to identify the commitments that most share. Recall that, on Lakatos' model, no RP can actually be falsified; the research community can generally only determine whether a research program is "progressive" or "degenerating." The RP approach therefore does not allow for decisive, thumbs-up or thumbs-down judgments; it involves evaluating *degrees of agreement* among communities of scholars.

In an important recent paper, "Panentheism and its Neighbors," Mikael Stenmark does not use the term "research programs," but he does distinguish between "core claims" and "extension claims" of panentheistic conceptions of God.[12] This distinction allows him to lay out similarities and differences in a compelling way:

> The essential difference is that traditional theists think that God is (ontologically) distinct from the world and does not depend on it for God's own existence, whereas panentheists believe that God (ontologically) includes the world and depends on the world for God's own existence. Both, in contrast to deists, stress the active presence of God in the world, but in different ways.[13]

Stenmark's exploration of eight initial claims that are shared and not shared among deists, traditional theists, panentheists, and pantheists is a powerful analytic tool for identifying the hard core of each of these four positions.

How does one specify the hard core of a RP? One studies the publications of scholars working in the field and attempts to identify the commitments that most share. Note that one cannot succeed at this exercise *in any field* without a certain tolerance for plurality, since the positions of the various authors are not identical; multiple sub-programs are being pursued at any given time.

The task for the broader community of scholars is to assess whether a school of thought (say, classical theism) has ceased to produce new insights, or whether it continues to solve philosophical and theological problems. We

12 Mikael Stenmark, "Panentheism and its neighbors", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 85, no. 1 (2019), 23–41. Stenmark makes important use of minimal personal theism (MPT), a notion that Knapp and I also used in a central way in the argument in *The Predicament of Belief* (OUP, 2011).

13 Stenmark, "Panentheism and its neighbors", 41.

ask: what are a program's weaknesses, and are proponents able to respond to objections in satisfying ways? As with Kuhnian paradigms, each research program is judged relative to its own goals; unlike Kuhn, some shared agreement among advocates and opponents may be reached.

What then are the central goals of most panentheistic theologians?[14] They challenge the timelessness of God and affirm the pervasiveness of change, holding that real change occurs not in the divine nature but in the divine experience. They maximize divine immanence: God does not just enter the world, say through the Incarnation; God permeates the world to the greatest imaginable extent, short of falling into pantheism. Multiple models are used to express the maximal immanence of God and may be judged as more or less adequate relative to this goal. Is it better to say that God is as intimately linked to the world as the soul is to the body? Is it better to say that we are parts of the divine being? Shall we follow Georg Gasser in his recent paper on "God's Omnipresence in the World" and link immanence to divine action, taking our clue from his intriguing phrase, "God is, where God acts"?[15] Should we say, as Ramanuja does, that the world must always remain separate enough from God that beings can still worship the Divine?

Understanding these priorities helps one understand the philosophical challenges that panentheists have to take on, and overcome, in order to ensure that panentheism remains a progressive RP. For example, in his first critique of Göcke, Raphael Lataster argues that dialogues between Western and Eastern philosophy — dialogues that are still in their early stages[16] — will help deepen

14 I have argued that Lakatos's distinction between "hard core" and "auxiliary hypotheses" is more difficult to draw outside of the empirical sciences; see Philip Clayton, "Disciplining Relativism and Truth", *Zygon* 24, no. 3 (1989), 315–334.

15 Georg Gasser, "God's omnipresence in the world: on possible meanings of 'en' in panentheism", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 85, no. 1 (2019), 43–62. Compare Gasser's notion with the concept of "conjoined panentheism" also developed in a recent paper by Elizabeth Burns, "How to prove the existence of God: An argument for conjoined panentheism", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 85, no. 1 (2019), 5–21: "God the Good is an agent of change by providing human persons with a standard of Goodness against which to measure the goodness of their own actions, while God the World provides the physical embodiment through which God acts."

16 See Loriliai Biernacki and Philip Clayton, eds., *Panentheism Across the World's Traditions* (OUP, 2013).

and extend panentheism as a research program.[17] My own work to show the usefulness of panentheism appeals to its ability to give convincing answers to a variety of contemporary challenges, for example: how to develop theologies that are relevant to the modern intellectual context, that are consistent with established scientific conclusions, that allow for some type of divine influence on the world, that can address challenges in both the Eastern and Western traditions, and (given my particular location) that can speak to core themes of the biblical traditions more adequately than the theologies of the creeds and the Scholastics have done. Tasks such as these help to define the RP.

By contrast, whether creation is necessary or contingent is a major point of debate between panentheists; hence, contra Göcke, neither answer should be used to define the panentheist RP. Instead, both necessary and contingent creation represent sub-research programs within panentheism, and each is thus to be judged by how much it strengthens the coherence of panentheism as a metaphysical account of the God-world relationship. Thomas Oord's excellent collection of essays on the debate, *Theologies of Creation: Creatio ex Nihilo and its New Rivals*, offers a good example of the debate.[18]

In short: the research program approach allows one to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a theistic metaphysic (in this case, panentheism) and of the sub-programs within it, without appealing to external criteria as the final judge. For example, many panentheisms make use of one of the traditions of dialectical reasoning. Panentheism is not falsified merely because a critic does not approve of dialectical modes of reasoning. Instead, the critic must engage the panentheist in the debate about dialectical argumentation, and only when *that debate* is resolved can a profitable discussion of panentheism itself begin.

17 Raphael Lataster, "The Attractiveness of Panentheism — A Reply to Benedikt Paul Göcke", *Sophia* 53, no. 3 (2014), 389–95. See also Raphael Lataster, "Theists Misrepresenting Panentheism — Another Reply to Benedikt Paul Göcke", *Sophia* 54, no.1 (2015), 93–8.

18 Thomas J. Oord, ed., *Theologies of Creation: Creatio ex Nihilo and its New Rivals* (Routledge, 2014). The question of sub-research programs deserves a treatment in and of itself. For example, Mikael Stenmark is right to argue that both coercive and persuasive divine action can be sub-RPs within the panentheism RP. Similarly, I have held that the question of the necessary creation of the world is a debate *within* panentheism and hence should not be used to define panentheism as such. Mullins, "The Difficulty with Demarcating Panentheism", is also critical of Göcke on this point, which he restates as follows: "His proposal is that classical theism and panentheism differ only over the modal status of the world. According to Göcke, panentheism says that the world is an intrinsic property of God. So, necessarily, there is a world."

V. PANENTHEISM AND THE DOUBLE "IN"

Two criticisms of panentheism are raised with particular frequency: the "double God" objection, to which we will return, and challenges to the idea that all is in God and God is in all things. The research program framework allows panentheists to turn to these topics with a double intent, looking both "inside" and "outside," as it were. We seek to show that the objections are not fatal to panentheism, of course. But the RP framework also turns the challenges into stimuli for significant new work in the history of philosophy, as in Benedikt Göcke's new book on Krause[19]; further refinements of existing types of arguments, such as dialectical ways of conceiving the God-world relation or panpsychist theories of the natural world; and creative advances in constructive theology.

Critics have often objected that panentheism turns on a spatial metaphor: everything is in God. But a being that is pure Spirit would not be spatially extended. The problem seems to be compounded when panentheists affirm both that the world is in God *and* that God is in the world. The little preposition "in" is insufficient to bear such metaphysical weight, it is objected, and doubling the weight by using "in" twice only makes the insufficiency more obvious.

Mullins, despite the overall negative tone of his article, offers a compelling way to understand the double "in."[20] It involves distinguishing between metaphysical space and time and physical space and time. It is clear that panentheists cannot maximize immanence by appealing to a pre-Thomist substance metaphysics, in part because, on the classical view, two substances cannot manifest the double "in" relationship that most panentheists emphasize. By contrast, Mullins rightly notes that panentheists

> will affirm that the universe is literally in God because the universe is spatially and temporally located in God. The universe is located in absolute

19 Benedikt Paul Göcke, *The Panentheism of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832): From Transcendental Philosophy to Metaphysics* (Peter Lang, 2018).

20 The argument that Mullins's "The Difficulty with Demarcating Panentheism" singles out in his section entitled "Another Attempt at Demarcating Panentheism", including one of six arguments on behalf of panentheistic theologies that I develop in *God and Contemporary Physics* (Eerdmans, 1997). These arguments are themselves part of a broader research program that includes the work of (for example) Jürgen Moltmann, Georg Cantor, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

> space and time, and space and time are divine attributes. This can actually capture the "in" of panentheism in metaphysical, instead of metaphorical, terms. The universe is literally in God since space and time are attributes of God…. I believe that this proposal could be fleshed out to capture the hard core of panentheism as well as the diversity within panentheism.

In *God and Contemporary Science*, I had argued that "If space is an attribute of God, then God must be present at all points in space… If space is God's space, then the world is not 'outside him' but by definition within him."[21] Stressing the radical immanence of God only works, in other words, as long as God remains the absolute framework for all talk of space and time:

> As God can be present to every now while still subsuming all Now's within the eternal Now that transcends and encompasses finite time, so also God can be present here while still subsuming all Here's within a divine space that transcends and encompasses physical space.[22]

In fact, even an endless (infinite) space could be included within God without being identified with God. In this case, we might say, "God encompasses infinite (created) space but … God *is* absolute space."[23]

This distinction makes it possible to think of God as coextensive with the world: all points of space are encompassed by God and are in this sense "within" the divine. Nonetheless, created space is precisely that — created, contingent. Only God has the ontological status to be absolute and to contain all space within Godself. In short: finite space is contained within absolute space, the world is contained within God; yet the world is not identical to God. I take this affirmation to be part of the core of the panentheistic RP.

The case for panentheism that I have just sketched is similar to the argument from infinity. Hegel's formulation of this argument continues to be the most clear and compelling. It is impossible to conceive of God as fully infinite if God is limited by something outside of Godself. The infinite may without contradiction include within itself things that are by nature finite, but it may not stand *outside of or over against* the finite. Imagine that something exists and that it is "excluded" by the infinite. This kind of infinite would not be truly infinite, that is, without limit. (Hegel thus calls it the "bad infinite.") There is simply no place for finite things to "be" outside of that which is *absolutely*

21 Clayton, *God and Contemporary Physics*, 89.
22 Clayton, *God and Contemporary Physics*, 89.
23 *Ibid.*, 90.

unlimited. An infinite God must therefore *encompass* the finite world that God has created, which means that the world must be metaphysically within God. This thesis is also, I suggest, part of the "hard core" of panentheism.

Note that many non-panentheists affirm that the world exists in some sense "within" God (Eleonore Stump), and even more affirm that God is in the world in some sense. We should expect for panentheists to make the case that both "ins" are necessary to an adequate account of the God-world relation, and to provide sophisticated philosophical accounts of what "in" means in both cases — especially since the two senses are probably not identical.

The double "in" is thus a third component of the hard core of the panentheistic RP — the task to provide a coherent account of what the two "ins" mean and how they are related. Affirming both that God is in the world and that the world is in God, panentheists are engaged in historical, comparativist, analytic, and systematic work on divine presence, agency, and inclusion, including topics such as human agency, freedom, temporality, and divine action.

VI. THE "DOUBLE GOD" OBJECTION

One of the greatest challenges to theism in the modern period is the challenge raised by Fichte in 1799 that launched the *Atheismusstreit*, namely the criticism that the infinite cannot be *a* person. Persons must be in relationship with something outside themselves, but, as we saw in the previous section, there cannot be anything outside the infinite. A ground of all things can be infinite, but a personal being cannot.[24] Yet it seems that, for theists, God must be both a personal being *and* the infinite divine ground or source of all things that exist. There are significant costs for the theist to say that finite things are not grounded, or that something outside of God does the grounding. But, Fichte claims, it is incoherent to say that God is both the infinite divine ground of all that exists and *a* personal being. Although the criticism has been called "double God" objection, it might more accurately be called the "double divine" objection, namely: theists need to affirm both an infinite ground and a personal being, but these two have not been, and some would say cannot be, thought together into a single metaphysical entity.

24 Godehard Brüntrup has labeled this counterargument the "double God" objection in conversations and an unpublished PowerPoint presentation.

Note that Fichte's challenge actually affects all theists who are not pantheists. If it cannot be answered, even in principle, then it's not just panentheists who are in trouble; classical theists also have a stake in this game. The only thing that would single out panentheists from other theists here, I think, is if panentheism is able to address the objection better than any other theistic option, and especially if *only* panentheism can answer it.

I would like to argue that there is indeed a way to answer the objection using the resources of panentheism. It starts with an insight from Alfred North Whitehead, which Charles Hartshorne later developed using the term "dipolar theism," theism with two "poles." The first pole is the "primordial" nature of God, which grounds all actual events in the universe; the second is the personal, responsive, and temporal "consequent" nature of God. Both poles are required for a complete panentheistic metaphysics.

I find this an attractive view and have been influenced by it. However, two concerns arise that should cause one to modify Hartshorne's conception. First, on this view one must say that the primordial nature of God is purely potential; it is "deficient in actuality," as Whitehead writes in another context.[25] For Whitehead, ground and personhood (to use the more traditional terms) are indeed reconciled, but only at the cost of making the primordial ground a mere ideal or possibility to be actualized — a set of initial aims that can guide the development of "actual entities," though only to the extent that these entities freely incorporate the initial aims in their becoming.

Second, Hartshorne's view implies that God is not actual but merely potential unless God is accompanied by a world. Hence there could be no initial creation by God, and hence no creation *ex nihilo*. I take this to be a weakness. Of course, many process thinkers do not agree that it is a weakness, including Anna Case-Winters and Thomas Oord.[26]

It might appear that dipolar theists have leapt from the frying pan into the fire; they avoid the double God objection only by making the primordial pole of God a matter of pure potentiality. For an "orthodox" process theologian, that result may not be problematic: no actual entity can exist that is not in relationship with other actual occasions; and besides, God has always been

25 That is, God possesses only conceptual feelings and lacks the completion provided by a subjective aim.

26 See their chapters in Thomas Oord, ed., *Theologies of Creation*.

accompanied by *some* cosmos, which means that the "consequent" (personal, responsive) pole of God has always been present as well.

I remain more optimistic about the resources of a broadly Christian panentheism that retains a kenotic, contingent creation and real relationship within God. This starting point offers strong resources for answering the double God objection. What "grounds" is the eternal nature of God, the unchanging character of God. God's personal, responsive being then evolves through God's interactions with the universe as divine creation. God is not a person, or three persons, as we use the word; many features of human personhood do not apply to the divine. But God is also *not less than* personal.[27] The becoming personhood of God remains always consistent with the eternal divine nature. But it is also responsive to and affected by God's interactions with all finite existing things. As I noted at the beginning, the panentheist RP seeks to maximize the immanence and relatedness of God, so that God might be thought of as permeating the world to the greatest imaginable extent, short of falling into pantheism.

VII. CONCLUSION

I began with the dilemma: the panentheist spends half his time fighting to win acknowledgement that his title might actually pick out an identifiable position at all, and the other half answering the objection that his position is so clear that every philosopher should immediately recognize that it is obviously false. In these pages we have sketched a way in which the demarcation problem can be solved. Panentheism is best understood as a research program that in turn consists of a variety of sub-programs. I have argued that it is a research program that can make, and is making, multiple positive contributions to work in philosophy and theology.

Mullins shows where the line of demarcation lies for at least one region of the debate:

> Can the panentheist demarcate herself from pantheism? Yes. The panentheist should not insist that God and the universe are the same substance. She can maintain that God and the universe are distinct substances. God and the universe are not identical. The universe is not identical to absolute space and

27 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume I* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956), 245: "[God] is not a person, but he [sic] is not less than personal." Tillich's "research program" has deeply influenced our work in Clayton and Steven Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief*.

> time. The universe exists in absolute space and time. In identifying God and the universe, the pantheist is collapsing the distinction between absolute (or metaphysical) and physical space and time.[28]

Other regions will presumably require other survey teams.

Note that philosophers can emphasize panentheistic features in thinkers who may not themselves be panentheists, such as St. Thomas and the Vedantic philosopher Shankara, and conversely. Grey areas are inevitable. If there are families, there will be family resemblances; the importance of your family is not decreased if your second cousin Elvira bears an uncanny resemblance to individuals to whom she is not related. Our disagreements about where to locate Thomas and Shankara do not show that there is no such thing as panentheism or that it fails in the end to be a coherent position at all. Instead, they are invitations to constructive work within the RP. For example, they should place the burden of proof on me to show that *other parts* of Thomas's work could not be panentheist, and I should accept that burden.[29]

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28 Mullins, "The Difficulty with Demarcating Panentheism".

29 I express my gratitude to Andrew Davis for research and discussions that contributed in important ways to the argument that I have presented here, and to Robert McDonald for his assistance in preparing the final manuscript for publication.

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INCARNATION: IN WHAT SENSE IS GOD REALLY "WITH US"?[1]

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PERSONAL NOTE:

I write as a theologian with a philosophical interest and with an affinity to process thought in particular. For me, process thought has offered a lifeline in an ongoing quest to find a more "adequate" concept of God — one more promising than prevalent classical and popular alternatives. God, of course, is and remains a Holy Mystery incomparably greater than all our best concepts of God. Nevertheless, it is important to articulate concepts that, at least, gesture in good directions. Whitehead spoke of the "brief Galilean vision" that has "flickered uncertainly through the ages."[2] It is my belief that this vision is more credible, more religiously viable, and more morally adequate than what many popular and traditional notions have offered. It is a vision of God that is more worthy of its Subject and more "worshipful." As a theological conversation partner, process thought has been a welcome source of illumination and correction — even a breath of fresh air — for me as a theologian. In the pres-

1 An earlier form of my presentation was delivered at the 2015 Tenth International Whitehead Conference held in Claremont, California on "Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization." Proceedings of the philosophical work group have since been published in a collected volume. The presentation as delivered there is: Anna Case-Winters, "Coming Down to Earth: A Process-Panentheist Reorientation to Nature", in *Conceiving an Alternative*: *Philosophical Resources for an Ecological Civilization*, ed. David Conner and Demian Wheeler (Process Century Press, 2017). The current presentation also incorporates earlier work from my article, Anna Case-Winters, "God Will Be All in All: Implications of the Incarnation", in *Seeking Common Ground*: *Evaluation and Critique of Joseph Bracken's Comprehensive Worldview*, ed. Marc A. Pugliese and Gloria L. Schaab (Marquette Univ. Press, 2012).

2 Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (Free Press, 1978), 342.

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entation that follows, I am taking a theological "adventure of ideas." I believe such adventures are warranted and even essential to progress in theology. As Victor Lowe has pointed out, "Theology, like metaphysics, is dead when it ceases to be a continuing business."[3]

I. INTRODUCTION

The present eco-crisis makes it imperative that we find ways of living with and within the natural world that are more just, participatory and sustainable. Our primary challenge may be *theological*. Ideas of who God is, how God is related to the world, how the world works, and who we are as human beings all shape how we interact with the natural world. Those engaged in eco-justice work often observe that drawing out the statistics on global warming or species extinction or habitat destruction — the "data of despair" — does not seem to motivate the needed changes. The problem is not a matter of information but rather a matter of *orientation*. What is needed is a fundamental reorientation — a "conversion to the earth," as Rosemary Radford Ruether put it. Our callous disregard and rapacious ways in relation to the natural world may be a symptom of not knowing our place within this wider environment. Perhaps what is needed is a more *down-to-earth* understanding of who we are as human beings.

The interaction of Christian theology with the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead has proven transformative precisely in the areas where a reorientation is needed. This interaction can help to overcome common habits of thought that are theologically and ecologically problematic. Perhaps the most problematic habit of thought in classical theism is the assumption that God is completely separate from the world. This way of thinking yields both a desacralization and objectification of nature which make disregard for the well-being of the natural world more thinkable. Process panentheist approaches, in conversation with incarnational theology, can illuminate a path toward reconnecting God and the world. A stronger conviction of divine presence in the natural world precludes the possibility of seeing the world as a world of mere objects. The world is resacralized, and it is reinvested with what might be termed "subject" status. Christian theology of the incarnation has an inherent capacity to convey "God with us" in the world of nature.

3 Victor Lowe, *Understanding Whitehead* (John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1962), 92.

However, the profound meaning of the incarnation has not been fully realized due to elements of classical theism which obscure its coherency and its religious viability. Process insights can offer correctives here as well.

A more extended conversation between Christian theology and process thought can be seen to be fruitful in rethinking the relation of God and the world and the deeper meaning of incarnation. These two foci are crucial elements in reorienting human sensibilities concerning the following:

II. SEEING GOD IN RELATION TO THE WORLD: THE CHALLENGE OF RESACRALIZING

In the interest of upholding divine transcendence, classical theism has carefully derived divine attributes *over against* the attributes of the world of nature. God is not the world or anything in the world. Intended as a proper apophatic reserve, this way of thinking has hardened into a binary opposition between God and the world: the eternal vs. the temporal, the changing vs. the unchanging, and so on. God has, in effect, been *structured out* of the natural world, and the world has been desacralized.

God		**World**
Eternal		Temporal
Unchanging (immutable)		Changeable
Not subject to suffering (impassible)		Subject to suffering
Necessary being		Contingent in being

A welcome alternative to this approach is to be found in Whitehead's "dipolar theism" (and Hartshorne's later interpretation of "dual transcendence"). Rather than setting up metaphysical polarities and assigning one pole to God and the other to the world, divine perfection is reconceived as embracing both poles, manifesting each attribute in the way in which it is most excellent to do so. God can be both unchanging in the sense of divine (loving) faithfulness and changing in the sense of divine (loving) responsiveness. Divine transcendence and divine immanence can both be maintained.

Another element of Whitehead's system that may move toward the needed resacralization is the proposal that God's relation to the world is internal

rather than external. In classical theism, it was assumed that while the world is *internally* related to God (and therefore can be affected by God) this relation was not reciprocal. God is only *externally* related to the world and is unaffected by the world (impassible). Embracing God's internal relation with the world opens the prospect of mutual influence and mutual indwelling. In a sense, every reality can be seen as co-constituted with the divine. Divine reality includes and does not exclude material reality. God is genuinely "all in all" (I Cor. 15:28). This is even now the case and not something deferred to the eschaton.[4] One may speak, even now, of the "indwelling presence" (*shekinah*) of God in the world of God's "glory" (*kavod*) appearing in our midst. Mayra Rivera puts it this way, "glory is the trace of the divine relationship woven through creaturely life and its relationships. It is the cloudy radiance of the ungraspable excess that inheres in ordinary things — something that manifests itself, that gives itself."[5]

In another promising reconsideration, process thought refuses the traditional absolute divide between "Creator" and "created" — the traditional "infinite qualitative distinction." In its place, Whitehead introduces the category of *creativity* — shared creativity. God may be thought of as the "chief exemplification" of creativity, even as the leader of the creative advance, but not as having a monopoly on creativity. Creativity characterizes all actual entities. As the Ground of Order and the Ground of Novelty, God, in a sense, makes creativity possible, but the stark separation between Creator and created does not apply. As Whitehead proposes, "It is as true to say that God creates the World as that the World creates God."[6]

Perhaps the most decisive step toward resacralization is process panentheism. God is in the world and the world is in God, yet God is more than the world.[7] Whitehead put it this way, "It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World."[8] In the work of reframe-

4 Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2015), 52.

5 Mayra Rivera, "Glory: The First Passion of Theology", in *Polydoxy*: *Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*, ed. Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider (Routledge, 2011), 177.

6 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

7 Following Nicolas of Cusa, it is best to think of this as an enfolding rather than an enclosure. His panentheism "destabilizes any picture of a container-God." Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 113.

8 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

ing the incarnation, pantheistic approaches have much to offer. Panentheism, simply put, is the view that "God is in all things and all things are in God" from the Greek terms πάν "all things" ἐν "in" θεοξ "God". It affirms "God immanent in the world and the world immanent in God without loss to the independent status of either God or the world."[9] As Arthur Peacocke defines it, it is "the belief that the Being of God includes and indwells all things in the cosmos, while not being reducible to these things."[10] God is *really present* "in, with, and under" but always more than the world. There is an immanent transcendence or a transcendent immanence in the divine life, in relation to the cosmos. The whole philosophy of organism, he said, "is mainly devoted to the task of making clear the notion of 'being present in another entity.'"[11] With this step all else falls into place. The world is effectively resacralized.

Among the panentheisms on the horizon, I think there is greater promise in the process approach. It does not so easily fall into *pantheism* (God is all there is) on the one hand or *pancosmism* (the world is all there is) on the other.[12] In this genuinely relational approach, both the alterity (otherness) of the world and the transcendence of God are preserved.

The world is not divine; it is *other than* God — "not God." The alterity of the world is preserved, and pantheism is avoided. In a relational framework this alterity is essential — else there is no real relation with a genuine other, only a divine self-relation. The world, dependent on God as the Ground of Order and Ground of Novelty, still has its own semi-autonomous unfolding. There is another attendant consideration, in connection with the eco-crisis which is the presenting problem of this paper. If God is all there is, then it is meaningless to speak of human ethical responsibility for the eco-crisis. Whatever is done is God's own doing.

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9 Joseph A. Bracken, *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (Susquehanna Univ. Press, 1991), 159.

10 Arthur Peacocke, *Paths From Science Towards God: The End of all Our Exploring* (Oneworld Publications, 2004), 51.

11 Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Macmillan, 1926), 50.

12 For example, the emanationist panentheism of Sallie McFague's proposal ("the world as God's body") may be leaning toward pantheism. Gordon Kaufman's proposal that God is the (non-agential) "serendipitous creativity in the bio-historical process" leans toward pancosmism. For the full argument see Anna Case-Winters, *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature: Down to Earth* (Ashgate, 2006), 19–43.

God who is pervasively present in world process is *more than* the world. In this way divine transcendence is upheld and pancosmism is avoided. In a process-relational framework God's transcendence does not consist in being absolutely separate from all else, but in being supremely related to all that is. Hartshorne has described God's relation to the world as "surrelativity."[13] God is supremely relative, internally related to all that is. In this way God is "all in all." This is a transcendence that includes rather than excludes relation.

Process approaches provide a vision of authentic relationality between God and the world that resacralizes the world. The implications for valuation of the natural world and exercising ecological responsibility follow from this new sensibility. Four particular contributions shape this new sensibility:

1) Dipolar theism allows for a derivation of divine attributes that embraces the metaphysical polarities rather than assigning one pole to God and the opposite pole to the world.

2) The embrace of internal relations in place of external relations opens the prospect for both mutual influence and a mutual indwelling of God in the world and the world in God.

3) The traditional absolute divide between Creator and created is replaced by a wider concept of creativity which both God and the world share.

4) Process panentheism articulates divine presence in world process in a way that upholds the alterity of the world and the transcendence of God.

These steps are a significant advance toward the needed resacralization of the world. These steps also help to illumine central Christian insights around incarnation. In Christian tradition, the possibility of seeing God as genuinely in relation to the world has always been implicit in the doctrine of the incarnation. Here we see the emblematic expression of "God with us." However, elements of classical theism sometimes obscured Christological affirmations to the point that they lost coherence and religious viability. Here we will trace some of the difficulties the traditional doctrine of the incarnation has faced and then indicate how the process contributions put forward above may

13 Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (YUP, 1948), 88.

point the way toward a more coherent and more religiously viable articulation of central Christological claims. A better articulated understanding of incarnation, will also serve in the revaluation of the natural world needed for ecological thinking and acting.

Traditional Christology has had significant difficulty in articulating its ancient affirmation expressed in the definition of Chalcedon: "truly God, truly human … two natures in one person." This claim has seemed at best paradoxical, at worst contradictory. How is it possible to make a non-contradictory affirmation of these Christological convictions? The challenge of coherency is heightened by the assumed "polar opposition" between God and all else. As discussed above, this opposition is structured by assigning of metaphysical contraries to God and the world in binary opposition. The "infinite qualitative distinction" between Creator and created makes any joining of divine and human difficult to imagine.

Continuing to affirm the Chalcedonian definition of "truly God, truly human … two natures in one person" in the face of the assumed incoherence has led to various distortions. Many Christians have settled for either a "Christology from above," deemphasizing the human or a "Christology from below," deemphasizing the divine. These approaches risk Docetism on the one hand and Adoptionism on the other. There has also been historic division over whether to emphasize the two natures (as Calvin did) or the one person (as Luther did). It seems one must choose. Attempts to articulate a unity-in-difference have lacked plausibility. The proposal of a *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of the attributes), for example, has seemed like "smoke and mirrors" to many. An unfortunate habit of parceling out attributes of the two natures has arisen. Joseph Bracken notes that, "It was necessary to distinguish within Jesus between that which was divine in him (the second person of the trinity) and that which was merely human."[14] The capacity for suffering, notably, was assigned to the merely human.

Process approaches can help toward a more coherent affirmation of the insights of Chalcedon through several distinctive contributions. Concerning the issue of "two natures," Chalcedon affirmed, "two natures unconfused, unchangeable, undivided, and inseparable." If these divine and human natures are thought of in terms of "substance," as classical theism has done, the prob-

14 Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 28.

lem seems insurmountable. It seems that if the divine Logos is to be present in Jesus of Nazareth, then some part of his human nature must be displaced.[15] How can two substances be both unconfused and inseparable? This is where theologians frequently just throw up their hands and say "mystery." While the doctrine of God is mystery through and through, we "misplace the mystery" when we use this to cover over contradictions we have ourselves created.

Process thought offers an alternative, urging that we not think of reality in terms of "substance" but rather as "process." Bracken has demonstrated, a creative rethinking in this direction advances the present discussion.[16] The process of being a divine person may be integrated with the process of being a human person without confusion or separation. The Incarnate one is co-constituted by divine and human processes just as God and the world are "interpenetrating fields of activity."[17] Accepting the process reorientation provided in "internal (not external) relations" and "process (not substance)" ways of thinking, new possibilities open up for understanding the incarnation for understanding how God can be "in" a human being without compromising his/her humanity. "In the fullness of this internal relation, humanity is brought to perfection."[18] There is no longer any need to choose between a Christology "from above" and a Christology "from below." Nor is it necessary to parcel out the attributes between the divine and the human natures.

In addition to challenges of coherency, challenges of religious viability present themselves. If the Chalcedonian statement cannot be coherently affirmed, there are implications for faith and life. The incoherence calls into question confidence that in Christ we see both "true God and true human being." People make the "from above" or "from below" choice. Each of these choices is problematic for the life of faith.

On the one hand, if we do not see "true human being" in Jesus the Christ, then his life cannot serve as a model for our own. If God's presence in him is ontologically different from God's presence in the rest of us, then we can-

15 John B. Cobb and David R. Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Westminster Press, 1976), 104.

16 Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 48–57.

17 Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 159.

18 Marjorie Suchocki in Joseph A. Bracken and Marjorie H. Suchocki, eds., *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God* (Continuum, 1996), 60.

not be expected to be like him.[19] We might be moved to worship this person (as divine), but we cannot really be expected to follow him. The "reign of God" that Jesus preached ceases to be the focus of our attention, and "the cult of Jesus" takes center stage. He becomes a mere object of devotion rather than a companion in the struggle of the reign of God.[20] If we are able to see "true human being" in Jesus, the Christ, then he could be an exemplar for us and the calling to follow in his way would be viable and compelling. Ethical implications and obligations follow. Karl Barth put the matter provocatively when he insisted that the question is not whether Jesus the Christ is human but whether we are. This is the case because it is only in Christ that we see the "true" human being, the one lives in fullness of covenant relation with God (unobscured by sin) and therefore in right relation to all else.[21] This true humanity is opened up for us in him and as future possibility and destiny however imperfectly realized in our situation of sinfulness. These insights illustrate the theological importance of the affirmation of true humanity.

On the other hand, if we do not see "true God" here, then our view of who God is and how God is related to the world cannot be significantly shaped by what we see in Jesus, the Christ. Some of our deepest theological insights cannot authentically be affirmed if we do not see "true God" in the incarnation. The suffering love we see there cannot be allowed to shape our view of God's nature and activity in world process. We cannot really acknowledge, as Barth did, that because of Jesus Christ, we know about the "humanity of God."[22] The deeper implication of the incarnation — that God is (already) in, with, and for the world — is obscured. These are central claims of faith and they are grounded in the belief that in the incarnation we see "true God."

Another religious viability issue presents itself when the incarnation is taken to be an "exception" to God's ordinary way of being and acting — the problem of exclusivism.[23] As mentioned above, process thought challenges the habit of seeing God and God acting as the "exception" to all metaphysical

19 Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 28.

20 Choan-Seng Song, *Jesus and the Reign of God* (Fortress Press, 1993), 17.

21 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (T&T Clark, 1956), 222–25.

22 Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (1960), 49–51 "When we look at Jesus Christ we know precisely that God's deity includes and does not exclude His humanity … His deity encloses humanity in itself … In his divinely free volition and election, in his sovereign decision, God is *human.*"

23 Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Fortress Press, 2008), 151.

principles and proposes instead that we should see God as their "chief exemplification." This proposal helps us to rethink exclusivism. Is God's self-revelation *only* in Jesus of Nazareth and not in other times and places? Catherine Keller asks whether the incarnation must be "an exclusive revelation of God in the final or competitive sense usually meant by identifying Jesus as the 'only son of God.'"[24] Such a view is deeply problematic in interreligious encounters. In our religiously pluralistic context it hampers efforts toward mutual understanding, faith sharing, and common work for the common good. If we could understand the incarnation as a profound exemplification of God's ordinary and ongoing presence and action in the world — rather than as an exception to it — then we might be delivered from exclusivist claims. It becomes possible to affirm God's presence and self-revelation in Jesus, the Christ, with the full wealth of conviction, without presuming that this is the only locus of divine presence and self-revelation. We may say that in him we see one who is "wholly" divine without claiming that he is "the whole" of the divine. Taking this standpoint, Christians may be genuinely open in interreligious dialogue to receive as well as to share good news of God with us. Might there not be what Laurel Schneider has called, "promiscuous incarnations?" If *God is genuinely indwelling all things*, as in panentheism, then there is always already a kind of "*pan*-carnation."[25]

Incarnation is an instance of transparency to ultimate reality — not an exception to it. Peacocke has observed that, "The Word which was before *incognito*, implicit, and hidden, now becomes known, explicit, and revealed."[26] What we see in the incarnation is echoed in the sacrament of communion. "Jesus identified the mode of his incarnation and reconciliation of God and humanity ("his body and blood") with the very stuff of the universe when he took the bread, blessed, broke, and gave it to his disciples..."[27] Bracken, summarizes approvingly the earlier work of Gustave Martelet who believed that "the far deeper truth about the doctrine of the Real Presence is that not just bread and wine but all of creation including the world of nature, are collectively becom-

24 *Ibid*.
25 Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 118.
26 Peacocke, *Paths From Science Towards God*, 154.
27 Peacocke, *Paths From Science Towards God*, 149.

ing the Body of Christ."[28] Bracken views this as a progressive integration into the divine field of activity with the passage of time. Taken seriously, a notion of divine *real presence* in incarnation and reiterated in sacrament must entail a revaluation of all material reality as open to and indwelt by the divine.

Another insight of process thought proves helpful for the Chalcedonian affirmation of "truly God, truly human." Process panentheism assumes that God is (already) in all things. This view has the potential of resolving the apparent contradiction inherent in the claim that God was "in" Jesus of Nazareth. The world's presence in God and God's presence in the world is already the reality and it is made visible in the incarnation. What happens in the man, Jesus of Nazareth, is emblematic of what is *already the case* about the whole of creation.

For Christian theology, this view unveils — among other things — the deeper meaning of incarnational theology. Whitehead offered that, "The world lives by its incarnation of God in itself."[29] Arthur Peacocke, who also speaks from a panentheist perspective, expressed the meaning of the incarnation in this way,

> The incarnation can thus be more explicitly and overtly understood as the God *in whom the world already exists* becoming manifest in the trajectory of a human being who is naturally in and of that world. In that person the world now becomes transparent, as it were, to the God in whom it exists: The Word which was before *incognito*, implicit, and hidden, now becomes known, explicit, and revealed. The epic of evolution has reached it apogee and consummation in God-in-a-human-person.[30]

In this sense when we speak of "the incarnation" we are describing an instance of transparency to a deeper reality — a place "where the light shines through." The meaning of Christian theology of incarnation has not yet been tapped for its deeper significance in conveying God's pervasive presence in world process with all its implications for our valuation of material reality.

In Jesus of Nazareth there is a responsiveness to divine initial aims, such that in him we are able to see what God intends and is doing everywhere and always. We see that God is in, with, and for the world. God's intentions and

28 Joseph A. Bracken, *Christianity and Process Thought: Spirituality for a Changing World* (Templeton Press, 2006), 102.

29 Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 149.

30 Arthur Peacocke, "Articulating God's Presence in and to the World Unveiled by the Sciences", in *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being*: *Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World*, ed. Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (Eerdmans, 2004), 154.

actions for each and for all become transparent in Jesus the Christ. Here is a place "where the light shines through." As Allan Galloway put it, "Once we have encountered God in Christ, we must encounter God in all things."[31] This necessarily reshapes how we think about the natural world.

III. SEEING THE WORLD AS COMPOSED OF SUBJECTS IN RELATION: OVERCOMING OBJECTIFICATION AND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

This alternative understanding of God "in all things" has the potential to radically reshape our thinking about the natural world, its value, and the role of human beings in it. Present habits of thought and practice seem to think of the natural world as a world of mere objects with human beings as the only subjects. This reinforces a dangerous anthropocentrism that has made the current exploitative, destructive patterns of behavior more thinkable. Some traditional ways of thinking about incarnation actually play into this anthropocentric mindset. If, for example, the incarnation is viewed as a kind of emergency measure on God's part to address the problem of human sinfulness, this fuels anthropocentrism implying that it really is "all about us."

Revised understandings of how God is in relation to the world and deepened insights into incarnation set us on a good course for a different kind of relation with the natural world. Two necessary steps along the way are overcoming both anthropocentrism and the objectification of nature. Again assistance may be found in process-relational approaches and particularly Whitehead's introduction of his "philosophy of organism." Exploring these contributions will also illumine certain streams of thought already present in Christian theology that may be more consonant with the reorientation needed.

If we view the world in a *relational* framework, the practical outworking is that we begin to ask relational questions. When any particular course of action is advocated as good, we ask: Good *in relation to what*? Good *in relation to whom*? We are pushed to consider the effects of our actions upon all those others to whom now know we are internally related and thus utterly connected. Pursuing purely selfish interests is revealed to be an irrational habit of thought and action — living *as if* we were autonomous individuals and not

31 Allan D. Galloway, *The Cosmic Christ* (Nisbet, 1951).

co-constituted by our relations. Living life *incurvatus en se* (curved in on ourselves), as Augustine put it, is a *dis*-orientation and an alienation.

Thus reoriented, we may begin to see things *whole* — existing in a complex pattern of relationality in which we are all co-constituted. A corollary of seeing things whole is the ethical imperative toward *making things whole* in the sense of healing. We may seek to heal the damage that has been done and reverse the *dis*-integration of ecosystems and social systems. The whole ecojustice project is an insistence that we affirm the integrity of nature and therefore make the connections.[32]

Jürgen Moltmann makes the point that theology has contributed to the present ecological crisis through the "subjectification of the human being" and the "objectification of nature."[33] In classical theism we declare a human monopoly on spirit. Among other things, anthropocentrism places the human being in a transcendent — even God-like — relation to nature, thereby lifting the human being right out of the natural world as a spiritual creature in a material world. Such a view assigns only instrumental value and not intrinsic value to nature and thereby permits and may even promote its exploitation. Nature becomes (to borrow Emily Townes's phrase) "a permissible victim."

A genuinely non-anthropocentric eco-justice ethic will base the call to preserve and protect the natural world in its *intrinsic* value, not in its value to us. When we seek to motivate care by remarking upon how dependent *human beings* are on "*our* natural environment" and "*our* natural resources," those are anthropocentric, instrumentalist valuations and motivations. It would be far better for us to insist upon the *intrinsic value* of species, ecosystems, and the biosphere.

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32 In the North-South global conversation, for example, people from the northern hemisphere are accused of not making the connections between ecology and economics when they insist on preserving the rain forest without acknowledging the economic needs that impinge upon persons living in and near the rainforests, needs that motivate them to turn rainforests into pastures and farmlands. To think in this way is to *disintegrate* ecosystems from social systems and economic systems. Economics has to enter the picture; it is the other half of the *eco*-crisis. For a substantive discussion of economics and process thought see John B. Cobb and Herman E. Daly, *For The Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, & a Sustainable Future* (Beacon Press, 1994) . Whitehead's relational ontology is suggestive for conceptualizing and interpreting in ways that make these connections.

33 Jürgen Moltmann, *Creating a Just Future: The Politics of Peace and the Ethics of Creation in a Threatened World* (SCM Press, 1989), 25.

Whitehead insists that, "value is inherent in actuality itself."[34] Whitehead's philosophy of organism takes an interesting step of proposing that all entities have both physical and mental poles (in varying degrees). This is probably one of his most misunderstood adventures of ideas. Whitehead is working with a meaning for "mentality" that is not anthropocentrically defined and does not require cognition or even consciousness or sentience; it is simply the "capacity for experience." Griffin's suggestion of "panexperientialism" may convey the meaning better than "panpsychism," a misleading term sometimes employed. Each actual entity in its own coming to be is a subject and has intrinsic value. Process thought admits to degrees of intrinsic value relative to capacities for sentience, but this represents a continuum with no absolute divide.

In an interesting aside Griffin reintroduces *extrinsic value,* in terms of value to the larger ecosystem — "ecological value."[35] He offers a disconcerting observation that if we take into account "ecological value," some creatures (like plankton, worms, bacteria, etc.) that may not be capable of the richest experience may in fact have great value in the ecosystems. Human beings, on the other hand, who are capable of the richest experience, may have little ecological value. "In fact most of the other forms of life would be better off and the ecosystem as a whole would not be threatened, if we did not exist."[36] The Gaia hypothesis goes so far as to suggest that we are like harmful bacteria to the organism that is earth, and it needs to eliminate us! We are "a danger to ourselves and others." A bit unsettling, that!

As Whitehead follows through on the insights of his philosophy of organism, the old spiritual-material dichotomy dissolves. There are no pure spirits, and there is no "dead" matter. There are only material beings (sentient and non-sentient) with varying capacities for experience. The important point is that in Whitehead's philosophy of organism, interiority extends all the way down to the submicroscopic. "Wherever there is actuality of any sort, it has a spontaneity and capacity for prehending its environment, albeit in a non-conscious way."[37]

34 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 100.

35 David R. Griffin, "Whitehead's Deeply Ecological Worldview", in *Worldviews and Ecology*: *Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, ed. Mary E. Tucker (Orbis Books, 1994), 192.

36 Griffin, "Whitehead's Deeply Ecological Worldview", 203.

37 Jay McDaniel, "Process Thought and the Epic of Evolution Tradition", *Process Studies* 35, no. 1 (2006), 78.

"By virtue of their capacities for inwardness or subjectivity … all deserve respect and care on their own terms and for their own sakes, not simply for their usefulness to human beings."[38]

Earth community is, as Thomas Berry has insisted, "a communion of subjects." The human being, in this way of thinking does not have a monopoly on subject status. As John Cobb often says, "process theology does not commit monopoly." Process-relational philosophy of organism challenges habits of thought that would treat the natural world as a world of separable objects. It also challenges the anthropocentrism that grants human beings a monopoly on subject status. These corrections from process relational ways of thinking can help redirect us toward a more theologically and ecologically sound understanding of the world and ourselves.

There are within Christian theology alternative visions of incarnation that are more companionable with the corrections process thought is offering. Two in particular will be illumined here: deep incarnation and cosmic Christology.

Niels Gregersen's work on "deep incarnation" envisions the nature of God's incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth in ways that connect it to the larger natural world rather than separating from it or limiting it to human beings as such.[39] He proposes that incarnation "reaches into the depths of material existence." In this way, "the eternal Logos embraces the uniqueness of the human but also the continuity of humanity with other animals, and with the natural world at large." The choice of the Greek term *sarx* (for "flesh") in John 1:14 ("the word became flesh and dwelt among us") conveys a much broader concept than "the word became human" might have done. *Sarx* is the Greek term that would be used to translate the Hebrew (*kol-bashar*, "all flesh") and would imply the whole reality of the material world. For contemporary readers, it would include everything "from quarks to atoms to molecules, in their combinations and transformations throughout chemical and biological evolution."[40] This wider embrace of the natural world in the incarnation has far reaching implications. It is commonly said of the incarnation, "If this is God, then thus is God." A key implication which Gregersen draws out is that because the incarnation is a coming-into flesh of God's eternal Logos, in and

38 McDaniel, "Process Thought and the Epic of Evolution", 70.

39 Niels H. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation: Why Evolutionary Continuity Matters in Christology", *Toronto Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 (2010), 174.

40 Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation", 177.

through the process of incarnation, "God the creator and the world of flesh are conjoined in such depth that God links up with all vulnerable creatures, with sparrows in their flight as well as in their fall…"[41] Thus the suffering in the natural world is also God's suffering and must be understood from this vantage point, no longer from an anthropocentric point of view.

There is another stream of thought in Christian theology that resonates well with process insights. "Cosmic Christology" provides yet another form of resistance to anthropocentrism and objectification of nature. In traditional Christology's the predominating understanding of the meaning of the Christ event has seemed to be limited to the work of redemption, and the work of redemption has been limited to "saving souls" and getting to a better world. Such a narrowing has led to an "acosmic" Christianity. However, within the broader Christian tradition there are alternatives which see the Christ event as embracing the whole of creation. This long-standing tradition is found in a number of biblical texts.[42] It is also prominent in notable theologians of the early church (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria) and 12th and 13th century theologians (Franciscans, Bonaventura) and predominates in Eastern Orthodox theology even today. In medieval Franciscan theology for example, the incarnation is no afterthought or emergency measure on God's part to deal with human sin. The incarnation lies in the primordial creative intent of God.

In this interpretation, Christ is related to the whole of creation prior to any role in redeeming humankind. The divine *logos*, is related to the very structure of the universe. Christ is the Word through whom God created all things, the one who was "in the beginning." (John 1). Cosmic Christology assumes the entire cosmos is included in the divine purposing; it is not just a context for the outworking of the redemptive drama of human beings. The goal of all creation is its relation in union with God — *theosis*. Christ's work is redemptive precisely because this union, which is intended for all, is manifest in him. "He became as we are, that we might become as he is" (Irenaeus). The symbol of Chalcedon expresses who the Christ is understood to be — "truly God, truly human united in one and the same concrete being." In doing so, it

41 Niels H. Gregersen, ed., *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology* (Fortress Press, 2015), 17.

42 Such as Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; Colossians 1:15-20; Philippians 2:6-11; Hebrews 1:1-4; John 1:1-14.

is at the same time expressing that union with God toward which all things are drawn. Salvation, understood in this light is not exclusively or even primarily about salvation of human beings from their sin. It is about God bringing to completion what God has begun in creation. Themes of fulfillment and consummation take center stage. "God creates so that a (final) life-giving synthesis of God and world might be realized."

Both "deep incarnation" and "cosmic Christology" enlarge the scope of God's connection with and purposes in the natural world. These approaches challenge the more limited anthropocentric reading and do not allow a division between human beings as subjects and the rest of the natural world as composed of mere objects.

IV. CONCLUSION

Distinctive insights of process-relational approach have been explored here with the intent of showing how they may help to reconnect God and the world and to see the world as composed of subjects in relation with one another and with God who is genuinely "with us." Particular elements have proven especially helpful in this regard: dual transcendence, internal relations, shared creativity, panentheism, and philosophy of organism. These themes have illumined and clarified key theological insights into the God-world relation. At the heart of the natural world is an openness to the God who "enfolds and unfolds"[43] it — the God who is "all in all" (I Cor. 15:28). If taken seriously, this view implies a "real presence" of the divine in the natural world. What is made visible in incarnation and reiterated in sacrament is a cosmic incarnation — the whole world is "a place of grace."[44]

The human being is decentered. Instead of being *incurvatus in se ipsum* ("curved in" on ourselves) we are reoriented, turned outward to care for the wider world that God pervasively indwells. This necessarily changes the way we understand and treat the natural world.

In conclusion, at this stage in our history, it is incumbent upon human beings to find ways of living that are more "socially just, ecologically wise and

43 Nicolas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, Book II:3.

44 Joseph Sittler, *Called to Unity: Creation and the Future of Humanity* (Lutheran School of Theology, 2000), 52.

spiritually satisfying, not only for the sake of human life but for the sake of the well-being of the whole planet."[45] I am convinced that our challenge in doing this is primarily theological. There are parts of our inheritance from classical theism that take our thinking about God and the world and the human being in problematic directions — both theologically and ecologically. Process relational approaches offer a helpful corrective that might assist the needed reorientation. Classical theism contributed to the desacralization of nature. By contrast, Whitehead's concept of God reinvests the natural world with divine presence and interactivity. Transcendence is maintained, but it is *relational* transcendence that gives place to a genuine other. The problem of anthropocentrism embedded in the tradition — with its subjectification of the human and objectification of nature — is also challenged by Whitehead's system. His philosophy of organism provides a way of seeing the natural world as composed of subjects.

Though I am no "orthodox Whiteheadian" (perhaps that is an oxymoron), I am convinced that the insights traced here from process thought can help Christian theology — illumining, clarifying, and sometimes correcting our doctrinal developments. We need a new theology of nature to help us find ways of living with and within the natural world that are more just, participatory and sustainable.

Whitehead once said that, "it is a disease of philosophy when it is neither bold nor humble, but merely a reflection if the temperamental presuppositions of exceptional personalities."[46] We are not urged to become Whiteheadians, but rather to make progress in this work, using our own constructive imaginations to address the challenges of our own context. Those challenges are as grave as they are urgent; we are hearing a compelling call to action. There is a fundamental reorientation needed if we are to have a chance of finding a "just and sustainable conviviality."[47] My hope is that we may be humble enough to come out of our anthropocentrism to a more down-to-earth sense of ourselves. Presented here with a genuine alternative that chooses life and supports the flourishing of all, may we be bold enough to seize it.

45 McDaniel, "Process Thought and the Epic of Evolution", 80.
46 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 17.
47 Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 52.

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NICHOLAS CUSANUS AND HIS 'NON ALIUD' AS CONCEPT OF GOD

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Abstract: This paper presents Cusanus' dialogue of 1462, named after and centred on the concept of non aliud, and exploits its speculative resources for conceiving the relationship between God and the realm of finite entities. Furthermore, it points to the elements of self-constitution of the absolute and of the latter's grounding relation towards the contingent. Finally, it is argued that Cusanus' concept of *non aliud* offers a valuable contribution to the present debate about an adequate concept of God.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nicholas Cusanus, the late medieval/early renaissance thinker, was born in 1401 and died at the age of 63 in 1464. In the springtime of 1462, he completed a work that is, in the critical edition, entitled *Directio speculantis seu de non aliud*.[1] It narrates a conversation between four thinkers that represent different philosophical schools. Two of them, Abbot Giovanni Andrea dei Bussi and Pietro Balbo Pisano, are dealing with Proclus's commentary on *Parmenides* and the *Theologia Platonica* of the same author. The third, who takes part in the said conversation, is the Portuguese medical man Fernando Martíns de Roriz, who

1 Nicholas of Cusa, *Directio speculantis seu de non aliud*, ed. Ludwig Baur and Paul Wilpert (Meiner, 1944), henceforth referred to as Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud.* Cf. also the more rececent edition of *De non aliud. Nichts anderes*, ed. Klaus Reinhardt (Aschendorff, 2011). Concerning the background of the (varying) title cf. Klaus Reinhardt, "Eine bisher unbekannte Handschrift mit Werken des Nikolaus von Kues in der Kapitelsbibliothek von Toledo", in *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft 17*, ed. Rudolf Haubst (Grünewald, 1986), 111–14. I quote the text of 'De non aliud' and all other works of Cusanus according to the Meiner edition and the English translation of Nicholas of Cusa, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa* (Banning, 2001).

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is familiar with Aristotelian philosophy. Finally, we have Nicholas Cusanus himself, who is actually preoccupied with the writings of Dionysius Areopagita.[2]

The conversation is centred on the concept of *non aliud*, which Cusanus uses to describe the divine in its relation to the finite. This concept will portray the absolute, for two reasons: it defines itself and it grounds what is finite. After having outlined Cusanus' ideas, I will consider how the author contributes, through the conception based on *non aliud*, to contemporary philosophical theology.

II. ACCESS INTO THE CONCEPT OF 'NON ALIUD'

It is at the very beginning of *De non aliud* that the author formulates the central insight. By doing so, he intends to establish a valuable concept of the absolute — i.e. an instance independent of everything else, an auto-referential and radically 'first' being. So, Nicholas[3] introduces the concept of *definitio* by asking

2 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 3) 1,1. Mischa v. Perger, "Nichts anderes: Ein Fund des Cusanus auf der Namenssuche für das erste Prinzip aller Dinge", *Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 13, no. 2 (2004): 116–18, offers further information concerning the conversation partners and describes the historical setting. Corresponding to the aforementioned philosophical schools, investigations in the history of philosophy have tried to identify sources for the formula of *non aliud*. While, for historical reasons, a direct dependence on the *Theologia Platonica*, written by Proclus, seems improbable (cf. Davide Monaco, *Deus Trinitas: Dio come 'non altro' nel pensiero di Nicolò Cusano* (Città Nuova, 2010), 182–85), Meister Eckhart is a good candidate for having furnished ideas to Cusanus. A formulation in his *Sermo „Deus unus est" (Sermo 29)* — „In deo enim non est aliud" — seems to allude to *non aliud*; see Meister Eckhart, *Die lateinischen Werke, herausgegeben im Auftrag der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft*, ed. Josef Quint and Konrad Weiss (Kohlhammer, 1936-2006), no. 270. Cf. Egil A. Wyller, "Zum Begriff ‚non aliud' bei Cusanus", in *Nicolò Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno*: *Atti del Congresso internazionale in occasione del V centenario della morte di Nicolò Cusano, Bressanone, 6-10 settembre 1964*, ed. A. Pattin (Sansoni, 1970), 419. The central motif of *non aliud* appears also in Meister Eckhart, *Expositio Libri Sapientiae* Cap. 7 v. 27a, n. 154, and *Expositio Sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem* Cap. 1 v. 11, n. 99, cf. Meister Eckhart, *Die lateinischen Werke, herausgegeben im Auftrag der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft*, no. 2; cf. Jean Greisch, *Du 'non-autre' au 'tout autre': Dieu et l'absolu dans les théologies philosophiques de la modernité* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), 49, fn. 1. Finally, Dionysius Areopagita, in his *Mystica Theologia*, holds that God can neither be named nor that he is something 'other', which emphasizes the 'mystery' of *non aliud*. In *De non aliud* (h XIII, 5) 1,5, Cusanus refers to *De Mystica Theologia* V: „οὔτε λέγεται οὔτε νοεῖται"; „οὔτε ἄλλο τι τῶν ἡμῖν ἢ ἄλλῳ τινὶ τῶν ὄντων συνεγνωσμένων." Cf. Pseudo-Dionysus Areopagita, *Corpus Dionysiacum: Vol. 2: De coelesti hierarchia. De ecclesiastica hierarchia. De mystica theologia. Epistulae*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf M. Ritter (de Gruyter, 1991), 149.

3 With 'Nicholas' I always refer to the literal figure of the *De non aliud*.

what it is "that most of all gives us knowledge."[4] Here we should not immediately think of 'definitions' we deal with in daily philosophical work. I propose an understanding of this Latin term *definitio* in a rather broad sense, as the giving of a special shape or form to something, like *Bestimmung* or *Umgrenzung* in German. We might even speak about the *definitio* as determining its object, but we should not associate 'determinism' to this way of determining.

Nicholas uses two further concepts in order to characterize the *definitio* he points to. The first one is *oratio*, the second one *ratio*.[5] In his translation, Hopkins combines both by saying "constitutive ground." I would rather like to distinguish two levels, which are highlighted by the explicit use of *oratio* and *ratio*. The first one, we might call 'logical' or 'of predication'; the definition is, therefore, just the way we speak about something. The second one, however, indicated by *ratio*, is rather an 'ontological' level. *Ratio* is, according to Cusanus and former thinkers, linked to the essence of an entity, not to (our) predication only. I am emphasizing this double level in the use of *definitio*, because it helps to defend the author against being accused of an unjustified transition from a logical to an ontological level. Speaking of *definitio*, he is, from the beginning, aware of both dimensions.

Etymologically, the substantive derives from the verb *definire*. In order to justify this particular comprehension it is added that "it defines everything" (*quia omnia definit*). Why is this accurate, we may enquire? Cusanus uses the term in the singular. Obviously, he does not point to the many concrete definitions of singular states of affairs, but to the general process of defining something. Furthermore, he has in mind *every* (imaginable) state of affairs that can be defined, determined, characterized or that can be given a shape. However, on this general or formal level, it makes sense to ask whether a definition that defines everything also defines itself.[6] It seems that at this point, the discourse gains a second feature. One still speaks about the general process of defining, but equally about a special, supreme, all-encompassing definition. This definition is said to define itself, because it does not exclude anything. Therefore, Nicholas intimates that "if [the] definition defines everything, then does it define even itself."[7]

4 *Ibid*., (h XIII, 3) 1,3: „Abs te igitur in primis quaero: quid est quod nos apprime facit scire?"
5 Cf. *ibid*., (h XIII, 4) 1,3: „[…] oratio seu ratio est definitio."
6 Cf. *ibid*.: „Si igitur omnia definit definitio, et se ipsam igitur definit?"
7 *Ibid*.: „Vides igitur definitionem omnia definientem esse non aliud quam definitum?"

By introducing the concept of *definitio*, the author certainly has in mind the Aristotelian 'essential definition.' In contrast to the 'nominal definition', an 'essential definition' makes clear what something is.[8] Of course, the familiar way of defining something by *genus* and *differentia specifica* is not followed here. Nonetheless, given the reference to the 'essential definition', the formulated supposition here becomes (more) comprehensible and allows for a more speculative interpretation: Nicholas is talking about a definition which defines everything in its essence. So it must carry, in some sense, the essence of everything — or at least something decisive about this essence — in itself. If this is the case, then it seems more plausible to hold that, also on the 'ontological' level, this *definitio* 'is' all that it defines, namely, the defined (*definitum*).

Fernando, a participant already referred to in the relevant conversation, gives his assent to what has been said, stating that the *definitio* (of everything) is also the *definitio* of itself.[9] This statement follows from the former one that the *definitio* defines everything, without excluding anything. Therefore, it also defines itself. As it still seems not clear to Fernando which definition they are speaking about, Nicholas makes him arrive at the thesis that *non aliud* — contained in the foregoing claim that the definition which defines everything is 'not other' than what is defined — is the instance one looks for, the instance that defines itself and everything else.[10]

The *non aliud* enters into the definition of every self-identical being. Please note that this self-identity is put into words exactly by the negative delimitation from other beings. Therefore, one should not simply link *non aliud* to *idem* that has played an important role in the earlier *Dialogus de genesi*.[11] In his later writing *De venatione sapientiae*, Cusanus clearly refuses the equation

8 Cf. Heribert M. Nobis, "Definition I.", in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Schwabe & Co., 1972), 31. Regarding the λόγος τοῦ τί ἐστι see Aristotle, *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, ed. William D. Ross (Clarendon Press, 1949), II 10, 93b; 7, 92b and elsewhere.

9 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 4) 1,3: „Video, cum sui ipsius sit definitio."

10 Cf. *ibid*., (h XIII, 4) 1,4: „Pauca, quae dixi, facile rimantur, in quibus reperies ‚non aliud'; quodsi toto nisu mentis aciem ad li ‚non aliud' convertis, mecum ipsum definitionem se et omnia definientem videbis."

11 Cf. Max Rohstock, *Der negative Selbstbezug des Absoluten: Untersuchungen zu Nicolaus Cusanus' Konzept des Nicht-Anderen* (de Gruyter, 2014), 72. Concerning the higher value of the negative formulation, Rohstock, *Der negative Selbstbezug des Absoluten,* 91 fn. 307, states that Cusanus does not merely talk about each X's being identical with itself, but that he rather holds that each X is not-other toward itself. According to Rohstock, this move does justice to the perspective on what is 'other' to this X as well.

of both terms.[12] The temptation to interpret *non aliud* simply as the negative formulation of *idem* certainly derives from the nominalization of *non aliud* which allows for the forgetting of its grammatical peculiarity. This tendency is fostered by Cusanus himself and others who have often added the definite article 'li' to *non aliud*, a move alien to the classical Latin language. In any case, we should understand *non aliud,* in defining other beings and itself, both as linguistic expression and as metaphysical definition, doing in this way justice to Cusanus' understanding of *definitio*, as explained before.[13]

In what follows, I want to focus on the concept's speculative resources.

III. THE SPECULATIVE RESOURCES OF THE CONCEPT

The concept *non aliud*, as introduced by Cusanus, serves as illustration of the absolute by defining both itself and everything that is *aliud*, finite. I will now further focus on these two points that we have already taken notice of in the foregoing passages. In what follows, I will stay with the author who develops the idea in both aspects, entangled in one another. There is a strong reflection by Cusanus about the status of *non aliud* in relation to God himself. However, I will skip the passages in which he tries to give a Trinitarian interpretation of *non aliud*,[14] although he is generally convinced that God's creation is based on the inner-divine relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Definition of Itself and Everything Else

As Fernando utters some doubts, Nicholas continues to defend the thesis in question, that is, of the self-defining *non aliud*. He argues for its validity in an apagogical way: First, *non aliud* cannot be *aliud*, in the way that different finite beings are distinguished from each other as 'others' (*alia*). In the realm of the finite, to be 'other' constitutes the basic relativeness of beings. It does not bear any distinguished direction; everything is 'other' in relation to the

12 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae* (h XII, 40) 14,41:„Advertas autem, quomodo li non aliud non significat tantum sicut li idem."

13 See Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 4) 1,3 (see footnote 5). Cf. Sandro Mancini, "L'estrema soglia della riflessione trascendentale di Cusano: nient'altro che nome divino", in *La persona e i nomi dell'essere*, ed. Francesco Botturi (Vita e Pensiero, 2001), 871.

14 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 12f.) 5,18f.

other.[15] One should note in this context, that also Thomas Aquinas, when dealing with the doctrine of the transcendentals, explains *aliquid* as *aliud quid*, i.e. as the relativity proper to each being insofar as it is and as it is distinct or separated (*divisum*) from others.[16] If it is impossible that *non aliud* is defined by its relation to other beings, one is left with the possibility that it is defined by the relation to itself:

> FERDINAND: Indeed, I see clearly how it is that Not-other is not other than Not-other. No one will deny this. — NICHOLAS: You speak the truth. Don't you now see most assuredly that Not-other defines itself, since it cannot be defined by means of [any] other? — FERDINAND: I see [this] assuredly […].[17]

The relation to itself, in which the definition takes place, is a negative one. Now, in the second step, Cusanus also shows that *non aliud* defines everything else. For this purpose, he refers to two examples in which are defined — apparently in a tautological manner — the 'other' and the sky:

> For what would you answer if someone asked you, 'What is other?' Would you not reply, 'Not other than other'? Likewise, [if someone asked you] 'What is the sky?' you would reply, 'Not other than the sky.'[18]

According to Nicholas, this way of defining *aliud*, the sky, or whatever else, has the advantage of being most precise and most true. Of course, one could respond that a definition that is, superficially considered, tautological, cannot be a definition to be taken seriously. Such a response does not occur. But *if* it did, how could it be rejected, while holding fast to Cusanus' intentions? Obviously, the positive, concrete content of what something is, is not explained; *aliud* is not described here in its properties with regard to other finite beings. Nonetheless, the definition with the help of *non aliud* is not simply tautological. It rather de-

15 Cf. the elucidations, including the hint to the definition of otherness as "relative non-being" in Plato's *Sophistes*, in Gerda v. Bredow, "Gott der Nichtandere: Erwägungen zur Interpretation der cusanischen Philosophie", in *Im Gespräch mit Nikolaus von Kues*: *Gesammelte Aufsätze 1948-1993*, ed. Hermann Schnarr (Aschendorff, 1995), 51.

16 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 1, a. 1, corpus (*Editio Leonina* 22/1, 5).

17 Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 4) 1,4: „Ferdinandus: Video equidem bene, quomodo ‚non aliud' est non aliud quam non aliud. Et hoc negabit nemo. — Nicolaus: Verum dicis. Nonne nunc certissime vides ‚non aliud' se ipsum definire, cum per aliud definiri non possit? — Ferdinandus: Video certe […] ."

18 *Ibid*., (h XIII, 5) 1,5: „Quid enim responderes, si quis te «quid est aliud? interrogaret? Nonne diceres: «non aliud quam aliud? Sic, «quid caelum?, responderes: «non aliud quam caelum."

limits the defined in relation to everything else and does so in a negative way.[19] Through this, one can defend, on the one hand, Cusanus' valuation that the definition, although it takes everything in account by denying it and therefore remains abstract, without giving any concrete qualification of other beings,[20] is most precise and most true. On the other hand, it is right that in the self-definition of *non aliud* — *'non aliud est non aliud quam non aliud'* –, neither in Latin nor in any translation do we find a complete equality of the three instances from a grammatical point of view, because the first and the third are mostly used as nominalizations, while the second takes the (original) role of denying the otherness.[21] Despite the objections I have mentioned, one can plausibly assume that the structure of *non aliud quam* has an all-encompassing significance, if we take into account the general level at which it defines negatively everything that there is. It is this characteristic of being all-encompassing that Cusanus makes use of in his search for a concept of the absolute.

A Concept of God?

Fernando takes up the reference to Dionysius Areopagita and underlines that *non aliud* has to be understood as the concept of God, because Fernando identifies it with 'the first beginning' or simply the 'first.' Qualifying something as 'first' brings already with it a reference to something second, that is dependent on the first. Concerning the originated (*principiatum*), it is said that it has from the beginning whatever it is. The beginning (*principium*), however, is the ground of being, or the definition, of what is originated.[22] Of course, the identification of *ratio essendi* and *definitio*, which we can observe in this place, also elucidates the foregoing reflection on *non aliud* as the one that defines itself and everything else.[23] Up to now, the *definitio* has been

19 Cf. Dirk Cürsgen, *Die Logik der Unendlichkeit: Die Philosophie des Absoluten im Spätwerk des Nikolaus von Kues* (Lang, 2007), 96.

20 Cf. Stephan Grotz, *Negationen des Absoluten: Meister Eckhart, Cusanus, Hegel* (Meiner, 2009), 214.

21 Cf. Thomas Leinkauf, *Nicolaus Cusanus: Eine Einführung* (Aschendorff, 2006), 138.

22 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 5) 2,6: „Principiatum vero cum a se nihil, sed, quidquid est, habeat a principio, profecto principium est ratio essendi eius seu definitio."

23 The order of the assertion used here corresponds to the logical order, beginning with the definition of itself, as Cusanus does in *ibid*., (h XIII, 61), propositio I (n. 114): „Definitio, quae se et omnia definit, ea est, quae per omnem mentem quaeritur", and also in Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, (h XII, 39) 14,40. At the beginning of *De non aliud*, however, one starts, for didactical reasons, with the definition of all beings. From this definition, one gets

interpreted somehow as essential definition; it is therefore the cause of the defined being what it is. If it also serves as *ratio essendi*, then it endows the so-and-so defined with existence, too. This reminds us of both the logical *and* the ontological level of *definitio* underlined at the beginning.

If we remember that *non aliud* defines both everything else and itself, then it must not only define itself, but also sustain itself; *non aliud* would be, therefore, *ratio essendi sui ipsius* as well. We can find some quotations of different works of Cusanus that allow for this conclusion. In *De docta ignorantia*, e.g., taking up the foregoing reflections, we read that "nothing exists from itself except the unqualifiedly Maximum (in which from itself, in itself, through itself, and with respect to itself are the same thing: viz., Absolute Being) and that, necessarily, every existing thing is that which it is, insofar as it is, from Absolute Being."[24] In the later *De principio*, the author argues that the beginning (*principium*) must be conceived as existing *per se*, because otherwise one could not think of anything else that is grounded, with regard to existence, in this beginning.[25]

Fernando, with the explicit consent of Nicholas, has identified *non aliud* with the 'first beginning' and the 'first'. By doing so, he has somehow declared *non aliud* to be a concept of God. Nicholas, however, formulates a caveat: *non aliud* is, in any case, not the (unnameable) name of God, which is before any nameable name, but it is rather similar to the way to reach this name.[26] Like other titles for the divine, *non aliud* has the value of a symbol (*aenigma*). It helps in the knowledge of the divine, but it does not properly denote it. Among the symbols hitherto developed though, it has an excellent position,

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the conclusion that *non aliud* also defines itself. Cf. Erwin Sonderegger, "Cusanus: Definitio als Selbstbestimmung", *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 4 (1999): 163.

24 Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* II (h I, 65) 2,98: „Docuit nos sacra ignorantia in prioribus nihil a se esse nisi maximum simpliciter, ubi a se, in se, per se et ad se idem sunt: ipsum scilicet absolutum esse […]."

25 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *Tu quis es <De principio>* (h X/2b, 23f.), n. 18: „Principium enim, cum non sit ab alio, per se subsistere dicimus, cum nihil esse concipere valeamus, si ipsum non conciperemus esse […]."

26 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 6) 2,7: „Cum nos autem alter alteri suam non possimus revelare visionem nisi per vocabulorum significatum, praecisius utique li ‚non aliud' non occurrit, licet non sit nomen Dei, quod est ante omne nomen in caelo et terra nominabile, sicut via peregrinantem ad civitatem dirigens non est nomen civitatis." Similarly *ibid*., (h XIII, 52) 22,99.

as it portrays quite closely the unnameable name of God, more closely (*propinquius*) than others.[27]

Now, Cusanus puts *non aliud* clearly in relation to the 'other' (*aliud*). It precedes the 'other' from a logical point of view, as it is its beginning (*principium*) with regard to being and knowing. Cusanus uses the metaphor of light and the analogy of proportion to elucidate the way in which *non aliud* is the beginning of perception:

> […] perceptual light is in some way conceived to be related to perceptual seeing as the Light which is Not-other [is related] to all the things which can be mentally seen.[28]

Perceptual light is the condition for our ability to see something perceptually. Nicholas explains that we can see a specific colour, because the perceptual light is delimited or defined. Out of this knowledge, founded in experience and even convertible into the modern scientific explanation of vision, he concludes that perceptual light is the beginning of the being and knowing of the perceptually visible.[29] One can surely follow this conclusion with regard to knowing, but it might be surprising in relation to being — at least if we do not restrict the argument of 'being' to 'visible existence.' Quickly, Cusanus steps onto the factual plane where God is presented as the light that precedes everything else. Concerning this 'light', which is identified with *non aliud*, he wants to state that it is the beginning in relation to the being and knowing of the other.

God or *non aliud* as unnameable light stands in relation also to the perceptual light we have mentioned; he shines in it (*lucet*). What is stated here could be explicated in the language of participation. By the mediation of the visible light — and in the case of mental knowledge by the mediation of the created spirit –, *non aliud* gives being and knowing, as Nicholas further explains: Concerning what exists and what is known/seen, it is beginning (*principium*) and therefore the beginning, the middle, and the end. Whatever something is, it receives this from *non aliud*.[30] In the same way, one can hold

27 Cf. *ibid*., (h XIII, 6) 2,7. This appraisal of *non aliud* will lose a bit of its value two years later, when, in *De apice theoriae* (1464), Cusanus similarly characterizes the excellence of *posse*.

28 *Ibid*., (h XIII, 7) 3,8: „Sed sensibilis lux visui comparata sensibili ita sese habere aliqualiter concipitur, sicut lux, quae ‚non aliud', ad omnia quae mente videri queunt."

29 Cf. *ibid*.: „[…] ita sensibilis lux principium est essendi et visibile sensibile cognoscendi."

30 Cf. *ibid*., (h XIII, 7f.) 3,9f.: „Ceterum quia ad aliud, quod videre cupis audireve, est intentio, in principii consideratione non defigeris, quamquam id principium, medium et finis est

that through the mediation of *non aliud*, which remains in itself hidden, the finite being can be known as what it is.[31]

An Apophatic Account

Through what follows, Cusanus reminds his readers of the special status of God. In order not to fail from the very first step in searching for the beginning, Nicholas suggests something else to his conversation partners: One must not, in any case, search for the beginning as for some being, something 'other,'[32] as for something that stands for itself and might be delimited from the other. He uses once more the analogy of light in order to formulate a criterion for the adequate approximation of the *non aliud*: "Therefore light is sought in what-is-visible, where it is perceived; thus, in this way it is seen at least gropingly."[33] That means that *non aliud* is concomitantly known in the knowledge of the other (*aliud*) and is thus approximately accessible.

Nicholas does not do justice to the desire uttered by Fernando that *non aliud* be described in greater detail. To be more precise, he does not feel able to do so, because otherwise he would have to delimit *non aliud* from the other and thus make it something 'other' as well. In order to defend his standpoint, he refers to the tradition of apophatic theology. Without naming him, he quotes statements typical of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita — that God is super-substantial and above every name.[34] Although these claims seem to be

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quaesiti. Eodem modo in ‚non aliud' adverte. Nam cum omne, quod quidem est, sit non aliud quam idipsum, hoc utique non habet aliunde; a ‚non alio' igitur habet. Non igitur aut est aut cognoscitur esse id, quod est, nisi per ‚non aliud', quae quidem est eius causa, adaequatissima ratio scilicet sive definitio […]."

31 This is correctly emphasized by Pál Bolberitz, *Philosophischer Gottesbegriff bei Nikolaus Cusanus in seinem Werk: ‚De non aliud'* (Benno, 1989), 43.

32 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 8) 3,10: „[…] nequaquam iuxta esse consideratur, quando quidem id, quod quaeritur, quaeratur ut aliud."

33 *Ibid.*: „Lux igitur in visibili, ubi percipiatur, exquiritur, ut sic saltem attrectabiliter videatur."

34 Cf. *ibid.*, (h XIII, 8) 4,11: „Omnes enim theologi Deum viderunt quid maius esse quam concipi posset, et idcirco ‚supersubstantialem', ‚supra omne nomen' et consimilia de ipso affirmarunt […]." The editors refer with regard to ‚supersubstantialis' (ὑπερούσιος) to Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, *De divinis nominibus* I 1.2.6; V 2 and *De Mystica Theologia* III, with regard to ‚supra omne nomen' (ὑπερώνυμος) to *De divinis nominibus* I 5.7 and *De Mystica Theologia* V; cf. Pseudo-Dionysus Areopagita, *Corpus Dionysiacum: Vol. 1: De divinis nominibus*, ed. Beate R. Suchla (de Gruyter, 1990), 108; 110; 116-20, and Pseudo-Dionysus Areopagita, *Corpus Dionysiacum*, Vol. 2, 146; 149f. Furthermore there is given the more fundamental reference to

negative and induce people to speak of negative theology, Nicholas underlines that *non aliud* is neither affirmation nor negation but prior to both. It is important to see how the author relates it to his path followed in earlier works: *Non aliud* "is that which for many years I sought by way of the coincidence of opposites — as the many books which I have written about this speculative matter bear witness."[35]

The formulation, as it stands, reminds us to distinguish between *coincidentia oppositorum* and *non aliud*. The former is the medium to reach what is now called *non aliud*. This distinction is already somehow included in *De docta ignorantia*, but not always rigorously followed. In his later works, then, Cusanus makes clear that God is to be individuated beyond the *coincidentia oppositorum*.[36] Nevertheless only some moments ago, I mentioned that *non aliud* cannot simply be identified with God either; it is only an excellent way to know the beginning (*principium*) and portrays closely the unnameable name of God.[37] The passages under examination have left open the question whether *non aliud* denotes the absolute himself or whether it is 'only' the path towards the absolute.

In consonance with the example of Dionysius Areopagita, especially from the fifth chapter of his *Mystica Theologia*, the conversation denies one property after another of *non aliud*, including those attributes that are classically ascribed to God or identified with his essence, like 'eternal' or the transcendentals *unum, ens, verum, bonum*. According to Nicholas, they all come close to *non aliud*, but they are still something 'other' in relation to it; therefore, they are denied. One can use them as names for the divine, but they lack the precision[38] which is obviously only proper to *non aliud*. The conversation partners even distance themselves from identifying the divine with the One (*unum*), as it is done in Plato's *Parmenides* and, by Dionysius, in *De divinis*

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the New Testament's *Letter to Philippians* 2,9: "[…] God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names (τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα) […] ."

35 Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 9) 4,12: „[…] sed ante omnia talia; et istud est, quod per oppositorum coincidentiam annis multis quaesivi, ut libelli multi, quos de hac speculatione conscripsi, ostendunt."

36 Cf. the quotations given by Mariano Álvarez-Gómez, *Die verborgene Gegenwart des Unendlichen bei Nikolaus von Kues* (Pustet, 1968), 48–60. To what extent the concept of *coincidentia* is widened to *non aliud*, is discussed by Grotz, *Negationen des Absoluten*, 164.

37 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 6) 2,7 (see footnote 26).

38 Cf. *ibid*., (h XIII, 10) 4,14: „Sumuntur quoque ob id omnia haec pro apertis Dei nominibus, tametsi praecisionem non attingant."

nominibus. We get the impression that it is intended to locate the divine beyond all concepts and points of access. Cusanus does so because he wants to avoid every temptation to conceive God in the way of a finite being. So he is also sceptical with regard to the doctrine of the transcendentals. That classically one also counts 'something' (*aliquid*) as among the transcendentals might have also contributed to all this. Of course, *aliquid*, explained as *aliud quid*, is not applicable at all in the description of *non aliud*.[39]

A Grounding Relation to 'aliud'

Going forward in *De non aliud*, Fernando individuates the consequences of what has been said so far; that means he explicates what is implied in the description of *non aliud* as the one that defines itself and everything else. In any case, he contemplates everything that can be seen within *non aliud*; nothing can be or be known apart from it.[40] According to him (and Nicholas will approve it soon), this is valid also for the negations of being and knowledge, nothing and ignorance:

> For everything which exists exists insofar as it is not other [than itself]. And everything which is understood is understood insofar as it is understood to be not other [than itself]. And everything which is seen to be true is seen to be true insofar as it is discerned as not other [than true]. And, in sum, whatever is seen to be an other is seen to be an other insofar as it is not other [than it is].[41]

This sums up, what has been conceived before and in other writings under the concepts of *ratio essendi et cognoscendi* or *entitas absoluta*. In the same sense, *non aliud* is now characterized, in relation to the 'other', as the most adequate constituting ground and as the standard and measure of everything; so it defines that something *is* and *how* it is, whether it be possible or actual,

39 Cf. Jan B. Elpert, "Unitas — Aequalitas — Nexus: Eine textkommentierende Lektüre zu ‚De venatione sapientiae' (Kap. XXI-XXVI)", in *Nikolaus von Kues*: *De venatione sapientiae: Akten des Symposions in Trier vom 23. bis 25. Oktober 2008*, ed. Walter A. Euler (Paulinus, 2010), 175.

40 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 11) 5,15: „‚Non aliud' seorsum ante omne aliud intuens ipsum sic video, quod in eo quidquid videri potest intueor; nam neque esse nec cognosci extra ipsum quidquam possibile […] ."

41 *Ibid*.: „Omne enim, quod est, in tantum est, in quantum ‚non aliud' est; et omne, quod intelligitur, in tantum intelligitur, in quantum ‚non aliud' esse intelligitur; et omne, quod videtur verum, usque adeo videtur verum, in quantum ‚non aliud' cernitur. Et summatim quidquid videtur aliud, in tantum aliud videtur, in quantum ‚non aliud'." For what follows cf. *ibid*., (h XIII, 11) 5,16.

moving or non-moving, living or understanding. Giving his assent to Fernando's speech, Nicholas states:

> You have rightly directed your acute [mental] gaze toward God (who is signified through "Not-other"), so that in this Beginning, Cause, or Constituting Ground, which is neither other nor diverse, you have seen — to the extent presently granted you — all the things which are humanly visible.[42]

By doing so, he emphasizes the instrumental interpretation of *non aliud*. It is not clear, however, in which relation stand the concepts *principium*, *causa* and *ratio*. On the basis of what has been said earlier, one might suppose that God himself accomplishes the functions indicated by these concepts. But immediately after the passage I have quoted, *non aliud* is called *rerum ratio*. That means that one of the concepts presumably to be referred to God is applied to *non aliud* itself:

> You are granted [this vision] to the extent that Not-other — i.e., the Constituting Ground of things — reveals itself, or makes itself visible, to your reason [ratio] or mind.[43]

In this same sentence, we note that the neutral expression *non aliud* is followed by a personal form of the adjective (*visibilem*), which contains a grammatical error. As the sentence goes on, we are confronted with a further difficulty. We do not explicitly get any new subject, and *non aliud* is given a mediating function. Cusanus says that by means of it, as it defines itself, something or someone has shown itself or himself more clearly than before.[44] If we refer to the preceding phrase *ipsum non aliud* as the sentence's subject, it sounds a bit strange; *non aliud* would reveal itself more clearly than before, and all this by means of itself. In his English translation, Hopkins suggests that God is to be taken as subject; so the claim would say that through *non aliud* — by means of the fact that it defines itself — God now has revealed himself more clearly than before. This sounds at least plausible, but why does then Cusanus not tell us explicitly that he wants to be understood in this way? As a solution,

42 *Ibid.*, (h XIII, 11) 5,17: „Recte in Deum aciem iecisti per ‚non aliud' significatum, ut in principio, causa seu ratione, quae non est alia nec diversa, cuncta humaniter visibilia conspiceres […]."

43 *Ibid.*: „Tantum autem conceditur, quantum ipsum ‚non aliud', scilicet rerum ratio, tuae se rationi seu menti revelat sive visibilem exhibet […]."

44 Cf. *ibid.*: „[…] sed hoc nunc medio per ‚non aliud', quia sese definit, revelavit clarius quam antea."

I propose that Cusanus writes *non aliud*, but thinks of *deus*, God, and that he betrays himself by using the adjective's personal form. The following sentence would then indicate the explicit passage from *non aliud* to *deus*:

> But in this symbolism of the signification of "Not-other" — chiefly by way of the consideration that it defines itself — [God has] now [revealed Himself] more richly and more clearly. [He has revealed Himself] to such an extent that I can hope that He will some day reveal Himself to us without a symbolism.[45]

The ambiguity between God and *non aliud* allows for the alternative interpretations that either Cusanus himself was not sure whether both collapse into one or that he explicitly wanted to keep his readers in this lack of evidence — in order to prevent them from fixing the divine into one concept and to appreciate the special value of *non aliud* which lets us get as near to God as possible and offers rich possibilities for speculation as no other symbolism does. The different interpretations, offered by scholars,[46] agree at least on this ambiguity: the term *non aliud* names in a really adequate manner the divine, and the latter reveals itself in this term without allowing itself to be caught in it.

Cusanus reminds us of the contrasting descriptions of *non aliud* and *aliud*. He especially underlines the complete independency of *non aliud*, while everything else depends on it. It does not lack anything, nor can anything exist outside of it.[47] That nothing can exist outside of *non aliud* entails that everything must either be identical to it or exist within it. That *non aliud* 'is' somehow the *aliud*, can be seen in the author's elucidations, but it is not a bare identity. For this reason, we had better start from the interpretation of 'immanence.' Obviously, we do not need to conceive it in a spatial manner; Cusanus rather hints at a conditional relation. It is explained in terms of *non*

45 *Ibid*., (h XIII, 12) 5,17: „[…] nunc autem in hoc aenigmate significati ipsius ‚non aliud' per rationem potissimum illam, quia se definit, fecundius et clarius, adeo ut sperare queam ipsum Deum sese nobis aliquando sine aenigmate revelaturum." As everywhere, the text quoted above reports the translation by Hopkins, including his clarifying amplifications in brackets that correspond, however, to the interpretation defended here.

46 Cf. Bolberitz, *Philosophischer Gottesbegriff bei Nikolaus Cusanus*, 61–64; Cürsgen, *Die Logik der Unendlichkeit*, 92, 97; Rohstock, *Der negative Selbstbezug des Absoluten,* 112f.; Ekkehard Fräntzki, *Nikolaus von Kues und das Problem der absoluten Subjektivität* (Hain, 1972), 111–24.

47 Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 13) 6,20: „‚Non aliud' autem, quia a nullo aliud est, non caret aliquo, nec extra ipsum quidquam esse potest."

aliud's being within the *aliud*, however, as *aliud*. To illustrate this idea, Cusanus describes the relation between God and the sky he has created:

> Accordingly, in itself Not-other is seen antecedently and as absolutely not other than itself; and in an other it is seen as not other than this other. For example, I might say that God is none of the visible things, since He is their cause and creator. And I might say that in the sky He is not other than the sky. For how would the sky be not other than the sky if in it Not-other were other than sky?[48]

So, the immanence of *non aliud* (or God) in the finite does not add anything to the latter which it would otherwise lack, but it makes the finite be totally itself. Especially if the understanding of the definition in question — "X is not-other than X" — follows the logic of conceptualizing, immanence consists in everything's being not-other/*non aliud* with regard to itself.[49] If we want to adopt a theological interpretation, we are invited to remember claims pertaining to the Absolute as being the *entitas* or *quidditas* of all there is. Yet, Cusanus does not tell us how to understand concretely that *non aliud* makes every finite entity to be just what it is. Nevertheless, the grounding role of *non aliud* for the finite has to be distinguished from the fact that every entity is different from anything other. The otherness, which is entailed, cannot be the effect of *non aliud*. For this claim, I refer to the following explication, which directs us further:

> Now, since the sky is other than not-sky, it is an other. But God, who is Not-other, is not the sky, which is an other; nonetheless, in the sky God is not an other; nor is He other than sky.[50]

This means that God is sky, insofar as the sky is the sky itself, and he is not sky, insofar as the sky is different to all that is not sky. If the latter were the case, then God himself would be other and would have lost his quality of being *non aliud*. Nicholas sums up with a hint to those theologians who have

48 *Ibid*., (h XIII, 14) 6,20: „[…] tunc ipsum in se antecedenter et absolute non aliud quam ipsum videtur et in alio cernitur non aliud quam ipsum aliud; puta si dixero Deum nihil visibilium esse, quoniam eorum causa est et creator, et [si, suggested by the *Codex Toletanus*] dixero ipsum in caelo esse non aliud quam caelum; quomodo enim caelum non aliud quam caelum foret, si ‚non aliud' in ipso foret aliud quam caelum?"

49 In this way I interpret Cürsgen, *Die Logik der Unendlichkeit*, 105.

50 Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 14) 6,20: „Caelum autem cum a non-caelo aliud sit, idcirco aliud est; Deus vero, qui ‚non aliud' est, non est caelum, quod aliud, licet nec in ipso sit aliud, nec ab ipso aliud […]."

claimed that God is all things in all things, while being at the same time none of them.[51]

Only briefly does Nicholas speak about how to conceive creation within this conception: *Non aliud* does not fall back upon something other in order to bring forward the 'other,' but it creates, for example, the sky "through the sky which in Not-other is Not-other."[52] As he has already done in the *Trialogus de possest*, Cusanus clearly rebuts the idea of any first matter that stands for itself. He rather integrates the potentiality of the created into *non aliud*. He continues to repeat what he has said in an even more 'Platonic' way:

> […] we might speak of Not-other as intellectual spirit — or as intellectual light — and might consider that, in the intellect, it is the Constituting Ground of all things [intellectual].) For the Constituting Ground of the sky's being the sky and not any other thing is antecedently in Not-other. Through this Constituting Ground [the sky] is constituted as the sky; and in the sky this Constituting Ground is sky.[53]

The definition — here the constituting ground (*ratio*) — of the created is implicated within *non aliud*. Using a Dionysius-like language, Cusanus describes it as being prior to every name, as being all in all names and yet none of all these names.[54] In this manner he intimates that in the supreme unity the names are not differentiated among each other. This as well is in consonance with the classical doctrine of God's perfect simplicity, as we can notice in Cusanus' attempt to formulate it in a positive way. He concludes: "Therefore, I

51 Based on the phrase of the New Testament's *First Letter to the Corinthians* 15,28: "[…] so that God may be all in all (ἵνα ᾖ ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν)", Cusanus states e.g. in Nicholas of Cusa, *Trialogus de possest* (h XI/2, 14), n. 12: „Sed dum est omnia in omnibus, sic est omnia quod non plus unum quam aliud, quoniam non est sic unum quod non aliud." The formula of *omnia in omnibus* is also used by Dionysius Areopagita. For more formulations of the same kind see Klaus Kremer, "Gott — in allem alles, in nichts nichts: Bedeutung und Herkunft dieser Lehre des Nikolaus von Kues", in *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft17*, ed. Rudolf Haubst (Grünewald, 1986), 188–91.

52 Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 14) 6,22: „[…] non enim creat caelum ex alio, sed per caelum, quod in ipso ipsum est […]."

53 *Ibid.*: „[…] sicut si ipsum intellectualem spiritum diceremus seu lucem et in ipso intellectu rationem omnium esse ipsum consideraremus; tunc enim ratio, cur caelum caelum et non aliud prioriter in ipso est, per quam constitutum est caelum, sive quae in caelo est caelum."

54 Cf. *ibid.*, (h XIII, 15) 6,22: „[…] quod vides ante nomen, quia omnia in omnibus est nominibus et omnium nullum."

view the Unnameable not as deprived of [every] name but as prior to [every] name."[55]

IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Within the movement of neoclassical theism, the figure of Nicholas Cusanus has found some interest. However, a deeper investigation of how he might contribute to the development of a valuable concept of God has not yet been undertaken. According to Daniel Dombrowski, Cusanus came close to the position of neoclassical theism that both God and world have necessary as well as contingent aspects.[56] Roland Faber, in presenting process theology to a German-speaking audience, explicitly refers to Nicholas Cusanus and his concept of *non aliud*, but without going further in developing the question.[57] For Philip Clayton as well, *non aliud* is somehow in the background.[58] Some others give a hint in the direction of Cusanus' idea of the *coincidentia oppositorum*.[59] In general, only thinkers familiar with the European continental tradition of philosophy have said that Cusanus might be an interesting dialogue partner in the philosophical theology of contemporary times. But the aforementioned authors themselves do not really exploit the speculative resources of Cusanus and his concepts of God.

So, to what extent does his conception adhere to the advantages of the classical tradition on the one hand, and how does it support, on the other hand, the requests of neoclassical theism for a renewed concept of God?

As, differently e.g. to Thomas Aquinas, famous for his great *Summae*, Cusanus has not written any systematic theological treatise, we do not always

55 *Ibid.*: „Non video igitur innominabilem quasi nomine privatum, verum ante nomen."

56 Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God* (State Univ. of New York Press, 1996), 9.

57 Cf. Roland Faber, *Gott als Poet der Welt: Anliegen und Perspektiven der Prozesstheologie* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), 248.

58 Cf. Philip Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit*, ed. by Zachary Simpson (Fortress, 2008), 151, note 38. Elsewhere, Clayton shows to be familiar with Cusanus's thought in general, see e.g. Philip Clayton, *Das Gottesproblem: Gott und Unendlichkeit in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie* (Schöningh, 1996), 135–38. See also the 3rd chapter ("Enfolding and Unfolding God: Cusanic *Complicatio*", 87-123) of Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2015).

59 Cf. John Macquarrie, *In Search of Deity* (Crossroad, 1985), 98–110; Ernest L. Simmons, *The Entangled Trinity: Quantum Physics and Theology* (Fortress, 2014), 149.

see how he stays within the central stances of classical theism. He certainly does not distance himself from God's being simple, eternal, immutable, and impassible, and furthermore, also not from his being omniscient, omnipotent and fully good, as neoclassical theists usually maintain. We have seen how he rather relativizes classical divine attributes in order not to substantialize God nor to describe him as an entity among others. Concerning the concept of potency, there are indications, in other works I have not analysed here, that Cusanus does not simply take over the idea of *actus purus*, but that he integrates active and, in some manner, also passive potentiality into the absolute. He is able do so because he conceives the absolute as an all-encompassing reality, as neoclassical theists like to claim. This can also be seen on the grounds of the concept of *non aliud*, introduced as the definition of — or the process of defining — itself and everything else.

Cusanus underlines the absoluteness of God — 'the first', as he calls him. Nothing finite can add anything to his/its perfection. The idea of divine receptivity, central according to neoclassical theists as, e.g., Charles Hartshorne,[60] is not explicated in Cusanus' work. He insists that God is the (exclusive) ground for his being (*ratio essendi sui ipsius*). Unlike neoclassical theists, he stands fast with God's aseity. Although he strictly holds to the distinction between absolute and finite, he is able to think of an intimate link between the two. Or should we rather state that he is able to conceive such an intimate link just *because* he distinguishes them so strictly, as he does? We arrive at a conception where the absolute, as *non aliud*, is transcendent to everything finite that is to be characterized as *aliud*. Equally, *non aliud* is totally immanent to every finite being: God is present in the sky (or 'is' the sky), to take up Cusanus' example, just by the sky's being not-other than the sky.

The author is, of course, aware of the possible misinterpretation that God seems to be identical to the universe of finite beings. In later passages of *De non aliud*, not considered here, he declares that God's overall presence, his total immanence, does not entail that he cannot be distinguished from the totality of being.[61] It is, on the contrary, possible to defend Cusanus against

60 Cf. Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Harper and Brothers, 1941), 330.

61 See especially Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud* (h XIII, 26) 12,47: „[…] cum omnia ad Deum seu ‚non aliud' ordinentur et nequaquam ad aliud post ipsum, non est considerandum universum quasi finis universorum; tunc enim Deus esset universum. Sed cum ad suum sint

the accusation of a pantheist account. Based on what has been said, there are good reasons to classify Cusanus as a panentheist thinker — if one likes to use this (somehow controversial, but nevertheless common) label.

Within a rather classical framework, Cusanus presents us with a kind of theism that allows for doing justice not to all, but at least to many important requests of neoclassical theism. At the same time, he is able to describe God as both self-referential and grounding other entities' being without damaging God's absoluteness. Cusanus protects us from the need to 'downgrade' God in order to conceive him as intimately linked to the finite. Here I see the value of his contribution, centred on the concept of *non aliud*. The idea of conceiving God as somehow personal is, as in other classical authors, at most in the background, but it is certainly not part of the author's interest in writing *De non aliud*.[62]

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principium ordinata universa — per ordinem enim a Deo universa esse se ostendunt — ad ipsum igitur ut ordinis in omnibus ordinem sunt ordinata; omnia enim ordinat, ut ipsum ‚non aliud' sive ordinis ordo in ordinatorum ad ipsum perfectione perfectius relucescat."

62 My thanks to Father Daniel Jamros S.J. for useful linguistic comments to this paper.

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TRUE IMAGININGS: INTEGRATING PANENTHEISM AND A PERSONAL VIEW OF GOD

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Abstract. The perhaps most challenging problem for a pantheistic paradigm in Christian god-talk consists in integrating the trait of personhood in the monistic horizon of this approach. A very helpful way to this goal seems to be the concept of imagination. Its logic of an "as if" represents a modified variation of Kant`s idea of the postulates of reason. Reflections of Jürgen Werbick, Douglas Hedley, and Volker Gerhardt substantiate the philosophical and theological capabilities of this solution which also include a sensibility for the ontological commitments included in the panentheistic approach.

I. PROBLEMS

The model of a *Great Unified Theory* (GUT) has been under discussion in particle physics for some time. It refers to the integration of three of the four fundamental forces of the universe: electromagnetism, strong interaction and weak interaction. If it were also possible to integrate the fourth fundamental force, gravity, including the theory of relativity, into this model, the so-called *Theory of Everything* (TOE) would be the result, GUT being a kind of intermediate stage on the way to TOE. There is quite a controversy about the various formulations of this model. However, if it could be developed in a consistent and stabile way, several hitherto aporetic problems in cosmology could be solved.[1]

I have mentioned this cosmological paradigm because the general discourse in philosophy is strikingly similar, especially in the field of the philosophical and theological question of God. This model originates in the high cultures of Egypt long before the beginnings of occidental philosophy. It re-emerges in traditions

1 cf. Klaus Müller, „Gott — größer als der Monotheismus?", in *Persönlich und alles zugleich*, ed. Frank Meier-Hamidi (Pustet, 2010), 10–20.

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of the Far East, and pervades nearly all the strata of the Bible, exerting decisive influence upon the philosophies and theologies of the Pre-Socratics, the Attic classics, the Church Fathers and countless scholastics. It suffuses Renaissance philosophy, notably Nicolas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno. Starting, as is frequently overlooked,[2] with Kant it may well be the key theme of modern philosophies, notably those of the great Idealists Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Hölderlin as well as those of the forgotten theologians and philosophers of the 19th century (such as the British idealists Bradley and MgTaggert) up to the process philosophies of the likes of Alfred N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. And this very pattern of thought is also key to the philosophies of a Teilhard de Chardin or a Karl Rahner.[3] Finally, it re-emerges with the greatest vigour in the integrative philosophy of a Timothy L.S. Sprigge, which can well be seen as a summa of this philosophical-theological paradigm[4] (this list of names does not purport to be exhaustive in any way).[5] This current of thought is called "panentheism", a term coined by Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, a pupil of Fichte. Topical debates about panpsychism[6] support the plausibility of panentheism. Like the parallel in particle metaphysics, this philosophical-theological GUT or even TOE is so attractive because it is able to integrate apparently contradictory concepts and perspectives of enquiry. This is particularly true of a consistent integration of the philosophical and theological (especially biblical-Christian) question of God which tend to be separated by a gap in nearly all treatises on the subject. In many a traditional dogmatic manual the treatise *De deo uno* was in fact dealt with at the beginning, and the treatise *De deo trino* at the end. Philosophy and theology could hardly be separated more strongly in the centre of a theological mode of thought which, notoriously, prided itself upon its affinity to philosophy. As against this somewhat schizoid structural severing, we may benefit from a quick look at possible solutions offered by panentheism.

2 cf. Klaus Müller, *Streit um Gott: Politik, Poetik und Philosophie im Ringen um das wahre Gottesbild* (Pustet, 2006), 186–195.

3 cf. Klaus Müller, „God in World and We in God: Panentheistic Speculation in the Early Karl Rahner", *in: God in the Iconic Imagination: Spiritual Sensation in Platonism and Modern Theology and Philosophy of Religion,* ed. Chr. Hengstermann, [Forthcoming].

4 cf. Timothy L. S. Sprigge, *The God of Metaphysics*, (OUP, 2006).

5 Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers speak of God* (Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1953).

6 cf. Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla, *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives* (OUP, 2017).

II. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

There are six problems which constitute stumbling blocks for theism but which panentheism can address.

(a) The first tenet is one of onto-semantics, as it were. There are philosophically sound reasons to identify that which is denoted by the term God with the absolute.[7] However, if God is ab-solute, i.e. literally separated from everything else, there cannot be anything real besides or outside him, since this would undermine his absoluteness. He would then be bound or "solute" to that other than himself. Hence, if there is indeed something real that is not God, this reality must exist only in God and as a self-differentiation of the absolute.[8] One can only evade the force of this argument by following Nietzsche and dismiss the very concept of God as an illusion due only to the grammar of our language. However, in so doing, one would also suppose reason to be full of sources of deception of which it is itself unable to give an account.

(b) Besides this general onto-sematic tenet, I find five particular focal points to literally make the espousal of panentheism mandatory: the question of cosmology, i.e. how can we, judging from our current knowledge about the coming-to-be and structure of the universe, talk of a personal creator? There are some 10^{11} Milky Ways whose existence we have been able to establish on empirical grounds. What, then, does "creator" or "creation from nothing" mean here? What does "person" mean unless this notion is to stand for a wholly different reality from the one which we usually designate by this word, unless, that is, it is pure equivocation? The insistence on a crypto-fideistic nominalism of a radicalised Scotism leads to a self-referential theology of exclusion at best.

7 cf. Josef Schmidt, *Philosophische Theologie* (Kohlhammer, 2003), 141. — Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis* (Mohr, 1967). Jan Rohls, *Theologie und Metaphysik* (Gütersloh, 1987).

8 cf. Klaus Müller, Article „Das Absolute" In *Neues Handbuch der Philosophischen Grundbegriffe. Band 1, Absicht — Gemeinwohl* (Freiburg i. Br., 2011), 12–24.

(c) We encounter this downright insoluble complex of neurology — in a mirror-inverted fashion, as it were — in the microscopic realm. How can phenomena like consciousness, let alone self-consciousness and freedom — if they exist, which many doubt –, emerge out of the interaction of probably some 10^{15} neurones and their synapses as well as the biochemical-electrical processes occurring between them? And what does a source or ground have to look like from which such a phenomenon can possibly arise in the first place? It cannot by any means be a person in large, as it were, one with its own consciousness and volition. Such a person would only be a repetition of the explanation problem which this thought was originally meant to solve.

(d) There is a direct theological foundation to the third focal point of our overall question regarding an intellectually justifiable use of God's name, namely the question of theodicy. How can God and the fact of evil and suffering both of human beings and other creatures be reconciled? The question already afflicted ancient thinkers since Lactantius[9] and has been the "rock of atheism" ever since, as the poet Georg Büchner put it in a classic formulation.[10] It will continue to be even that as long as a tear of grief and pain flows from the eye of only one hurt human being or only one abused child.

(e) There is another genuinely theological motif which we need to address, and which reveals the resolution of the aporiai of traditional theological tenets quite palpably. In gender theories, there is a critique of traditional notions of God, notably those in monotheistic religion, as predominantly masculine. Its language therapy is meant to counter the problematic social consequences of this way of speaking about God by means of a feminization of semantics, thereby frequently ending up in the opposite extreme. However, this whole problem evaporates in a panentheistic perspective in which, as is necessarily implied by panentheism, literally-construed conceptions of personhood are overcome. Panentheism instead leads us beyond gender differences altogether.

9 cf. Lucius C. F. Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, c. 13,20f.

10 cf. Georg Büchner, „Dantons Tod". In *Kritische Studienausgabe des Originals mit Quellen, Aufsätzen und Materialen*, ed. Peter von Becker (Syndikat, 1985), Act three, first scene.

(f) And there is still another aspect that tends to be overlooked quite easily. At core, however, it is an obvious one and a matter of course. Strictly speaking, the soul, in Platonic parlance, can only know what is akin to itself and shares its nature. Thus, we would not know anything real as such, not even knowing what the word truth meant if not everything existent had an inner spiritual dimension. More precisely, everything that is must be embraced and encompassed by the one spiritual reality which we call God, the universe or the absolute. This very old idea is being rediscovered right now by authors like Wolfang Welsch, the most prominent of postmodernists of German language, in a startling fashion. Welsch is convinced that only in this way can we overcome the inconsistency of a fundamental antagonism between world and man.[11]

Undoubtedly, then, the overall merits of panentheism are quite impressive. However, the proponents of this paradigm appear to be unable to evade the key question which is raised by its critics almost instantaneously: where is there room for God's personhood which, they say, is absolutely essential to the three great monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam? We cannot object to this. However, we can develop certain ideas which are apt to reformulate this postulate of the personal within the logic of a panentheistic paradigm. We shall approach this issue from several angles in the following step.

III. ON THE LOGIC OF THE "AS IF" OR: HOW IMAGININGS CAN BE TRUE

In my view, the pivot of such a retrieval of the personal dimension in a panentheistic view of God lies in the concept of the imagination and, hence, in a concept of the aesthetic. Incidentally, it is not an accident that aesthetics swiftly rose to be the lead discipline of modern philosophy in the vein of the Kantian critiques and the Idealists.[12] It was perceived as the place in which one could find the common root of theoretical and practical reason. Likewise, it is, as it were, a point where immanence and transcendence meet.

11 cf. Wolfgang Welsch, *Mensch und Welt* (Beck, 2012), especially 61.

12 cf. Klaus Müller, *Glauben — Fragen — Denken. Bd. II: Weisen der Weltbeziehung* (Aschendorff, 2008), 553–560.

This starting point is in fact far from new. I share it with several authors who make use of it in various ways. A first author to whom I refer is one who does so from an emphatically systematic-theological perspective, even though he evinces certain reservations and certain scepticism about the paradigm of panentheism. The systematic theologian Jürgen Werbick uses the concept of the imagination in the context of the theistic notion of God. He assumes that the will of God, which, he claims, constitutes God's personhood solely by itself, is a good will, identifying it with God's perfection and adding verbatim: "The personalism of the Bible imagines *this* perfection." [13]

However, in his hermeneutics, he also emphasizes a biblical realism, mediated by the concept of testimony. He adds a philosophical foundation to the latter by virtue of the key metaphor of "appreciation" and its manifold implications of intersubjective challenge and recognition:

> The metaphor of appreciation adds the relationship of finite subjectivity to the absolute which remains disregarded in the concept of self-differentiation [of the absolute in the sense of panentheism; K.M.]. It relativizes the human and overly-human speech about an absolute ground into which all things are brought forth and in which they consist, making use of the *intuition* [emph.; K.M.] of an absolute counterpart in whom the challenge to self-immanence in self-transcendence occurs and a horizon of personal appreciation in participation and communication is opened up.[14]

Provided the epistemic character of the imaginative and intuitive is given sufficient weight, as it certainly is in Jürgen Werbick's detailed reflections upon interpersonal metaphors,[15] I can gladly concur with these ideas. The contentious issues is, then, encapsulated in, or even restricted to, the question on which side the reasoning is more "human and overly-human", whether in the field of "appreciation" or that of a "self-differentiation" of the absolute within the logic of a doctrine of all-oneness and panentheism.

This seemingly abstract question becomes quite concrete and tangible in what Jürgen Werbick says about the topic in his book on the *Lord's Prayer*. In his reflections on the third entreaty ("Thy will be done"), he tackles this head-

13 Jürgen Werbick, *Vater unser: Theologische Meditationen zur Einführung ins Christsein* (Freiburg i. Br., 2011), 113. — cf. „Einbildungskraft" in: Jürgen Werbick, *Transzendental denken in einer hermeneutischen Diskurslandschaft. Notizen zu Klaus Müllers Denkprojekt* In: Saskia Wendel, Thomas Schärtl, *Gott — Selbst — Bewusstsein (Regensburg: Pustet),* 7–26. Here: 23.

14 Werbick, „Transzendental denken", 17.

15 cf. Werbick, „Transzendental denken", 24f.

on.[16] Excitingly, right from the start, he expressly confronts this entreaty of the Lord's Prayer regarding the doing of God's will on earth and in heaven with an "Egyptian" paradigm, i.e. one of all-oneness. He juxtaposes a God who acts here and now, but whose action is frequently missed here, with the notion of "the founding of the earthly and temporal in the heavenly and eternal."[17] Jürgen Werbick is far from brushing aside any difficulties. Instead, he wonders whether this might in fact be a God who just wants to subject his creatures to his sovereign will.[18] Nor is this suspicion, which quite a few biblical passages certainly evoke, alleviated by the fact that he supposes this will, which alone constitutes God's personhood,[19] to be a good will. This is the tendency of his interpretation of this entreaty.[20] However, what is the basis of this supposition? If it is true that, as we have quoted, the Bible's personalism is a product of the imagination, the question remains legitimate whether this notion of a personal God of good will might not be a variety of the naturalistic fallacy, arguing from the ought to the being of something. And of course it is true:

> We know only the story of *this* life in which benevolence and suspicion are intertwined. And we likewise know the passionate longing that it should not always be like this. We know experiences in which it did not remain like this, in which, instead, love and not suspicion led the whole of reality into an encounter in which the heaven opened itself on our earth.[21]

All of this is certainly true. However, we know the opposite as well. There are those disconcerting experiences which always conjure up the question of theodicy again, and which cannot be calmed by the notion of a divine will. If we consider this aporia, is the notion of "[...] an absolute that is hypervolitional because it is infinitely perfect in itself [...]"[22] really as absurd as classical theism makes it appear? We may also take into account a tendency of thought like the one in panentheism according to which the finite, fallible and marginal little human being (cf. Ps 8) "is not made to vanish as an aspect of an apersonal universal and all-encompassing process."[23]

16 cf. Werbick, *Vater unser*, 103–129.
17 *Ibid.*, 104. cf. 110.
18 cf. *ibid.*, 104.
19 cf. *ibid.*, 108.
20 cf. *ibid.*, 110, 112–114, 120.
21 *Ibid*, 124.
22 *Ibid*, 113.
23 *Ibid*, 114.

On the contrary, everything proceeding from the absolute carries, as it were, the signature of the sovereignty of its origin, as it becomes temporal in the autonomy and freedom of finite and contingent entities. What I miss in the logic of the notion of appreciation is an answer to the questions forced upon us by the inconsistencies of classical theism. These inconsistencies find their expression in a more or less equivocal use of the concept of personhood, which are frequently hidden in the black box of the concept of creation, especially of *creatio ex nihilo*. On the final pages of his *Theory of Science*, Jürgen Werbick makes quite some concessions to me. Taking the theology of the Trinity and the topic of creation as starting points, he raises the question:

> In what sense, however, does God an 'other', something external into which he can and wants to communicate himself in love? Has he not always been everything? Here human *imagination* [emph.; K.M.] reaches its limits. One may perhaps still be entitled to say that God *wants* to have something external and communicated himself into it. He wants those to whom he can communicate himself, human beings who can be his 'image' [inverted commas; K.M.] [...] One may perhaps go on to say that God does not need this external reality. He does not need it to express himself within himself and in a Trinitarian fashion as the love which he is by his essence. [...] The very words show that they, like all the basic concepts of the theology of the Trinity, may be 'apposite'. However, those who make use of them, hardly know *how* they are apposite and what they might mean in the infinite [...].[24]

Yes, indeed, one would like to comment. It is a Hen kai Pan that is very close to the outer limits of equivocation in that furthest-reaching analogy based upon those resources of the imagination which are gained from the inversion of the relationships of its images. The notion of man being created in the divine image, in some certain way, finds its analogue in the image of a God in the human image. All of this can be accommodated within the tradition of a panentheism which is aware of differences and which, ultimately, views the whole of the cosmos and the life of the subjects in it as a self-differentiation of the absolute. In fact, Werbick himself confirms this in a concluding draft of a theology of the Trinity in these very words, as he writes:

> However, the difference of God vis-à-vis our finite thinking about God does not mean a 'less', but an 'infinitely more'. No matter what or who God is: He will surprise us by an "infinitely more", rather than a regrettable "less". Thus, thought thinks itself towards its limit in order, hopefully, to open itself to

24 Jürgen Werbick, *Einführung in die theologische Wissenschaftslehre* (Herder, 2010), 352.

> 'learned hope' *(docta spes)* of this more which it traces in its thinking, that 'about which nothing greater can be thought'.[25]

Thus, it becomes undeniable that our thought is moving in an area close to its very limits.[26] This is also what Paul Tillich says who writes: "God is not person. Neither is he less than a person, however."[27]

However, the notion of the imagination, which is so central for Werbick, may even furnish thoughts at these limits with a communicable profile. In turn, detailed descriptions of the imaginative process itself can only be given in metaphors and similes.

In his voluminous trilogy, the British philosopher of religion Douglas Hedley has provided a comprehensive exposition of this very profile.[28] This trilogy aims to provide a vast panorama of myth, literature, poetry, music, art and philosophy and thereby prove that all human speech about God is, by its very nature, rooted in an archetypal pool of the imagination, a strictly basic *a priori* evidenced in material concreteness. It is not an accident that sources from Romanticism are at the fore. Hedley is especially indebted to Samuel Coleridge and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, who also influenced one another.[29] Taking these two witnesses as his starting point, Hedley voices his conviction that:

> On a crass Romantic view, imagination is a royal road to reality, a specially privileged faculty of aesthetic vision. Imagination, on this view, is the highest form of knowledge,[30]

whose power consists in uniting the infinite and the finite.[31] He views the imagination as a bridgehead to that archetypal pool by which we may articulate

25 cf. Werbick, *Wissenschaftslehre*, 37., cf. 353. Womit sich erneut das Diktum Th. W. Adornos bestätigt, dass jedes Philosophieren, das wirklich ein solches ist, schlussendlich in den Bannkreis des ontologischen Arguments eintritt. Vgl. Adorno, Theodor W., Negative Dialektik (Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 6), Darmstadt: 1998, 378.

26 cf. Werbick, *Wissenschaftslehre*, 352.

27 Paul Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* (de Gruyter, 1984), 283.

28 cf. Douglas Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination* (Clark, 2008). — Douglas Hedley, *Sacrifice Imagined: Violence, Atonement and the Sacred* (Continuum, 2011). — Douglas Hedley, *The Iconic Imagination* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

29 cf. Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 115–124.

30 Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 56.

31 cf. Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 106.

something like revelation in the first place. The still unspent power of Christianity as a condensation core of occidental culture, Hedley avers,

> lies in its capacity to address with the imagination, through symbols and narrative, those archetypical aspects of human experience which lie beyond the merely instrumental, and indeed are often beneath consciousness.[32]

At the same time, however, Hedley, despite this dimension of the subconscious (in the sense of Jung), is deeply indebted to Coleridge for the theory of subjectivity informing his account of the unfolding of the imagination:

> Coleridge defines imagination as the 'repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM': the human imagination as repetition is a reflection or *mirror* of the infinite, and it is often fired by the intimation of transcendence in the experience of beauty and the holy. To see with the eye of imagination is to grasp truth, even if its reality is obscure or invisible to empirical perception.[33]

It is against this backdrop that Hedley, in the epilogue to the concluding volume of his trilogy, offers what might be seen as a dense description of the "imagination":

> The imagination in its deepest sense is the mediating power of the intellectual world in the physical cosmos and the presence of the transcendent ideal in the world of senses. Belief in God is neither a purely intellectual exercise nor is it a brute given of human awareness. The idea of God in our account is rather mediated through the human imagination, somewhat akin to the imagination of other minds or moral facts.[34]

We can invoke a great many poets and artists as witnesses to this notion of the imagination. I shall restrict myself to two particularly memorable voices. The painter Franz Marc, who died very young in World War I, and who is now the expressionist figurehead of the Munich Lenbach House, wrote in 1914:

> The longing for the indivisible being, for the liberation from the phantasms of our ephemeral life is the basic mood of all art. It is its great aim to dissolve the whole system of our partial emotions, to show an unearthly being living beyond everything else, to shatter the mirror so that we can see this being. [...]

32 Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 126.
33 Hedley, *The Iconic Imagination*, 76–77.
34 Hedley, *The Iconic Imagination*, 259.

> No enlargement of the life of the imagination is sufficient in width or immensity, nor can we assume great enough distances if we want to escape from the mad and selfish narrowness of this pathetic life and participate in the kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit.[35]

The second voice is that of Reiner Kunze, a dissident from the former Eastern Germany who, to borrow an expression from Hegel, put his times into thought in beautiful poetry. He writes:

> The poetic image is the 'creative device which God inadvertently left in his creatures' (Ortega y Gasset). It is part of the basic instruments of man by which he reassures himself of himself and the world.[...]
>
> The poetic idea and the poetic image emerging from it are connections which are both charming because they are 'far superior to conscious combinations in subtlety and range' and which unsettle because they abrogate certainties which help us to orientate ourselves in the world.[...]
>
> We are willing to accept absurdity to gain being."[36]

It is hardly possible to give a more complex depiction of the phenomenon of the imagination.

Hedley's plea for Romanticism follows logically from the above-mentioned primordiality of aesthetics, as it is expressed in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* and, emblematically summarizing post-Kantian thought, in the *Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism*. Incidentally, this also applies to one of the few, if not indeed the only, early idealist of catholic denomination, the inventor of pastoral theology who went on to become the bishop of Regensburg, Johann Michael Sailer. In his writings, on priest training and homiletics he points out in one place:

> Your sermon must move the heart [...]: Not only must you, in your sermon, move the people's reason and imagination, but, above all, their heart as well. And not only must you move their heart, but also make them change themselves from the very bottom of their heart. [...].[37]

And in Sailer, too, the preacher himself is drawn into a learning process in the course of such emotional relationships as he forges with his audience:

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35 Wilfried F. Schoeller, *Franz Marc: Eine Biographie* (Carl Hanser, 2016), 264–265.

36 Reiner Kunze, *Das weiße Gedicht: Essays* (S. Fischer, 1989), 58–60.

37 Johann Michael Sailer, „Neue Beiträge zur Bildung der Geistlichen", in *Sämtliche Werke 19*, ed. Joseph Widmer (Seidel, 1839), 65–66.

> This very thing has led some preachers astray: the people, they say, must not always be children. We must make the child a man. Hence, we must educate them towards concepts by means of concepts. Ah, you want to educate the people towards concepts by means of concepts? My dear friends, you cannot do this by means of concepts alone! Tell me: what do the people do with their passionate longing for sight and feeling in order to live from concepts? Show me the child that became man only by means of concepts. Does the concept alone make one a man?[38]

In my view, Hedley is completely right in saying in the very first volume of his trilogy straightforwardly that „Psychologically or morally, the imagination is a necessary route to reality."[39]

I think the first phrase could easily be omitted. We then have to deal with the exiting topic of how imaginings may lead to reality or, put differently, how fictions can be true.

The philosopher Volker Gerhardt has written something extremely illuminating on this very topic in his book *Der Sinn des Sinns*,[40] doing so with special regard to the personal theistic notion of God. It is frequently said that the use of prepositions tells us a great deal about a speaker's metaphysics. Something similar can be said about the use of the modes of the verb in which a speaker's epistemology is expressed. This rule results in an illuminating discovery in Gerhardt's treatise: in central places which deal with the transition from the divine to a personal God, the author makes use of the subjunctive. As early as the introduction, he says that the whole of reality should be addressed "*as if* [emph.; K.M.] it were a *person*."[41] Later on, he points out that it can be understood as an expression of raising a claim to himself "if he addresses the whole as if it were facing him *as a unity* — like his *kindred*."[42] A religious person is allowed "to accept the universal as if it turned

38 Sailer, „Neue Beiträge zur Bildung der Geistlichen", 69. — Vgl. dazu ausführlicher: Klaus Müller, „Kongeniales zwischen Johann Michael Sailers Homiletik und der Philosophie des Frühidealismus", in *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Bistums Regensburg*. Bd. 50., ed. Paul Mai and Karl Hausberger (Verlag des Vereins für Regensburger Bistumsgeschichte 2016), 17–27. Zu Sailer als Frühidealisten insgesamt cf. Margit Wasmaier-Sailer, *Das Verhältnis von Moral und Religion bei Johann Michael Sailer und Immanuel Kant* (Pustet, 2018).

39 Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 39.

40 Volker Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns* (Beck, 2015).

41 Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 27.

42 Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 217.

to him so that he can address the whole like a person."[43] This leads Gerhardt to this finale:

> And once someone takes another little step forward and dares to lay claim to himself as a person in the organizing centre of his own reason, he will soon realize that he finds this easier under the adverse conditions of the world if he believes that that which forms itself into a person in himself is present in the whole as well [...]
>
> Not only will he trust himself as person then, but he will likewise trust the whole of the world *as if the latter approached* [emph. K.M.] him like his own better self. If he succeeds in doing so, he believes in God.[44]

Volker Gerhardt, thereby, contributes to a debate which began with Kant, and which intensified at the beginning of the 20th century thanks above all to Hans Vaihinger's book *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*.[45] It has been given such a succinct formulation in Dieter Henrich that it has gained the highest pertinence both in cultural sciences and in theology: can fictions be true and, if they can, how?[46] This is nothing but a modified formulation of the Kantian doctrine of postulates, albeit one that could hardly be more exciting.[47]

Kant's own contemporaries were uncertain about the philosopher from Königsberg's conclusion that the highest concepts of reason — God, freedom and the whole of the world — had, for the sake of the latter's own consistency, to be assumed necessarily without our being able to gain any theoretical knowledge about them. Hence, there were necessary assumptions to which the expression "as if" had to be added. In the context of these concepts of wholeness, Kant himself, in fact, expressly spoke of "fiction" or "poetry". And this raises the question whether these ideas may have to treated as "[...] inevi-

43 Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 288.

44 Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 314. –Cf. Klaus Müller, „Der ‚Panentheistic Turn' nimmt Fahrt auf: Überlegungen zur Transformation des Theismus in Volker Gerhardts philosophischer Theologie *Der Sinn des Sinns*", in *Gott und Sinn: Im interdisziplinären Gespräch mit Volker Gerhardt*, ed. Michael Kühnlein (Nomos, 2016), 79–89.

45 Hans Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (Felix Meiner, 1918).

46 Cf. Müller, *Streit um Gott*, 226–229. — cf. (with special focus: Thomas Mann: Josephs-Romane) Klaus Müller, „Zum Rationalitätskonzept der Fundamentaltheologie: Analytische Rationalität und Letztbegründung aus der Theorie der Subjektivität", in *Wozu Fundamentaltheologie? Zur Grundlegung der Theologie im Anspruch von Glaube und Vernunft,*, ed. Josef Meyer zu Schlochtern (F. Schöningh, 2010), 289–306.

47 cf. Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 274.

table and, simultaneously, life-giving fictions, which have a raison d'être only as such"[48] Or should we follow Fichte and others in assuming that convictions of such crucial importance for our lives, which, moreover, unify all our others into one, must be considered true despite such misgivings? Incidentally, Kant himself was convinced that something that must be considered unreal does not, therefore, also have be considered incapable of truth at all, as in fact his doctrine of the postulates shows.

This gives rise to the fact that even someone who generally refrains from answers to those questions situated at the boundaries of our knowledge may be asked from which life, for her or him, such an idea as that of freedom arises "[...] what it would mean to *lead* a life according to it."[49]

The life arising from this idea knows, by its consciousness, about itself and, by irreducible implication, about its reality. Such an idea is something in which everything impelling a conscious life is gathered and collected. Hence, it is so deeply embedded in it as a mode of its own existence that this idea, in a certain fashion, participates in its own irreducibility *and*, concomitantly, the implied degree of the reality of the I's knowledge about itself. In fact, this comes close to John's Searle's description of the notion of freedom:

> The refusal to take a free decision works only if I suppose that the freedom to refuse exists. If one refuses to make use of one's free will, this makes only sense if one has expressed one's own free will in this very refusal. [...] We cannot explain our life anymore if we have to give up the supposition of freedom.[50]

In this case, however, a subject obliged to enlightenment may dare to harbour the thought that this imagined thing called "freedom", this fiction, is not only a function conceived for a certain purpose. Rather, it is a concluding thought in which a constitution of reality occurs between that which exists and is true and that which is assumed to be true for the sake of its truth and reality. Hence, the thinking subject and the object thought, at their very core, are intertwined and belong together and, therefore, both have the predicate "true".

48 Dieter Henrich, *Versuch über Kunst und Leben: Subjektivität — Weltverstehen — Kunst*. (Edition Akzente, 2001), 60.

49 Dieter Henrich, *Bewußtest Leben: Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Subjektivität und Metaphysik* (Reclam, 1999) 43.

50 John R. Searle, „Wie frei sind wir wirklich?" (Interview), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung 12*, March 23, 2008, 30.

Of course, we have not thereby secretly usurped a metaphysical, let alone a religious insight:

> Such a connection to truth into which a conscious life inserts itself as such can only be established if it finally understands and newly conceives the synthesis of all its life's tendencies which it first must bring about on its own, and experience as its own, as an occurrence of which all its own actions are part.[51]

Or, in other words, fictions (in the sense described above) can only be judged true within a holistic mode of thought, i.e. one which eventually unifies all theoretical and practical epistemic tasks and therefore all modes of knowledge in one whole of understanding.[52] This whole must be conceived as a processual complex of reality of which the subject believes itself one element. If such thoughts of a whole, i.e. of a metaphysics, is not ruled out from the beginning in such a project, but remains open to the notion of a last ground, subjecting itself to reason's critical guidance at these limits, then it is advisable to follow Henrich and choose the path towards a monist ontology of all-oneness. Everything real, in its reality and individuality, is to be conceived as being part of a self-differentiating unity. In this case, the development of this fiction will have led the subject into the truth that it is part of the all-oneness of reality, and is, therefore, true. The punch line of this ontology would be the fact that all of this becomes visible only in the light of the self-reflection of an irreducible process of reason.

If one follows Gerhardt's preceding reflections, the notion of a personal God is legitimized on the basis of the power of the imagination in the face of the whole of reality. Henrich's thoughts buttress this connection ontologically. Thereby, the personal dimension is also integrated into panentheism. In this way, this mindset contrives to capture the whole of reality, the absolute and the finite, God and world, in and from one essential unity, doing it in such a fashion that the difference between both is expressed very clearly and that they both continue to be part of this unity. This, in turn, suggests the idea that the concrete religions are all imaginations or images and illustrations of this very core of all notions of the divine. Moreover, the monotheisms achieved this feat on the basis of the resources of the self-experience of the human per-

51 Henrich, *Bewußtes Leben*, 148.

52 cf. Henrich, *Bewußtes Leben*, 61–62.

son in its wholeness, as it faces the whole of reality. And perhaps we may say that Christianity with its core message of the incarnation of the Logos stands out in a special way because it thereby literally translates the divine into the matter of the world, thereby also drawing the latter into the absolute in the process.[53] In this sense, one can certainly say that, from a Christian vantage point, the predicate of God's personhood must, as it were, be forced through the Christological eye of the needle. However, it thereby wins such a concrete, if not indeed downright univocal sense which the notion of personal theism in Islam with its radical *theologia negativa* can never attain to. As to Jewish and rabbinic traditions, this applies only partially if Peter Schäfer's research are apposite that there is in the later strata of the Tenach and, subsequently, in rabbinic thought a "divine or half-divine figure besides God".[54] This figure never becomes human (as in Christianity). However, as an angel or man elevated to divine honours it does possess human traits. Indeed, in the tradition of Enoch raised to God, which has biblical roots (cf. Gen. 5:21–24), this figure, which is later called "Metatron", is given the name "JHWH haquatan",[55] i.e. "Little/Young God", by God, in rabbinical interpretations. It is possible that Christianity, in its struggle about a doctrine of the Trinity, drew upon this Jewish-rabbinical binitarianism. However confusing, the sources adduced by Schäfer point to an imaginative inclusion of the personal dimension in the discourse about God.

Inasmuch as this inclusion of the personal dimension in panentheism, conceived along such a theory of the imagination and fiction capable of truth, is essentially linked to the dimension of self-conscious subjectivity, the suggested outline of a metaphysical construction may be further buttressed by transcendental logic.

53 cf. Klaus Müller, „All-Einheit christlich: Eine kleine Provokation mit Folgen", in *Eigenschaften Gottes: Ein Gespräch zwischen systematischer Theologie und analytischer Philosophie,* ed. Thomas Marschler and Thomas Schärtl (Aschendorff, 2015), 101–122.

54 Peter Schäfer, *Zwei Götter im Himmel: Gottesvorstellungen in der jüdischen Antike* (Aschendorff, 2017), 153.

55 Schäfer, *Zwei Götter im Himmel,* 121.

IV. IMAGINATIVE ANAMNESIS

The attempt at such a foundation in transcendental logic which I find to be the most precise has been undertaken by Eric Voegelin. In his encyclopaedic survey of the intellectual architectonics of high religions he came to the conviction

> that a metaphysics which interprets the world's transcendence system as an immanent process of a divine substance is the only sensible systematic philosophy. At least it attempts to interpret the order of the world which is transcendent to consciousness in an 'intelligible' language. Every other metaphysics with a different ontological foundations only adds to the impossibility of understanding transcendence in an immanent way the absurdity of interpreting it in 'unintelligible' language, i.e. one that is not accessible 'from within' the experience of processes of consciousness.[56]

I shall try to give a tentative translation. When the attempt to talk about the transcendent is undertaken, this is only possible by using a language "from within", i.e. one from the pool of the subjective and one that is taken from the intellect's self-knowledge. As I have briefly said before, this is in fact an originally Platonic argument. Or, in theological language, man can, because of the very fact that he is God's image, become a source of a discourse about God which is both imaginative and in his image. This very language is also apt to develop a semantics of systematic theology which manages to hold together personal theism and all-oneness. Simultaneously, it would be a mode of thought very suitable to Roman Catholicism if the latter is willing sufficiently to fulfil the philosophical obligations connected to such an enterprise, i.e. one of an "et et" or "both and".[57]

Such a theology has, at least since Spinoza and Kant and the idealistic synthesis of both philosophical perspectives,[58] accepted the challenge to conceive

56 Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: Zur Theorie der Geschichte und Politik* (Piper, 1966). 50–51.

57 Klaus Müller, „Plädoyer für das Prinzip des ‚Sowohl - als auch'", in *Die Gewalt des einen Gottes. Die Monotheismusdebatte zwischen Jan Assmann, Micha Brumlik, Rolf Schieder, Peter Sloterdijk und anderen*, ed. Rolf Schieder (Univ. Press, 2014), 175–195 — Jan Assmann, *Totale Religion: Ursprünge und Formen puritanischer Verschärfung* (Picus Verlag, 2016), 158–174.

58 cf. Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2003), 73–81.

of God in such a way that he "is both personal and all things at the same time",[59] a challenge which cannot be avoided anymore if I may use an expression of Peter Strasser which sounds as though it had been taken from Schelling: "God is the single thing that is all things",[60] he says in one place in his *Philosophy of Revelation*. Schelling himself did not succeed in solving the problem connected to this expression in his project of the *Ages of the World* on which he worked for several decades. Neither did those who came after him, not even the most ambitious ones, who joined forces under the sobriquet of "Speculative Theism". Hermann Lotze thought that the reason for this failure lay in the fact that in these projects the "... the system of Freedom [...] was transformed into a dualism more openly than its supporters were willing to concede."[61]

This very fact is the misery of all contemporary proponents of a theology of difference who are willing to accept any costs, however high, only to open up a chasm between God and the world — allegedly for the sake of God's divinity. I find their nominalism and voluntarism, usually bought at the price of a weird strategy in theodicy — cold and alienating. Both are reflected in the self-referentiality of the respective debates. If I am right, the alternative which I sought to present here might turn out to be a fresh source of the transformation of an intellectually legitimate discourse about God by a panentheistic mode of thought against the backdrop of a culture of global knowledge and science.

59 Peter Strasser, *Der Gott aller Menschen: Eine philosophische Grenzüberschreitung* (Styria, 2002), 191. cf. Dieter Henrich, „Eine philosophische Begründung für die Rede von Gott in der Moderne? Sechzehn Thesen", in *Die Gottrede von Juden und Christen unter den Herausforderungen der säkularen Welt. Symposion des Gesprächskreises „Juden und Christen" beim Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken am 22./23. November 1995 in der Katholischen Akademie Berlin*, ed. Dieter Henrich (Lit, 1997), 10–20. here 19.

60 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung. Buch I, 8*, (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), 174.

61 Hermann Lotze, *Metaphysik* (Weidmann, 1841), 322.

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THE DIVINE SELF-MEDIATION IN THE UNIVERSE: EUTELEOLOGY MEETS GERMAN IDEALISM

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Abstract: The paper compares the non-standard theistic notion of God as presented by John Bishop and Ken Perszyk in their so-called "euteleological" concept of God with idealistic, especially Hegelian and post-Hegelian, concepts of the divine. Both frameworks not only share striking similarities, based on their guiding intuitions, but also have remarkably parallel problems that have already been discussed in 19th-century speculative German theology in the aftermath of German Idealism. The article offers some proposals to strengthen the euteleological concept of God metaphysically — based on some insights coming from post-Hegelian discussions.

I. INTRODUCTION

That the concept of a personal God should be placed under scrutiny is not just a recent idea or development, but, rather a basic tenet found for example in Johann Gottlieb Fichte's highly disputed remarks on the notion of a divine governance of the world, in which he proposes that a personal concept of God nearly always falls prey to superstition and eventually becomes religiously inadequate.

In the past two decades, a slightly different set of motives has fostered a comparable tendency to move beyond the notion of a personal God.[1] We can distinguish between motives stemming from: (1) perceived inconsistencies

1 For a survey, see Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, "Introduction: Alternative Conceptions of Divinity and Contemporary Analytic Philosophy of Religion", in *Alternative Concepts of God*: *Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, ed. Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa (OUP, 2016); Thomas Schärtl, Christian Tapp, and Veronika Wegener, eds., *Rethinking the Concept of a Personal God: Classical Theism, Personal Theism, and Alternative Concepts of God* (Aschendorff Verlag, 2016).

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among divine attributes (for instance, divine goodness, divine omnipotence, or divine omniscience); (2) metaphysical demands of naturalism and contemporary views on the origin of the universe or the evolution of life; and (3) evidential problems that any kind of supernaturalism, which seems to be a necessary ingredient of personal theism, must face.

II. THE EUTELEOLOGICAL PICTURE

The motives for the alternative notion of God that John Bishop and Ken Perszyk have developed come from all the above-mentioned sources, that is, their concept of God in opposition to the personal omniGod conception of the divine. Over the years, Bishop's and Perszyk's initial criticism of *classical* theism has faded and became, instead, directed towards contemporarily identifiable versions of *personal* theism (as found in the writings of Richard Swinburne, Paul Moser, and others) — i.e., concepts that hold that God is an incorporeal, almighty, everlasting person who has intentions, motives, develops a will, and behaves like an agent (who can be held morally responsible).[2] In their proposal, an axiological aspect — as a certain consequence of perfect-being theology — is still alive, but understood in a more specific and focused way, for God is the *id quod maius cogitari nequit* only in a very specified understanding, and for reasons that have to be unfolded. Ethical requirements take the lead, as seen below:

> Divine greatness is *onto-ethical*. It is greatness that should not be assessed against *merely* metaphysical criteria of greatness '*qua* being': *ethical* criteria of greatness must also be met. Still, ontological greatness must certainly be part of the mix — but it is important to challenge the assumption that ontological greatness *has* to be greatness with respect to a being's degree of dependence or independence *along the dimension of productive causality*. We warn against assuming that God must be that than which a greater producer cannot be thought — an Unproduced Producer of all else.[3]

Nevertheless, Bishop and Perszyk seem to incorporate the most fundamental insights of classical theism into their own concept as well, especially, classical

2 Cf. John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "The Divine Attributes and Non-personal Conceptions of God", *Topoi* 36, no. 4 (2017), esp. 609–610.

3 John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion Volume 5*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (OUP, 2014), esp. 13.

theism's emphasis on divine *uniqueness*, to a certain extent, against the plausibility of personal theistic notions of God:

> [A] uniquely supernatural person still shares something with finite persons, since God's — agent-causal — relation to the universe is just of the same type of relation as finite agent-causes (supposedly) have to the events intrinsic to their actions. The personal omniGod conception, arguably, fails to capture the fullness of divine uniqueness. So long as God counts as an item — albeit highly exalted — God is still one item amongst many, and that is inconsistent with God's having the ultimate status 'he' must have to be God.[4]

So, if God is not a person, what is God's role and nature? In a very early attempt, Bishop tried to disentangle the notion of God from God's traditional role as the creator of the universe:

> God could be the Universe's ultimate explainer by being its overall final cause in the absence of the Universe having any efficient cause. The Universe would then be explicable in terms of its point. God would be the ultimate explainer, not by standing outside the Universe as its efficient cause, but by being its teleological culmination within it […].[5]

This sounds as if, based on the euteleological concept of God, there is *no* creation story to tell. In comparison, Bishop's and Perszyk's more recent answer to the creation-problem is more subtle and sophisticated: only by adopting a very *narrow* interpretation of efficient causality will one be required to rule out God as equivalent to an agent that (by efficient causality) brings about the existence of the universe. However, in a widened and liberalized interpretation[6] of the ways in which efficient causality might work, there is enough space for regarding the universe as a "divine creation" of sorts: creation is a cipher for the *permanent dependency* of the development of the universe on God as its goal:

> How is God to be identified under the euteleological conception? Under this conception, God's causing the Universe is understood as a matter of its realizing the divine purpose, namely the supreme good, rather than as a matter of super-natural productive agency. That may seem to make the ultimate explainer the supreme good itself. But euteleology does not make that direct Platonist identification of God with the supreme good. A closer

4 Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", 7.

5 John Bishop, "Towards a Religiously Adequate Alternative to OmniGod Theism", *Sophia* 48, no. 4 (2009), esp. 429.

6 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 614.

> candidate is identification as the Universe's being such that it realizes the supreme good, since this is what ultimately explains the Universe's existence.[7]

Within this picture, God is transcendent to, as well as immanent in, the universe: God is transcendent insofar as he is the yet-to-be-realized ultimate *telos* of the universe[8] and represents the *supreme good* to which everything is directed; but he is also immanent because the ultimate *telos* of the universe is — eventually — a stage of the universe.[9] Based on God's role as yet-to-be-realized *telos* and final stage of the universe, Bishop and Perszyk can claim that their proposal is monistic, but not pantheistic.[10]

In their proposal, there is also some space for what we might call "divine agency or activity," in another widened interpretation of the relevant concepts: divine actions are instantiations of the ultimate *telos* of the universe, alongside the realization of this very *telos* throughout the history of the cosmos.[11] This bi-directional perspective, which claims that God is as much the transcendent *telos* of the universe as he is present in the immanent realizations of the ultimate good, covers another traditional idea, which says that God must be perceived as an all-encompassing reality:

> On the euteleological conception, the divine may be identified not just with Love, as the supreme good which is the ultimate *telos* of all that exits, but, at the same time, with reality at its most profound or ultimate — that is to say, with reality as inherently directed upon the supreme good, and actually existing only because that end is fulfilled. It is thus essential to the ontological priority of the divine on the euteleological conception that particular instantiations or incarnations of it do not exhaust the divine — though that there are such incarnations is necessary, since the actuality of the Universe cannot be explained as existing to realize its *telos* if its *telos* were not actually realized. But the divine transcends its particular manifestations through its

7 John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "A Euteleological Conception of Divinity and Divine Agency", in *Rethinking the Concept of a Personal God*: *Classical Theism, Personal Theism, and Alternative Concepts of God*, ed. Thomas Schärtl, Christian Tapp and Veronika Wegener (Aschendorff Verlag, 2016), 221.

8 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", 11–12.

9 Cf. *ibid.*

10 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 615.

11 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", 13, 15, 17.

> status as all-encompassing reality existing for the sake of, and only because of, the realization of love, the supreme good.[12]

Most recently, Bishop and Perszyk gave the traditional attributes of classical theism (notably divine *necessity* and divine *simplicity*) a specifically apophatic reading: that there is no adequate metaphysical category into which the concept God can be placed.[13] For God, as the ultimate *telos*, is not just a supreme idea (seen as an abstract object). Neither is he identical to the universe as such (which would deprive him of his teleologically necessary distance) and, clearly, nor is he an entity in alignment with or in relation to other entities either:

> [What] *is* God […]; *with what* may God be identified? Our reply is that this query assumes that God is some kind of, uniquely special, entity — an assumption that euteleology explicitly denies.[14]

At first glance, the euteleological God seems to be an ideal as well as the very realization of that ideal in the universe. As an ideal, God would not be identical to the universe as the ultimate realization of the *supreme good* within the universe. God, however, would seem to be identical with a certain stage of the universe. Despite the fact that God as the ultimate *telos* has some sort of transcendence, there is no way of picturing God *without* the universe from the euteleological viewpoint. Would it follow then that, based on this approach, God's concrete reality (which is a necessary aspect of his nature as a realized *telos* and ideal) somehow depends on the universe, while — seen from a different angle — the development of the universe, directed towards the ultimate good as its driving force, depends on God?

This slightly paradoxical impression is exactly the point where we should refer back to German idealism and the 19th-century discussions on God's personhood — emerging within Protestant theology and theology-friendly philosophy in the aftermath of the reception and criticism of Hegel's concept of the divine. Bishop's and Perszyk's endeavor could face the very same opposition: the personal omniGod concept, in defense of the adversary's counter-

12 John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "Concepts of God and Problems of Evil", in *Alternative Concepts of God*: *Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, ed. Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa (OUP, 2016), esp. 121.

13 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 612; Bishop and Perszyk, "A Euteleological Conception of Divinity and Divine", 222.

14 Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 618.

maneuver, eventually revolves around the question of whether a metaphysically robust notion of divine being[15] is to be found in such an overall monist layout or whether God is merely an anthropologically relevant metaphor for ultimate concern (*love*) and human (or cosmic) progress.[16] The adversary's litmus test for Hegel, as well as for Bishop and Perszyk, can be identified as the question of whether there is enough space for divine transcendence — seen as some kind of *divine independence* — traditionally described as divine aseity and ontologically conceptualized as divine substantiality. In the euteleological as well as in the Hegelian picture, the history of the cosmos as well as the history of mankind seem to give birth to the Godhead while, at the same time, the universe exists *because of* the Godhead (in a widened interpretation of causality). While Hegel adopts Trinitarian theology to resolve the problem of God's transcendence in immanence, Bishop and Perszyk either face a bootstrapping objection[17] or turn to a more explicit *axiarchic* perspective, which holds that the reason for the universe's existence is nothing else but the goodness of its existence that might be measured against its directedness towards an ultimate goal. As a third alternative already alluded to, they could move the euteleological concept of God in a more Trinitarian and Christological[18] direction. Perhaps, Hegel's overall picture of God as a *living idea being a substance in becoming a subject within the realm of finite subjectivity* — an idea which states that God is in need of a self-mediation that is based on the development of life as well as the history of mankind — can give a hint as to where to find a suitable concept — a concept that fulfills the above-mentioned requirements in order to flesh out God's independence while reconciling it with his dependence on the development of the universe.

15 For such a rather orthdoxy-friendly interpretation of Hegel see Carl F. Göschel, *Beiträge zur spekulativen Philosophie von Gott und dem Menschen und vom dem Gott-Menschen* (Duncker und Humblot, 1838), esp. 121–125, 128–135.

16 Cf. Walter Jaeschke, *Die Vernunft in der Religion: Studien zur Grundlegung der Religionsphilosophie Hegels* (Frommann-Holzboog, 1986), 361–370, 381–385.

17 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 614.

18 *Ibid.*

III. THE DIAGNOSTICS THAT LEAD TO EUTELEOLOGY

Bishop's initial criticism of (personal) omniGod theism starts as a highlighting of certain problems that are well-known as intricate questions of religious epistemology: on what basis is it perceived as *rational* to believe in the existence of God (and on what basis would such a belief be called *non-rational*)? It has become clear that the shape, quality, and amount of evidence we may be able to propose in favor of our religious convictions crucially depends on *what* we believe God to be. Furthermore, it might also be the case that a certain concept of God severely weakens or undermines the weight of evidence we would otherwise have, if our belief in God would force us to agree to something that — outside the area of religious convictions — may be unacceptable for various reasons. Bishop underlines what seems to be widely acknowledged — if one signs off on the most basic insights Immanuel Kant (among others) has developed within moral philosophy — namely, that faith-commitments and moral judgments must *coalesce together*, i.e., that mature morality requires the same mature self-reflection regarding one's own religious convictions.[19] In other words, it is highly problematic to have a certain religious conviction if this very conviction severely hurts our mostly undisputed moral judgments or our highly esteemed ethical theories. To put it the other way, something must have gone wrong in our conceptual networks if religious convictions (like a specific concept of divinity) would hold us to believe what is morally problematic or even depraved. If we, nevertheless, should get thrown into such conceptually muddy waters, from a contemporary point of view, it would be absolutely prohibited to give up our moral commitments and convictions. Rather, we would have to renounce certain religious ideas — not just for the sake of honoring "pure reason," but also, for the sake of honoring a (religiously and axiologically adequate) concept of God, which necessarily entails that God cannot be conceived of being anything less than the "epitome of the moral law" and pure goodness.

Having established such a philosophical perspective, it becomes clear why Bishop identifies the problem of theodicy as the most problematic aspect of personal omniGod theism: if for personal omniGod theism the only viable

19 Cf. John Bishop, "How a Modest Fideism may Constrain Theistic Commitments: Exploring an Alternative to Classical Theism", *Philosophia* 35, no. 3–4 (2007).

option in facing the problem of evil is a combination of the so-called greater good defense with the so-called free-will defense then, inevitably, we have to picture God as a sovereign who proceeds on a rather utilitarian and consequentialist basis.[20] He permits natural and moral evil to occur in order to, hopefully, safeguard or bring about a greater good — which might be something one does not yet understand and which is, apparently, more important than the fate of the suffering victim. However, such a rather wildly utilitarian view runs counter not only to our modern-day ethical convictions (which are inclined to refer to unalterable rights that must not be violated — not even for the sake of a greater good); it also stands against the very ethics established within the familiar framework of religious convictions. For a religious ethics — here Bishop and Perszyk take mainly the Christian tradition into account — is built on the idea of mutually supportive, loving relationships, and of attitudes that always and under any circumstance seek the flourishing and well-being of *each and every* individual — an attitude that firmly rules out the permissibility of using one person's suffering and pain for the advancement of another person, let alone of an impersonal entity.[21]

In a revised version of a *Logical Argument from Evil*, Bishop and Perszyk point out that, at least within the framework of a religiously-based ethics, the prerequisites of greater-good defenses or free-will defenses lead to severe conceptual conflicts:

> If one requires, for instance, that a morally perfect God not only bring about the maximum good, but also ensure that he is *good to* each person (and perhaps each sentient being), then a viable speculative theodicy will have to show how God might meet this requirement. Otherwise, the logical possibility of God's having sufficient moral reason for evil will not have been established […].[22]

Underlying these conceptual conflicts (that eventually lead to a *reductio* argument) is a double role the omniGod apparently must play within the framework of traditional theism: God is regarded as the ultimate cause of everything and is, therefore, ultimately responsible for any event and being

20 Cf. Bishop, "How a Modest Fideism may Constrain Theistic", 394.

21 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Concepts of God and Problems of Evil", 112–13; see also John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "The Normatively Relativised Logical Argument from Evil", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 70, no. 2 (2011), esp. 110.

22 Bishop and Perszyk, "The Normatively Relativised Logical Argument from Evil", 115.

that originates within the universe (evil and suffering included), but he is also conceived as the one who is supposed to bring healing and grant liberation from all evil and salvation. He is like a doctor who is eager to cure the diseases he has ultimately brought upon his people himself.[23] Early on, Bishop states that there remains an unbearable dilemma for traditional theism. (*Please note* that the following remark is directed towards classical theism, while — assessed from the most recent writings — its observation is mainly true for personal theism):

> When we reflect on what seems morally problematic about classical theism, I think we find a basic assumption coming under severe pressure — namely, that God is *both* the supreme individual personal agent on whose creative activity all else depends *and also* the One who actively brings good from evil, redeems, restores, forgives, reconciles.[24]

Once we approach this diagnosis from the point of basic logic, we can reshape Bishop's main intuition as a double destructive dilemma — using our intuition of what it means to be *morally praiseworthy* on the one hand and to be *worthy of worship* on the other:

(1) If God is the omnipotent sovereign, he cannot be morally praiseworthy in every respect. AND if God is the most praiseworthy redeemer, THEN he cannot be the first cause of everything — a cause on which everything depends. [Bishop's premise].

(2) God is morally praiseworthy in every respect AND he is the first cause of everything [omniGod theism].

(3) God is not the omnipotent sovereign AND he is not the most praiseworthy redeemer. [from 1) and 2) Destructive Dilemma].

If we replace God's *ethical praiseworthiness* with his being worthy of worship, we arrive at the very same result:

23 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 618. For a condensed analysis of their main logical argument from evil and related sidesteps see also Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrors: To What End?", in *Alternative Concepts of God*: *Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, ed. Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa (OUP, 2016), esp. 129–130.

24 Bishop, "How a Modest Fideism may Constrain Theistic", 397; see also Bishop, "Towards a Religiously Adequate Alternative to OmniGod", 426–28.

(1) If God it the omnipotent sovereign he cannot be worthy of worship in every respect AND if God is the one redeemer who is truly worthy of worship, THEN he cannot be the first cause of everything — a cause on which everything depends [Bishop's premise].

(2) God is the one redeemer who is most worthy of worship AND he is the first cause of everything [omniGod theism].

(3) God is not the omnipotent sovereign AND he is not the most praiseworthy redeemer [from 1) and 2), Destructive Dilemma].

Of course, many discussions of the problem of theodicy as well as an abundant interpretation of how to squeeze human responsibility into the ultimate responsibility of an omni-powerful Godhead on which everything depends might try to escape this dilemma by arguing against the credibility of Bishop's first premise. But, despite these attacks, the most important intuition, which is couched in the first premise of each argument, won't disappear: namely, that the personal sovereign omniGod, on whose activity and will everything causally depends, won't be able to meet the most fundamental ethical standards — at least not those standards that are established within religious convictions that picture God as the epitome of love and the source of flourishing.[25] Consequently, not even the eschatological promise of ultimate salvation will be able to resolve this problem:

> So if God does finally bring participants in those evils into the joy of eternal relationship with him, he will be coping with the effects of evils *that he himself ultimately produced*.[26]

Bishop's and Perszyk's answer to the dilemma in which the personal omniGod seems to get unavoidably trapped is *euteleology*: God's role, as the ultimate salvific force, must be established over and (perhaps) against his traditional position as the ultimate (efficient causal) source of being. Bishop and Perszyk give traditional personal attributes of the divine a rather anti-realistic reading, but according to their multi-layered proposal, God is still a reality (but clearly *not a thing among other things*): God is the *supreme good* for and the *ultimate telos* of the universe. First of all, he serves as the truth-maker of value-ascriptions if they presuppose a standard of unrestricted goodness.

25 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "The Normatively Relativised Logical Argument from Evil", 122.
26 Bishop and Perszyk, "Concepts of God and Problems of Evil", 109.

However, he is also the driving force of the realization of ultimate goodness and love *in* the universe. Salvation, in their view, is nothing else but the ultimate reign of goodness and love in the universe. Based on their criticism of supernaturalism and on their endorsement of a rather monistic and naturalistic worldview, salvation, however, has to remain a this-worldly affair.[27] There is no space for an afterlife outside of or beyond the universe wherein the ultimate salvation is supposed to take place.

IV. HEGEL'S PARALLEL DIAGNOSTICS

In his *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel is dealing with the problems and prospects of a personal God — in his words, of a Godhead that is conceived of as an individual subject — in a surprisingly parallel way. Of course, his treatise of these problems is steeped in his idealistic and dialectical reconstruction of the history of religion — a reconstruction some might find highly artificial or rather schematic. Despite the fact that some of his considerations might not be historically accurate, the layout of Hegel's assessments will, nevertheless, help us to get closer to one of the burdens of personal theism: the problem of *anthropomorphism* — a problem Hegel touches on in discussing the classical Greek and Roman religions, as well as the God concept of some of the Hebrew scriptures. Hegel's assessments could — on first attempt — serve as support for the critical evaluations of personal omniGod theism, upon which the euteleological perspective is built. Moreover, Hegel's somewhat metaphysically more robust but, nevertheless, monistic understanding of divinity might present a pattern, which sheds some light on the requirements, conceptual promises, and the possible range of monistic non-standard-theisms — euteleology included.

In his schematic history of the evolution of religious thought, Hegel regards the transformation from the Indian gods to the Greek and Roman gods as an important step within the history of religion: transforming the concept of God from a kind of *raw substantial power* — which might be equated with some kind of force of nature — to a new form of divine subjectivity, which is, so to speak, *reflected* in itself. On the first level of religious awareness, the divine is, therefore, conceived as an all-encompassing infinite in which the finite is

27 *Ibid.*, 122–23.

encapsulated. On the second, slightly improved but still not fully reflected level, God is conceived as a sovereign and powerful substance, clothed as a subject (a self) that is disconnected from the world based on its sovereignty.[28]

For Hegel, the first of both stages leads to a concept of the Godhead which is inseparable from the forces of nature and which is — to a certain extent — identical to the various forms and shapes of finite beings. In contrast, the concept of God as a subject — the second of the above-mentioned stages — seems to introduce a most welcome distance: God distancing himself from the forces and powers of pure nature, with a raw substantiality turning into self-reflective subjectivity. Hegel regards this second stage as a conceptual necessity, a necessary evolution of a religiously and metaphysically sophisticated concept of God, which holds that the multitude of beings cannot be identical to God. There must be a metaphysical difference.

In a way, the concept of God seems to restart itself — based on the notion of perfect subjectivity and (in our words) personhood. But, within this evolutionary transformation of religious convictions, what formerly has been a raw force of nature, turns into some kind of decision-making, although still-arbitrary power, whose expressions are purely based on a self-determination not subject to any external factor or force. To Hegel, the arbitrariness of free decisions is what marks the sphere of isolated, completely independent, and all-powerful subjectivity as such. Therefore, its liberty is not bound by anything, as Hegel points out — neither by content nor by any kind of concept. Its decisive power consists of its raw selfhood.

Yet, in Hegel's picture of the evolution of religious convictions, the notion of *supreme subjectivity* (as it is at work within the concept of a personal God) is not just connected to the idea of unlimited power but also almost always to the notion of *infinite wisdom*. In order to reconcile both notions within this concept of God, the necessary step in the evolution of religious convictions would be to conceive of the supreme divine subject (as the supreme divine intellect) as *forcing* its goals and aims onto a world which seems to be entirely passive and powerless, because God as a supreme subject — at this level of religious conceptualizing — is primarily seen as an unsurpassable power against which nothing can stand. So whatever goals we detect in the world,

28 Cf. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion: Teil 2: Die bestimmte Religion [1824]*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Meiner, 1994), esp. 282.

they would appear to be purely external (i.e. installed by an outside force and will) compared to what mundane structures might reveal to be in themselves and in their own rights. To make a long story short: what we experience as the core problem of any greater-good theodicy — namely, that God seems to make us subject to aims that are external because they violate our basic ethical rights, is the result of a deeper problem contained in a second-stage religious conviction which states that God is to be pictured as a supreme power forcing its will upon anything else: we end up by appealing to goals a supreme power has imposed on us in a rather arbitrary way — goals with inner connections and aims we do not understand, because they are the product of a supreme power that is rather alien to us.[29]

This concept of God — to Hegel, visible, especially in the Roman gods — carries further problems: for *pure* power is, to Hegel, also *empty* power. Along these lines, the alleged wisdom of the all-powerful personal God turns out to be an equally empty wisdom because there are neither rules to be followed nor things to be learned that an all-powerful sovereign could not overturn. Every goal this omni-sovereign God can come up with could have been completely different. Since raw power is not, and cannot be, determined by any content (which is not itself subject to this very power and which, therefore, could not have been otherwise) we must end up with a concession of emptiness regarding such goals, because, again, any determination could be theoretically overthrown by the raw power as such. However, for Hegel, a goal that is devoid of any determinate content cannot serve as a goal at all. So, for the goal to become *real*, in the full sense of the word, (that is, content-full and apt for guiding the processes that are subject to this goal), it craves determination. Still, if we start contemplating such a determination within the mentioned framework of God being an all-powerful sovereign, we end up again with the notion of a purely arbitrary, purely accidental goal: for the supreme power cannot be determined by anything but itself. To escape these problems, Hegel hints at the idea that, whatever the goal might be, it can neither be something that is subject to divine decisions — for, in that case, it would remain purely arbitrary — nor something that is different from the divine nature itself, for, in this case, it would appear to be an external force that threatens the sovereignty of God.[30]

29 Cf. *ibid*., 283–84.
30 Cf. *ibid.*, 286.

What Bishop and Perszyk have shown in relation to the problem of evil is deepened by a Hegelian perspective: as long as we conceive of God as the omni-powerful sovereign, any ontological and ethical order this God may have laid out, remains the result of a purely arbitrary decision. This God is not just a utilitarian being: he remains a *decisionistic emperor* and *despot* whose raw pronouncements somehow turn into binding metaphysical and ethical laws.

However, this is, to Hegel, only one side of the problem: if we really conceive of God as the omni-powerful sovereign, the dignity of the world — its self-sustaining nature and prerequisites of nature turning into history — starts to vanish as well. For as a purely passive material, subject to an all-powerful sovereign's decisions, the world and its inner structures become demoted to a mere playground of power and to pure instruments — falsifying our basic impressions of mundane nature as having a genuine power and a genuine dignity in itself.[31] Of whatever the order of the world might consist, in the face of the omni-powerful God, it is just a tool for the execution of the will of an almighty emperor.

However, Hegel takes it even further. For although we are inclined to call the omni-powerful God omniscient and wise, it is divine wisdom, as we have seen, that turns out to be an empty concept as well, for the very reasons already mentioned: if being wise rests on insights into both goals and order and if the omni-sovereign God decides on order and on goals as he pleases, then divine wisdom turns out to be as circular as it is empty.

So, within the conceptual framework of the all-powerful Godhead, we are left with a dilemma: either whatever qualifies as divine wisdom consists of goals that ultimately are the product of divine decisions (with arbitrarily dreamed-up and even empty goals) or the divine goals are — in order to be called the product of divine wisdom — primarily determined by something rather *external* to the divine wisdom. Then the problem of divine power arises as the limitation of a divine power that, by definition, must not be limited.[32]

From a Hegelian perspective, it does not come as a surprise that Bishop's and Perszyk's transformation of the concept of God and the overcoming of a personal notion of God are ultimately motivated by a bewilderment caused by so-called greater-good defenses and the problem of theodicy. For as long

31 Cf. *ibid*., 284.
32 Cf. *ibid*.

as we conceive of God as someone who is able to decide, yet even to choose the goods and goals that are meant to be greater ones, i.e., more valuable and important than other estimated goods and aims, we are bound to the notion of a decision-making, and presumably, arbitrarily deciding divine king.

In order to arrive at a *third stage* of religious convictions, per Hegel, one must integrate whatever serves as a goal for the development of the world *into the very nature of God*. This leads to the interesting, yet somewhat dialectical consequence, that God cannot have power over such inner-divine goals, because he does not have power over his own nature. Additionally, in Hegel's view, once we are denying a relation of choice between God and his nature (as well as between God and his goals), we are unavoidably stepping into a rather non-personal or supra-personal concept of God, i.e., towards a concept of God that makes God resemble a supreme principle and metaphysical anchor rather than an all-too-human sovereign or despot.

Carl Friedrich Göschel († 1861), one of Hegel's followers, even calls the concept of the omni-sovereign God the outcome and epitome of humankind's wishful-thinking stage: with the idea of a bourgeoisie liberty shot into the stratosphere of transcendence as nothing but a subtle version of anthropomorphism. The concept of an omni-sovereign God is born, as Göschel says, out of a purely human imagination of individualism, a tribute to the finitude of human existence despite its prolongation into infinity. Göschel adds, we are doomed if this God loves and wills as human lovers and human decision-makers do.[33]

What is the solution to this problem? In Hegel, we find the idea that we must move on to another level of conceiving divinity — a level Hegel identifies with the contribution of the Christian concept of God as Trinity. Whether or not this identification is accurate is certainly up for debate. Nevertheless, the transformation of the omni-sovereign God into something different is quite remarkable.

33 Cf. Carl F. Göschel, *Aphorismen über Nichtwissen und absolutes Wissen im Verhältnisse zur christlichen Glaubenserkenntniß: Ein Beytrag zum Verständnisse der Philosophie unserer Zeit* (E. Franklin, 1829), 15.

V. HEGEL'S ALTERNATIVE CONCEPT OF GOD

To what concept of God is Hegel pointing? Hegel's first order of business is a recommendation: we have to let go of a concept of God that is circling around the notion of raw power. Whenever power must be executed, this power is — so to speak — in need of direction. So, then, what are its intrinsic goals? Formally, in order to overcome the stint of arbitrariness (i.e., whenever such goals seem to be externally imposed on the world), these goals must be the same for God as for the world: they have to reflect God's innermost nature as well as the world's innermost determination and destiny. So, if we can identify the reason why God exists, and if we can identify that reason as the same reason why the universe (or the multiverse) exists, then we are clearly breaking away from an empty, omni-sovereign Godhead who comes up with orders and rules as he pleases.

Contentwise, the situation is more complicated, if we take a closer look at Hegel. In his view, the one basic reason for the existence of God, as well as for the existence of the universe, is the process and development of life. To Hegel, life is one of the most important metaphysical features we have to take into consideration because life has the ability to turn an abstract principle into something concrete — to turn essence into 'appearance'. This very mediation is a common ground between the Godhead and the finite world. For Hegel, having an inner goal reveals itself as a self-sustaining power or, at least, as a self-sustaining potential. This is something we can find if we take a metaphysical look at the phenomenon of life: life is self-sustaining and self-oriented.[34] Moreover, everything alive carries its goals within itself — as an ἐντελέχεια.

So, the first step towards an alternative concept of God, in Hegel's view, is to conceive of God as something that has an intrinsic goal in itself and that, then, is shared with and manifested in the world. Beyond this important but formal outline, can we say something specific about the innermost divine goal that is, at the same time, the innermost goal of the universe's existence and development? To Hegel, the ultimate divine goal, which reflects the nature of God and the nature of the created world at the same time, is *incarnation*. For, in Hegel's view, the true basis for the realization of the goal that the Godhead and the finite world have in common, is what Hegel calls *spirit* — encompass-

34 Cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion 2*, 308.

ing the divine and human minds and consciousnesses (which is expressed in the Christian doctrine of incarnation). However, if the ultimate goal of the finite universe is to bring about the all-encompassing Spirit in the form of human subjectivity and self-consciousness, and if, moreover, this very goal is identical to the inner goals of God's divinity, then we can conclude that the self-manifestation of the divine spirit in the form and emergence of a finite, human spirit is nothing other than the ultimate self-manifestation of the inner goals of the divine.[35] Admittedly, this seems to be a bit of a stretch. However, for Hegel, it isn't, since it is the innermost aspect of the reality of the spirit to be all encompassing and to encompass even what seems to be contrary to the spirit's initial nature. Therefore, the absolute spirit has to encompass the plurality of finite spirits in order to be an all-encompassing reality.

Of course, we have to look at this innermost goal from the perspective of finite entities as well. To Hegel, it is the innermost goal and destiny of finite beings to become, so to speak, integral parts of an all-encompassing reality or, in order to phrase it in more orthodox terms, to become the material of divine incarnation and self-manifestation. Incarnation, to Hegel, is nothing else but the divine self-manifestation that is — as such — the innermost goal of the divine. For being Spirit means becoming transparent to oneself while being mediated through the other (a process which is achieved in becoming manifest to the other and in the other). For Hegel, becoming a reality within the other does not necessarily entail crossing out the reality of the other.

To Hegel, the 'process' of self-manifestation, which contains the true grammar of revelation, is the true nature of being a spirit (i.e., of having consciousness and self-consciousness). An isolated, self-enclosed mind could not be what spirit is meant to be, as a process of self-determination and self-manifestation. In this view, it is clear to Hegel that God somehow depends on the universe, because to be self-manifest to the other requires the appearance of an instance of what is called the *Other* — especially, if we think of self-manifestation as something that is a necessary part of God's nature as an absolute spirit.[36] Based on these considerations, Hegel is well-prepared to criticize a personal concept of

35 Cf. ibid., 322.

36 Cf. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion: Teil 3: Die vollendete Religion [1824]*, ed. Walter Jaeschke, Vorlesungen ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte; 5 (Meiner, 1995), esp. 105.

God: the notion of personhood does not fit well into the concept of the infinity of the *absolute Spirit* and its self-sustaining process of self-manifestation.

Thus, what survives this process of philosophical concept clarification, in Hegel's view, is a notion of absolute consciousness which is stripped of its finite limitations — limitations that would still be in place if we were to consider God to be a mere person. Instead, God is a process of self-manifestation as the absolute Spirit. In Hegel's view, such a process presupposes an inner self-differentiation within the nature of God — a self-differentiation (in a wider interpretation of the term) that is — at the same time — the ultimate cause for the existence of the other (the world, for instance) within God itself. For Hegel, to have the power of self-manifestation and self-differentiation is a sign of being a spirit. However, to be a *living Spirit* requires every goal to be an *inner* goal, to which everything else is oriented.[37]

The concept of a personal God remains problematic for various reasons: its hollow notions of power and wisdom are symptoms of a much deeper problem (i.e., how we reasonably conceptualize the relationship between God and the world). Furthermore, the concept of a personal God fails to put the notion of divinity into full-blooded metaphysical infinity. If God is truly perceived as an infinite reality, this divine reality must be pictured as an all-encompassing reality. Therefore, divine subjectivity (and personhood) must be seen as, somehow, growing 'out' of the limitations of being a single subject — limitations we become aware of once we focus on human subjectivity. In contrast the divine mind must be conceived of as encompassing the many instances of finite subjectivity, which is possible only if we conceive of God as the absolute Spirit becoming transparent to itself in the transparency of finite self-consciousness.

VI. TAKING STOCK

Now it seems that Hegel's concept of God is still quite different from a eu-teleological concept of God. This impression, however, should be considered a prima facie assessment only, which is in danger to overlook much deeper

37 Cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen* über *die Philosophie der Religion 2*, 410.

connections and alliances. Hegel and the euteleological concept of God have some interesting features in common:[38]

1) Questions regarding the various aspects of divine omnipotence turn out to be misguided once we see the divine self-manifestation as the innermost goal of the divine, echoed in the finite realm. Along the same lines, Bishop and Perszyk re-read divine omnipotence as having the powers that are embedded in the universe to bring about the ultimate *telos* of the universe.[39] Given that this *telos* is the driving force in these powers, there is no distinction between God's innermost aim and the universe's internal and ultimate goal.

2) Questions regarding the origin of the universe (and God's contribution to this origin) turn out to be of lesser importance since the ultimate goals of the existence of the universe is the participation in divine self-transparency and the incarnation of the divine as the participation in an all-encompassing reality. Along the same lines, Bishop and Perszyk underline emphatically that the reason why the universe originated is to realize the ultimate *telos* and the supreme good. Moreover, the existence of the universe is the presupposition for a process that also provides instantiations of the supreme good as manifestations of the divine.[40]

3) Questions regarding the inner stages of the Godhead — especially, exploring divine intentions, consciousness, and knowledge — turn out to be superfluous since God as the absolute spirit is manifest *in* finite consciousnesses and transcends them as an all-encompassing spirit that rests on the performances of finite consciousnesses. At this point, Bishop's and Perszyk proposal remains silent; but there is a

38 McCord Adams suggested some significant parallels to Aristotles' unmoved mover. McCord Adams, "Horrors", 130. I do not think that this contradicts my intuition that says that there are significant parallels to Hegel, since for Hegel, Aristotles' conception of God as *noesis noeseos* played a significant and inspiring role. What brings the euteleological concept closer to Hegel is the underlying idea of a cosmic process (encompassing the history of nature as well as the history of mind-gifted beings) that arrives at an ultimate stage and that this stage has to do with the "incarnation" of reciprocal acknowledgments among finite beings (a description that could serve as a circumscription of what *love* means — well, formally).

39 Cf. Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Attributes", 616.

40 Cf. *ibid*., 617.

certain hint that could be re-read in a more Hegelian way: although there is no divine mind that knows everything there is to know, there is a some sort of 'knowing-how' with regard to the ways in which the ultimate *telos* will be brought about.[41] Once finite consciousnesses plug into this kind of knowledge, they become the instruments in order to enrich the manifestations of the ultimate *telos* with their own consciousnesses — thus making the ultimate *telos* of the universe more and more transparent, i.e., knowable and reflected along the way. The backbone of finite consciousnesses could also be seen as the advancing echo of the emerging divine awareness that consists of the awareness of the divine.

4) Additionally, we are in a position to conceive of divine action as divine presence in all those instances and forms that reveal the innermost goal of the divine, i.e., which are to be regarded as the incarnation and self-manifestation of the divine. For Hegel, in a rather formal way, the infinity-grasp of the human mind as well as the goodness-grasp of the human conscience would serve as such instances. For Bishop and Perszyk, the divine is active insofar as it is present in manifestations of unrestricted love, which reveal the ultimate *telos* of the universe.[42]

These aspects do not contradict the idea of God being ultimate goodness that manifests itself as an emerging reality in the universe. Quite the opposite, once we have an expanded notion of ultimate goodness, life and spirit can be seen as layers or manifestations of divine goodness. While the euteleological conception focuses on love as the most convincing manifestation of goodness, Hegel tries to include various instances of being that display an inner value — addressing life and spirit just at the outer border of such value-oriented existence. Despite Hegel's different horizon, love still plays an important role since the grammar of being a spirit, in the most appropriate sense, is nothing less than the grammar of love. The self-manifestation of oneself in the other, while not crossing out the self-sustaining aspects of the existence of the other, is a very formal circumscription of what we can find in mutual and reciprocal love. Hegel's formal approach protects the notion of love from

41 Cf. *ibid*.

42 Bishop and Perszyk, "Divine Action Beyond the Personal OmniGod", 16–17.

a shortsighted romantic interpretation and blends the ethical with the metaphysical: the goodness of existence can be identified as the goodness of life and spirit. Therefore, the ultimate good is the life as the absolute Spirit; and the ultimate stage of the universe would be its full participation in absolute life and spirit.

There might be also an aspect in Hegel's picture that makes it more approachable in terms of evidence and metaphysical prerequisites. As the late Marilyn McCord Adams has pointed out (based on her in-depth knowledge of Aquinas, Scotus, and Occam) the euteleological view must address the following prerequisites:[43]

(1) There is (exists as a significant driving force) an overall goal of the universe's development, and love is the very nature of that universal aim.

(2) Animate, as well as non-animate beings and their development, are analogously (but, nevertheless, equally) subject to this same goal — despite the fact that they have (so to speak) "miniature" intrinsic goals that are based on their species and kind-related natures.

(3) To have an overall goal of the universe in place does not require an efficient will or agent to establish the forces and factors that are necessary to guarantee the realization of that very goal.

Prerequisites (1) to (3) point to an *ontological* as well as an *evidential* problem: it is not easy to defend the idea that everything that exists has in some way to contribute to the realization of love as the innermost goal of its existence. Bishop and Perszyk might respond that this ontological query rests on a fallacy: the fact that a certain whole has a certain goal does not entail that all the parts of the whole must be subject to this same goal in a similar way. It might be enough to state that the intrinsic goals of the parts in question serve the overall goal eventually or contribute to the constitution of the whole as such. However, even if this counter argument might alleviate ontological pressure, there is still the evidential problem: Does our universe really look like something that is headed towards a utopia of love as its innermost goal? Is the origin of quarks and Higgs bosons, of galaxies and stars, of a huge variety of

43 McCord Adams, "Horrors", 130–35.

species nothing other than a requisite to provide material for the universal reign of love? Would it not be too harsh to call this a grand and somewhat hyperbolic version of anthropocentrism? In contrast Hegel's assessment of the innermost goals and aims of finite entities leads to a substantial notion of *life* — life that eventually results in an awakening of consciousness and self-consciousness. Of course, love is still in the picture, but it is the peak of what self-consciousness, which has become aware of itself and its relation to the *Other*, is able to accomplish under certain circumstances. That the universal goal of the universe is to bring about life in its axiologically most valued form, insofar as life, being awakened and, therefore, aware of itself, might be easier to sell in the light of what we know about the dimensions of the cosmos, its beginning, its evolution, and the origin of species within it.

Along these lines, another problem has been uncovered by Marilyn McCord Adams: if the ultimate *telos* of the universe and the *supreme good* is not 'just' a transcendent idea (let alone a *transcendental ideal* in the Kantian sense), but is, instead, realized in the manifestations of love our universe brings about, than these manifestations or, at least, some of them (namely those which belong to the final stage of the universe) have to be identified with God. They are, in a way, the metaphysical constituents of the Godhead. However, whatever the universe may have in store for us, whatever utopia might be realized, the realizing instantiations and manifestations of unrestricted love remain finite. There is no way of altering their metaphysical fate as merely finite instantiations of something that is meant to be infinite.[44] How can the appearance of something that is the presence of unrestricted love, but, nevertheless, has all the metaphysical marks of finite existence (including the possibility that it might be annihilated or erased as time goes by) actually *be* the infinite Godhead? In Hegel, we find a somewhat easier solution, since he uses Chalcedonian Christology as a blueprint: all the finite instances of God's (and nature's) innermost goals are just incarnations and self-manifestations of the divine. They do not constitute the Godhead in all its richness and fullness, but their existence is the necessary expression of the Godhead's innermost goal: to become a self-mediated spirit and all-encompassing reality.

As I pointed out earlier, Hegel's concept of God can itself be seen as the provocation of further discussions that might as well be referred to a euteleo-

44 Cf. McCord Adams, "Horrors", 136–37.

logical concept of God. The 19th century interpreters of Hegel's theology explored the question of whether or not Hegel's God was and is a reality in God's own right. Given that, for the self-manifestation of the absolute spirit, the existence of the universe becomes a necessary requirement, even an inner goal for the divine, Hegel's God is to a certain extent *bound* to the world. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that left-leaning Hegelian and proto-Marxist adaptations of Hegel's philosophical theology insinuated that these connections between God and the world are ontologically stronger than suspected — maybe the robust realm of the Godhead is nothing else but the world or the universe. Along these lines another follower of Hegel's, Carl Ludwig Michelet († 1893), stated: the true lesson we can learn from Hegel is that God is not just another person or entity next to (or in addition to) a variety of entities or persons; and he is not just a substance in the abstract sense of being an independent entity. Instead, God must be compared to an eternal movement in which the universality of being finds a center in itself, insofar as it is becoming aware of itself and insofar as it is becoming self-conscious, but in which the self-centeredness of any kind of subjectivity (and personhood) are already overcome and opened up towards the *Other*, gaining a higher level of conscious universality along these lines. In this rather left-leaning Hegelian perspective, God is not a person but, rather, the epitome of what the real core of being a person truly means: to be conscious and to be connected to a universal consciousness which has overcome any form of self-centeredness and lack of objectivity that seems to be inescapably attached to self-centeredness. According to this view, subjectivity — seen as the intermediate stage of self-centered consciousness — is the true root and origin of anything evil, so that salvation and atonement must be achieved by repeating the process which God unfolds as an epitome: God opens himself up eternally to encompass and originate the cosmos and the universe as well as humanity and all those instances that turn a community of individuals into a true community. Thus, in this perspective, God's role is to be the absolute Spirit, having overcome the limitations of personhood and individuality. This process of overcoming is visible in the transformation of nature as well in the love of the human community that is on its way to be transformed in God's image.[45]

45 Carl L. Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel: Teil 2* (Duncker und Humblot, 1838), 646–47.

Michelet draws our attention to a second possible interpretation of Hegel's concept: God is not a person but the very *idea* of what the innermost content of subjectivity is: spirit. Thus, God's reality is the realm of an abstract entity, of an abstract universal, so to speak, which needs to be instantiated and realized in order to be manifest and to "interact" with other concrete entities. While being a person is a metaphysical problem insofar as this includes being an individual (and, therefore, being limited as an individual), God as the universal idea of subjectivity is beyond those limitations and is able to become everlastingly individuated by a community of individual, nevertheless finite, persons.

However, if Michelet is right, Hegel's God somehow seems to vanish into thin air — the air of a communal idea or of an idealized imagination of what spirit is or could be. The robust substantiality of the God of traditional theism would turn into the thinness of a mere idea. This might be the price of trading one for the other: God's closeness to the world would have to be paid for with a lesser robust metaphysical nature. This could also be true for the euteleological God: if the ultimate *telos* of the universe needs the universe as a means to be realized and "materialized," what would the nature of the *telos* be in itself? The tradition of apophatic theology, recently invoked by Bishop and Perszyk, may not help us here, because in Pseudo-Dionysius and his followers, the God beyond being is pictured as the unlimited source of goodness and being, an infinitely overflowing source that cannot be grasped by human concepts. In this case, God would be an über-entity rather than a non-entity. However, in the euteleological view, God seems to be an abstract principle, realized as a driving force of a presumed evolution of the cosmos. There is, indeed, a certain parallel between the cosmic utopia of euteleology and the left-leaning Hegelian hope in the development of human consciousness (and society).

Now, Michelet's interpretation is not the only possible way to understand Hegel. This time it is Göschel again — Hegel's most notorious theistic disciple — who emphasizes a more ontologically robust reading of Hegel's notion of God: for if we concede that God is the Word, meaning that he is self-manifestation, then we also admit that God can be known. However, if God can be known by self-manifestation this requires at least some kind of self-consciousness, based on a relation God has to himself as found within the parameters of conscious existence. To Göschel, if God were just an ab-

stract object, an idea of some kind, he would lack true existence and reality, remaining strange to our reasoning, even opaque. So, Göschel concludes, we cannot help but include some sort of self-consciousness in the realm of the absolute spirit, because only in this way we can ensure that God remains open to our attempts to know him, since any object of knowledge which is devoid of self-consciousness and the power of self-manifestation would be (within an idealistic frame of reference, of course) an inferior object of knowledge (being below the pay grade of our own self-conscious curiosity and intellectual endeavor).[46]

Still, for Göschel, God as the absolute spirit is a reality in God's own right, because this God can be known and must become known. God is present to our deliberations as something which inspires us and which can be addressed. As an addressable reality, this God must be a substance; but, as an inspiring reality, this God is also an idea (for Hegel, substance turning into idea and idea turning into substance, are the epitome of life and spirit). Nevertheless, it would be high treason in a Hegelian world to ask whether the divine reality is a mind-independent reality: given that spirit is the essence of God, the divine reality is the reality of the mind seeking goodness and truth. Our, as well as the universe's, place in this picture is to fulfill the divine role of God's self-revelation as spirit — which is his self-manifestation as the absolute within us.

It is this complicated connection between substantiality and ideality which could serve as a grammar for future discussions of the ways towards which the euteleological concept of God is headed: if God has to be equated — while moving away from a personal concept of God — with some kind of abstract entity, somehow comparable (but not quite identical) to the Platonic idea of the good, then Bishop and Perszyk will have to flesh out in more detail what kind of reality this ultimate goodness might have, i.e., whether or not God can be deciphered as a mere universal, being real only if instantiated in finite images or instances of unrestricted love and goodness. In her discussion of Bishop's and Perszyk's proposal, Marilyn McCord Adams is equally mystified by the rather underdeveloped account of the euteleological God's own metaphysical nature:

46 Cf. Göschel, *Beiträge zur spekulativen Philosophie,* 74–75.

> [O]ne might think that Bishop and Perszyk were opting for an Aristotelian ontology of immanent universals, according to which there is no transcendent Platonic form […], but only individual instantiations […]. In Aristotle himself, the ontology of immanent universals is combined with his commitment to the eternity of the species to yield the conclusion that, for each time, every universal has some individual instantiations or other. For Aristotle, the immanent universal would not simply be identified with the sum total of its instances, because it may be contingent that a universal is instantiated by these instances rather than those […]. But there wouldn't be anything actual over and above its actual instances with which the immanent universal would be identified.
>
> Bishop and Perszyk do want to deny both that alternative-God is a transcendent ideal and that alternative-God is '>just< the sum total of the truly good loving relationships actually achieved throughout history.' Nevertheless, they do not seem to take over Aristotle's idea that the species must be eternal […].[47] Perhaps, Hegel's view — as perceived through the lens of Göschel — could offer some help in this regard, if Bishop and Perszyk would permit us to think of the ultimate *telos* of the universe and the supreme *good* the universe as directed towards a mind-like, spirit-like reality, being the non-physical, onto-ethical ground of physical, as well as mind-gifted, existence and serving an all-encompassing reality, which fires up the engine of a cosmic development, insofar as the ultimate good reveals itself as the all-encompassing spirit in which everything is naturally inclined to participate. However, this would require that the ultimate stage of the universe be not just a utopia of loving relationships but also the consciousness-filled reality of a universal transparency of being: a reality in which all the parts are interconnected by the transparency of being mutually conscious of every other part.

However, the left-leaning Hegelian 'Michelets' are already waiting in the shadows and wondering whether the euteleological Godhead isn't just another metaphor for an *idealized humanity* or an *idealized cosmic utopia*. To stop the euteleological God from falling into the Feuerbachian lava stream, we need to see the ontology of the absolute good explained, which is allegedly the ultimate *telos* of the cosmos and its inner developments.

47 McCord Adams, "Horrors", 135–36.

VII. THE BACKLASH OF PERSONAL THEISM?

Presumably, every further adjustment of the euteleological proposal will be closely monitored by another camp — by those who are still eager to defend the concept of a personal God. Immanuel Hermann Fichte († 1879), the famous son of the notorious first-person perspective philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte († 1814), suggests that Hegel and his followers might have taken the wrong turn in dismissing the concept of a personal God, and introduced an interesting, still-Hegelian line of argument in order to strengthen the notion of God as person.

To I.H. Fichte, the conclusion we have to draw is clear: (1) If God needs to have a robust metaphysical nature; and (2) if God needs to have an identity that makes him as distinguishable from the world as it makes him connectable to the world, then; (3) we need to conceive of God as an absolute spirit, metaphysically revolving around an absolute first-person perspective.[48]

I.H. Fichte's argument is based on two crucial premises:

1) If God is just an abstract object, his becoming realized by being instantiated in the cosmos would lead to some kind of self-diffusion, even a dissolving of God's true nature.[49]

2) If God has some kind of initial and non-dissoluble identity, we need to find an ontological concept that helps to grant God such an identity.[50]

I.H. Fichte worries that God has the status of a mere idea, being doomed to find his mode of existence solely in the hearts and heads of mind-gifted beings. In this way, God would be somehow dispersed among finite entities, ultimately rendering him finite as well. This can be avoided only by sticking with divine transcendence. However, within a monist worldview, such a position would be equivalent to saying that, although the history of the universe is on its way to an ultimate *telos* and towards the incarnation of the supreme good, there is never a final stage and a perfect incarnation. So, if we don't want to fall back into the problem of traditional distinctions between God

48 Cf. Imanuel H. Fichte, *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen Fortdauer* (Dyk'sche Buchhandlung, 1855), 90–96.

49 Cf. *ibid.*, 52.

50 Cf. *ibid.*, 87–91.

and the world, and if we insist that God still has some crucial ontological role to play, the absolute Spirit God would have to be, as I.H. Fichte points out, the ground of being;[51] therefore God needs to have a more *substantial* nature beyond the status of a mere universal.

I.H. Fichte's approach to support his premise is more complicated, as he seems to work with a more or less neo-platonic vocabulary, including, nevertheless, some Hegelian concepts. Thus, God, as the ground of being, has to be regarded as a supreme unity, as the one which comprises in its Godself a difference we perceive to be manifold and finite within the mundane realm. That said, this is not just a dogmatic viewpoint Fichte is proposing. Rather, the notion of oneness follows from Hegel's own perception of God as an absolute spirit: if God is an all-encompassing reality, the mode of encompassing the manifold cannot be a simple iteration of the manifold ways of being, but has to reveal itself as a *unifying principle*. To serve as the grand unifier, God would have to be *supreme oneness in itself*, which, as such, opens up a huge distinction between God on the one hand and whatever exists within the cosmos on the other.[52] Whatever connection there might be between God and the world, once God is perceived as supreme oneness and ground of unity, then, God needs to have a substantial relation to the realm of the manifold — a substantial relation which apparently presupposes that God has to be regarded as a substantial form of being in himself.[53]

Additionally the ascription of a first-person perspective to God — of the notion of self-consciousness — is, in Fichte's eyes, a prerequisite to explaining not only the value of things and the appreciation of their intra-mundane developments in the light of their goodness, but also their intelligibility as such.[54]

While Fichte still conceives of God as the epitome of supreme unity and infinity, the incorporation of his first-person perspective into the concept of God is the building block that eventually results in a personal concept of God.[55] Although it is a matter for further discussion whether the incorpora-

51 Cf. *ibid.,* 83.
52 Cf. *ibid.*, 88.
53 Cf. *ibid.*, 89.
54 Cf. *ibid.*, 97.
55 Cf. *ibid.,* 97–100, esp. 99.

tion of any equivalent to self-consciousness[56] into the notion of God necessarily results in an invigoration of personal theism, instead of (and this would be my assessment) just moving a Hegelian-colored concept of God closer to classical theism, there is something the euteleological concept of God can learn from these 19th-century discussions. If it is true that the supreme idea of the good is meant to be realized and instantiated in the world while not being identical to the world, we may wonder upon what the divine self-identity is built. To be more precise, there are three things worth noting for the future development of a euteleological notion of God: (1) an argument against a so-called "dissolution" of identity, (2) an argument for the robust self-identity of the divine; and (3) an argument for the power to initiate reciprocal relationships as a sign of divine perfection. All three arguments can be derived from I. H. Fichte's coping with Hegel's notion of the absolute spirit and can be transferred to Bishop's and Perszyk's euteleological concept of God:

The first argument can be presented in the following way: (1) If an entity has to be non-dissoluble, it must not have a weak kind of identity; (2) the absolute spirit and the ultimate *telos* of the universe are non-dissoluble; (3) therefore, it must not have a weak kind of identity.

To I.H. Fichte, the criteria of identity of the above-mentioned kind must take into account that the absolute spirit (or the ultimate *telos*, as in Bishop's and Perszyk's case) is also supremely perfect. Although divine perfection might be restricted to an ethical aspect only, at least at first glance, we are back in the ballpark of an ontological notion of perfection once we admit that to exist in a self-sustaining and robust way is an instantiation or realization of goodness (which implies that a non-existent idea of supreme goodness or a non-existent ultimate *telos* would be a contradiction). If this is true, we can move on to the argument for a robust divine self-identity, which presupposes a broadening of the notion of perfection to include the area of ontological constituents as well:

56 We could instead imagine God to be a stage of unlimited cosmic consciousness in which finite self-consciousnesses has transcended its limitations and has become transparent to its Godself. Such notions of the divine as one can find in Bradley to Sprigge — would enable us to ascribe a more robust metaphysical role to God, would also bring back consciousness as somehow an identity-safeguarding factor, but would not allow expressions of personal theism.

1) Anything that is perfect, especially an entity that has the highest form of perfection, must possess perfect criteria of identity.
2) Only robust criteria of identity can serve as perfect criteria of identity.
3) An abstract entity does not have robust criteria of identity.
4) The absolute Spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) possesses the highest form of perfection.
5) The absolute Spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) has robust criteria of identity (in order to fulfill its role as Godhead *axiologically*).
6) The absolute Spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) cannot be an abstract entity.

We can build the third argument on much the same foundation; again, in the same way in which the additional argument presupposes a wider view of divine perfection. One crucial ingredient of this argument is included in the idea that reciprocal relationships are more perfect than one-sided relationships. However, it is of utmost importance to note that this emphasis on reciprocity does not suggest that the relations in questions must be of the same kind in each and every case. Rather, the intuition leading up to this argument may be expressed as some sort of truism: it is of higher value to be related to a being that is capable of (ontologically significant) relations (in a self-sustaining and self-initiating manner) than to be related to a being that lacks those capacities (right from the start). It is easy to see that neither an abstract absolute spirit nor a monolithic ultimate *telos* of the universe will count as the most perfect being we can conceive of if measured against these standards. The argument runs as follows:

1) If an entity is not capable of reciprocal relations, this incapacity has to count as a lack in perfection.
2) Whatever possesses the highest form of perfection cannot be incapacitated in a way that leads to a lack of perfection.
3) The absolute Spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) possesses the highest form of perfection.
4) The absolute spirit (or the ultimate *telos* of the universe) cannot be incapable of reciprocal relations.

To I. H. Fichte, the overarching conclusion that almost naturally flows from these arguments is the inclusion of a strong first-person perspective into the concept of the divine.[57] For, based on idealistic presuppositions, whatever has a first-person perspective is also blessed with considerably strong, even unsurpassably perfect, criteria of identity. Furthermore, whatever has a first-person perspective cannot be an abstract entity, and whatever has a first-person perspective also possesses consciousness and self-consciousness, which allow for having (at least cognition- and intention-based) relations to other entities and to those instances that serve as the presuppositions to engage in reciprocal relations.

At the end of the day, we are left with the question of whether or not Bishop's and Perszyk's concept of God can incorporate what the above-mentioned arguments suggest: a significantly robust metaphysics of the divine nature that explains the non-dissoluble, perfection-related self-identity of the Godhead. That the result of such an endeavor might be a notion of God which is adjacent to classical theism[58] and that might still be lightyears away from any form of personal theism (as it is presented nowadays by *open theists*, *agapeic theists*, or *developmental theists*) might be of benefit in encouraging future research.

VIII. CONCLUSION

For I. H. Fichte, getting rid of the God who has some personal attributes (at least in the way of possessing a first-person perspective), comes at high costs: it also undermines the value of being an individual self — a consequence which can be studied in Hegel's unresolved struggle with making sense of individual immortality. If God is just the universal idea of goodness vanishing into the thin air of ideality, the inner goal of human existence could also be nothing more than a an idea vanishing into the thin air of universal existence — remaining a necessary piece or ingredient in the history of the universal and divine idea's self-manifestation, but deprived of any hopes for the continuation of the first-person perspective that makes persons as unique as they

57 Cf. again Fichte, *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen*, 97–100.

58 For a taxonomy and a first draft of the principles required for distinguishing between classical theism, personal theism and (Platonist) non-standard-theism see McCord Adams, "Horrors", 139–40.

are special. To Fichte, our belief in personal immortality is a consequence of our appreciation of the first-person perspective; and this appreciation is mirrored in our concept of God only if we include a first-person perspective in the concept of God's divinity.[59]

For Bishop and Perszyk, the question of personal immortality could become a crucial litmus test of their proposal: from the perspective of religious psychology and of the soteriological relevance of religious convictions, it could become unavoidable to include the concept of personal immortality into a concept of God that regards itself as religiously significant, adequate and, moreover, redeeming, given that 20th-century theology has always underlined that salvation remains halfhearted, even cruel if the so-called "victims of history" remain lost and forgotten eternally. As such, the salvific stage of the universe's history would be a *dance macabre* on the graves of those who did not make it to the stage of ultimate realization of the overall *telos*. It might turn out that the emphasis on the predominantly salvific role of God and implied soteriological standards cannot be met by a hope based on a this-worldly utopia only.[60]

In order to strengthen the soteriological and, therefore, religious relevance of their proposal, Bishop and Perszyk could move into two different directions: either they might consider including (to meet I.H. Fichte halfway) a robust basis for divine self-identity in the form of some kind of consciousness or awareness in the concept of the Godhead (indicating, for instance, that this very *telos* of the universe is transparent to itself, which results in some kind of self-conscious divinity); or they could try to disentangle the notion of God from the assessment of the value of individual human persons (and their survival of death) entirely. To follow the second, more (right-leaning) Hegelian (and less Fichtean), route would not only help their own concept of God, in order to appeal to the religious heart, but it would also do a great intellectual service to non-standard theism as such. This, because to disconnect the dignity and value of human persons and their (perhaps immortal or indestructible) first-person perspective from the supra-personal nature of the divine would be a major step in lowering the costs of an alternative concept of God — costs which are not so much based on metaphysical price tags as on what the religious point of view

59 Cf. Fichte, *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen*, 129–146, 173–178.
60 Cf. McCord Adams, "Horrors", 138.

perceives as being essential for a religious form of life. In other words, if it is imaginable that the emergence of finite first-person perspectives is itself a realization of the ultimate *telos* of the universe and if the continuation of such first-person perspectives (beyond the destruction of their physical constitution-bases) is another realization and manifestation of this very *telos* (in order to bring about a real utopia of love — which includes love beyond the grave), then I.H. Fichte could be proven wrong: one could have eschatological salvation without a self-conscious, personal Godhead.

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THE ILL-MADE KNIGHT AND THE STAIN ON THE SOUL[1]

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Abstract. One of the main tasks for an account of the Christian doctrine of the atonement is to explain how and in what ways the salvifically relevant work of Christ heals the damage wrought by human sin on our souls, our relationships with one another, and our relationship with God. One kind of damage often neglected in philosophical treatments of the atonement, but discussed at some length in Eleonore Stump's forthcoming Atonement, is what she, following St. Thomas Aquinas, calls the stain on the soul. The stain on the soul comprises the "moral leftovers" of serious evil, damage to the soul that goes beyond the guilt, shame, and separation from God brought about by sin and that lingers in a person even after she has repented and been forgiven. In this paper, I critically examine Stump's account of how the work of Christ deals with the problem of the stain on the soul. I offer reasons for thinking that if the stain is exactly as she describes it, then it is indelible; and then I explore possible ways forward for her account of the atonement.

I.

Eleonore Stump's *Atonement* is a masterful and historic contribution to the project of Christian soteriology. Among its many virtues is the fact that it manages to be richly novel and innovative while at the same time hewing close and doing justice to what has been most widely and traditionally affirmed about the salvific work of Christ. One of the most interesting and important novelties in the book is her treatment of what she, following Aqui-

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nas, calls *the problem of the stain on the soul*. In this paper, I will present that problem and Stump's solution to it, explain why I think her solution falls short, and then suggest an alternative way of addressing it. I believe that the suggestion I will sketch is, in broad outline at least, compatible with Stump's theory of the atonement; so I take myself to be recommending a supplement to what she says in her book, rather than rejecting any significant part of it.

A soteriology is a theory of the salvific significance of the work of Christ, which work comprises whatever aspects of his total earthly career that have salvific significance. More fully, it is a theory that identifies a salient problem (for human beings or God's creatures in general) from which salvation is necessary, provides some specific content to the notion of salvation, and provides an explanation of how some salient work of Christ contributes to salvation from that problem for those affected by it.

Christian philosophers and theologians have traditionally understood sin and its consequences to be the most salient problems afflicting creation. But the consequences of sin, according to traditional Christian doctrine, are legion. Some of the more important ones are the Fall of humanity, the breaking of creation, guilt before God, the cultivation of vice, enslavement to the flesh, suffering of various kinds and legacies of further sin and suffering in one's own life and the lives of others, enmity toward God, separation from God, spiritual death, and eternity in hell. *Salvation* has, accordingly, been variously construed as Christ's defeating or in some other way rectifying some combination of these consequences. Offering a theory of *the atonement* as one's contribution to soteriology represents a choice to focus on the consequences of sin for our relationship with God as the problem, and to understand the salvific significance of some aspect of Christ's career — usually his suffering and death on the cross, but sometimes also some combination of his sinless life, resurrection, and ascension — mainly in terms of its contributions toward rectifying that relationship.

For most contemporary philosophers working on the atonement, it seems as if the problem and its solution can be captured roughly as follows: Sin makes us guilty before God; guilt is what separates us from God (at least temporarily, if not permanently); therefore, we need forgiveness from God, and the work of Christ is a vital part (and maybe the whole of) what makes that possible, fitting, or both. Stump does not deny any of this; but, in contrast to most contemporary philosophers, she does offer a view according to which

this is far from the *whole* story about the nature of the rift in our relationship with God and about what Christ does to help repair it.

According to a fairly standard picture, we are separated from God mainly because (for some reason or other) God, being perfect, cannot or will not tolerate the presence of guilty creatures without some act of atonement (which act, of course, is done by Christ, thus removing or in some other way remedying our guilt and making it possible for us to re-enter the presence of God). In human relationships, however, remedying *guilt* by way of atoning acts and subsequent forgiveness may not be sufficient for full reconciliation and restoration of relationship.

When human beings sin in serious ways against one another, there remains even after repentance and forgiveness what Stump characterizes as a kind of morally lamentable "residue". She acknowledges that it is hard to say exactly what this residue consists in; but, as she characterizes it, it seems mainly to include the following components: *memory* of having committed the sins in question; *experiential knowledge* of what it is like to both desire and commit that kind of sin; and *relational damage* arising partly out of the damage wrought upon one's psyche by one's sin, but also out of the fact that this sin is now part of one's own history and the history of one's relationship with her victims, and will typically be remembered as such by all parties involved.

So, for example, if you perpetrate serious abuse upon another person, however much you might repent and she might forgive you and absolve you of guilt, you or she or both will still *remember* you as the one who committed that abuse; you will remember what it is like to have both desired and then committed the abuse that you did; and all of this will morally diminish or taint both you and your present relationship, even if and after you have been forgiven by her. Moreover, even if you both manage to forget the abuse and all of its lingering effects upon your psyche, Stump points out that there will still be the *history*: you will still be one who *did that thing*; and this alone will morally diminish or taint both you and your relationship with her, even if and after you have been forgiven by her. These effects of that sin together comprise a stain on your soul.

The *problem* of the stain on the soul, then, is *almost* captured in Stump's own summary of it as follows:

> Wrongdoing not only distorts the wrongdoer's intellect and will, but it also has other morally lamentable effects; for example, it has deleterious effects on memory and on the cognitive capacities underlying mindreading and empathy.

> Furthermore, wrongdoing leaves relational characteristics altered for the worse. Something sad can remain for the wrongdoer in his relations with those hurt by him, even if he is repentant, even if he is forgiven by his victims. (340–41) [2]

But I think that this statement does not *fully* capture the problem, because what it omits is the fact (apparent in Stump's characterization of it, but never made fully explicit) that the stain on the soul — or some stains on the soul, anyway — linger also even after this-worldly therapies and other instruments and processes of psychological healing and restoration have run their course. If this were not so, then the problem of the stain on the soul would not be a problem from which we need *divine* salvation, and it would not properly figure very significantly into a theory of the atonement.

The problem of the stain on the soul is, in my view, both genuine and serious; and it is one that has been almost entirely neglected in contemporary discussions of the atonement. But how can it possibly be solved if the stain lingers even after repentance and forgiveness, if some instances of it resist this-worldly processes of healing and restoration, and if it is partly constituted by *history*, the immutable past? What more could even an omnipotent God do about the effects of our sin *after* we have repented, been forgiven by God and others, and undergone the best, most effective processes of healing that this world has to offer? Are divine instruments of psychological healing so very different? Can they change the past? If not, then what can be done? The stain would seem to be indelible.

II.

Stump's answer to the question of how the stain can be removed, and how the work of Christ accomplishes its removal, comes in the final third of the penultimate chapter of her book. She begins by addressing what may well be the thorniest aspect of the problem: the fact that even after repentance and forgiveness, our sins against one another, and *a fortiori* our sins against an eternal and omniscient deity, live on in memory in a way that can still damage or otherwise diminish the quality of our relationship.

Her solution, in short, is to point to the way in which the sting of a painful memory can sometimes be drawn. To illustrate, she imagines her familiar ex-

2 Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (OUP, 2018).

ample-characters, Paula and Jerome, coping with some sin of Jerome's against Paula in the following way. Jerome repents and Paula forgives Jerome; she then tells him that they can "forget this" sin, and she expresses her willingness to be reconciled. In saying that they both can forget Jerome's sin, she does not intend to convey that the sin will literally be wiped from their memories; rather, her point is simply that "this past event, now a subject of pain to both of them because of its evil, will remain in their memories but without its ability to cause either of them pain." (373)

But how can Paula's declaration draw the sting of the painful memory? How can one make a memory no longer painful simply by fiat? Stump's answer comes in the following paragraph:

> That a memory which was once painful to both Jerome and Paula can stay in their memories but lose its painful character stems from the fact that the harm which Jerome did Paula and now so regrets has become part of their ongoing joint story of mutual love and care. Their relationship is stronger because Jerome has come to Paula in repentance and Paula has accepted him as the repentant person he is. In his repentance and her acceptance of him, their relationship has not been restored to the same condition it had before he harmed her. His repentance cannot return either of them or their relationship to the relative innocence of the period before he hurt her. But his repentance and her willingness to be reconciled to him alter the relationship by making it more deeply rooted in each of them. Through his repentance and her reconciliation with him, the past hurt has been interwoven into a renewed commitment on the part of each of them to the other. This fact — that there is such a deepening of their relationship because of Jerome's hurting Paula but repenting it and Paula's accepting his repenting — does not mean that, retroactively, the very harm that Jerome did Paula is now not harm or that his harm should be welcome to her or that his harm is in some other way not the evil that it was. But this episode in their shared lives, in which Jerome did real and unwelcome harm to Paula, may nonetheless become precious to both of them because of what they have gone through together in it. (374)

In short, then: the sting is drawn by the combination of Jerome's repentance, Paula's expressed willingness to be reconciled, and the deepening of the relationship that comes in the wake of those things.

It is perhaps easy to imagine things working as they do in Stump's example when the sins in question are serious but not horrendous. Jerome spends the better part of a year drinking himself into oblivion, imposing heavy burdens upon Paula; finally there is a confrontation and Jerome is booted from

the house and sent to rehab, after which Paula receives him back in something like the manner just described. Jerome badly and with much culpable negligence mismanages the finances for Paula's business; heavy losses are sustained and Paula fires Jerome, whereupon he sues her, all to the near destruction of their friendship; but later he repents, and Paula receives him back in the manner described. And so on. But can things also work in this way when grievous, horrendous wrongs are in view? Stump says yes: Referring back to the sense, just described, in which Jerome's sins against Paula, or the pain of a toddler's frustratingly bad behavior, can be forgotten, Stump says:

> This is the sense in which one can forget even great sins too if they are part of the history of human salvation. The acts are remembered, and so is their character as wrongful. But the remembered wrongful acts lose their power to produce pain in virtue of being wrongful, because they have become interwoven into a story of love that is worth prizing. And so there is a sense in which the sinfulness of those acts *is* forgotten. (374, emphasis in original)

Moreover, and crucially for Stump's project, the "forgetting" here described can come about with no *actual* loss of memory; and so it is a forgetting that even an omniscient God can experience.

But even with such forgetting accomplished, more yet needs to be remedied to remove the stain on a person's soul. For memory is not the only ingredient in the stain. There is also one's history, and one's experiential knowledge and its effects upon one's personality and one's ability to be close to others. At this juncture in her discussion, however, things start to move rather quickly. Shifting focus to Jerome's reconciliation with God rather than Paula, and having effectively established that Christ's atonement effects God's forgetting of Jerome's sins, Stump says that, if God forgets Jerome's sins in the sense just described, those sins

> will also be forgotten in this sense by Jerome and a fortiori by all the redeemed in heaven for whom Jerome's wrongdoing is also visible. … And so this last part of the stain on the soul from past sin, the shadows in memory and their connection to the empathic capacities, is healed also through the atonement of Christ… (375–76)[3]

One might worry that the historical component of Jerome's sin still lingers — he is, after all, still the person who did those things, whatever they

3 The "connection to empathetic capacities" that Stump mentions here are what I have been discussing under the description "experiential knowledge and its effects."

were, to Paula. But I take it that on Stump's view this part of the stain, too, is healed by being rendered irrelevant. Presumably the idea is that simply being the person who committed the sins one has committed is not by itself a *stain*; rather, it contributes to the staining of one's soul only by way of its effects. Once those effects have been healed and only the history remains, however, its staining power has been thoroughly neutralized.

III.

There is much that I like in Stump's account of how the stains on our soul get removed. But it is not the way of contemporary philosophy to dwell at length on points of agreement, and so I turn now to objections. The upshot of my objections will not be that Stump has said the *wrong* thing about the healing of the stains on our soul. I think that everything I will say here is fully consistent with at least the broad contours of her account of the atonement. Rather, the upshot is that she has not said enough: there are stains on souls that her account thus far does not address. But, as I shall explain later, I think that there are ways of supplementing her account that will remedy this problem. To facilitate the discussion, I turn to an example from Arthurian legend.

The tale of Sir Lancelot, as told in T. H. White's [4] *The Ill-Made Knight*, is the story of a man with a stain on his soul. Early in his career, before his ruinous and tragic affair with Guinevere, Lancelot is a model of purity, chivalric heroism, fidelity to his king and God — the greatest knight in all the land, a man destined for noble deeds and, indeed, one who fully expects, partly by way of remaining always a virgin, to be able to work miracles. The fall of Sir Lancelot comes while he is away from Camelot — partly in an effort to flee the temptation of his growing love for Guinevere. On his travels, he meets and rescues Elaine of Corbenic, who repays his good deed by getting him drunk and then deceiving him into having sex with her by posing as Guinevere. This rape costs him his virginity and so, in his mind, also his honor, all of his prospects for ultimate greatness, and his hope for one day being able to work miracles. Moreover, as he sees it, he has now not only betrayed Arthur, his king and best friend (never mind that the woman was not in fact Guinevere; for he *thought* that she was), and Guinevere, his one true love (never mind that

4 T. H. White, *The Ill-Made Knight* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940).

he did not do it consensually). Overwhelmed by grief and guilt and shame, he returns to Camelot, whereupon he soon consummates his affair with the actual Guinevere, thus setting in motion the events that ultimately lead to the breaking of the round table and the tragic end of Arthur's kingdom.

The end of *The Ill-Made Knight* gives us Sir Lancelot utterly broken by shame and guilt over his many sins. He is in important ways a model case for the problem of the stain on the soul as Stump has set it up, for his sins — not just the loss of his virginity, with their attendant experiential knowledge and memories, but his actual betrayal of and lies to Arthur, as well as the consequences of his non-voluntary "betrayal" of Guinevere — have literally driven him to serious mental illness and, even after his return to some semblance mental health, have left him deeply alienated from himself, his closest friend, his lover, and even his God. In the final pages we find Arthur badly in need of a miracle to save a fallen knight; and we see Lancelot, earlier a paragon of courage and honor, hiding away in a cell in abject fear of public failure, watching every other knight in the land try and fail to work the miracle. Eventually Lancelot is brought forth and persuaded to try. Fully expecting failure followed by public humiliation, Lancelot goes to the fallen knight and *does* work the miracle. God has blessed him; God has apparently forgiven him; God is apparently willing to be reconciled. Even so, we find Lancelot still plagued by the marks left on memory and other quarters of his psyche by his many sins.

The case of Sir Lancelot is, as I have said, in some important ways a model illustration of a man whose soul is stained in the ways that Stump describes. But in some ways he is not. For it is not only *his* sins that have left the stain. The precipitating factor for the fall of Sir Lancelot — the event that moved him from being a faithful friend and servant of God actively resisting hard temptation to being a betrayer, an adulterer, and someone estranged from God and the people he loved — was an act to which he did not consent. Admittedly, as the story is told, Lancelot was not wholly without agency in the loss of his virginity; but he was mostly so, insofar as he was drunk, deceived, and partly under the influence of sorcery. We would not hesitate nowadays to say that Lancelot was victimized in this event; and yet it is among the most important events contributing to the stain on his soul.

Here, then is the first problem: As the idea of a stain on the soul is described — lingering, morally undesirable leftovers of great moral evil within the psyche, leftovers that come in the form of what is now unwelcome

experiential knowledge and the memories thereof, together with a history whose consequences impair our relationships and even alienate us from ourselves — such stains are *not* caused by our sins alone. Look closely at the case of Lancelot. He remembers first intending, and acting on the intention, to betray Arthur with Guinevere because he was deceived by someone posing as Guinevere; the loss of his virginity that looms so large in his conception of himself and his vocation and that has left him at least partly estranged from God happened because he was deceived; his further sins — including his actual betrayal of Arthur — came not just in the wake of but partly *as a result of* this initial thing that happened to him; and so on. Things that happen to us can stain our souls no less than things that we do.

The story of Sir Lancelot as described here is, of course, probably fictional. It is also dependent in significant ways upon ideas about men, women, God, human sexuality and its significance, and so on that many will find quaint at best, and in many ways positively problematic. But I hope it is evident that none of this matters for the main points I want to make. For it is similar enough in its details to plenty of true stories; and even quaint, false and otherwise problematic beliefs can contribute in salient ways to the feelings, attitudes, and memories that enter into the stains on our souls. Trauma of all sorts, including traumas in which we have no agency whatsoever, can produce precisely the same kinds of effects that are supposed to comprise the stain on the soul — including (importantly) unshakeable feelings of guilt and shame, together with the alienation from self and others that they cause.

The problem, though, is that stains left by trauma rather than by sin do not at all seem to be the sorts of stains that will *inevitably* vanish and be forgotten by us simply in response to God's letting us know that God has forgotten it, or is willing to forget it. Why think that a victim of horrific abuse whose soul has been stained thereby will suddenly "forget" (in the relevant sense of having the sting drawn from her memories) the abusive events that have left her feeling guilty, ashamed, and alienated from self, other people, and God in response to God's own willingness to forget about it? Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, why think that a divine "let's forget about this" response is an *appropriate* (or even morally *acceptable*) way of dealing with the stains left by victimization?

A very natural reply, at this juncture, might be that these questions of mine have rhetorical force only because I am leaving out most of Stump's sto-

ry about how God gets, through Christ's atoning work, to the stage of "forgetting" human sins. The most important part of that story (so I would say, anyway) involves Christ's empathetic engagement with every individual human being and their particular sins while dying on the cross. According to Stump, this is the way in which Christ "bears our sins", and, on Stump's account, this is a large part of what is behind the cry of dereliction from the cross. Christ's psyche is somehow joined with the minds of everyone else so that he bears all of the psychological effects of our sins even without having actually committed any sin himself. He gets the experiential knowledge; he gets the feelings evoked by now unwanted memories; he knows the alienation; he knows what it is like to have the relevant history. And it is easy to imagine that knowing that we've been thus empathetically engaged would matter to those who have trauma-inflicted stains upon their souls.

Easy to imagine, yes; but would it *inevitably* matter? That is harder to accept, and this for two reasons. First, there is no clear connection between Christ's empathetic engagement with our experiential history and our no longer being pained (or guilty, or ashamed, or anything else) by it. Although it is certainly easy to imagine that one might feel a kind of comfort in knowing that Christ has felt all that we have felt, even in our worst moments as perpetrators or victims, it is just as easy to imagine that one might simply think "Well, I'm sorry for you too, then; but that doesn't really help *me* at all." So that is one reason for doubting that this aspect of Stump's story can do the work my imagined objector is suggesting it might do.[5]

But there is a second reason, which is also the second problem that I want to raise for Stump's account. Victims of serious evil do not always blame *only* their human perpetrators. Some blame God simply for standing by and watching. Some victims of what Michelle Panchuk calls "religious trauma" might blame God for putting into the hands of their perpetrators certain tools — for example, passages of scripture that seem to encourage submission to abuse — that contributed to their victimization.[6] Some might even count God to be among the perpetrators. It makes no difference whether some or

5 For this point I am indebted to Michelle Panchuk (although she raised it not specifically in connection with Stump's theory of the atonement, but rather in connection with ideas I was developing in Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God* (OUP, 2018)).

6 See Michelle Panchuk, "The Shattered Spiritual Self and the Sacred: Philosophical Reflections on Religious Trauma, Worship, and Deconversion", *Res Philosophica* 95 (2018).

all of these "blaming God" beliefs and feelings are false or perhaps even unwarranted (as might be the case, depending on their content, given the traditional view that God is perfectly good and loving and has perfectly good reasons for all that God does and allows). They are there nonetheless and contribute to people's alienation from God. And here it seems that a "let's forget about this" response on the part of God is exactly the *wrong* approach to dealing with the stains left by their traumas, and pointing to Christ's empathetic engagement with their trauma will (insofar as they partly blame Christ as one of the causes) be of no psychological help whatsoever.

We might sum up the two objections I have raised against Stump's solution to the problem of the stain on the soul as follows: Stump focuses on stains left by *a person's own sins*; and her solution places *us* in the position of the person who, by rights, ought to be seeking and taking the first steps toward reconciliation. It is by virtue of the fact that we, rather than God, are in the latter position that the divine "we can forget about this" comes as such sweet grace and comfort. But in fact the psychological components of what she is calling the stain on the soul can be caused by things other than one's own sins; and, though I do not believe that God can sin or otherwise be in the wrong, and though I hesitate to speak of divine duties toward human beings, it nonetheless seems to be a mistake to locate us so firmly in the position of the one who, by rights, ought to be taking the first steps toward reconciliation. My smallest children sometimes get angry with and temporarily alienated from me for reasons that have much more to do with their own lack of understanding than any wrongdoing on my part. Maybe in some of those cases I have no duty to take the first steps toward putting things right between us. But, given their lack of understanding and its inevitability in light of their cognitive capacities, it does seem rather cold and unloving not to take those first steps, or to expect that my own willingness to forget about the whole thing would come anywhere close to doing the job.

IV.

What, then, can be done about these other stains on our souls?

I said earlier that the project of soteriology is to develop a theory about the restorative significance (in relation to some salient affliction) for human beings and the rest of creation of the salvific work of Christ, which work

includes some or all of his life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. Within this project, Christ's death has been interpreted as a gambit, a vicarious punishment, a substitutionary punishment, a straightforward non-substitutionary punishment (of sin, or death, or human sinful nature), an expiatory sacrifice, a communicative sacrifice, a ransom payment, a divine apology, an act of identification with humanity, a great example of obedience and love, and much more; and this is to say nothing yet of other aspects of Christ's earthly career. So, again, it is important to bear in mind that casting one's soteriological theory specifically as a theory of (the) *atonement* is already to make a decision that might well be contested.

As Stump herself points out, however, understanding Christ's work as contributing to atonement does not preclude understanding it in other ways as well; and, to my mind, a promising way forward in light of the objections I have just raised is first to acknowledge that the *atoning* function of Christ's work is not the whole story about how the stains on our souls are addressed in the context of the divine-human relationship, and then to supply some further story about what the work of Christ accomplishes for us *beyond* atonement. My own view (following Marilyn McCord Adams[7]) is that at least part of this further story must be that Christ's work somehow both *defeats* the badness of the evils — particularly the horrendous evils — in which we participate as victims and perpetrators, and *redeems* for us the parts of our lives that have been touched by those evils.[8] Constraints of time and space permit only a sketch of what I have in mind. I leave the fuller details for another time.

Theories of the atonement generally start from the idea that there is a rift caused by sin in God's relationship with human beings, and they main-

7 Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (OUP, 1990); Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (CUP, 2006).

8 Adams characterizes horrendous evils as "evils the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole." (Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", 26.) On her view, defeating something bad is not the same as compensating someone for it, or seeing to it that the badness is outweighed. Instead, it is a matter of the bad thing's being "included in some good enough whole to which it bears a relation of organic (rather than merely additive) unity"; and an instance of evil or suffering is defeated *within the context of someone's life* if their life "is a good whole to which [that instance of evil or suffering] bears the relevant organic unity." (Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", 28).

tain that the atoning work of Christ is, fundamentally, God's gracious way of repairing that rift *as it appears from God's side of the relationship*. Christ's atoning work is God's way of addressing God's grievances against us. But if what I have said in earlier sections of this paper is correct, what we learn from reflection on the problem of the stain on the soul is that God's grievances against us are not all there is to that rift. Instead — in some cases, at least — the rift is partly also caused and maintained by grievances that human beings have against God and also by, as it were, "grievances" that human beings have against themselves. These latter grievances are often not considered in soteriological theorizing, largely (I suspect) because they are considered to be unjustified, irrational, or both. But I think that they deserve to be taken seriously, I think that they *are* taken seriously by God, and I think that part of the function of Christ's work is to address them. But they are not addressed by *atonement*, for the simple reason that they are neither grievances for which *we* need to atone nor, given divine sinlessness, are they grievances for which God needs to atone.[9]

As I have argued elsewhere, one way in which God deals with human grievances against God is via the scriptural authorization of lament and protest. But the work of Christ also has a role to play. Here is what I said there, drawing on ideas in Marilyn McCord Adams's work,[10] about how it might play such a role:

> In the early 1990s, in a manuscript that was never subsequently published, Jesse Hobbs argued that the atonement was, at least in part, a kind of divine apology for all of the evils in the world. [footnote omitted] This sort of view is untenable on the assumption that God is morally perfect; for, presumably, a morally perfect being would never do anything for which genuine apology is appropriate. But a morally perfect being might well sorrow over the pain inflicted on uncomprehending creatures by the pursuit of good ends that are ultimately beyond their ken; and such a being might take steps to validate the complaints that arise out of it, to take dramatic steps to identify not only with human victims of horrendous evil but also with the perpetrators, and to secure for people a blessed life at the end of all things — all with the aim of *defeating,* rather than merely compensating, the badness of the evils they have suffered. ... Identifying through his own suffering with victims puts

9 Cf. Ch 9 of Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*.

10 See Adams, *Christ and Horrors*. See also Marilyn McCord Adams, "In Praise of Blasphemy!", *Philosophia* 30 (2003), esp. note 4 on 48–49.

> God in a kind of solidarity with victims; and identifying in his own suffering with perpetrators allows victims to see in the work of Christ both a divine acknowledgment that God has participated somehow as perpetrator of horrors and that the badness of these horrors, and of participation in them, merits some kind of condemnation. This kind of acknowledgment falls short of apology or penance, since it includes no actual admission of guilt; so it is an acknowledgment that can in principle be given by a morally perfect being. And it is the sort of acknowledgement, too, that can fit within a variety of different stories about what else, exactly, happens in and is accomplished by the work of Christ.[11]

I think that this is all true, as far as it goes; but what is omitted from what I said there is an explanation of the *connection* between the defeat of the evils in which we have participated and the removal of the stains on our souls. It is at just this point that I think talk of redemption needs to enter the picture.

The idea of redemption can be woven into our discussion in the following way. Stains claim for themselves territory on the things that bear them. Removing a stain is a matter of reclaiming its territory — redeeming it from the presence that has taken it over. When we sin in serious ways, or when we are victimized, we might think of the moral leftovers that Stump takes to comprise the stain on the soul not via imagery of a *blemish* on an otherwise pristine surface but rather via imagery of a colonizing presence. The latter imagery is no less scriptural than the former; and I like it in the present context because I think it more readily facilitates the kind of supplemental story I would like to sketch about how the work of Christ might address the stains left by victimization, shame and self-blame, and the like.

Over the past several decades, there has been growing appreciation in developmental and personality psychology of the vital role played by narrative in shaping our *sense of self*, our representation to ourselves of *who we are*.[12] Facts

11 Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, 177–78.

12 Cf. Dan P. McAdams, "The Psychology of Life Stories", *Review of General Psychology* 5 (2001); Dan P. McAdams, "Personal Narrative and the Life Story", in *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*, ed. Oliver John, Richard Robins, and Lawrence Pervin (Guilford Press, 2008); Kate C. McLean and Dan P. McAdams, "Narrative Identity", *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22 (2013); Tilmann Habermas and Christin Köber, "Autobiographical Reasoning Is Constitutive for Narrative Identity", in *Oxford Handbook of Identity Development*, ed. McLean, Kate C. and Moin Syed (OUP, 2015); Habermas and Köber, "Autobiographical Reasoning Is Constitutive for Narrative Identity"; and Jefferson Singer, "Narrative Identity and Meaning Making Across the Adult Lifespan: An Introduction", *Journal of Personality* 72 (2004).

about who we are (as contrasted, say, with facts about *what* we are, or about what person we are identical with) include, most importantly, facts about our core values, personality traits and dispositions, our salient social roles, and the trajectory of our lives and the significance (for us) of the events within it. Empirical research suggests, furthermore, that there is a bi-directional causal link between our narrative representations of who we are and who we *in fact* are, or become.[13] In other words, our narrative representations of ourselves are not only shaped by the relevant real-world facts (most saliently by way of autobiographical memory) but they also contribute to *shaping* those facts over time. For example, there is evidence that recovery and growth in the wake of trauma are often facilitated by learning how to fit one's traumatic experiences into a broader life-narrative that has a redemptive arc.[14] Some, in fact, go so far as to say not only that narrative shapes our *sense* of self and *impacts* who we are at any given time, but that it *constitutes* us as persons and thus *defines* who we are.[15] This is an interesting and suggestive idea; but I will not here recommend or develop it, in large part because I am not yet sure how best to understand it.

Importantly, too, there is good reason to think that the narratives that shape — or, as some would have it, constitute — our sense of self are substantially co-authored by our families and peers, and that family narratives and the self-defining memories from which they are built play a particularly important role in shaping who we take ourselves to be.[16] If this is true, and if everything else I have just said about self-shaping narratives is true, then the

13 Cf. Kate C. McLean, Monisha Pasupathi, and Jennifer Pals, "Selves Creating Stories Creating Selves: A Process Model of Self-Development", *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 11 (2007).

14 McAdams 2001, Kate C. McLean, *The Co-Authored Self: Family Stories and the Construction of Personal Identity* (OUP, 2015). 27–29. Note, however, that research also indicates that narrative meaning-making may not *always* be a healthy process in which to engage, and that in people with certain kinds of abuse-histories it is linked with greater incidence of PTSD. (McLean, *The Co-Authored Self*, 79. Cf. Andrea Follmer Greenhoot et al., "Making Sense of Traumatic Memories: Memory Qualities and Psychological Symptoms in Emerging Adults with and without Abuse Histories", *Memory* 21 (2013).) To what extent these latter findings might force qualifications on what I say below about how Christocentric meaning-making might help to address the problem of the stain on the soul is not yet evident to me.

15 See, e.g., Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1996); Marya Schechtman, *Staying Alive: Personal Identity, Practical Concerns, and the Unity of a Life* (OUP, 2014) and the Unity of a Life (OUP, 2014).

16 Cf. McLean, *The Co-Authored Self*.

stories that others tell about us play an important role, too, in shaping not only who we take ourselves to be, but also who we in fact are.

Reflecting on all of this in connection with familiar scripturally grounded claims to the effect that, in Christ, we have been reborn, adopted into a new family, given a new life and a new identity in Christ, and so on suggests a further way in which the work of Christ contributes to the defeat of the evils in which we have participated and the redemption of territory claimed within our souls by sin (both ours and other people's) and its consequences. Serious sin and its consequences, as well as victimization, trauma, and their consequences, make a tremendous impact on our self-defining memories and threaten to consume the narratives that shape our sense of self. But, as the New Testament scriptures richly illustrate, the work of Christ provides tremendous resources for embedding our sins and traumas in new, redemptive narratives of our lives; and it constitutes a new source of "family stories" and memories that are vividly called to mind by the Lord's Supper and other liturgies of the church, and are available for use in the co-authoring of our sense of self. To the extent that these new narratives of our lives can be overall beautiful and good, and to the extent that they can play a role in making us into (even if not fully constituting us as) who they say that we are, we would seem to have here a promising story about how the work of Christ and his solidarity with both victims and perpetrators might defeat, or contribute to defeating, the evils — even the horrors — in which we have participated. So likewise, to the extent that the work of Christ contributes (in the way just described) to making it the case that sin and its consequences for us (as either perpetrators or victims) no longer dominate the story of who we are, we would seem to have here a promising story about how the work of Christ *redeems us* from sin, reclaiming the territory within us — territory in our histories, our memories, our relationships and relational capacities, and much more — that has been colonized by sin and its consequences.[17]

17 It is instructive to recall, at this juncture, the following part of Stump's answer to the question of how the sting can be drawn from Paula and Jerome's painful memory of his offense against her: "That a memory which was once painful to both Jerome and Paula can stay in their memories but lose its painful character stems from the fact that the harm which Jerome did Paula and now so regrets has become part of their ongoing joint story of mutual love and care." (*Atonement*, 374) It is not clear just how much Stump wants to lean here on the relevance of the *story* of Paula and Jerome's relationship, but I take the fact that she clearly sees the story

I acknowledge, of course, that I have come nowhere close to delivering on the promise I claim for the line of thinking I have just sketched. Among other things, I have yet to explain whether the mechanisms of defeat and redemption that I have just described depend on our consciously reflecting on and appropriating *in this life* the narrative resources that Christ's work provides (I think it doesn't), and what precise relationship the available Christocentric narrative of who someone is might bear on the actual facts about who she is (I am, as of yet, uncertain). Filling in such details and delivering on the promise is a project that must be left for another time. But if the promise can be delivered on, it provides the kind of supplement to Stump's theory that I think is needed to fully address the problem of the stain on the soul.

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as being of some relevance as a small bit of evidence that the supplement I am sketching here should be viewed as a welcome and friendly amendment to Stump's overall project.

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DIVINE UNION WITH AND WITHOUT THE GOSPEL: A PROBABILISTIC PROBLEM OF PLURALISM

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> As fire sets other things on fire, so God's love enables human spirits to blaze in love too, by consuming in them what is ruined in self-willed loneliness and leaving the loveliness that is left in them to flourish in beauty which is like God's own (Stump 2018, Ch. 12, p. 28).

In the final words of her concluding reflection of her rich and varied book on the Atonement, Eleonore Stump says that on the view explained and defended over the course of the book "the atonement of Christ is the unquenchable love of God offered to all the suffering, the self-alienated, and the evil, so that in their own beauty they might be at peace with themselves and with others and at home in the love of God." This concise statement identifies the atonement with a mode of God's love. It is the love of God offered. It is offered to the broken. It is offered to them for a specific reason: *so that* they might rest in a multifaceted self- and other-directed peace. Here, then, the *telos* of the atonement is peace; peace with God, peace with our fellow human beings, with creation as such, and, finally, with ourselves. A main thesis prior to this is that God's forgiveness is (and I *think* this is the is of identity or constitution) a mode of God's love as directed to fallen human creatures. Forgiveness has the power to alleviate guilt and shame, which are sources of anxiety and clearly barriers to peace. God's love, then, aims at bringing the peace package just mentioned. Since love aims at the good of the beloved as well as union with the beloved, peace should be identified as on of the chief goods God aims at for humans. And since God has made us for himself, our hearts are restless until they rest in him. Thus, peace and union with God are necessarily coextensive.

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I. WHAT IS THE WORK OF THE PASSION WITHIN THE PLAN OF ATONEMENT?

A prominent part of the answer to this question is that it is a sort of instrumental cause of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is this indwelling that affects the human psyche most directly, bringing about not just a *state* of peace but the *sense* of peace, what we might call *being at peace*. This is a feeling that few of us have very often, as far as I can tell. For me, it exists only in fairly fleeting moments, usually involving my children, nature, or my children in nature. A paradigm case of my being at peace, then, is the family gathered around a campfire, watching my older daughter reading to the younger children. Each listener will have their own example, and you know well what I'm talking about. We feel its absence palpably amidst the blooming, buzzing confusion of the hectic workweek. We desire this great good greatly. So it is no surprise then that our having it is a central object of God's love, for God's love aims at our good.

It is this good, together with its compliment the indwelling of human minds in the mind of Christ, that would justify God in allowing Jesus to suffer on the Cross, if in so suffering he brought us to the surrender that throws open the doors of the psyche in warm welcome of the Holy Spirit. Since the Passion is not logically necessary for this to happen, the rule of inference at must be something like Anselm's maxim: *potuit, decuit, ergo fecit*. I will take the possibility for granted and focus on the appropriateness, what makes the Passion "meet" for the occasion of drawing people to God's love in a posture of surrender.

II. "AND I, IF I BE LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH, WILL DRAW ALL MEN UNTO ME."

This is a crucially important subject to look at closely for two reasons. First, the satisfaction of the guiding desiderata of Stump's project are all structured together in a way that points directly to the Passion's ability to trigger the surrender that leads to the indwelling of the Spirit that replaces the sense of shame and guilt with that of peace (my focus here is on the phenomenological aspects of guilt, shame, and peace, not the juridical notions, important as they may be). And this is, in turn, important because it is plausibly is a great

enough good to justify (perhaps together with other related goods) the suffering of Christ and even the sufferings with which Christ was identifying.

Now, Stump says that "the work of Christ [by which she means primarily the passion] is actually most needed in eliciting that person's surrender to God's love and grace" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 1) and that it is the "best means for facilitating human surrender to God" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 2). One option for understanding these phrases that is *not* on the table for Stump is Abelard's "Moral Influence" view. Stump defines Abelardiamism thusly:

> Christ's passion and death mediate human salvation *only* by serving as an exemplar of right conduct (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, n3, emphasis added).

I think the word "only" is doing most of the work here, for Christ's life *is* clearly an exemplar of right conduct. Furthermore, the exemplar *calls to us*, as it were. In Christ's passion there is an ideal of surrender that evokes our own surrender. There is a spiritual magnetism that is more than merely a subsisting good example, it has genuine causal influence. There is in this view, I suggest, the makings of a narrative-based, non-heretical, quasi-Abelardianism whereby the chief efficacy of the passion is its power to evoke in us the mindset required for surrender to God's love. The answer to Cur Deus homo? is in its unique effectiveness to bring us into the life of God.

This is my gloss on Stump's claim that the passion is "best means for facilitating human surrender to God." It is a means for facilitation because of its role in "eliciting that person's surrender to God's love and grace." This surrender is what enables the indwelling of the of the Holy Spirit in the believer. The other direction of indwelling—the indwelling of the human psyche in the mind of Christ—is accomplished unilaterally by Christ. This asymmetry is important for my concerns concerning possible pluralistic problems. For to elicit any kind of reaction at all, one must be aware of it.

In the book, Stump gives considerable attention to two events in the life of Christ that don't usually draw much careful analysis: the cry of dereliction and the temptations of Jesus. Both events are fairly enigmatic without much context in Scripture, yet Stump magnificently draws fascinating connections between these events and the broader story of the mission of Christ's life on Earth. Nevertheless, the way in which Jesus' temptations serve the larger picture remains quite tenuous in my mind. For though the interpretations are consistent with the text and consonant with tradition, they remain only optional ways of seeing them.

However, it strikes me that the real story is the story itself, the *plot*, if you will; what Dorothy Sayers called the "drama in the dogma": God the creator of the universe and the bestower of all good gifts on those little gods called humans is betrayed by them. As they turn their backs on him, they fall into further and further discord with one another and within their own souls. Rather than wiping them out or turning his back on them, God does the opposite: he joins them. He experiences, in the way God can, the suffering and humiliation of fallen humanity—"He became sin on our behalf." As Stump says "If there is any aid to quell the resistance of a broken and lonely human heart, isn't real suffering and humiliation on the part of God himself a *very good* way to do so?" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 29, emphasis added). I agree with this deeply, but to have ones resistance quelled by the story of God's own suffering and humiliation, they must be *aware* of that story.

A modest digression will treat an interesting feature of her claim just above and lead right back in to the main point. Just a bit earlier, as I noted above, she says it is the "*best* means for facilitating human surrender to God" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 2, emphasis added). And afterwards, she goes on to say it is the "*most suitable* remedy, the one *most likely* to work, for a heart that needs to melt" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 30, emphasis added). Then later on it is called "*a* most promising way" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 45, twice). So, does Stump need the thesis that it is the *best*? Is there good reason to believe it *is* the best? The answer in need of most defense would be that God *needs* to use the best method *and* he did so. The answer easiest to support would be that God only needs to use a *sufficiently good* method and that the life of Jesus was sufficiently good. A hybrid option is that God didn't need to use the best method, but that he did anyway. The question here isn't yet the issue of exclusivism vs inclusivism, whether *each person* must be saved in the best way, but, rather, whether the best *way* to do it must be offered. As I say, I would like to hear from Eleonore more and more explicitly about her dispositions here.

One might worry about it being the best method because one might worry about there *being* a best method. Maybe there are infinitely many options all equally good or incommensurable. One might worry about it being the best (or even sufficiently good) because of all the violence involved. I have these worries myself, though they don't, for me add up to any doubt.

Here are two related problems. The first is that though it *does* strike me as the greatest story ever told, I wish I could defend this claim better. I think

of features of stories that make them great, and things come to mind like this: Someone great does something kind to someone in need who can't help them. Well, by this standard, the Gospel is superlative. That than which no greater can be conceived makes an act of supreme kindness for a people who can do literally nothing for him. Can a further case be made along similar lines, a cumulative case?

The second problem is that the Gospel *doesn't* strike some people as the greatest story ever told. Some think it is a *terrible* story. Bertrand Russell expresses this sentiment in *Why I am Not a Christian*, some contemporary theologians see it awash with violence in an objectionable way, some just see it as inferior to more exciting stories and are unable to connect with it. Fueling this last issue is the expansion of blockbuster movies with fantastic CGI special effects. When the Passion *is* made into a gripping movie, as in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ,* it can be almost unwatchable for many.

Therefore, as a master of narrative analysis, I would love to hear what advice Stump has to artists and expositors to translate the drama of the dogma into terms that are able to grip the modern viewer. Or is this culture simply unable to do it? Must we somehow work first to bring the culture around in some way before there is even a chance of the bulk of westerners being able to narratively connect with the Gospel. The extended quote from Newman on p. 39 which I found incredibly evocative and considered holding up as a model is "florid" and "melodramatic." Thus it seems we may need a battery of artists and expositors writing from a variety of aesthetic perspectives. How do we philosophers do our part in inspiring this radical return to wonder at the Gospel?

One thing I think I learned from the book that helped me a lot came only after repeated readings. I confess that at first I found it odd how much time was spent meditating upon what previously seemed to me relatively obscure events such as the temptations of Christ, his Gethsemane trial, and his cry of dereliction. I think now that my puzzlement was the result of trying, and failing, to see any *logical* or *doctrinal* connections between these events and other events of his life as well as his mission as a whole. Even though I'm not fully convinced of the particulars of Eleonore's interpretations of the related texts, what I was drawn into was the Christ phenomenology, Jesus mental life, what it was like for him to go through these events. Merely by raising and delving so deeply into the question of *what it was like* for Jesus to face these temptations, to struggle with the knowledge of what he must face or

to suffer in a way to illicit the cry of dereliction, merely raising and delving into these questions so deeply drew me into the inner life of Christ and I think I learned that even though none of these particulars might have been a *necessary* part of the mission, they were the drama that did *in fact* unfold, they were *his* story, history of the highest drama. Their connection is not in the first instance *theological* but rather they are concentrated points in the narrative of a particular life, a life of a man with a human mind [or "range of consciousness"] feeling particular things. In trying to figure out why there was so much focus on these discreet details, I was recalled to the man whose life they were the details of.

One thing Stump does that helps one focus on the power of the details is to ask us to consider, for certain details, how the effect of the story would have been different if those details were different. The key lesson here has been that Jesus—Jesus himself, not primarily something he teaches or even a teaching about him—is the answer. But if Jesus is the answer, what of those who have never heard of him? If the drama of his life is the best way to draw the sinner to repentance, do the unevangelized have to settle for second best?

Stump has no truck with either Pelagianism on the one hand nor exclusivism on the other. She notes one historically prominent way of reconciling the centrality of Christ with non-exclusivism (at least in the Catholic tradition). The way in question is to have a *de re* connection to God in the absence of *de dicto* knowledge. She notes, quite correctly, that people with no biblical knowledge at all can have a profound connection with God. She refers to Aquinas as holding the view that "some pagans before the time of Christ might have had implicit faith in Christ in virtue of trusting God to be a rewarder of those who seek him" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 44). Aquinas phrases implicit faith as "believing in Divine providence, since they believed that God would deliver mankind in whatever way was pleasing to Him" (ST II-II, Q2, Art 7, ad 3).

However, this by itself doesn't reconcile inclusivism with the centrality of Jesus. I suggested above that an implication of Stump's view was that the contingent historical details of the Passion matter. Of the perhaps infinite varieties of particularized realizations of the general plan of salvation, only a rather narrow range allow for the kind of evocative story necessary to open the sinner to the holy spirit's work in bringing peace to the psyche by re-organizing it—in cooperation with the human will—around the good. If this is so, then there are two problems with Stump's attempt to reconcile this with non-exclusivism. The

first is the one just hinted at: the life of Jesus is nowhere contained in believing God to be a rewarder of those who seek him and certainly not in the belief that God would deliver in whatever way was pleasing to him. I'm not doubting that the phrase "whatever way was pleasing to him" could plausibly—at least for an eternalist—constitute a definite description picking out the actual life of Jesus. My point is that the *de re* route by definition has no ability to tap into the narrative power of the life of Jesus to evoke the love response.

The non-Christian Jewish response presents a special problem. Stump quotes some very moving lines of poetry by Yehuda Halevi that she points out clearly "manifest a knowledge and love of God" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 45). Here again we have the original problem but also a further problem. Stump notes "there is no reason for supposing that Halevi had any developed theological beliefs about Christ" but that doesn't go far enough. There is every reason to believe that insofar as he was aware of the details of the life of Jesus, he was *not* relevantly moved by the it. Indeed, he might have found it (and many have found it) objectionable on the whole, even blasphemous. [Here I must pause and recognize that some in the Christian tradition have used Jewish rejection of Jesus' messianic claims as an excuse for violence against Jews. To what extent is debatable, but *whenever* it happens, it is *wholly* un-Christian and worthy of condemnation by all.] To put it coarsely, it's not obvious that a de re connection to God can be reliably counted upon to outweigh *de dicto* rejection.

Before moving on to what Stump has to say to a version of these objections, I want to register some concern about the following inference. She writes "Furthermore, as the second person of the Trinity, Christ is God; and so love of what really is God is also love of Christ" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 45). The validity of this inference is far from clear to me. "Christ is God" is made true by the hypostatic union of the human nature with the divine nature, but the second person of the trinity is not essentially hypostatically united to a human nature. This is not a conclusive objection, but it does make me hesitate to endorse the inference.

But regardless of the details of the *de re* approach, Stump avows that "One can grant the line that there is no greater love than that shown by God in Christ's passion and death and still hold that in many other ways, explicitly or subtly and beneath the level of consciousness, God makes a person feel God's love enough to help a person yield to it" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 45). The ques-

tion, though, is whether all these ways are equally effective, and whether the love of God is consistent with differeing effectiveness.

> [B]eauty can start the motion whose endpoint of rest is love of God (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 45)

Stump's anti-exclusivist position is the common one that "A person *can* come to Christ without accepting specifically Christian theological claims" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 46). But this doesn't say anything with respect to *how likely* it is. If any means other than the passion of Christ is second best, then we have a sort of "exclusivism by degrees." Think of the ordinary doctrine of exclusivism as simply the terminus of a spectrum. Now move just down the scale to nearly-complete-exclusivism: a very low but non-zero probability that one can be saved without de dicto Christian belief. Further down the scale there is a significant chance but still much lower than via de dicto belief. Then there is the balancing point of its being equally likely either way. At this end of the spectrum, knowledge of the Gospel seems irrelevant (literally statistically irrelevant), but any other location on the spectrum partakes of some degree or other of exclusivism. Excluding the view that hearing the Gospel

In Stump's estimation, exclusivism is "incompatible with the love of God" (Stump 2018, Ch. 8, p. 44). I couldn't agree more. But I'm hard pressed to see how *any* degree of exclusivism is compatible with the love of God. How could a loving God allow any historical contingency such as place or time of birth to affect the probability of one's eternal destiny? Is there any way to address this without making the Gospel irrelevant (statistically)?

Note well that even if the passion is necessary for the indwelling of human psyches in the mind of Christ so that there is no one for whom Christ's passion and death do not play an essential in their union with God, the probabilistic problem of pluralism remains. For the question I'm raising isn't whether the passion of Christ is necessary for our salvation (whether we are aware of it). The question I'm raising isn't one of what is or isn't *necessary* but one concerning *relative sufficiency*. Excluding the cases in which hearing the Gospel is a *dis*advantage, we may illustrate the problem in the following spectrum.

Let S = One is saved. Let B = One explicitly believes the Gospel. The locution "Pr(x|y)" is read as "The probability of x given y".

Pr(S|~B)=Pr(S|B)—Pr(S|~B)=.75(Pr(S|B))—Pr(S|~B)=.5(Pr(S|B))—Pr(S|~B)=.25(Pr(S|B))—Pr(S|~B)=0

On the far right, we have the fully exclusivist view that one *cannot* be saved without explicitly believing the Gospel. On the far left, we have the radically inclusivist view that it doesn't matter (statistically) whether or not one explicitly believes the Gospel. In between, we have a continuum of intermediary positions. So now consider the position just a tiny bit to the left of full exclusivism: that $Pr(S|{\sim}B) = .01$. This is, technically, a species of inclusivism, since it allows for the *possibility* of someone being saved without explicit belief in the Gospel. Nevertheless, it is very nearly as hateful as full exclusivism. Indeed, the natural position is that it is 99% as bad!

Now start from the left side. Where the two probabilities are exactly equal, we have the radically inclusivist thesis that explicit belief in the Gospel is statistically irrelevant to salvation. Now go a very little bit to the right: the view that $Pr(S|{\sim}B) = .99(Pr(S|B))$. That is very nearly as hateful as the view that explicit belief in the Gospel is irrelevant. Indeed, the natural position is that it is 99% as hateful!

Both ends of the spectrum seem obviously unacceptable. Yet the middle ground hardly seems a golden mean. The idea that explicit belief doubles ones chances at salvation seems to place far too much benefit on the chance event of ones hearing the Gospel. Or, conversely, it confers far too much of a disadvantage on those who, by pure chance, live at a time or a place where they don't even hear the Gospel. So it doesn't appeaer that there is anywhere on the spectrum that one can both honor the efficacy of the Gospel story, as Stump clearly does, and also avoid a hateful exclusivism.

Stump's position (see Ch 5 on the cry of dereliction) is that on the Cross, Christ takes in the psyche of every person (or perhaps takes "in" "them" in some hard-to-comprehend way), so that all men dwell in him. This makes the Passion *metaphysically* relevant (and gives it "accidental necessity"), but Stump has been at great pains in the book to justify the Passion because of its *motivational* relevance, the "drama in the dogma" that draws people to repentance. But this can only be effectual in those who are aware of the story. The Greatest Story Ever Told motivates only those to whom it is told.

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STUMP'S FORGIVENESS

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Abstract. To love someone, Eleonore Stump tells us, is to have two desires: a desire for her objective good and a desire for union with her. In *Atonement*, Stump claims that loving someone — understood as having these desires — is necessary and sufficient for morally appropriate forgiveness. I offer several arguments against this claim.

I. STUMP'S FORGIVENESS

In *Atonement*, Eleonore Stump tells us that love is two interconnected desires: (1) the desire for the good of the beloved; and (2) the desire for union with the beloved. As it turns out, these two desires, Stump claims, are also necessary and sufficient for forgiveness. "On my view", she writes, "love is necessary and sufficient for forgiveness" (Stump 2018, 438, n. 47). This means that the two desires of love are necessary and sufficient for forgiveness. As such, there are two ways to fail to forgive: you fail to desire the objective good of the other, or you fail to desire union with her.[1] Let us then consider:

Basic Claim: Loving someone is necessary and sufficient for forgiving her.

Two initial clarifications about the Basic Claim are in order. Although Stump claims that the two desires of love are necessary and sufficient for forgiveness, she is explicit in denying that forgiveness should be thought of as *nothing but* the conjunction of these two desires (i.e., as nothing over and beyond love). Something else must be added to these desires to get to the thing that

1 "Since love emerges from the interaction of two desires, for the good of the beloved and for union with her, the absence of either desire is sufficient to undermine love. To the extent to which love is implicated in forgiveness, the absence of either desire undermines forgiveness, too", Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (OUP, 2018), 81–82.

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is forgiveness. She gives the following analogy: "Being risible is necessary and sufficient for being human — anything that is risible is human and nothing that is not risible is human — but being human is not reducible to being risible. Risibility picks out human beings by an accident which is had by all and only human beings, but the nature of human beings is not nothing but risibility" (438, n. 47). Stump is therefore not attempting to give an account of the *nature* of forgiveness.[2] Nor is she giving us a *definition* of forgiveness. We are simply given two conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for forgiveness.

Second, these necessary and sufficient conditions are intended only to apply to *morally appropriate* forgiveness.[3] That qualifier is crucial: Stump does not claim that these two desires are necessary and sufficient for just any instance of forgiveness. As we proceed then, I will assume that our discussion is about morally appropriate forgiveness. I'll usually drop the qualifier and proceed to talk simply of forgiveness.

II. WHAT IS THE BASIC CLAIM?

Let's clarify the Basic Claim. Consider one flat-footed way of interpreting it:

(1) *S* loves *P* iff *S* forgives *P*.

The sufficiency claim — If *S* loves *P,* then *S* forgives *P* — is false. This is because the sufficiency claim eliminates the sense in which forgiveness is a response to wrongdoing. If loving as such is sufficient for forgiveness, then the way in which forgiveness is a response to wrongdoing is completely lost. Loving someone as such is not sufficient for forgiveness. It must be love of a *wrongdoer*, as Stump herself makes clear.[4] If you love a young child, this does not mean that you have forgiven the child for anything. Or suppose you love God. According to (1), this is sufficient for forgiving God. But in what sense

2 For an overview of recent accounts of the nature of divine forgiveness, see Brandon Warmke, "Divine Forgiveness I: Emotion and Punishment-Forbearance Theories", *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 9 (2017) and Brandon Warmke, "Divine Forgiveness II: Reconciliation and Debt-Cancellation Theories", *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 9 (2017).

3 "Whatever exactly is required for morally appropriate forgiveness, it must involve some species of love for the person in need of forgiveness", Stump, *Atonement*, 81.

4 "So whatever else forgiveness is, it seems to include a kind of love of someone who has done one an injury or committed an injustice against one", Stump, *Atonement*, 81.

could it be possible to forgive God? And to the extent that the persons of the Trinity love each other, then they will also have forgiven one another. But for what?

We can address this problem by requiring that the beloved and forgiven person is a wrongdoer, where 'wrongdoer' is a placeholder to denote one who is a candidate for forgiveness, and 'x' is the thing for which *P* is forgiven.

(2) *S* loves wrongdoer *P* iff *S* forgives wrongdoer *P* (for x).

As stated, (2) can't be right either. We need to build into (2) the requirement that the lover has the standing to forgive. Merely loving a wrongdoer cannot be sufficient for forgiveness. I can love my neighbor who cheats on his wife, but I cannot forgive him for cheating on his wife. I lack standing to do so. If loving a wrongdoer is to be sufficient for forgiving her, then I must already have the standing to forgive her. So we must assume that *S* and *P* stand in the right kind of relationship such that *S* has standing to forgive *P*. I will treat this requirement as implied. We just must keep in mind that *S* needs standing to forgive *P*.[5]

Even with this addition, there is a further problem with (2), a temporal one. To see this, consider:

(2') *S* loves wrongdoer *P* at t_2 iff *S* forgives wrongdoer *P* (for x) at t_1.

(2') would have it that loving someone at one time is necessary and sufficient for forgiving them at another time. But that is false. Suppose I love you today. That is not a necessary or sufficient condition for forgiving you for something next year. And vice versa. Suppose I forgive you today for something you did today. This is not a necessary or sufficient condition for loving you next year. One way to address this problem is to make the loving and forgiving simultaneous.

(3) *S* loves wrongdoer *P* at t_1 iff *S* forgives wrongdoer *P* (for x) at t_1.

(3) gives us something to work with. It says, roughly, that (at some time) having the two desires of love towards someone who has done wrong is necessary and sufficient for forgiving a wrongdoer (at that time) for that wrong.

I work through these refinements not because I think Stump would at any point disagree. I suspect she would welcome them. But I am going to turn

5 For more on God's standing to forgive, see Brandon Warmke, "God's Standing to Forgive", *Faith and Philosophy* 34, no. 4 (2017).

shortly to criticize the Basic Claim, and I don't want us to be distracted by other kinds of objections that one could make against it. With these refinements out of the way, we can begin to see more fundamental problems with the Basic Claim, problems that I do not think can be addressed with some Chisholming. Throughout, I'll speak generally of the Basic Claim, but what I have in mind is something like claim (3).

One small point before I proceed: I take the Basic Claim to be about *all* cases of morally appropriate forgiveness, not just divine forgiveness. Stump's primary interest here is the relevance of divine forgiveness for a theory of atonement, but I believe the Basic Claim is meant to generalize.

III. IMPLICATIONS OF THE BASIC CLAIM

Let us consider four implications of the Basic Claim. First, the Basic Claim implies that forgiveness is *unilateral.* In other words, the constitutive conditions of forgiveness — whatever those happen to be — can be met solely by the victim. It is easy to see why this is so. If loving a wrongdoer is sufficient for forgiveness, then whatever forgiveness happens to be, the victim's love of the wrongdoer is sufficient to ensure that forgiveness is accomplished.

Second, the Basic Claim implies that (morally appropriate) forgiveness is *unconditional.* Many views of forgiveness claim that for forgiveness to be morally appropriate, certain conditions must be met by either the victim or the wrongdoer. The wrongdoer must apologize or repent, for instance. Or the victim herself must forgive for the right moral reasons. But Stump's forgiveness is not conditional in either of these senses. The appropriateness of loving the wrongdoer (and therefore the appropriateness of forgiving her) does not depend on the wrongdoer apologizing or repenting. Further, there are no other conditions that must be added to loving the wrongdoer for one to forgive appropriately: loving is sufficient for morally appropriate forgiveness.

Third, Stump's forgiveness is *obligatory*. This follows from the fact that love is always obligatory.[6] And since love is sufficient for forgiveness, forgive-

6 "[O]n this account, love is obligatory, in the sense that, for any person, the absence of love is morally blameworthy, and the presence of love is necessary for moral good or excellence", Stump, *Atonement*, 43.

ness is always obligatory. Indeed, Stump claims that forgiveness and love are "obligatory in the same way and to the same extent" (Stump 2018, 82).

Finally, forgiveness is *automatic*. Because God is loving, God automatically forgives. There is no sense in which a loving God could withhold forgiveness. And to the extent that a human loves her wrongdoer, then her forgiveness will be automatic, too. Loving automatically secures forgiveness. Yet because being loving is an essential aspect of God's being, then God's forgiveness is *fully* automatic. Unlike humans, God cannot refrain from or withhold forgiveness by failing to love.

Stump's forgiveness is therefore unilateral, unconditional, obligatory, and (in the divine case) fully automatic.

IV. WHAT MOTIVATES THE BASIC CLAIM?

As best I can tell, Stump draws on two primary motivations for defending the Basic Claim. The first is that it is

> implied by Aquinas's account of love. Whatever exactly is required for morally appropriate forgiveness, it must involve some species of love for the person in need of forgiveness. A person who refuses to forgive someone who has hurt her or been unjust to her is not loving towards the offender, and a person who does forgive someone who has treated her badly also manifests love of one degree or another towards him. So whatever else forgiveness is, it seems to include a kind of love of someone who has done one an injury or committed an injustice against one. (Stump 2018, 81)

This passage relies on two intuitions. First: if you morally appropriately forgive someone, you love them. This would show that love is *necessary* for morally appropriate forgiveness. Second: if you refuse to forgive someone, then you don't love them. The contrapositive says that if you do love someone, then you don't refuse to forgive them. This would come close to showing that love is *sufficient* for morally appropriate forgiveness. So the first motivation for the Basic Claim appears to be two intuitions: if you love someone you'll forgive them, and if you forgive someone, you love them. This is, of course, just the Basic Claim itself.

What about Stump's claim in this passage that the Basic Claim is implied by Aquinas's account of love? I am not sure in what sense the Basic Claim is *implied* by Aquinas's account of love. It does not seem to be an implication, at least in any straightforward sense, of an account of love that love is also necessary and sufficient for *forgiveness*. But I will not pursue that thought here.

The second motivation for the Basic Claim is that "on this view of forgiveness, we also get the right reading of the parable of the prodigal son: the father does not need his son to make amends before he can forgive him and be willing to be reconciled with him in morally appropriate ways" (Stump 2018, 82-3). If love is sufficient for morally appropriate forgiveness, then the son need not make amends to the father to appropriately forgive. It seems to Stump that the father could have (appropriately) forgiven his son without the son's amends. Therefore, the Basic Claim is consistent with the Prodigal Son, for the Basic Claim implies that forgiveness is unconditional. I'll return to this thought later.

V. OBJECTIONS TO THE BASIC CLAIM

I believe that the Basic Claim is false. I argue that there are good reasons to reject both the necessity claim (that if you forgive someone, then you love her) as well as the sufficiency claim (if you love someone, then you forgive her).

One reminder: I take the Basic Claim to generalize to all cases of forgiveness. So while some of my objections will take aim at the Basic Claim in the divine instance, others will target the Basic Claim in the human case. Unless Stump claims that the Basic Claim is true only in the divine case, I'll take objections in the human case to count against the divine case.

a. Against Necessity

According to Stump, if you forgive someone, then you desire their objective good and you desire union with them. I contend that, depending on what Stump means by "appropriate forgiveness", this is a very high bar for morally appropriate forgiveness.

If by "appropriate forgiveness" Stump means something like "morally praiseworthy forgiveness" or "morally virtuous forgiveness" or perhaps even "morally admirable forgiveness", then desiring the good of the wrongdoer and desiring union with her are plausibly necessary conditions. But I think this is not what Stump has in mind by "appropriateness." In one footnote, she uses the terms "morally appropriate" and "morally justified" apparently interchangeably (Stump 438, n. 46). So let us ask: could your forgiveness be morally permissible even if you did not desire union with your wrongdoer, or didn't desire her objective good?

I believe so. Suppose you are indifferent about union with the person who wronged you or indifferent about her objective good. Mightn't your forgive-

ness still be a morally good and permissible thing? Why think it must necessarily be morally unjustified? Naturally, it won't be good in every way that forgiveness might be good. But that is not what's at issue. The issue is mere moral appropriateness.

If you don't think such indifference is consistent with good or permissible forgiveness, suppose we add a second order desire. You *want* to desire union with your wrongdoer (or you want to desire their objective good), but you don't yet have that desire. Suppose that because of how I treated you, you are having a hard time desiring union with me (or desiring my objective good). But you want to have that desire because you know you should. In such a scenario, are you barred from morally permissibly forgiving me because you don't yet have the first order desire for union with me? If not, then love is not necessary for morally appropriate forgiveness.

b. Against Sufficiency

I now turn to raise six objections to the claim that love is sufficient for morally appropriate forgiveness.

i. The Felicity Objection

Suppose I say to you:

(a) "I love you but I'm not ready to forgive you",

or

(b) "I love you but it will be difficult to forgive you."

According to the Basic Claim, these statements are infelicitous, or admit of a conceptual confusion, or reveal a lack of self-knowledge. To sincerely assert something like (a) or (b) is to make *some* kind of mistake. According to the Basic Claim, if you love the wrongdoer, then you are mistaken to think that you are not ready to forgive or to think that it will be difficult to forgive. You already have forgiven in virtue of your loving.

But it makes perfect sense to tell someone that you love them but that you are not ready to forgive or that you think it will be difficult to forgive. Such a person need not be confused about their own attitudes toward the wrongdoer or confused about what forgiveness is. Imagine your spouse cheats on you, or is fired from their job for sexual harassment. I see no good reason to think that you would be making an error were you to say to your spouse, "I love you

but I'm not sure I can forgive you, at least not now. I desire your good and I desire union with you, but forgiveness will take some time." You can love a wrongdoer without forgiving her. If so, then the Basic Claim is false.

ii. The Request Objection

The Basic Claim implies that, on the assumption that God loves every one of us, God has already forgiven every person for all the sins they have ever committed. (Or at least that God has already forgiven us for every sin which God has standing to forgive.) God has already forgiven you for all the wrong things you have done. I think this is precisely the implication that Stump wants.[7]

Yet consider the fact that Jesus teaches that we should ask God for forgiveness (Matthew 6:12). But why ask for God to forgive you if God has already forgiven you? We cannot ask for forgiveness in the expectation that God will do something God hasn't already done. God has forgiven us regardless of our asking! Now there may be other kinds of reasons why you are taught to ask for God's forgiveness. Perhaps you are taught to ask for forgiveness to remind you that you've been forgiven. Or perhaps you are supposed to ask to remind you that God's forgiveness is a gift. But it is still the case, on Stump's view, that when you ask for forgiveness, you are not asking to be given something that you don't already have. But it would be deceptive for Christ to teach us to so ask. To believe you are requesting something is to believe you don't yet have it. To teach us to ask would be to deceive us about what we already have. Christ would not deceive us about this. Therefore, we can ask to receive forgiveness from God that we don't already have. Therefore, the Basic Claim is false.

iii. The Textual Objection

There are three passages in the New Testament that indicate, if not straightforwardly teach, that in at least some instances, God's forgiveness is neither unconditional nor automatic. The first is from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:15:

7 This implication appears to follow directly from her claim that "Since God is perfectly loving and loves every person that he has made, it follows that God also always has a desire for union with every person", Stump, *Atonement*, 150.

(a) "But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Consider another passage in Mark 11:25:

(b) "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

And another from 1 John 1:9:

(c) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

These passages indicate that in at least some cases God refuses or withholds forgiveness. But how could this be if God is always loving and that loving a wrongdoer is sufficient for forgiving her? If God can withhold forgiveness, then God's forgiveness is not automatic. And if God's forgiveness depends in some way on our forgiving others, then it is not unconditional either. If God sometimes withholds forgiveness, then either (1) love is a sufficient condition for forgiveness, but God does not always love wrongdoers, or (2) God does always love wrongdoers, but love is not a sufficient condition for forgiveness. We should reject (1) and with it the Basic Claim.

Another passage warrants inspection. Consider Luke 17: 3–4:

(d) "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent', you must forgive them."

I do not think this passage shows that repentance is required for morally appropriate forgiveness. But it does suggest, I think, that in the human case if someone repents then there is something like a moral requirement to forgive. This perhaps suggests that there was not a requirement before repentance. But if this is so, then forgiveness cannot be morally obligatory in just the same way and to the same extent that love is, as Stump claims.

I should point out that Stump does address the Matthew 6:15 passage mentioned above. She concedes that it is "possible to interpret this saying as claiming that God withholds forgiveness from some people" (Stump 2018, 440, n. 61). But her response to this counter-evidence is puzzling. She writes:

> But, so understood, the saying would be at least in serious tension with other texts, such as Christ's telling people to love their enemies so that they will be like God, who sends his good gifts on both the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45) (Stump 2018, 440, n. 61).

I agree that if Matthew 6:15 said that we shouldn't *love* those who wrong us, then it would be in contrast with other passages. But that is not what the passage is about. It is about forgiveness. And the unconditional requirement to love doesn't entail an unconditional requirement to forgive unless you have a view like Stump's. My point is that Stump's response to the Matthew 6:15 passage begs the question. The Matthew 6:15 passage, along with the others I have mentioned, clearly place the burden on those who claim that divine forgiveness is unconditional and automatic. Simply restating the Basic Claim is non-responsive.

The view that God's forgiveness is conditional and not automatic was held very early in Christian tradition as well. I'll provide just a small sampling[8]:

(e) Ignatius of Antioch: "I therefore exhort you in the Lord to receive with tenderness those who repent and return to the unity of the church." For "to all those who repent the Lord grants forgiveness, if they repent returning to the unity of God and communion with the bishop." [*Letter to the Philadelphians*, 3]

(f) Justin Martyr: "If, indeed, you repent of your sins, and recognize this person to be Christ, and observe his commandments, then… forgiveness of sins will be yours." [*Dialogue with Trypho* 95]

(g) Origen: "[I]t is impossible to obtain, by praying, the forgiveness of one's sins if one has not heartily forgiven the sibling who has offended him or her and now asks to be forgiven." [*De oratione* 8.1]

8 Here I draw from and use translations from Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, "Unconditional Forgiveness in Christianity? Some Reflections on Ancient Christian Sources and Practices", in *The Ethics of Forgiveness: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Christel Fricke (Routledge, 2011). For defense of the claim that "nowhere in the New Testament is it affirmed that an offended person should forgive the offender even if the latter does not repent" (30), see Ramelli, "Unconditional Forgiveness in Christianity?". I am not convinced that all the evidence Ramelli provides supports the claim that forgiveness in the NT was always understood to be conditional. I do think, however, that she establishes a presumption in favor of forgiveness being conditional, especially in the case of divine forgiveness.

(h) John Chrysostom: "Even though your wounds are difficult to be healed, it is not impossible to cure them. Our Physician can: so skilled is he. Only, we should recognize our wounds: even if we should reach the deepest point of evil, he creates many ways of salvation for us. In fact, if you give up your anger towards your neighbors, and forgive them, your sins will be forgiven to you. For if you forgive your fellow humans, your heavenly Father also will forgive you. And if you give alms, he will forgive your sins…Also if you pray with zeal you will enjoy forgiveness." [*Homilies on the First Epistle to the Corinthians,* PG 61.194–196]

(i) Augustine: "He announces a baptism of repentance, that repentance may precede forgiveness. For there can be no forgiveness without repentance." [*Catena in Lucam* 59.13]

What about Aquinas? Stump claims that the Basic Claim "is implied by Aquinas's account of love." Perhaps. But Aquinas does speak to this issue and what he says does not, in my view, support the Basic Claim. It is true that Aquinas does say something that looks like a defense of unconditional forgiveness when addressing the question as to whether sin may be pardoned without penance (*Summa Theologica* III q. 86 a. 2).

> It would seem that sin can be pardoned without Penance. For the power of God is no less with regard to adults than with regard to children. But he pardons the sins of children without Penance. Therefore He also pardons adults without penance.

However, this comes from one of the three preliminary *objections* concerning the question of whether sin can be pardoned without penance. It is apparently not Aquinas's own view. For immediately thereafter, he writes:

> On the contrary…if man does no penance, it seems that God will not pardon him his sin.
>
> It is impossible for a mortal actual sin to be pardoned without penance, if we speak of penance as a virtue.

Later, Aquinas says that sins can be pardoned without the *sacrament* of penance, as when Christ pardoned the adulterous woman, but that even in this case, Aquinas says, "He did not forgive without the virtue of penance."

Stump might reply that these claims are only about what is translated "pardon" and so not about forgiveness. So it may be that Aquinas thinks that

divine "pardon" is conditional, but that divine "forgiveness" is not. I suppose this might be the case. But I still think there is a problem for Stump. As best I can tell, the English translations of these passages use both "forgive" and "pardon" and their cognates interchangeably for the same Latin word, *remitto.* Now I do not know exactly what *remitto* means, but in the immediate context of the *Summa*, it is whatever Christ does with the adulterous woman's sin in John 8. And Aquinas uses *remitto* to translate Matthew 12:32, where English translations standardly use "forgive".[9] These passages seem to be more clearly about forgiveness than pardon from punishment. At any rate, I am happy to leave the Aquinas exegesis to the experts, of which I am not one.

Finally, I note a teaching from the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church:

> There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, *provided his repentance is honest*. Christ who died for all men desires that in his Church the gates of forgiveness should always be open to anyone *who turns away from sin.* (Catholic Church 2012, 982, italics added))

Again, it looks as if some divine forgiveness is conditional on repentance. It therefore seems to me that the weight of the New Testament, along with the Church Fathers, and even Aquinas, sides with the view that forgiveness, including divine forgiveness, is at least sometimes conditional and not fully automatic. If so, this is good evidence against the Basic Claim.

iv. The Prodigal Son Objection

As noted above, Stump thinks the Basic Claim gives us the right reading of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. On her view, the father in the parable does not need to wait for the son's repentance to appropriately forgive. If the two desires of love are sufficient for forgiveness, and if there's no good reason to think that it wasn't appropriate for the father to love his son before his son repented, then we do indeed get the result that father appropriately forgave (or could have appropriately forgiven) his son prior to repentance.

I want to say a few things about the way Stump uses the Prodigal Son to support the Basic Claim. First, Stump's claim that the parable supports an unconditional forgiveness is complicated by the fact that in the parable, we are

9 "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

not only told that the son *will* repent upon going home, we are also told that he *does* repent directly to his father. Before he returns home, he says:

> I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you, and am no more worthy to be called your son: make me as one of your hired servants (Luke 15:18–19).

And once he arrives, we are told:

> And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son (15:21).

So it *may* be true that the father appropriately forgave his son before his son repented. But we *do* know that the son repented. And we do *not* know whether and when the father forgave him.

And this leads to a second point. Nowhere in the parable are we told that the father forgives his son. There are three Greek words that are commonly translated as 'forgive' and its cognates in the NT.[10] None of them appear in the parable. Now I don't mean to suggest that the father didn't forgive his son. But I do think that if Stump locates the father's forgiveness prior to the son's repentance, then this conclusion must rely on an argument from silence. Perhaps this is true. But how would we know?

This brings me to a third point. Multiple passages in the NT appear straightforwardly to teach that divine forgiveness is at least sometimes conditional. Yet Stump, as best I can tell, privileges the Parable of the Prodigal Son over those other passages, a passage that is silent on the issue of forgiveness. I find this puzzling. I see no good reason to privilege a passage that is silent

10 Anthony Bash, *Forgiveness: A Theology* (Wipf and Stock, 2015), 105 notes that *aphiemi* (and *aphesis*) are the only words that Matthew uses for forgiveness, and that these are the Greek words for forgiveness used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Bash points out that these words, "taken from the world of business and commerce", are used when one person remits the debts of another and are commonly taken to mean "to free or release someone from something", Bash, *Forgiveness*, 26–27. Luke also uses *aphesis* at 1:77 and 11:4 in his Gospel. A less commonly used word to refer to forgiveness in the New Testament is *charizomai,* which "carries the idea of giving a gift or giving freely", Bash, *Forgiveness*, 27. Like *aphesis*, *charizomai* can be used of canceling a debt (see Luke 7:42–43), but connotes further the idea of doing something gracious and kind. According to Bash, Apostle Paul uses *charizomai* at Col. 2:14 in conjunction with a phrase that means "to erase the record that stands against us", strengthening the thought that "forgiveness is likened to the erasure of debt", Bash, *Forgiveness*, 28. The word *apoulo* is also used once in the sense of "forgive" at Luke 6:37. Here, the word points to another aspect of forgiveness: "the idea of offering release to someone from that wrong that he or she has done", Bash, *Forgiveness*, 28.

about the conditionality of forgiveness (and perhaps is not meant to teach us about forgiveness in the first place) over passages that straightforwardly teach that divine forgiveness is at least sometimes conditional.

One final point. Suppose we grant that the Prodigal Son does teach that divine forgiveness is unconditional and we are justified in privileging this text over many others. This would only show that Stump is correct that divine forgiveness is at least sometimes unconditional. Crucially, it would *not* show that the Basic Claim is correct. The Basic Claim gives us a set of necessary and sufficient conditions on forgiveness. It is a consequence of this claim that forgiveness is unconditional. But to show that forgiveness is unconditional is not to show that the Basic Claim is correct. Forgiveness could be unconditional for a host of reasons that have nothing to do with the truth of the Basic Claim. Indeed, forgiveness could be unconditional and the Basic Claim false.

At best, the parable shows that (appropriate) forgiveness does not require something like repentance. (Although, as I have argued, the text is silent on this issue.) But the Prodigal Son does not provide any *further* evidence for Stump's specific conditions on forgiveness. In saying this, I do not mean to deny that the father in the parable loves his son, or even loves him in the way that Stump has in mind. My point is simply that Stump's interpretation of the parable, even if correct, provides very minimal support for the Basic Claim.

v. The Obligation Objection

On Stump's account, love is always morally obligatory. And given the connection between love and forgiveness, it follows that morally appropriate forgiveness is, as Stump says, "obligatory in the same way and to the same extent." This view apparently entails that forgiveness is morally obligatory immediately after offense, even egregious evil. Why? Simply because you should love your wrongdoer immediately after the offense. And, therefore, you should also forgive them.

I have two concerns here. One is simply the moral claim itself. Is forgiveness always morally obligatory? There are a couple of reasons to think not. One reason is simply that in the NT passages discussed above, it is suggested, if not straightforwardly taught, that God withholds forgiveness. But since God cannot violate a moral requirement, then we should reject the view that forgiveness is always morally required. Now turn to the human case. Suppose you are done a horrendous moral evil by someone you trusted, in full knowledge and awareness of what they were doing, and who is not repent-

ant or sorrowful for that they did to you. I'll let you fill in the details of the wrong. The point is that on Stump's view, it is apparently morally required to forgive your wrongdoer immediately upon him wronging you. I concede that this might be morally praiseworthy. But the claim that forgiveness is always morally required goes far beyond this. It claims that there is a moral fault in not forgiving. Such a person has failed morally and is blameworthy (because the "absence of love is morally blameworthy" so too is the absence of forgiveness, given that love and forgiveness are obligatory in the same way and to the same extent). But it is hard for me to fathom that in such a case, a victim *is blameworthy* for not immediately forgiving.

Here's another thought: I suspect that the claim that you are morally obligated to love your wrongdoer will strike you as less radical than the claim that you are morally obligated to forgive that wrongdoer. But if the former claim strikes you as less radical than the latter, then that is some defeasible evidence that you also think that love and forgiveness are, contrary to Stump, *not* "obligatory in the same way and to the same extent." Perhaps we are wrong to think this. But we will need an argument to see why.

vi. The Blame Objection

I now want to consider an untoward consequence of the Basic Claim regarding the relationship between forgiveness and moral blame. To see it, recall Stump's claim that loving someone entails desiring her good and desiring union with her. Sometimes, when people wrong us, the loving response is to blame our wrongdoer: to express disapproval or anger, to request or demand apology, perhaps even to withdraw friendly relations. By 'blame' I therefore do not simply mean a judgment of blameworthiness. Rather, I have in mind what some people sometimes call "overt blame."[11] Such overt blaming can be done, at least in part, for the blamed party's objective good. Overt blame is a crucial means to let people know that they have done wrong and need to make amends. You might think that such blame cannot stem from a desire for union. But this would be a mistake. Overt blame can be a crucial element in helping someone to identify the error of their ways, make amends, and reconcile. The point is that sometimes overt blame is morally consistent with and perhaps even required by love. And I suspect Stump would agree as well.

11 For discussion see, e.g., Michael McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility* (OUP, 2012).

But here a problem arises for the Basic Claim. On that view, if you love someone, then you forgive them. But as we have just seen, overt blame is sometimes compatible with, and even required by love. This means that forgiveness is also sometimes compatible with overt blame. According to the Basic Claim, then, there is apparently nothing problematic, no tension, between on the one hand, forgiving a wrongdoer, and on the other hand, continuing to openly and intentionally blame them. Imagine confronting your wrongdoer with love: expressing anger, sadness, disappointment, and hurt feelings, requesting and perhaps even demanding apology and restitution, withdrawing friendly relations, and in the very same breath profess that you have forgiven your wrongdoer. I think your wrongdoer would be puzzled. "If you have truly forgiven me", they might say, "Why are you still holding my wrong against me?"

As I have argued elsewhere, forgiveness paradigmatically alters the normative relationship between victim and wrongdoer.[12] When we forgive, we release the wrongdoer from certain obligations (to continue apologizing, feeling and showing remorse, to make further restitution, etc.) and we also give up the right to regard and treat the wrongdoer in certain characteristic ways (to embrace resentment, to demand apology, restitution, etc.). Any theory of forgiveness must explain this fact: that after we forgive someone, certain ways of treating or regarding them (even loving ones) are now off the table. The Basic Claim, however, does not explain why forgiveness typically renders loving blame morally inappropriate.

In reply, Stump might advert to a defense she gives in the book for the compatibility of forgiveness and punishment. Since forgiveness is consistent with punishment, it is also consistent with blame, and so my objection fails. But this would be too quick. I agree with Stump that punishment is sometimes consistent with forgiveness, for reasons I've given in a series of papers.[13] But I think overt blame is a different matter, for reasons I won't explain here.

12 See Brandon Warmke, "The Economic Model of Forgiveness", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (2016) and Brandon Warmke, "The Normative Significance of Forgiveness", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94, no. 4 (2016).

13 See Brandon Warmke, "Is Forgiveness the Deliberate Refusal to Punish?", *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 8, no. 4 (2011), Brandon Warmke, "Two Arguments against the Punishment-Forbearance Account of Forgiveness", *Philosophical Studies* 165, no. 3 (2013) and Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke, "Punishment and Forgiveness", in *The Routledge Handbook of Criminal Justice Ethics*, ed. Jonathan A. Jacobs and Jonathan Jackson (Routledge 2017).

But the general thought is this: Imagine someone claiming to forgive you and then continuing to engage in various overt blaming behaviors done out of love. They may not doubt that you love them even as you blame them, but they would have reasonable doubts that you had forgiven them.

Notice that it is not responsive to show that *unloving expressions* of blame are not consistent with forgiveness. Unloving expressions of blame are of course not consistent with love or forgiveness. What is at issue are loving expressions of blame. If there are such expressions, then love and forgiveness appear to come apart in ways not permitted by the Basic Claim. In my estimation, this is another reason to reject the Basic Claim.[14]

VI: FORGIVENESS AND SATISFACTION

Let me conclude by drawing attention to the relevance of the Basic Claim to Stump's larger theory of atonement. Stump defends what she calls a Thomist View of Satisfaction. In doing so, she rejects what she calls the Anselmian View. On the Anselmian View, satisfaction is required if we are to be reconciled to God. Swinburne (1989) has notably defended such a view. The basic idea is that because we owe a debt to God due to our sin, we must make up for it with apology, repentance, restitution, and penance. At this point, God forgives us and reconciles with us. Crucially, for our purposes, on the Anselmian view, satisfaction precedes forgiveness. Divine forgiveness is conditional on something like repentance and perhaps more besides.

Stump rejects the Anselmian View. On the Thomistic view she prefers, the logic of satisfaction is reversed. Forgiveness *precedes* satisfaction. According to this view:

> God always loves every human being; and, for this reason, God also always forgives every wrongdoer. Nothing else is needed for God's forgiveness and acceptance of reconciliation with sinful human beings, including even with those who are unrepentant. On the Thomistic approach, the role of satisfaction

14 The Felicity, Request, and Textual Objections also count against similar views of divine forgiveness, such as Strabbing's claim that to forgive is to be open to reconciliation, see Jada T. Strabbing, "Divine Forgiveness and Reconciliation", *Faith and Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (2017). I believe that revised versions of the above argument against necessity, as well as the Obligation and Blame Objections also count against a claim like Strabbing's. Like Stump, Strabbing also draws inspiration from the Prodigal Son to support an unconditional account of forgiveness. But as argued above, the text is silent about the conditionality of forgiveness.

> has to do not with providing a condition needed for God's forgiveness or acceptance of reconciliation. Rather it has to do with helping to repair the wrongdoer's damage, the damage he has done in the world and the stain on his soul. So understood, satisfaction has a role in reconciliation, but it has this role because it alters something in and for the wrongdoer, not because it gives God a needed condition for God's forgiveness. (Stump 2018, 102)

Here, satisfaction plays a different role. It is not what we do to make God's forgiveness of and reconciliation with us morally just. Rather it is what we do after we have been forgiven that makes us fit for relationship with God.

Crucially, the Thomistic View, as Stump understands it, does not require anything like repentance for God's forgiveness to be morally appropriate. So here is the problem. I have argued that the Basic Claim is false. The Basic Claim is consistent with the Thomistic View of Satisfaction since the Basic View says that God's forgiveness is unconditional. The Thomistic View, it should be noted, does not *require* us to endorse the Basic Claim, however. We could endorse the Thomistic View and reject the Basic Claim, and endorse some other view of forgiveness instead. If Stump is committed to the Thomistic View of Satisfaction, then this is what I recommend, given all the good reasons to reject the Basic Claim.

However, this is not the whole of the problem. I have also argued that there is good reason to think that divine forgiveness is at least sometimes conditional on human repentance. If this is true, then not only is the Basic Claim false, but so is the Thomistic View of Satisfaction.[15]

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15 I am grateful to an audience at the 2018 Central APA at which I gave earlier draft of this paper for a book symposium on Eleonore Stump's *Atonement*. I thank Craig Warmke for organizing that session. I also thank Eleonore Stump for writing such an interesting book and for offering comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT: RESPONSE TO MICHAEL REA, TRENT DOUGHERTY, AND BRANDON WARMKE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the atonement of Christ is the distinctive doctrine of Christianity. Over the course of many centuries of reflection, highly diverse interpretations of the doctrine have been proposed. In the context of this history of interpretation, in my book *Atonement* (OUP, 2018), I considered the doctrine afresh with philosophical care. Whatever exactly the atonement is supposed to be, in Christian theology it is understood as including a solution to the problems of the human condition, especially its guilt and shame. In *Atonement,* I canvassed the major interpretations of the doctrine that attempt to propound and defend a particular solution, and I argued that all of them have serious shortcomings. In their place, I explained and defended an interpretation that is both novel and yet traditional and that has significant advantages over other interpretations, including Anselm's well-known account of the doctrine. In the process, I also discussed many concepts in ethics and moral psychology, including love, union, guilt, shame, and forgiveness, among others.

At an author-meets-critics session at the American Philosophical Association Central Division, 2018, organized by Craig Warmke, three critics presented papers raising questions about one or another strand in the book. I am grateful to these critics, Michael Rea, Trent Dougherty, and Brandon Warmke, for their stimulating comments on this book. (I should add that I owe both Trent Dougherty and Michael Rea a special debt for their extensive help with the manuscript while it was in progress. Each of them worked through it carefully then and gave me extensive comments — Rea in writing and Dougherty in the course of

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a reading group and workshop that he organized. The book is undoubtedly better for having had the benefit of their comments while it was being completed.) The comments and questions of all three of these presenters at the APA session are helpful, and I am glad of the chance to clarify one or another element in the book further in consequence. I am only sorry that in the short space available to me here, I am able to comment on only some of the interesting issues they raise.

II. RESPONSE TO MICHAEL REA

Michael Rea's paper focuses on what, using Aquinas's terminology, I called 'the stain on the soul'. I argued that the stain could be removed by Christ's atonement and that God could forget the stain (in an analogous sense of 'forgetting') and thereby alleviate it. In his paper, Rea wants to call our attention to cases in which the stain on the soul stems not from a person's guilt, but from something else, such as a person's victimization at the hands of others or a person's suffering something, including something for which God might be blamed. Rea makes two claims about such cases, first that

(a) Christ's atoning work cannot remove the stain in such cases,

and second that

(b) God's forgetting about the stain does not necessarily alleviate every kind of stain on the soul.

In these cases, Rea argues, something more is needed to remove the stain. And, in Rea's view, that something cannot be Christ's atonement alone, because atonement is a matter of giving something to God; but something needs to be given to human beings in such cases.

As far as I can see, Rea is here using the word 'atonement' in its common usage, to mean something like morally appropriate appeasement or pacification. But in *Atonement* I hoped to rescue the word from this more constrained usage and return it to its original meaning of *at-one-ment,* that is, a unifying of separated and distant persons, making them at one with each other. So whatever rescues human beings from the problems of the post-Fall human condition, that counts as atonement in my use of the term. Whatever Christ does to remove any of the stain on the soul of a person guilty of grave wrongdoing is therefore also part of Christ's atonement, understood as *at-one-ment*.

And here I need to make one more terminological adjustment, this time about the phrase 'the stain on the soul'. I introduced this phrase as the English equivalent to a Latin phrase Aquinas uses, and I explained the notion of a stain on the soul as I first learned that notion from Aquinas, although I also broadened it for my purposes. As I developed the notion, the stain on the soul is the residue of grave wrongdoing that is not removed by a wrongdoer's repentance, even with the victim's forgiveness. There are sad effects on the memory, empathic capacities, and relationships of such a wrongdoer that do not vanish as soon as he has repented and been forgiven.

So Rea is right that the remedies for the stain on the soul that I explored cannot cure problems that have nothing to do with guilt. But that is because I introduced these remedies as remedies only for the psychic leftovers of a person's guilt for serious wrongdoing.

As Rea is thinking about the stain, however, it does not have to be a result of a person's own wrong acts. There can also be an undesirable residue left on a person's psyche by being the victim of someone else's wrongdoing, for example. A stain of that sort, Rea argues, cannot be remedied just by Christ's satisfaction for human evil and God's willingness to forget such evil in consequence (however such forgetting has to be understood for an omniscient God.)

On this score, I agree. It is right to think that there are stain-like defects on a person's psyche that stem from someone else's serious human wrongdoing, for example, and so have nothing to do with that person's own guilt. In *Atonement*, I discussed defects such as these (and others as well) and grouped them together under the heading of *shame*. As I explained shame there, it is a matter of diminished relative standing by comparison with other human beings on some scale of values that the shamed person accepts and expects others around him also to accept. Lessened relative standing can arise from being victimized by others; but it can arise as well from other sources, such as defects of nature. On my account, shame is also part of the post-Fall human condition, and I argued that it also needs to be remedied by Christ's atonement if Christ's atonement is to be a full and complete solution for the post-Fall human condition.

So, insofar as there seem to be disagreements between my position and Rea's on these issues, the disagreements are largely terminological, in my view. Like Rea, I also think that there are diminishments for human beings that arise from sources other than guilt, and that these diminishments need rectifying for a solution to be complete.

In this connection, Rea seems to me right to look to the work of Marilyn Adams for help, but I do not think that her account is sufficient to handle the issue Rea is focused on. One way to understand Adams's account of Christ is to interpret her as trying to find in Christ's life, passion, and death a solution to the problem of shame. For Adams, Christ's joining the human species in becoming incarnate by itself is a remedy for human shame. But, although there is merit in Adams's thought on this score, it cannot do the whole job of explicating Christ's life, passion, and death as a solution to the problem of shame. That is because, on Christian theology, construed as a solution to shame Christ's life, passion, and death affect all post-Fall human beings equally. But shame is a matter of relative standing among human beings. What affects all equally cannot then be a solution for those who feel particularly disadvantaged through shame by comparison with others.

In *Atonement,* I argued that the general remedy for shame is honor. As I showed, on Christian doctrine, there is real honor in being so greatly desired by God that God would become incarnate to endure passion and death in order to bring human persons to himself. By this standard of value, the standard that measures desirability to God, all shame has to fall away. What greater honor could there be than being desirable in the eyes of God? Furthermore, honor comes in degrees, as shame does also; and there is a way of understanding the doctrine of the atonement that implies shame and honor can be in direct proportion to one another. (But I am here abbreviating drastically what is a long account in the book.) And so, on my interpretation of the doctrine of Christ's atonement, there is a full solution to the problem of shame, as Rea thinks (and I also think) there needs to be.

Finally, I also agree with Rea that a person who is angry at God or is alienated from God is not helped by having it explained to her that in the incarnate Christ God has also suffered as she has. If, on Christian doctrine, all that there is in Christ's incarnation and passion is an additional suffering in the world, then what Christ endures simply makes more suffering. It does not alleviate or defeat the suffering or the shame of others.

The one place where in my view Rea in fact highlights an incompleteness in my account has to do with cases in which people suffer in virtue of being angry at God or alienated from God because they take God to be responsible for their suffering.

As witness the unpublished passage from a work by Jesse Hobbs that Rea cites, some philosophers suppose that God owes such people an apology or needs to make reparation to them. But I would say that in this connection everything depends on whether we suppose that God has done such people an injustice. On orthodox Christian theology (which Rea himself accepts), God is not capable of doing an injustice; and so it is not possible for God to do anything for which it would be appropriate for God to make an apology. But if, contrary to orthodox Christian theology, God does sometimes have something to apologize for, then I would agree that there is a problem to solve in cases where people are angry at God or alienated from God.

Rea's own point is that people can be right to be angry at God or right to be alienated from God even if God in fact is not guilty of any injustice against them. And on this score my own previous work aligns with Rea's point, though it is not the subject of explicit examination in that work.

For example, on my interpretation of the book of Job, Job is someone who is right to be angry at God even though God has done no injustice to Job. That is because on the evidence available to Job in advance of his being faced with God during God's speeches to him, the suffering Job undergoes cannot be understood as punishment for any wrongdoing on his part, and he is unable to conceive that there is any other explanation for God's allowing that suffering. Given that the evidence looks this way to Job, then, it would in fact be bad of Job *not* to be angry. And, as I read the story of Job, at the end of the story God himself validates Job's anger.[1]

Or, to take another example, on my interpretation of the story of the raising of Lazarus, Mary of Bethany is right to be alienated from Christ when he does not come to help while Lazarus is sick, even though in fact, contrary to what she supposes, Christ is guilty of no injustice against her.[2] Being angry or being alienated from a person can be a right response to that person on the basis of information that appears rock solid; but appearances can be misleading, and human beings can easily be mistaken in their evaluation of others. Given her understanding of her situation, Mary of Bethany is right to be alienated from Christ; but, in the story as I read it, it remains the case that her

1 See my *Wandering in Darkness. Narrative and the Problem of Suffering (*OUP, 2010), Chapter 9.

2 Ibid, Chapter 12.

understanding is mistaken and that Christ has done nothing unloving to her. Nonetheless, it is her own understanding of her situation that she has to rely on, and so she does well to be hurt and alienated.

So my previous work aligns with Rea's view of cases in which a person is angry at God or alienated from God. But I also agree with Rea that such cases need some explicit treatment in connection with the problem of shame, as I would put it, or the stain on the soul, on Rea's broader use of that phrase. In this sort of case, it might well be true, as Rea argues, that a perfectly loving God would need and want to do something to remedy the human sufferer's anger or alienation, even though God is not guilty of any injustice towards the sufferer. This kind of case is one that I did not deal with explicitly in my account of atonement, and so I welcome Rea's interest in it and his suggestions for approaches to it. In my view, he develops these suggestions in promising ways in his own treatment of the book of Job and analogous cases in his *The Hiddenness of God.*[3]

III. RESPONSE TO TRENT DOUGHERTY

Trent Dougherty begins with a brief summary of the goal of the atonement on the interpretation of the doctrine that I defended; and while his summary is generally right, it is not entirely accurate or complete. As Dougherty describes my interpretation, the goal of the atonement, as of human life in general, is peace; and God's love is a means to that peace. But if I were to rephrase Dougherty's summary, I would do it this way.

On the doctrine of the atonement as I interpreted it, the heart of all human excellence is second-personal; and nothing that can be described solely in terms of individual intrinsic characteristics, as it seems that peace can be, properly captures either the goal of the atonement or human flourishing.

In fact, as I presented the Thomistic ethics that underlies the interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement that I argued for, all human excellence is relational. On Aquinas's ethics, a true virtue is one or another kind of mutual relationship of love between a human person and God; it is not an intrinsic characteristic of an individual human being. And the best state for a human person is union of love, which is of course also relational. Insofar as peace is a

3 Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God,*(OUP, 2018).

goal of the atonement or of human life, it is as an accompaniment to the goal more properly described as union with God.

Furthermore, although Dougherty recognizes that, on my interpretation as on Christian doctrine generally, union with God is a mutual indwelling between God and a person in grace, nonetheless in his discussion of my interpretation Dougherty concentrates on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a human person. But when union with God is at issue, the relationship in question is something metaphysically greater or metaphysically more unified than union between ordinary human beings can be. On the interpretation of the doctrine that I argued for, not only does the Holy Spirit indwell a human person in grace, but also the psyche of a human person indwells in Christ as well. And in my examination of the story of the cry of dereliction and other stories of Christ's life, I explored in detail what it might mean for a human psyche to indwell Christ.

Consequently, on the doctrine of the atonement that I argued for, the goal of the atonement is mutual indwelling between God and a human person in grace, and Christ's passion and death are meant to be a means to that goal. Love, joy, and peace — the first of the fruits of the Holy Spirit — are only a byproduct of that goal.

The emphasis on the mutuality of indwelling and on the second-personal character of human flourishing makes a difference to some of Dougherty's main worries about my interpretation.

Dougherty notes that there are varying ways of specifying the character of Christ's life, passion, and death[4] as a means to the goal of union with God. And in this connection Dougherty rightly focuses on the problem of exclusivism and on my attempt at sailing between Scylla and Charybdis with regard to that problem. Scylla is the exclusivism which seems to imply the highly unpalatable claim that only those human beings who explicitly and sincerely espouse orthodox Christian doctrines are saved, so that the vast multitude of human beings are not saved. And Charybdis is the problematic theological relativism which holds that every worldview is efficacious for salvation and that none is ultimately more privileged than another. Dougherty interprets me as having "no truck with exclusivism" and as supposing that exclusivism is incompatible

4 Dougherty sees Christ's passion as central in the interpretation of the atonement I argue dfor, and he is right in this regard. But I also argued that Christ's life and death, and the mode of his death, all have a role to play as well.

with the love of God, but this characterization is not entirely accurate. For the purposes of developing an interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement, I accepted Christian exclusivism; what I rejected as incompatible with the love of God are the hateful implications that seem to follow from exclusivism.

In my view, it is the character of union as mutual indwelling that has the potential for solving the problem of exclusivism. As I explained the relation between mutual indwelling and Christ's life, passion, and death, on Christian theology Christ's atoning work has two different roles. First, in his passion Christ provides unilaterally one part of the mutual indwelling, namely, the indwelling of human psyches in God. No human being comes to union with God without Christ's having received in his own human mind the psyche of that person. For this part of the goal, then, on the doctrine as I interpreted it, Christ's passion is a necessary means to union with God– not metaphysically necessary, but conditionally necessary, that is, necessary given the way in which God has chosen to remedy the problem of the post-Fall human condition. With regard to this part of mutual indwelling, on the doctrine of the atonement I argued for, it is true that no one comes to God except through Christ. For this part of mutual indwelling, Christ's passion and death are the best way *simpliciter* to the end of the mutual indwelling that is union between God and human beings.

But on the interpretation of the atonement I defended, in his life, passion, and death[5] Christ also provides means for the other part of the mutual indwelling, namely, the surrender to God by a human being alienated from herself and from God. It is this surrender that enables the indwelling in her of the Holy Spirit. On the interpretation I argued for, which in my view is broadly Thomistic but non-Anselmian (and non-Abelardian too), Christ's passion and death are the best means or a most promising means for God to help a human person to this surrender.

Dougherty rightly points out that the ways in which I describe the status of the means with regard to this part of mutual indwelling — the best means, a most promising means, and so on — are varying, and he wishes for clarification on this score. He also worries that the needed clarification might imply that some people do not have access to the best means of salvation. I

5 Or in the story of his life, passion, and death. The connection between the story and the things related in the story is explained in detail in Chapter 9 of *Atonement*.

agree that my formulations are varying, but I use these varying claims to try to convey a point about exclusivism.

To see this point, it may help to consider analogous claims in medicine. Consider, for example, the claim that morphine is the best means to alleviate severe and otherwise intractable pain. This claim seems to be true; but clearly it is true only relative to a context. For those people who live in times or cultures where morphine is not readily available or is not available at all, it is not true that the best remedy for severe pain is morphine. And even in those contemporary communities where morphine for medical purposes is readily available, the claim that morphine is the best means for the alleviation of severe, otherwise intractable pain is true only in general. There are some patients who respond better to alternative treatments for pain, such as hypnosis and meditation; and there are some patients who cannot so much as tolerate morphine because for them it depresses oxygen in the body to dangerous levels. Obviously, for them, morphine is not the best means of alleviating pain.

So, if we are thinking in the abstract about biological pain in general and the means to relieve it, it is true to say that morphine is the best means to alleviate severe pain. But clearly if we are thinking not in the abstract but rather of the general run of people, more nuance is needed in the claim. We will need to say that morphine is a most promising means to treat severe pain, but that there are also other means that might be better for some people. The attitudes of the people or the circumstances in which they live may make it impractical or inefficacious to treat the severe pain of some people with morphine. And yet, even with these considerations about particular people in particular circumstances, it remains true that, generally speaking, considering pain and human beings in the abstract, morphine is the best means to alleviate severe pain.

Analogously, if we are speaking in the abstract of human psychology, then, I argued, Christ's life, passion, and death are the best means to the surrender to God's love that is necessary for the sanctification that is in turn necessary for union with God. But if we are thinking not in the abstract but rather of the general run of people with access to the Christian story of Christ's passion and death, then it is better to say that Christ's passion and death are a most promising means. Finally, for some people, something in their past life experience or their present psychological state may make the Christian story toxic for them; and so, for them, something other than the Christian story will be

a better means. And, nonetheless, speaking in the abstract, considering in general human psychology and the post-Fall human condition, it remains true that Christ's passion and death are the best means to elicit the surrender needed for union with God.

So it could be true that Christ's passion and death are the best means to help bring about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a human person, but it might still be true that some other means can serve better for some people. And it would not follow that the means which serves for them is second best. On the contrary, it could be true that the means that helps bring about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for them is the best means for those particular people in their particular circumstances. Consequently, Christ's passion and death could be the best means for bringing a person to surrender to God's love, and yet it could also be true that many people who do not have Christian beliefs are nonetheless brought to the same salvific surrender through means that are the best for them.

For this reason, the apparently hateful implications of exclusivism are warded off, but theological relativism is also avoided because Christ's passion and death enable the union of mutual indwelling in two different ways. As enabling the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a human person, Christ's passion and death are rightly described only as the best means or a most promising means. But as enabling the indwelling of a human psyche in Christ, Christ's passion and death are necessary for every person — conditionally necessary, but still necessary.

And so the exclusivist claim of Christianity can be true: no human being comes to God except through Christ, because mutual indwelling requires that human psyches indwell in Christ in his passion. And yet the apparently lamentable implications do not in fact follow from this exclusivist claim, because for some human beings something other than the story of Christ's passion and death may be the best or at least a most promising means to the needed surrender to God's love. That some people never have access to the story of Christ's passion and death does not imply that they are not offered the means that are best for them to come to God.

Finally, Dougherty questions an inference important for my argument that exclusivism does not entail the distressing claims generally attributed to it, namely, the inference that since Christ is the second person of the Trinity and so God, love of what is really God is also love of Christ. Dougherty says, " 'Christ is God' is made true by the hypostatic union of the human nature with

the divine nature, but the second person of the Trinity is not essentially hypostatically united to a human nature." And so, he thinks, the inference fails because one can love some things that really are God without loving Christ.

But, as I explained my usage of the term 'Christ' in my *Atonement*, I said that by this term I intended to refer to what the Chalcedonian formula mandates as the appropriate referent for the term: one *person* — who is the second person of the Trinity and is thus God — with two *natures*, one fully divine and one fully human.[6] It is therefore the *person* who is referred to as 'Christ'; and this person is God (and therefore also essentially God) in virtue of being the second person of the Trinity. So while it is true on Christian doctrine that the second-person of the Trinity is not essentially incarnated, it is also true on Christian doctrine that the person who is Christ is the second-person of the Trinity. And insofar as on the Chalcedonian formula 'Christ' refers to this person, who is essentially God, the inference that Dougherty worries about is actually good and acceptable, on the relevant Christian theology.

IV. RESPONSE TO BRANDON WARMKE

Brandon Warmke starts with an attempt to refine what he sees as my basic claim about forgiveness, which he interprets as the claim that love is necessary and sufficient for forgiveness.[7] But in *Atonement* I did not depend on a basic claim about forgiveness; I gave an extended and detailed discussion of it. And I began that extended discussion this way:

6 It is also possible to use 'Christ' to designate the whole composite of person and natures. For an explanation of the circumstances in which it is appropriate to think of Christ as composite, see, for example, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III q.2 a.4.

7 Warmke also objects that the source of my account of forgiveness consists in intuitions about forgiveness. It is true that intuition is one main source of my account, but then intuition is one source for any basic ethical claim. In forming ethical theories, we do typically begin with strong intuitions; and if we find an ethical theory that violates them, we tend to reject the theory, so that ethical intuitions retain a kind of primacy in theory formation. But, of course, on the other hand, once we use intuition as a source in ethics, we then go on to test the results of those intuitions against a number of cases, to see if the apparent implications of the intuitions, or even the intuitions themselves, need to be revised. This is the methodology employed in my discussion of forgiveness, where one test case after another is raised to see how the developing account of forgiveness based on basic intuitions fares. As I argued in surveying such cases, the account of forgiveness I develop handles the test cases very well and can in fact explicate some cases that are hard for other accounts of forgiveness to explain.

> Whatever exactly is required for morally appropriate forgiveness, it must involve some species of love for the person in need of forgiveness. A person who refuses to forgive someone who has hurt her or been unjust to her is not loving towards the offender, and a person who does forgive someone who has treated her badly also manifests love of one degree or another towards him. So whatever else forgiveness is, it seems to include a kind of love of someone who has done one an injury or committed an injustice against one. Since love emerges from the interaction of two desires, for the good of the beloved and for union with her, the absence of either desire is sufficient to undermine love. To the extent to which love is implicated in forgiveness, the absence of either desire undermines forgiveness, too. (Stump (2018, 81–82) footnotes in paragraph omitted)

This beginning description of forgiveness clearly includes some of the conditions on forgiveness that Warmke thinks are needed as refinements of what he takes to be my basic claim, including the time-indexing of forgiveness and the standing to forgive. So he is right that I do not disagree with the conditions he highlights at the beginning of his paper.[8] They are included in the description of forgiveness with which I began.

It should also be said here that working out the details of any of these elements of an account of forgiveness would not be simple. Consider, for example, just the issue of standing to forgive. As his example about a person's inability to forgive a neighbor's adultery suggests, in this paper[9] Warmke seems to suppose that only those who have been the direct and immediate targets of moral wrongdoing have the standing to forgive, because only they have been injured by the wrongdoing. But such a view seems evidently mistaken. To the extent to which human beings are social animals, a person can be injured by wrongdoing without being the direct and immediate object of it. The carjacking in a neighborhood saddles all its inhabitants with the need for extra security measures and with extra anxiety as well. The anonymous gossiper in an

8 Warmke correctly lists the implications of the account of forgiveness as I gave them except that he adds one for God, namely, that God's forgiveness is fully automatic. It is not clear to me what it means to say that something is automatic; but usually calling something automatic indicates that it is not voluntary. So understood, there is no such implication of my account of forgiveness. Insofar as God is perfectly good, he not only does not do what is morally wrong but he also has no desire to do what is morally wrong. On the contrary, God necessarily does what is morally right. But to say so is not to say that God's doing what is right bypasses God's will. Rather, God's doing what is right has its source in God's perfectly good will.

9 I add the qualifier 'in this paper' because Warmke has written a great deal about the topic of forgiveness. The references to his previous work on forgiveness are given in the footnotes to his paper.

organization diminishes trust among all the people working there. The harm done to the most vulnerable people by those in power over them shames all human beings, who belong to the species that does such things. And so on. To the extent to which the lives of human beings are intertwined in this way, the question of who is harmed by a particular wrongdoing is more complicated than it might originally seem; and consequently so is the question of who has standing to forgive a particular wrongdoing.

Warmke then argues for a number of claims, all of which he sees as objections to my account of forgiveness. In the interest of brevity, I will focus largely on one. In my view, the considerations raised by this one claim of his show the way in which to deal with most of his other objections as well. In the objection I will examine here, Warmke claims that love is compatible with blame ('overt blame', in his terms), but forgiveness is not. And so, in his view, forgiveness and love come apart, contrary to my account.

I think that the assessment of this and the other objections Warmke raises is made difficult by the fact that the crucial terms — 'forgiveness', 'blame', and so on — are common and widely used, and so they tend to have ambiguous meanings.

'Forgiveness', for example, can be taken in a broad sense to include reconciliation, or it can be used in a narrower way, where it does not automatically imply reconciliation. An older brother who has been cruel to a younger sister might repent and ask for forgiveness. Then what he is seeking is forgiveness-plus-reconciliation. But, on the other hand, a spiritual director might encourage a client to try to forgive his father, who has been dead for years.[10] Then what the director is recommending is forgiveness construed in a narrow sense since there can be no question of reconciliation in such a case.

Analogously, 'blame' can be used narrowly to indicate just negative moral appraisal, or it can be used more broadly to indicate negative moral appraisal

10 Someone might suppose that it is not possible to forgive a person who is dead, but in my view this supposition is mistaken. The context for this discussion is the interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the atonement. But Christian doctrine includes claims about the afterlife. So, at the very least, on Christian doctrine a person can forgive someone who is dead by desiring that that person be in heaven and by desiring to be united at some time with that person in heaven. In addition, in my view, there are secular analogues to these Christian claims, so that even on secular worldviews it is possible to forgive the dead; but in the interest of brevity I leave explanation of this view to one side here.

together with alienation from the wrongdoer and a desire for something bad for him (which is what Warmke calls 'overt blame'). When we say that Peter's denial of Christ is blameworthy, we generally have the narrow sense of 'blame' in mind. But when we blame those responsible for the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, it is the broader sense of 'blame', with its implication of alienation and resentment, that is usually at issue.

Furthermore, whether we understand these terms broadly or narrowly often depends on the context of the case under consideration. For example, when a wrongdoer is begging for forgiveness and thereby demonstrating repentance, we unreflectively suppose that forgiveness includes reconciliation as well. But when we ask whether it is possible to forgive those who are our enemies, we are construing forgiveness in a narrower sense, since there is no question of reconciliation with someone who is actively hostile.

With these things in mind, consider Warmke's claim that love is compatible with blame (with overt blame, on his view) but that forgiveness is not. (I will assume that in this connection he means 'forgiveness' in the narrow sense since that is the sense I specify is at issue in my account.) To have a concrete case with which to evaluate this claim, think about John Newton, who was a slave trader in his younger years but who went on to fight victoriously for the abolition of the slave trade in England. And think about a human person kidnapped and enslaved by Newton — for ease of reference, call this enslaved person 'Sam'.

We can now consider Warmke's claim with respect to two different contexts for this case.

> *Context A*. Suppose that Newton has by now repented his slave trading and is trying to make amends. And suppose also, for purposes of the example, that Newton has succeeded in buying Sam out of slavery and that Newton and Sam are working together for the abolition of the slave trade in England.

In this context, could Sam forgive Newton and still blame Newton for Newton's kidnapping and enslaving him?

In one sense, as Warmke argues, the answer to this question is clearly 'NO'. Sam's forgiveness of Newton is not compatible with his blaming Newton if we construe blame in its broad sense as including alienation and a desire for something bad for the wrongdoer.

But, then, contrary to Warmke's view, blame so understood is not compatible with Sam's love of Newton either. That is, in *Context A* it is not compatible with Sam's love of Newton that he be alienated from Newton. On the contrary, if Sam loves Newton, then Sam will have a desire for union with Newton, where union is a matter of being at one with him, in whatever kind of oneness is suitable to the nature of their relationship. And something roughly analogous can be said of the desire for something bad for Newton. In *Context A,* insofar as Sam loves Newton, he will want the good for Newton, not something bad.

So if we understand blame in a broad sense to include alienation and a desire for vengeance, then in *Context A* neither love nor forgiveness is compatible with blame. Consequently, it is no objection to the strong connection between love and forgiveness in my account that in such a context forgiveness is not compatible with blame. In such a context, with blame understood in this broad sense, love is not compatible with blame either.

On the other hand, but still with respect to the same context, if we construe blame in the narrow sense as a matter of negative moral appraisal only, then the answer to the question of whether Sam could forgive Newton and still blame him is clearly 'YES'. Construed narrowly, blame is compatible with love; but in this context, with blame so understood, blame is also compatible with forgiveness. It is compatible with both Sam's love and Sam's forgiveness of Newton that Sam continue to have a strong negative appraisal of Newton's slave-trading. Sam can say to others or even to Newton that Newton's slave-trading was a moral horror, even while it is nonetheless true that Sam loves and forgives Newton.

In fact, on this understanding of blame Newton continued to blame himself for his slave-trading even after he felt forgiven by God and reconciled with him. Newton expressed his attitude this way: "I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders."[11] And Newton seems entirely right in this attitude. It would be an appalling moral failure not to blame Newton for slave-trading, on this narrow understanding of blame. But then on this understanding of blame, it is also the case that Sam can forgive New-

11 See *The Journal of a Slave Trader (John Newton) 1750–1754,* ed. Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell (The Epworth Press, 1962), 98.

ton even while still blaming Newton for his past slave trading, just as Newton forgave himself but continued to have a strong negative moral appraisal of his past slave-trading.

So in this first context, *Context A*, love and forgiveness do not come apart. They are both compatible with blame narrowly construed and incompatible with blame broadly construed.

Now consider a second context:

> *Context B*. Suppose that Newton has not yet repented his slave-trading; suppose that he is in fact still active in the slave trade. And suppose also that one of his victims, Sam, is still in an enslaved condition at this time.

In *Context B*, Sam could desire that Newton stay away from him, and he could desire that something bad happen to Newton; but he could have these desires in two different ways.

(1) Sam could have these desires and also hope that eventually Newton rot in hell (or some suitable secular analogue).

Or

(2) Sam could have these desires and hope that Newton undergoes conversion and reform and eventually goes to heaven (or some suitable secular analogue).

In (2), Sam is desiring something bad for Newton only as an aid to Newton's conversion, and he desires distance from Newton only while Newton is so sunk in evil. Ultimately, Sam wants Newton to become a decent human being, one with whom Sam can be glad to share the human family, one with whom Sam would be glad to be united in heaven. In way (2), then, Sam's more global desires include both the desires of love for Newton, namely, the desire for the good for Newton and the desire for union with Newton.

So, although in both ways (1) and (2) Sam has the desire that Newton stay away from him and the desire that something bad happen to Newton, these desires of Sam's are incompatible with love of Newton only in (1). In (2), these desires of Sam's are actually part of Sam's love of Newton. To want the ultimate good for a slave trader and to want union ultimately with him, it may be necessary to want something bad for him and alienation from him while he is still actively engaged in slave trading.

Consequently, in *Context B*, while Newton is active in the slave trade, blaming Newton even in the broad sense that includes alienation and a desire for something bad for the wrongdoer is compatible with love of Newton. But then it is also compatible with forgiveness of Newton. If, in spite of still being enslaved by Newton, Sam hopes for Newton's reform and is willing to be reconciled with Newton ultimately, then Sam does forgive Newton. After Newton's repentance of his slave trading, when Newton looks back on these desires of Sam's while Sam was still enslaved, Newton will be able to see what a gift he was given in that attitude of Sam's towards him. It was a gift Newton most definitely did not deserve then, and that is one of the reasons why it is easy to recognize it as forgiveness.

And so in *Context B*, the context in which the person being blamed is an unrepentant perpetrator of great evil, blame is compatible with both love and forgiveness, even when blame is construed in the broad rather than the narrow sense. And since the broad sense implies the narrow sense, in *Context B* blame construed in the narrow sense is also compatible with both love and forgiveness.

Consequently, in neither of these contexts do love and forgiveness come apart. In each context, blame is compatible with love only in case it is also compatible with forgiveness. So if we disambiguate the different contexts and the different usages of the relevant terms, then considerations of blame actually confirm the strong connection between love and forgiveness defended in my account.

Finally, a word is needed about what Warmke calls his textual objection. Warmke acknowledges that I considered biblical texts such as Matthew 6:15 that seem contrary to my position. But Warmke gives the impression that my response to such texts consisted in little more than pointing to Christ's injunction to love one's enemies. This, however, is a misimpression. Here is my comment about Matthew 6:15:

> Christ says that if people do not forgive others, God will not forgive their sins either (see, for example, Matt. 6:15). It is possible to interpret this saying as claiming that God withholds forgiveness from some people. But, so understood, the saying would be at least in serious tension with other texts, such as Christ's telling people to love their enemies so that they will be like God, who sends his good gifts on both the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). Furthermore, in the parable in which this saying about forgiveness occurs, the king (who represents God in the parable) is portrayed as forgiving his servant first, before the episode in which the servant fails to forgive his fellow

> servant (Matt. 18:23–35). So, in my view, a better way to interpret the saying in the Gospel text about God's forgiveness is to take it as a claim about God's forgiveness-plus-actual-reconciliation, and to understand it as claiming that the hard-hearted cannot be united to God because of their resistance to love, not God's resistance to them. Stump (2018, 440).

It may help to see the point at issue in that passage to look first at the parable in Matthew 18:23–35, which seems to illustrate the general claim in Matthew 6:15. In that parable, in fact the king (who represents God) initially forgives his servant without any conditions on the servant's attitude towards any past wrongdoing of his. That is, the king's forgiveness of the servant is prompted not by the servant's repentance, confession, apology, and penance for a previous sin of accumulating debt.[12] Rather the king's forgiveness is prompted only by the king's compassion for his servant. In the parable, the king only *later* becomes alienated from his servant and sends him away into prison when it turns out that the servant is hard-hearted towards his fellow servant. The parable therefore actually supports my interpretation that God's forgiveness is not conditional on a wrongdoer's repentance of his sins — or his repentance, confession, apology, and penance — but rather is a manifestation of God's love.

And now consider the general claim in Matthew 6:15: "if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."[13] It is important in this connection to focus on the details of this claim, and for this purpose it may be helpful to have a specific case in mind.

So consider the case of Eleanor Roosevelt. When her husband Franklin Roosevelt died suddenly and unexpectedly, Eleanor discovered that he had been betraying her with another woman, Lucy Mercer.[14] In one dreadful blow, Eleanor learned that her husband had died and that he had died in the presence

12 It is true that the servant promises to pay his debt in the future, but this promise is not repentance and apology for having acquired the debt in the past or for having failed to pay it up to now. Suppose, by way of analogy, that a divorced person Paula has gotten hold of her former spouse's credit card and has wracked up an enormous debt on it. And suppose that, confronted with his angry reaction, Paula promises to pay the debt herself sometime in the indefinite future. Surely, this promise alone will not strike him (and should not strike us) as Paula's repenting and confessing her wrongdoing, apologizing for it, and offering to make amends for it.

13 The Greek words for forgiveness in Matthew 6:15 and Matthew 18:27 are not the same, but the context makes clear that the same idea is at issue in both places.

14 There are endless other details to this story that make Franklin's betrayal of Eleanor's trust worse, but I do not want to complicate the example by including them.

of his beloved Lucy, with whom he had been unfaithful to Eleanor for a long time. Clearly, Franklin was guilty of a serious betrayal of Eleanor's trust, which was an injustice to her and inflicted psychological injury on her as well.

For the sake of this example, let it also be the case that Eleanor herself was guilty of some sin. Suppose just for the sake of the example that Eleanor harbored racist biases which led her to many small or large injustices against other human beings. (And if the historical Eleanor had no such sins, then she must have had some others, which could serve just as well in this example). Given her time and background, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that she was entirely unaware of these biases and that she felt no guilt over the treatment of others to which these biases led her. Let her acts based on such racist biases count for the sake of this example as Eleanor's sins.

Now, on the general claim in Matthew 6:15, here is what we need to say. Unless Eleanor forgives Franklin his sin of betrayal of her, God will not forgive Eleanor her sins of racist bias against others.

The first thing to recognize in this case is that Eleanor's forgiveness of Franklin has to be unconditional where Franklin's sin against her is concerned. That is, no repentance (or repentance, confession, apology, and penance) on Franklin's part is required as a condition on Eleanor's forgiveness of him; and, of course, nothing of the sort could be given since Franklin was dead at the time that Eleanor discovered his treachery.

And the second thing to recognize is that, on the general claim in Matthew 6:15, God's forgiveness of Eleanor's sins of racial injustice is also unconditional as regards those very sins of hers. That is, no repentance of these sins on Eleanor's part is required as a condition on God's forgiveness of them. Eleanor does not even need to recognize that she has such sins in order for God to forgive them. Where Eleanor's sins of racial injustice are concerned, God's forgiveness of them is unconditional on any psychic state of Eleanor's as regards those very sins.

On Matthew 6:15, what God's forgiveness of Eleanor's sins depends on is not Eleanor's attitude towards her own sins. It depends only on Eleanor's attitude towards *Franklin's* sins against Eleanor. And, with regard to Franklin's sins, Eleanor's attitude of forgiveness is also unconditional, in the sense that Eleanor's forgiveness of Franklin does not depend on Franklin's attitude towards his sins against her. Therefore, on Matthew 6:15 neither God's forgiveness of a human person's sins nor her forgiveness of the sins of others is conditional on

the sinner's repentance of his sins. Rather, in each case, the forgiveness is unconditional as regards the sinner's attitudes towards his own sins.

Because Warmke wants to argue that early Christian tradition is contrary to my account on this score, it is worth noting that Augustine reads Matthew 6:15 in this same way, and that he also uses Christ's teaching about loving enemies to interpret that text. (I omit here to address Warmke's claims about Aquinas's views, since my interpretation of Aquinas is defended in detail in *Atonement.)* Commenting on this biblical text, Augustine says,

> That [fifth petition in the Lord's Prayer] may indeed be construed in this way, that when we say, 'Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive', then only are we convicted of having acted contrary to this rule, if we do not forgive them who ask pardon, because we also wish to be forgiven by our most gracious Father when we ask His pardon. But, on the other hand, by that precept whereby we are enjoined to pray for our enemies, it is not for those who ask pardon that we are enjoined to pray. For those who are already in such a state of mind are no longer enemies. By no possibility, however, could one truthfully say that he prays for one whom he has not pardoned. And therefore we must confess that all sins which are committed against us are to be forgiven, if we wish those to be forgiven by our Father which we commit against Him."[15]

To generalize, then, when the claim in Matthew 6:15 mandates that a human person Paula forgive any person Jerome who has wronged her, that claim puts no conditions on Jerome's attitude towards his wrongdoing for getting this forgiveness from Paula. There is nothing at all that Jerome must do as regards his wrongdoing against Paula in order to win Paula's forgiveness. And when the claim in Matthew 6:15 implies that God will forgive the sins of a human person Paula who forgives the sins of others against her, that claim also puts no conditions on Paula as regards her own sins. There is no attitude or action with regard to her own sins that Paula has to adopt in order to gain God's forgiveness of those sins. The point of the claim in Matthew 6:15 is only that God's forgiveness is there for all Paula's sins, which therefore must include even the unrepented ones, provided only that Paula is not hard-hearted towards others with regard to their sins against her.

15 Augustine, *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, According to Matthew,* tr. William Findlay, revised and annotated D.S. Schaff, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church,* ed. Philip Schaff (Eerdmans), 1980), 43.

Consequently, if read carefully, both the general claim about God's forgiveness in Matthew 6:15 and the parable about forgiveness in Matthew 18 in fact strongly support my point that forgiveness is unconditional on anything on a wrongdoer's part as regards his own wrongdoing.

As Warmke acknowledges in his paper, my claim that God's love and forgiveness are unconditional is spelled out clearly in *Atonement* as a claim that God's forgiveness does not depend on the wrongdoer's repentance, or repentance plus confession, apology, and penance. But, as I explained in detail in that book, this claim does *not* mean that God fails to be responsive to *anything* in a wrongdoer. To receive the desired *effect* of God's forgiveness and love, which is union with God in reconciliation, the wrongdoer cannot close out the love of God. For God to have the desires of love and forgiveness for a human person *fulfilled*, the loved person has to surrender to God's love. And it is not possible for a person to be open to God's love while also being hard-hearted towards others.

The two commandments on which all the law and the prophets hang (as Matthew 22:40 puts it) are in a sense just one commandment. To love God is to love the goodness that God is and so to love what God loves. Consequently, to be hard-hearted towards another human person *is* in effect to close out the love of God. And that is why reconciliation and union with God, which is what God in love and forgiveness desires, is ruled out for a human wrongdoer when she is unwilling to forgive someone who has wronged her. Even God cannot fulfill his desire for union with a human person if that person is closed to God, as in effect the hard-hearted servant in the parable turns out to be.

So, as I argued in *Atonement* and explained in connection with the discussion of Matthew 6:15, the forgiveness of God which is not conditional even on a wrongdoer's repentance cannot find the fulfillment of its desires if the wrongdoer resists God's love. The offered gift of forgiveness cannot succeed in being given if the intended recipient refuses it. So although the *forgiveness* of God is not conditional on the wrongdoer's attitude towards his sins, the *union* desired in forgiveness is conditional — not on the wrongdoer's repentance of sins, or on his repentance plus confession, apology, and penance, but rather just on the wrongdoer's surrender to God's love.

This explanation of Matthew 6:15 applies also to the other similar text that Warmke cites, namely, Mark 11:25. As for I John 1:9, which Warmke includes in his list of texts that seem to him contrary to my account, that text

connects confession of sin with forgiveness-plus-sanctification. But this text is not an objection to my position; rather, it summarizes the very view that I argued for. On Christian doctrine as I interpreted it in *Atonement*, God's love and forgiveness cannot have their desired effect of reconciliation with God, which requires sanctification, without a sinner's first having surrendered to God; and that surrender includes hating one's own sins and yearning for God's goodness. This surrender begins the process of sanctification, which will continue to its ultimate goal of union with God unless in self-protective refusal to acknowledge her own sins the sinner abandons that initial surrender. So it is not only right on the interpretation I argued for but it is in fact an explicit part of that interpretation that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

CONCLUSION

In this brief paper, I have considered only some of the interesting issues and questions raised by the three papers of the APA session presenters; considerations of space prohibit my touching on all of them. But I am grateful to Rea, Dougherty, and Warmke for their generosity in bringing their expertise to bear on *Atonement* and for taking the time to work through the book so thoughtfully. I appreciate their helping me see where I could profitably elucidate in more detail some of the views in that book, and I am glad of this chance to expand more fully on the issues raised by their good questions and concerns.

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THE GOALS OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: A REPLY TO IRENEUSZ ZIEMINSKI

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Abstract. In a recent article, Ireneusz Ziemiński argues that the main goals of philosophy of religion are to (i) define religion; (ii) assess the truth value of religion and; (iii) assess the rationality of a religious way of life. Ziemiński shows that each of these goals are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Hence, philosophy of religion leads to scepticism. He concludes that the conceptual tools philosophers of religion employ are best suited to study specific religious traditions, rather than religion more broadly construed. However, it is unclear whether Ziemiński means the goals he attributes to philosophy of religion to be normative goals that philosophers ought to pursue, or whether he is merely offering a description of how philosophers of religion actually operate. I argue there are difficulties for both the normative and descriptive interpretations. If Ziemiński's project is normative then many of its requirements for successful inquiry are implausible. On the other hand, if his project is descriptive he needs to do a lot more work to show that the goals he attributes to philosophers of religion really are the goals philosophers pursue. At minimum, more information is required to successfully evaluated Ziemiński's proposal.

I. INTRODUCTION

In a recent article,[1] Ireneusz Ziemiński argues that the main goals of philosophy of religion are to (i) define religion; (ii) assess the truth value of religion and; (iii) assess the rationality of a religious way of life. Ziemiński shows that each of these goals are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Hence, philosophy of religion leads to scepticism. He concludes that the conceptual tools philosophers of religion employ are best suited to study

1 Ireneusz Ziemiński, "Philosophy of Religion as Way to Skepticism", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 1 (2018), 53–65. doi:10.24204/ejpr.v10i1.1873.

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specific religious traditions, rather than religion more broadly construed. In Section II, I outline the main takeaways from Ziemiński's article. In Section III I explore two different possible interpretations of Ziemiński's project. The first is that Ziemiński means for the goals he attributes to philosophy of religion to be normative goals that philosophers ought to pursue. I argue that on this interpretation it's unclear whether the goals Ziemiński attributes to philosophy of religion are necessary for successful inquiry. For instance, I argue that an essentialist definition of religion isn't necessary for philosophy of religion. Additionally, the epistemic standard Ziemiński has in view is often obscure. And when it is clear, it is unrealistically high, especially when taken as a normative standard. The second interpretation is that Ziemiński is merely offering a description of what in fact philosophers of religion are already doing. While this interpretation is more charitable I suggest that Ziemiński needs to do more work in order to defend it. Some case studies of work from prominent contemporary philosophers of religion would go a long way in this regard.[2]

II. ZIEMINSKI AND THE GOALS OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

According to Ziemiński the three main goals of philosophy of religion are to (i) define religion; (ii) discover and/or justify the truth about religious claims and; (iii) rationalize religious behavior. He argues that none of these goals are achieved by philosophy of religion.

1. Defining Religion

Ziemiński believes that one of the tasks of philosophy of religion is to explain what makes its inquiry distinct from other subjects such as the psychology of religion, sociology of religion, history of religion, or comparative religious studies. He also observes that philosophy of religion often seeks to defend or criticize the truth claims of religion (54). From this fact Ziemiński appears to infer that:

> [R]egardless of the differences, both models (apologetics and critical) show that philosophy depends on everyday beliefs, our worldview or

2 I'm grateful to an anonymous referee for prompting me to consider the descriptive interpretation of Ziemiński's project.

> even emotional factors. Philosophers do not want to admit this problem, proclaiming the notion of knowledge based on unbiased arguments of reason; they also often consider philosophy to be the most important science, the base and condition of the rest… However, philosophy of religion is neither the most important area of studies of religion nor its basis; and yet it takes on important issues ignored by other sciences concerning religion (54).

Part of the problem is that according to Ziemiński, "philosophy is linked to the question about the essence of religion: what religion really is" (55). And its essence is impossible to define. He believes that any definition of religion needs to be an essentialist definition and hence include any and all essential religious phenomena, while simultaneously providing a criterion by which to distinguish the religious from the non-religious. This definition need not only include both past and present instantiations of religious but all future (and hence logically possible) instantiations of religion (56).

Ziemiński claims that appealing to either an *a posteriori* or *a priori* definition of religion is problematic. The former requires a knowledge of religion in order to be able to distinguish religious phenomenon from others, and hence is circular (56). The latter requires a definition of religion which is apparent from reference to its historical instantiations and Ziemiński believes this will be impossible.[3] To avoid this problem philosophers of religion "initially assume a common and unfocused definitions, specifying them in the course of studies; but this definition is not, of course, [an] essential definition" (57). Ziemiński suggests that in seeking an essentialist definition philosophers assume there is a 'perfect religion' and that various religions resemble it to varying degrees. He appears to believe that scholars can't abandon the need for a 'perfect religion', since the concept is assumed in their work. One might wonder why we need to worry about offering an essential definition of religion, but Ziemiński writes that "essentialism is the condition of human thinking; in every phenomenon we must distinguish what is important (and necessary) from what is unimportant (and unnecessary)" (57).

Another response Ziemiński explores to the problem of definition examines whether one can simply use Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance

3 It's worth noting that Ziemiński recognizes that these problems of definition apply to other phenomena like art, knowledge, and human nature. In order for them to be studied one has to know how to distinguish them from other phenomena, just as one needs to do with religion.

to define religion. This solution says that while even if we can't offer necessary and sufficient conditions for religion, we can recognize religion when we see it. For instance, "it may be difficult to find shared features between Islam, Buddhism, and Roman Catholicism, but they are similar enough to be called religions" (58). But Ziemiński suggests that:

> The solution is not satisfactory because in the case of family relations there are more and less typical examples. Certainly, being a parent is a closer relationship than being a nephew or a niece. Similarly, there can be more typical examples of being religion, which could be its essence. But, even if there are no typical examples of religion (like there is no typical example of a game), they are all called religions, because of the similarities between them. Therefore, they have similar traits, considered to be the essence of religion, which suggest that the theory of family resemblances is also a form of essentialism (58).

Ziemiński concludes "essentialism is a necessary assumption in studying religion, but it leads to skepticism in the case of [the] definition of religion" (58).

2. The Truth Value of Religion

Another problem Ziemiński raises concerns the question of "whether religious claims (doctrines) can be true or justified (and if yes, than which one is true and the most credible)" (55). But "the problem is that in the case of religious statements concerning the existence of God or the afterlife, we do not know how to check if they are true" (59).[4] The problem of confirmation can be illustrated by examining a number of debates including the consistency of God (i.e. the divine attributes) and the existence of God. With respect to the latter, Ziemiński explains that we cannot know whether the concept of God is possible, and hence we cannot know whether the ontological argument is sound (60). We likewise cannot know whether the teleological argument or cosmological argument are sound either. Disproving God's existence is equally problematic. For instance, it's impossible to know whether a solution to the problem of evil like the greater goods theodicy is successful (61). According to Ziemiński while we can know that the statement 'God exists' has a truth value, we cannot know whether it is true or false. So we are left

4 Ziemiński thinks this matter is complicated because of competing definitions of truth. The correspondence theory of truth (or realism) is often assumed by philosophers of religion.

with scepticism with respect to God's existence, just as we are with respect to definition (61). Ziemiński suggests that perhaps for the religious individual, the truth value of religious claims aren't important. Instead, religion is important because it offers comfort and meaning. That religion is providing an accurate description of the world is less important than whether one is able to trust God. However, Ziemiński believes trust in God presupposes God exists. Hence, "[t]he problem of God's existence is therefore key to the truthfulness of religion, even though we cannot solve it" (62).

3. Rationality of Religious Behavior

Ziemiński concludes with a discussion of the rationality of religious behavior, which he recognizes depends on the account of rationality one has in view. He writes that "[a]ccording to the ethics of beliefs defended by W.K. Clifford, only those claims which are proven can be considered true. Therefore, if there is no evidence that God exists, faith in Him/Her is irrational and morally wrong" (62). Ziemiński explains that religious beliefs, along with many other beliefs do not meet Clifford's criteria. If one follows Clifford's epistemic standards then very few beliefs could be accepted as true. He writes "the lack of proof for God's existence does not negate the rationality of religious cults because humans are celebratory animals, living in a world full of symbols, no matter if those symbols refer to some real and transcendent objects" (63). An alternative account of rationality is found in William James, who claims that:

> [I]n significant cases one is allowed to follow emotions, and consider whatever brings more benefits to be true. Therefore, if a certain religion fulfills people's expectations, gives them a feeling that life is meaningful or hope for eternity, then they are allowed to consider such religion as true. Similarly, if religion brings more damage than good to individual and to society, then practicing it is not only irrational, but also evil from a moral perspective. (63)

However, Ziemiński contends that even if James is correct to think that pragmatic reasons can trump epistemic reasons, it's difficult to discern how to assess the pragmatic (dis)utility of religion. He writes that, "[b]ased on the observations of religious history we cannot prove that religion is in itself a source of evil or a source of good" (63). Thus on the question of the rationality of religious behavior Ziemiński believes we must be sceptics (63).

4. Ziemiński on the Meaning of Philosophy of Religion

Toward the end of his article Ziemiński writes that "[s]o far, the conclusions are rather pessimistic, since the main problems of philosophy of religion remain unsolved… philosophy of religion fails, because it cannot answer for its main questions. In this situation we should ask, if these questions are serious scientific problems" (64). Even if philosophers of religion can never answer important questions about religion, they do have something to offer. Ziemiński writes that "[p]hilosophers may not be gathering empirical knowledge, but they bring conceptual tools which can help us to understand problems of the truthfulness, consistency and rationality of religion" (64).

If, however, philosophers are to successfully employ these conceptual tools they must abandon studying religion broadly and focus on specific religious doctrines. In other words, "[i]f there is no perfect or essential religion, just specific historical religions, philosophers should not study fiction, which they consider to be the essence of religion, but should concentrate on the consistency, truthfulness and rationality of specific religions" (64). One way to do this is to focus on the philosophy of a specific religion. For instance, one could focus on the philosophy of Christianity or Islam. However, Ziemiński believes the focus ought not to be apologetic in nature, but "as far as possible an objective analysis of its consistency, truthfulness and rationality" (64). Ziemiński concludes that:

> [O]ne cannot exclude the possibility that such research will result in skepticism. However, skepticism, even as the last word in philosophy, is not fruitless since it modifies the original understanding of the object of studies. Consistent skepticism is (or at least should be) also a skepticism aware of its limitations; this means that a skeptic is (should be) skeptical towards skepticism… Therefore, skepticism is a natural, critical standpoint, taken by every scholar not only towards different branches of science or theories constructed by their colleagues, but also towards their own ideas. From this perspective, philosophy is not a separate area of research, but a critical self-knowledge of every scientist, no matter which branch of study of religion they represent (64–65).

III. INTERPRETIVE PROBLEMS FOR ZIEMINSKI

There are a number of difficulties with what Ziemiński puts forward in his article. Many of these arise, at least initially, from issues of interpretation. In

the first half of this section I explore problems for a normative interpretation of Ziemiński's project. In the second half I examine some concerns with a descriptive interpretation, though they are admittedly less formidable than the problems associated with the normative one. In short, one of the main questions is whether Ziemiński holds philosophy of religion does in fact lead to scepticism, or whether it ought to lead to scepticism.

1. The Normative Interpretation

The normative interpretation of Ziemiński's project understands him to be offering a research program for philosophy of religion. He is stating what goals philosophers of religion *ought* to pursue. There are, however, a number of serious problems if this is the correct interpretation.

A. Essentialism

There are a number of problems with what Ziemiński says with respect to an essentialist definition of religion as a normative requirement. If Ziemiński is suggesting that an essentialist definition of religion is necessary for successful inquiry, he fails to make clear *why* this is the case. After all, he realizes that philosophers often "initially assume a common and unfocused definition [of religion]" (57). So it seems clear enough that he recognizes that philosophy of religion in practice gets conducted without an essentialist definition. On this interpretation his suggestion, then, has to be the stronger claim that successful philosophical inquiry into religion is impossible without an essentialist definition. But again, he hasn't told us *why* this is the case. The failure to offer an essentialist definition about religion doesn't require a sceptical stance toward religion. Likewise, consider just how strong this claim really is about what's required for successful inquiry in philosophy of religion. Since Ziemiński believes no such definition is on offer his view entails that there has been *no past or present successful philosophy of religion*. Yet we seem to be doing a lot of philosophy of religion without offering (or trying to offer) an essentialist definition of religion. Ziemiński needs to tell us more clearly what the problem is with this state of affairs. The implausibility of this as a necessary requirement lends support to the idea that, at least with respect to the definition of religion, Ziemiński's project is descriptive.

B. The Meaning of Philosophy of Religion

Ziemiński concludes his article by suggesting that philosophy of religion is best suited to use the tools of conceptual analysis to assess the consistency, truthfulness, and rationality of specific religious claims. Again, suppose that this is meant as a normative requirement. There are at least two different ways to understand this as a normative requirement and they both are problematic. First, Ziemiński could be claiming that this is what philosophers of religion ought to do, regardless of what they're actually doing. Second, Ziemiński could mean that this is what philosophers of religion ought to be doing but currently aren't.

On the first interpretation, Ziemiński could be right about what philosophers ought to do. But since they're already doing what he recommends it's difficult to understand why Ziemiński mentions it. Contemporary philosophers of religion already use conceptual analysis to discuss the truth claims and the rationality of religious belief. Indeed, this is the focus of most of the contemporary literature. Thus, Ziemiński is making a claim that is true, but completely uninformative. So this first interpretation is implausible. While the second interpretation might be a more reasonable way of understanding Ziemiński it's even more problematic than the first. This is because it is simply false that philosophers of religion aren't using conceptual analysis to assess the truth value, etc., of specific religious doctrines. Indeed, contemporary analytic philosophy of religion has been criticized for overly focusing on the Judeo-Christian conception of God to the inappropriate exclusion of other religions. Some have asserted that philosophy of religion *just is* the philosophy of Christianity. Still more, some argue that since many philosophers of religion are Christian theists that the field is infected with pernicious cognitive bias. Any survey of the speciality journals in philosophy of religion will confirm that philosophers of religion are often focused on specific Christian doctrines.[5] So this too is an implausible interpretation of Ziemiński.

5 I have in mind journals such as *Faith and Philosophy, International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Religious Studies,* and the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. *Sophia* is perhaps an exception in that it appears to have a much broader focus because it often publishes articles on Eastern religions. But such articles are on specific aspects of specific Eastern traditions and thus still follows Ziemiński's advice.

C. Epistemic Standards

The most difficult aspect of Ziemiński's article to interpret is with respect to epistemic standards. For it is often challenging to decipher what epistemic standards Ziemiński has in mind. And when they are clearly in view his standards appear unreasonably high. In what follows I'll survey a few different ways of understanding Ziemiński on epistemic standards (on a normative interpretation) and point to a number of problems. Ziemiński begins his article with some observations about the nature of philosophy in general. He chides philosophers for defending absurd positions (e.g. external world scepticism) which they cannot prove. He claims one problem with philosophy is that it "seeks final and absolutely certain solutions to fundamental problems like the nature of existence or criterion of truth" (54). Ziemiński's criticism of philosophy is twofold: (i) philosophy makes absurd claims and; (ii) its cognitive ambitions are far too high. Likewise:

> Philosophers attempt to solve these problems not empirically but only by conceptual analysis; they are not interested in detailed differences between historical religions, but in their essence. They do not examine the differences between different images of God, but the essential content of the concept of God and His/Her existence. Philosophers also do not ask what role do specific religions have in history and how they are used, but whether religious faith is rational (55).

Much of what Ziemiński says about the philosophy of religion's inability to achieve its epistemic goals appears to assume that knowledge is equivalent to empirical confirmation. And, of course, the confirmation Ziemiński has in view only exists in the sciences (and even then only in the 'hard' sciences). Yet Ziemiński is also aware that if Clifford's epistemic standard is followed, then very little can be rationally believed. It therefore just isn't clear what specific epistemic standards Ziemiński has in view. It's true that philosophical arguments aren't subject to confirmation in the same way that scientific hypothesis can (sometimes) be confirmed or disconfirmed. But contemporary philosophers of religion never claim otherwise. This problem, if it really is a problem, isn't unique to philosophy of religion. It's a problem for all philosophical arguments, and indeed all non-empirical types of inquiry. Likewise, when understood as a normative requirement it's unclear *why* philosophers of religion should adopt it. Why favour this epistemic standard over a different (more achievable) one? This standard may well lead

to scepticism about religion, but we need some reason to adopt it. It thus again seems unlikely that this is the most charitable reading of Ziemiński's project.

2. The Descriptive Interpretation

Much on the normative interpretation of Ziemiński's project is implausible: Providing an essentialist definition of religion isn't necessary for successful inquiry into religion. Philosophers of religion already use the tools of conceptual analysis in conducting inquiry so to have it as a normative requirement is uninformative. To claim that they aren't doing so, but ought to is simply false. Likewise, it's unclear how failing to provide an essentialist definition or use conceptual analysis necessarily leads to scepticism about religion. Finally, to hold that philosophers of religion ought to have confirmation in view as an epistemic standard is implausible. In this section I explore a descriptive interpretation of Ziemiński's project which, as a whole, is more plausible than the normative interpretation. Having said that, there are still a number of difficulties with the descriptive interpretation, along with places where Ziemiński at a minimum should provide more information.

A. Essentialism

The descriptive interpretation of Ziemiński's requirement for an essentialist definition of religion merely says that philosophers of religion are indeed attempting to offer essentialist definitions of religion, but such attempts are failures. Another way to understand this is that philosophers are attempting (but failing) to offer necessary and sufficient conditions for what it would take for some phenomena to qualify as religious. Hence, this is one area where philosophy of religion leads to scepticism about religion. However, it is simply not true that philosophers of religion spend very much time attempting to define religion. At least within contemporary (post WWII) analytic philosophy of religion, I observe little time spent by philosophers defining religion. While it is true that philosophers often offer very precise definitions, particularly with respect to terms being employed in arguments, this is altogether a different matter. In sum, it's simply false that philosophers of religion are concerned with offering essentialist definitions of religion. It's also unclear how this would lead to scepticism about religion even if it were the case. It's thus not an appropriate feature to focus on when offering

a description of philosophy of religion. If Ziemiński believes I'm mistaken about this, then he could support his claim by appealing to case studies from prominent contemporary philosophers of religion.

B. The Meaning of Philosophy of Religion

With respect to the meaning of philosophy of religion, if Ziemiński is merely offering a description of the discipline when he says philosophers of religion use the tools of conceptual analysis to assess the consistency, truthfulness, and rationality of specific religious claims, then he is certainly correct. Many contemporary philosophers of religion undertake their inquiry into religion almost exclusively using conceptual analysis. On its face, then, this is the most accurate part (on either the normative or descriptive interpretation) of Ziemiński's article. Still, even if this interpretation is correct there are at least two ways he could have strengthen his claim. First, these claims sometimes read as if Ziemiński is offering a possible defense of the value of philosophy of religion. If this is so, and conceptual analysis is part of that value, then Ziemiński should say something about the benefits of conceptual analysis when applied to religion. Why is conceptual analysis valuable? Second, Ziemiński could again strengthen his account by appealing to case studies in the philosophy of religion. Examples of conceptual analysis in the philosophy of religion abound in the contemporary literature. Appealing to such examples could strengthen his case for those in doubt about it. Finally, I do not see a clear connection between conceptual analysis about religion and scepticism about religion. Though whether one believes conceptual analysis about religion leads to scepticism will be closely tied to the epistemic standards the inquirer in question adopts.

C. Epistemic Standards

As mentioned earlier, the most difficult part of Ziemiński's article to interpret regards the sort of epistemic standards he has in view. Again, to say that philosophy of religion ought to adopt something like confirmation as an epistemic standard is unrealistic. However, if Ziemiński is pointing to this standard as a description of what occurs in philosophy of religion, then it seems wholly inaccurate. Prominent philosophers of religion such as Plantinga, Swinburne, Oppy, and Rowe (among many others) do not appear to be employing confirmation as an epistemic standard.

Ziemiński seems to gloss quickly over both the arguments for theism and arguments for atheism. This does a disservice to the centuries of hard work philosophers have dedicated to developing these arguments. It is true that confirmation about these arguments is impossible, at least in the way we can sometimes have confirmation in the (hard) sciences; it's true that philosophers aren't scientists (at least in the contemporary sense of 'scientist'). But they don't claim to be, and if this is a problem for philosophers of religion, then it's a problem for *all* philosophers in general.[6]

Epistemic standards is the part of Ziemiński's project I'm most tempted to read as normative, since it seems entirely implausible as a description of the current state of the discipline. Yet, I've already noted that confirmation is a completely unrealistic standard in the philosophy of religion (and indeed philosophy in general). I think Ziemiński could help clarify this issue by stating explicitly what he thinks constitutes a successful argument in philosophy. What does it take for a philosophical argument to succeed? He could then state whether any of the arguments in the philosophy of religion meet the standard he has in mind. Slowing down to examine specific arguments as case studies would help the reader better understand his claim. Likewise, it would help the reader avoid feeling as if he has waved his hand dismissively about the arguments in philosophy of religion when this is perhaps not his intention. In sum, it is not true that philosophers of religion use confirmation as an epistemic standard, and it is unclear why they should adopt such a standard. Seeking confirmation might lead to scepticism, but why think philosophers are seeking it, or should seek it?

IV. CONCLUSION

There are at least two main ways to interpret Ziemiński's article. The first is that he is offering a normative description about how the discipline ought to proceed. However, there are reasons to think that this interpretation is

6 Alternatively, perhaps Ziemiński believes there isn't 'decisive evidence' in philosophy such that the evidence in question points clearly to one unique rational response. Likewise, he seems to think that disagreement about whether P entails that we can't know whether P. But how one ought to react to disagreement is a matter of controversy in itself. The ever-growing literature known as the epistemology of disagreement addresses the question of whether disagreement constitutes a defeater.

implausible. Why hold that an essentialist definition of religion is necessary for successful philosophical inquiry into religion? Likewise, philosophers of religion are already conducting conceptual analysis so it's hardly informative to state it is a requirement. Finally, to think that philosophers of religion require confirmation of their claims to have knowledge is to adopt an unrealistically high epistemic standard. The second interpretation is that Ziemiński's project is merely descriptive. This interpretation is more plausible than the first, though problems remain. For it is doubtful that philosophers of religion spend very much time attempting to define religion. It is true, however, that the methodology philosophers of religion often use is indeed conceptual analysis. In both cases it would be helpful if Ziemiński offered some case studies to help support his claims. Finally, I see little evidence to think philosophers of religion have confirmation in mind as a relevant epistemic standard. Ziemiński's (both implicit and explicit) claims about epistemic standards are the most difficult part of this project to decipher. Neither the normative or descriptive interpretations about epistemic standards seem very plausible. Clarification from Ziemiński about these interpretive issues would go a long way towards explaining the merits of his project, and would thus be most welcome. For according to Ziemiński does philosophy of religion in fact lead to scepticism, or ought it to?[7]

7 Acknowledgements: I would like to thank an anonymous referee for helpful comments. This paper was made possible, in part, by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

"ANTI-THEODICY" AND ANTITHEODICIES

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Abstract. The article reviews different antitheodicies in response to Toby Betenson's article "Anti-Theodicy". Antitheodicies involve rejecting the position that God or meaning exist only, if evils have justifying morally sufficient reasons. The article builds on Betenson's division into moral and conceptual antitheodicies and his characterization of antitheodicies as a metacritique of the problem of evil. Moral antitheodicies are problematic, as they do not address the key conceptual issues and might end up in question-begging or moralism. Dissolving the problem of evil requires a conceptual antitheodicy that exposes its presuppositions as speculative metaphysics. Religious conceptual antitheodicies help to focus on different ways of sense-making that do not fall into theodicism.

Antitheodicy is an emerging approach to the problem of evil. Toby Betenson describes antitheodicy as a Wittgensteinian metacritique of the presuppositions of the problem in his article "Anti-Theodicy"[1], which presents an overview of the contemporary antitheodicy discussion. Antitheodicy goes deeper than objecting to particular theodicies and defences like the soul-making theodicy, as it questions the entire framework of discussing the justice of God in terms of offering justifications for evil. Betenson characterizes antitheodicy as arguing "that the ways in which the problem of evil is both presented and solved, and the foundational conceptual and moral assumptions in which such a discussion is grounded, are erroneous."[2]

Alternatively, antitheodicy can be defined as a critical rejection of theodicism. Sami Pihlström and Sari Kivistö define theodicies and theodicism: theodicies are justifications for God's choice for creating a world where creatures suffer. They use the word "theodicism" to mean a demand that theism

1 Toby Betenson: "Anti-Theodicy", *Philosophy Compass* 11 No. 1, 2016. The word "metacritique" comes from J. G. Hamann, who was an important background influence on Wittgenstein's later philosophy. See John Betz: *After Enlightenment* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), esp. 230–257.

2 Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy", 57.

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is acceptable only if one can produce a theodicy.[3] Theodicism can also be characterized as the claim that God will only allow evils that are necessary for greater goods, as otherwise He would not have "a morally sufficient reason to permit evil".[4] Antitheodicy can then be seen as a rejection of the demands for justifications, or rejecting the theodicist demand that if God exists, then all evils have morally sufficient reasons.[5]

Betenson distinguishes moral and conceptual antitheodicies.[6] Moral antitheodicies question either the moral premises of (both atheist and theist) theodicist arguments, or question the language-game of issuing justifications itself. Conceptual antitheodicies object to the theodicist presuppositions about the nature and properties of God. Betenson includes religious antitheodicist traditions under the conceptual challenge.

MORAL ANTITHEODICIES

Betenson describes the main point of moral antitheodicies and generalizes it into a main claim of antitheodicy in general: "*Theodicies mediate a practice that sanctions evil.*"[7] He lists four types of moral objections against theodicies: theodicies trivialize evil; the attempt to give third-person explanations of evil does not take it morally seriously; theodicies presuppose an instrumentalist consequentialism that takes sufferings to be means to an end; and the inherent Panglossianism of theodicies is a vicious practice that contributes to the evils of the world.[8]

Betenson elaborates on the claim that theodicies trivialize evil by contrasting horrendous evils like the Holocaust with everyday evils like going to the dentist. He then argues that the theodicist practice of weighing between the good and bad consequences of an evil presupposes that the evil is not horrendous. Horrendous evils are incommensurable with goods and therefore cannot be compensated or compared with good consequences. Betenson

3 Sami Pihlström and Sari Kivistö: *Kantian Antitheodicy* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

4 Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger: *Reason and Religious Belief* (OUP, 2003).

5 Susan Neiman argues that the principle of sufficient reason is the central presupposition of the entire modern theodicy debate. See *Evil in Modern Thought* (PUP, 2015), esp. 314–328.

6 Betenson, "Anti-theodicy", 57. For conceptual antitheodicies, see "Anti-theodicy", 62–63.

7 Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy", 64. Betenson is quoting Nick Trakakis.

8 The list is a condensed version of Betenson's list of moral antitheodicies ("Anti-Theodicy", 57–62). Cf. Pihlström and Kivistö: *Kantian Antitheodicy.*

takes an example from D. Z. Phillips, who argues that comparison of the disaster of the Holocaust with the pain of going to the dentist is absurd, unless one has been to a Nazi dentist. Such comparisons are category-mistakes that are insensitive to the seriousness of horrendous evils.[9]

Betenson introduces another moral criticism of theodicism: taking a third-person point of view to suffering is inhuman.[10] Theodicists have to assume a third-person God's eye point of view in their practice of weighing goods and evils and explaining away suffering. One way of developing an antitheodicy is to argue that such a view of suffering detaches one from the suffering person and the suffering itself. The God of theodicism and the theodicist are thus detached from morally correct practices like having empathy for the suffering person, helping him or recognizing his point of view as correct. This criticism forms a core Levinasian transcendental argument from the possibility of a moral point of view in *Kantian Antitheodicy*:

1. A moral point of view is possible only, if we recognize the dignity and the suffering of the suffering person.
2. One can recognize the suffering and dignity of a suffering person only, if one does not give a third-person explanation or justification that would endow it with meaning.
3. The practice of developing theodicies involves giving third-person explanations or justifications that endow first-person suffering with meaning.
4. The practice of developing theodicies cannot recognize the suffering and dignity of a suffering person.
5. The moral point of view is possible only, if the practice of developing theodicies is unsound for moral and transcendental reasons.
6. A moral point of view is possible.
7. The practice of developing theodicies is unsound for moral and transcendental reasons.[11]

9 Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy", 57–58. See Phillips, D.Z.: *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (Fortress Press, 2005), 33–44, 77–78.

10 Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy", 58–60.

11 Pihlström and Kivistö, *Kantian Antitheodicy*, 263–264, ch. 6.

Betenson discusses a third moral criticism of theodicies. He argues that balancing goods with evils presupposes a consequentialist calculus for reasons that do not take personal dignity or subjective factors into account. He quotes Phillips who criticizes the soul-making theodicy: evils are supposed to build up character, but having a self-involved instrumental good like character development elevated into the telos of suffering is self-serving. Moreover, such hyper-consequentialism judges everything (including horrendous evils) as a means, so it cannot account for having human dignity as an end. Even theodicies involving compensation to the sufferer cannot evade this objection, because they are trapped in a consequentialist logic of compensation. Thus theodicies cannot account for moral reasons involving dignity and first-person meaningfulness, because they justify evil instrumentally.[12]

Betenson sums up these moral criticisms by pointing out the Panglossianism of theodicist practices.[13] First, he argues that the moral criticisms show that constructing theodicies is itself morally vicious and therefore contributes to the evils of the world. The second criticism involves the claim that explaining away evils is a way of evading responsibility for fighting them.

The second objection goes back to secular writers like Karl Marx and Albert Camus. Neiman argues that Marx's work is in fact an answer to the problem of evil: philosophers like Hegel have attempted to explain the evils of the world with theodicies, but the real goal of philosophy is to change it by addressing evil with human action.[14] Camus takes up this theme in *The Plague* by contrasting the doctor Rieux with the priest Paneloux. Paneloux is a theodicist who gives sermons justifying the plague, which kills him in the end. Rieux is an atheist antitheodicist: he thinks that illnesses might have their benefits, but accepting them is either cowardly or dishonest. The priest does not (want to) see evil, but the doctor rather wants to fight the plague than prove its benefits. Camus is thus defending a Marxist and atheist form of moral antitheodicism: one can either believe in God and explain evil, or reject the belief in God who offers an explanation for evil in order to fight it and thus change the world for the better.[15]

12 Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy", 60–61, Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God,* 49–90. See also Pihlström & Kivistö: *Kantian Antitheodicy*.

13 Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy", 61–62.

14 Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, 103–109.

15 Albert Camus, *The Plague* (Penguin, 1960).

The closeness of moral antitheodicies to 19th and 20th century existentialism and secular humanism raises a strong objection to moral antitheodicies.[16] Are they antitheodicies or meta-theodicies that offer just more moralistic reasons for "condemning the architect"?[17] Betenson briefly discusses the question when answering the claim that moral antitheodicies are question-begging. He admits that antitheodicy presupposes the moral claim that there are horrendous evils that cannot be justified.[18] The moral case against theodicy could well be made in terms of Wittgenstein's claim that language-games become pointless if the necessary conditions for their functional relationships do not hold.[19] The language-games for constructing theodicies are morally pointless, because the process of weighing goods against horrendous evils from a third-person perspective cannot be morally justified.

However, if this is the case, then even God cannot justifiably weigh goods against evils in this way. Then He doesn't have a morally valid sufficient reason for creating this kind of world. This is however consistent with atheistic theodicism: there are no first-order justifications for horrendous evils, and God does not exist because He would not have a justification for creating such a world. Alternatively, one can consider the case where God has sufficient reason for horrific evils like the Holocaust after all.[20] The same moral arguments might still be made against the language-game of theodicy, even though theodicy would end up giving justifiable reasons with its own criteria that also happen to determine the real moral reasons and meanings for the evil events in the world. In such a case, moral antitheodicies would amount to moralism, as their moral reasons would be detached from the system of reasons that exists in the world in question.

Both cases raise the problem that moral antitheodicies sidestep the key premise of theodicism: that God's decisions to create are bound to the principle of sufficient reason. It could be that theodicy is immoral, but this is compatible with the claims that God does not exist and He creates a meaningful

16 See also Leo Perdue: *Wisdom in Revolt* (Almond Press, 1991).

17 The phrase comes from Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought,* 113–202.

18 Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy", 60.

19 Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, §142.

20 To avoid begging the question against moral antitheodicists, the world does not need to be morally possible (i.e. have the same moral truths). It is sufficient if it is logically or metaphysically possible to work as a thought-experiment.

world only if everything happens with a moral reason. It could also be that God has reasons for horrendous evils, in which case protest antitheodicies would be question-begging moralism. Moral antitheodicy shows at most that attempts to find sufficient reasons for evils are immoral, not that searching for sufficient reasons and connecting them with God is mistaken at the outset.

Moral antitheodicies thus fail to dissolve the link between God, meanings and sufficient reasons. At worst, they amount to a moralistic condemnation to theodicies and probably God as well. Betenson's account inherits this problem. He distinguishes between antitheodicies that reject the problem of evil and ones arguing that religious beliefs founded on theodicism are immoral, and opts for the latter criticism. It looks like a metacritique of the speculative metaphysics underlying theodicism is required for a successful antitheodicy.[21]

CONCEPTUAL ANTITHEODICIES

Betenson identifies another approach to antitheodicy: showing that the conceptual assumptions of theodicy are mistaken.[22] Betenson offers two examples of such arguments, both from Phillips. The first involves focusing on God's weighing of reasons for horrible evils. God can either allow a horrible evil without thinking it through, or alternatively think it through and commit Himself to it despite its monstrosity. In the first case, He does not pay enough attention to the consequences of His choices. In the second case, He is involved in the evil and can be blamed for it. In either case, He is not perfectly good. The second objection is directed against anthropomorphism: theodicism presupposes that God is an ordinary agent making choices according to sufficient reasons. However, God's being is His active presence and faithfulness that "cannot (…) be subject to morally sufficient reasons that explain their presence on some occasions and their absence on others".[23] The latter argument is the key claim of Biblical antitheodicy, which Betenson lists under conceptual approaches.

21 Gwen Griffith-Dickson has expressed similar views about the key role of metaphysical assumptions for antitheodicy. Private conversation, 9.3.2018..

22 Betenson, "Anti-Theodicy", 62–63.

23 Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God,* 151, 33–44, 148–151.

Perhaps the sharpest conceptual antitheodicy in recent philosophy has been written by Bas van Fraassen.[24] He argues that theodicy arises out of 17th century speculative metaphysics. Early modern philosophers defined God to be omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent to make His activity transparent to reason. In effect, God is made to be transparent to reason because He is taken to be an ideal agent who has an unlimited power to choose states of affairs according to the principle of sufficient reason. However, such a God has nothing to do with the Biblical God of Isaac, Abraham and Jacob, and is instead a metaphysically constructed idol. The theodicist God is a creation of speculative metaphysics, which creates a shadowy ersatz reality and a series of insoluble and self-inflicted puzzles with its abstract conceptual models that are not connected in any way with the real world through experience and definite linguistic practices.

van Fraassen's claims receive strong support from Susan Neiman. She argues that the problem of evil is a key motivating problem in modern philosophy: how can the world be meaningful and intelligible, when there seems to be so much pointless evil? The problem of evil connects religion, metaphysics and ethics. The distinction between natural and moral evil emerged in the modern debate, which faces thinkers trying to make evil intelligible against those who do not. Moreover, attempts to explain evil and insistence that it cannot be explained are ultimately moved by moral concerns.[25] The conceptual gaps of modern philosophy lead to the problem. Facts and values as well as facts and meanings are taken to be separate and conceptually opposite, and they have to be unified by an appeal to the principle of sufficient reason. Such a unification reduces the facts of the world to morally sufficient reasons, but the appearances of horrendous evils make it seem that there are no such reasons.[26] Leibniz' theodicy is a model for a unification of facts and reasons on the basis of an omnipotent God who acts according to the principle of

24 Bas van Fraassen: "Against Analytic Metaphysics", in *The Empirical Stance* (Yale Univ. Press, 2002). van Fraassen's position also sums up the metacritical focus of meta-metaphysical antitheodicy. Cf. J. G. Hamann: Briefwechsel 5. Ed. Arthur Henkel (Insel-Verlag, 1965), 272, Hamann: *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 205–218.

25 Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought,* esp. 1–13, 27. Neiman's argument that a denial of a good world order is dependent on moral concerns strengthens the claim that moral antitheodicy amounts to moralistic protest atheism in the end.

26 For the insolubility of problems caused by conceptual gaps in modern philosophy, see Gwen Griffith-Dickson, *Johan Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism* (de Gryuter, 1995), 12–15.

sufficient reason. The approach is built around two key presuppositions: God is constrained by the choice of essences He can choose, and His choices aim for the best.[27]

Conceptual antitheodicy then involves rejecting the Leibnizian picture presupposed by metaphysical theism and theodicism. The debate between Immanuel Kant and Hamann in the 1750s offers starting-points for conceptual antitheodicies that build around the idea that the Leibnizian presuppositions of linking the world of facts with the world of meanings and values through the principle of sufficient reason are speculative metaphysics. Both build on a critique of metaphysics to ground a conceptual antitheodicy.

In his Theodicy Essay, Kant presents an argument that theodicies are groundless speculative metaphysics.[28] Kant uses his doctrine of transcendental idealism to locate Job's sufferings in the world of experience, and divine wisdom in the moral world that can only be accessed through reason. Since Kant's transcendental idealism entails that rational concepts can only be objectively used of the world of experience, relating evils like Job's suffering to the moral order of the world with theodicies or atheist arguments necessarily oversteps the limits of reason. Kant concludes by arguing that Job's comforters are just trying to flatter God, while Job reveals His will through sincere and honest behavior. Kant's antitheodicy then rests on his meta-metaphysical theory of transcendental idealism to show that attempts to unify facts with values through the principle of sufficient reason ends up in speculative metaphysics. Thus Kant takes up the need for a critique of speculative metaphysics for a successful antitheodicy.

Kantian antitheodicy can also be used as a metatheory for moral antitheodicies. If antitheodicies rest ultimately on metaphysical and axiological premises, such a grounding allows the moral antitheodicist to avoid some of the problems of question-begging and moralism by appealing to Kant's Copernican turn to defend a humanistic perspective in ethics and metaphysics.[29]

27 G. W. Leibniz: "On the Ultimate Origination of Things", in *Philosophical Essays.* Eds. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Hackett, 1989).

28 Immanuel Kant: Über das Misslingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee, AA 8, 255–275. See also Pihlström and Kivistö, *Kantian Antitheodicy*, ch. 2, Immanuel Kant: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Meiner, 1998).

29 See Pihlström and Kivistö, *Kantian Antitheodicy*, ch. 6, Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought.*

Kant's antitheodicy builds on the antitheodicist arguments Hamann sent him in a letter at the end of 1759.[30] Hamann responds to the pre-critical Kant's theodicism by posing a dilemma: one is either operating with a philosophical concept of God, or with the God of Christian theology. Working with the philosophical concept of God is speculative metaphysics: one would have to have both total knowledge of the world and a priori knowledge of the nature and intentions of God to justify God in a theodicist manner. Both claims overstep the limits of human reason. The project of theodicism is thus hubris, and Hamann uses the images of a blind man staring at the sun and a mob of theodicists flattering God. Hamann links speculative metaphysics and other confusions of reason like theodicism with abuse of language, as language is "the centerpoint of reason's misunderstanding with itself."[31] Indeed, van Fraassen's claim that theodicy involves just a priori word games captures well the spirit of Hamann's critique.[32]

On the other hand, working with the Biblical concept of God leads to an antitheodicy based on Biblical grammar: philosophy investigates language-use like theology investigates how the word "God" is used in the Bible.[33] Leo Perdue and N.T. Wright present interesting conceptual antitheodicies building on the stories of the Bible.[34] Perdue points out that Biblical creation theology offers four metaphors of divine activity: God upholds life, orders the world with his Word, crafts an ordered world and fights against evil. These metaphors can however get out of gear.[35] Job's friends construct either divine command theories or theodicies. Bildad argues that God's power is absolute, so Job has no right to complain. Eliphaz constructs a Leibnizian theodicism out of Deuteronomy's theory of retribution: if Job is suffering, then he must have sinned and the suffering has a sufficient reason. Job constructs first an atheistic theodicism and then an all-out secular humanism from his sufferings. God is unjust, because Job's sufferings do not have a sufficient reason,

30 Hamann: *Briefwechsel 1*. Ed. Ziesemer, Walther and Henkel, Arthur. (Insel-Verlag, 1955), 450–453. See also Frederick Beiser: *The Fate of Reason* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1987).

31 Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language,* 99, 211.

32 See van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance,* 1–30.

33 See Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language,* 22, Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations,* §373.

34 Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt,* N. T. Wright: *Evil and the Justice of God* (SPCK, 2006).

35 Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, §132.

and therefore human activity must replace God's saving role and religious explanations of the world. In the end, God reveals all of these approaches to be confusions, as the storyline of battle against evil forms the background for the other mythical models: "justice is not a static principle inherent in the structure of creation, but rather a dynamic force which must be continuously established and aggressively maintained by means of victory over evil".[36] Thus there is evil without sufficient reasons, but God and human beings can and will defeat it. Wright takes up a similar point: the Biblical stories do not point to a static order of sufficient reasons, but tells a story of God's plans and actions in fighting evil and laying groundwork for a new creation.

Biblical grammar offers thus a model of sense-making that calls both theodicism and moralistic secularism into serious question. Other religious traditions and humanistic approaches have their own ways of responding to evil and finding meaning in the world and locating humans in it.[37] Religious conceptual antitheodicies can shift the emphasis of the antitheodicy debate into a debate on broader issues of sense-making by focusing on different ways of understanding the place of humans in the world.

CONCLUSION

Anti-theodicy is a promising emerging approach to the problem of evil. Betenson has distinguished two different streams: moral and conceptual antitheodicies. Moral antitheodicy is deeply problematic, because it does not dissolve the key link between God, morally sufficient reasons and the meaningfulness of the world and thus might end up as moralizing about God and the world order. Dissolving the link requires exposing the speculative metaphysics behind the problem of evil by developing a conceptual antitheodicy on the lines of Hamann, Kant and van Fraassen. Such meta-metaphysical anti-theodicies also open new ways to discuss the link of theodicist metaphysics, ethics and religion by e.g. pointing out the dependence of metaphysics on the moral point of view or by describing the concept of God by building grammars of religious stories that explicitly reject theodicism.

36 Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 221.

37 See Gwen Griffith-Dickson, *Human and Divine* (Duckworth, 2000). For the problem of evil as a problem of meaning, see Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought.*

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IN DEFENCE OF MORALISING ANTI-THEODICY: A REPLY TO SNELLMAN

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I am almost entirely in agreement with the arguments of Snellman's article[1]. The only significant point of disagreement I can identify is his rejection of moral anti-theodicy on the basis of its 'moralising' about God and the created order. I agree that moral anti-theodicy often does this, but I do not see it as a sufficient reason to condemn such moralising anti-theodicy as deeply problematic. I suspect this point of difference is symptomatic of a more fundamental disagreement about the role of justification in ethics and religion. Just as Snellman would reject the demand that theism can only be acceptable with a theodicy ('theodicism'), I would reject the demand that a moral reaction can only be acceptable with a metaphysical foundation. So, in spite of this point of difference, I am very grateful for the opportunity to develop some lines of thought that did not have a place in the original survey article to which Snellman responds. I will therefore offer three responses, mainly in defence of moral anti-theodicy, in the interests of furthering the discussion: Firstly, moral anti-theodicy stands accused of 'moralising' about God and the created order, or of otherwise being question-begging in its moral condemnation. I agree that it probably is, but (for reasons I will outline) I am not sure this is a much of a failing. Secondly, it is claimed that moral anti-theodicy insufficiently dismantles the speculative metaphysics underlying the problem of evil. Again, I agree, but I am not sure that it needs to do this in order to remain a legitimate response to theodicy. Thirdly, even if the underlying metaphysics is dismantled such that we can construct a grammar of religious stories that avoids theodicism, I think a moral anti-theodicy could still have

1 Lauri Snellman, "'Anti-theodicy' and Antitheodicies", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11, no 1, 201–211. doi:10.24204/ejpr.v11i1.2579.

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a place in this new context, even if it might end up taking the form of a more traditional protest atheism.

I.

Firstly then, moral anti-theodicy stands accused of begging-the-question against theodicy by offering a moralistic judgement that is 'detached from the system of reasons that exists in the world in question [i.e., the theistic world in which a theodicy is true]'.[2] Simply put: if theism is true, and if a theodicy is correct, then the moral facts are not as the moral anti-theodicist believes them to be. There are, in fact, justificatory reasons for the permission of all evils. The moral anti-theodicist denies this. But if a theodicy is correct, the moral anti-theodicist is simply wrong. When they then denounce the morality of theodicy, they engage in a question-begging 'moralising'. I am not sure whether there is a clear consensus on what 'moralising' means in this context, but we can tentatively define it as 'an illicit introduction of moral considerations',[3] or else a 'failure to recognize what moral thought or reflection requires (and does not require) of us in the broad sense'.[4] Perhaps more importantly, moralism 'like other terms of disapproval such as "sexism", is essentially normative, and attributes some kind of mistake or error', and usually 'the mistake is one of emphasis or excess. Moralizers can be excessive about morality in some way, and thus seem to exhibit a vice, one involving lack of due proportion in the direction of extreme demandingness or strictness'.[5] To accuse moral anti-theodicy of a moralising question-begging is therefore to level two criticisms at it: Firstly, that of question-begging, and secondly, a kind of unfounded and over-reaching moral judgmentalism.

The thoughts I offer in response are intended to counter both accusations. I am not convinced that begging-the-question is a vice in the context of moral anti-theodicy, and therefore the accusation of a vicious moralism does not follow. This is because I see most (or at least some) moral-anti-theodical responses as being *necessitated* responses.[6] Due to this moral modality, ac-

2 Snellman, "'Anti-theodicy' and Antitheodicies", 205.

3 Julias Driver, "Moralism", *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2005), 137.

4 Craig Taylor, *Moralism: A Study of a Vice* (Routledge, 2014), 153.

5 Driver, "Moralism", 137.

6 I see Ivan Karamazov's to be an archetypal expression of a necessitated moral response: 'I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unassuaged indignation, *even if I am*

cusations of question-begging do not seem to me to apply to the same extent as they would normally.

My intention is only to show that a morally-motivated anti-theodicy can find the resources needed to avoid an accusation of question-begging — whether it is ultimately correct to do so is another question. I appeal here to the familiar thoughts of Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*,[7] and to a greater extent to the arguments of Raimond Gaita in *A Common Humanity*.[8] It is internal to the concept of reasonable thought that there are some beliefs held to be beyond doubt, or otherwise held to be 'unthinkable' to seriously deny. 'The reasonable man does not have certain doubts.'[9] For there to be doubting behaviour, or any kind of rational enquiry, some things must be held certain: 'If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either […] I am not more certain of the meaning of my words that I am of certain judgments.'[10] I would align these certain judgements with 'necessitated responses'. Life shows us these: 'Why do I not satisfy myself that I have two feet when I want to get up from a chair? There is no why. I simply don't. This is how I act.'[11]

I won't repeat those arguments in detail here (other than to recycle them for my purposes) — it is a broad and no doubt controversial area in epistemology — suffice to state that I agree with them and see no reason why the same could not be said of moral reasoning. In this, I fall largely in line with others who have pressed something similar to this case, including Nigel Pleasants,[12] Stefan Rummens,[13] and Benjamin De Mesel.[14] It seems to me that there are some moral judgements that are 'unthinkable' to deny, because to

not right.' Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Penguin, 2003), 320.

7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Harper & Row, 1969).

8 Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking About Love and Truth and Justice* (Routledge, 2001), in particular the chapter 'Forms of the Unthinkable'.

9 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 220.

10 *Ibid.*, § 114

11 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §148. Also: 'My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on. — I tell a friend e. g. "Take that chair over there", "Shut the door", etc. etc.' *ibid.*, § 7.

12 Nigel Pleasants, "If Killing Isn't Wrong, Then Nothing Is: A Naturalistic Defence of Basic Moral Certainty", *Ethical Perspectives* 22, no. 1 (2015).

13 Stefan Rummens, "On the Possibility of a Wittgensteinian Account of Moral Certainty", *The Philosophical Forum* 44, no. 2 (2013).

14 Benjamin De Mesel, *The Later Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy* (Springer, 2018).

deny them would undermine the practice of moral judgement, or would otherwise expose oneself to be incapable of making moral judgements.[15] Some moral judgements are necessitated responses: they are 'hinge propositions' around which moral reasoning swings. To surrender these judgements is not to change one's judgement, but to lose grip on the meaningfulness of making moral judgements. When we encounter such a moral 'hinge proposition', we find we cannot deny it, we find it to be 'unthinkable' to deny: The situation in a moral context is in fact stronger than a non-moral epistemological context, since we also find that we *should not* deny it. If we can characterise the moral-anti-theodical reaction in this way, as a necessitated response, then it seems to me that an accusation of question-begging would miss the point.

By way of illustration, let me make a moralising anti-theodical judgement, citing the varied ways I might express a necessitated response to the example (familiar to the discussion of theodicy) of the Holocaust (with the intention of using language as parallel as possible to Wittgenstein's arguments in *On Certainty* and elsewhere, and to Gaita's in *A Common Humanity*): I want to say that if I know anything, morally, I know that the Holocaust should not have been permitted, that there is no reason morally sufficient to warrant its permission. That judgement is likely to be stronger and strike me as more reasonable than any argument offered in attempt to justify it.[16] My attitude to the Holocaust is an attitude towards 'something that cannot be morally justified'; I am not of the *opinion* that the Holocaust is not morally justified.[17] It is *unthinkable*, for me, that there would be a reason to justify the permission of the Holocaust. It is not as if I infer, on the balance of probabilities, that the Holocaust was probably the kind of thing that shouldn't be justified. If I decided to seriously investigate the balance of probabilities and, after investigation, came to the conclusion that the Holocaust was in fact probably

15 'Practice in the use of the rule also shows what is a mistake in its employment.' Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 29. 'The truth of my statements is the test of my understanding of these statements. That is to say: if I make certain false statements, it becomes uncertain whether I understand them.' *ibid.*, § 80.

16 'My not having been on the moon is as sure a thing for me as any grounds I could give for it', *ibid.*, § 111.

17 '"I believe that he is not an automaton", just like that, so far makes no sense. My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: With German and English Indexes*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe (Blackwell, 1967), no. 2.

not justified by a morally sufficient reason, I would not consider that to be a paragon of reasonable investigative thought, but a parody of it (much as if I seriously investigated the existence of my feet before standing from a chair).[18] What I know of the Holocaust stands as a paradigmatic case of moral clarity: it is utterly unambiguous. It is probably constitutive of what I understand to be 'wrongness', of what I understand to be the limits of 'justification by a morally-sufficient reason'.[19] It is a judgement that characterizes the way I judge, that characterizes the nature of moral judgement.[20] Any argument that requires me to surrender my judgements in this paradigmatic case would be too morally demanding: it would require me to dismantle my entire moral understanding.[21] I would fear to change my judgement of the Holocaust.[22] It would seem to me to be a moral failing for me to even attempt to change my judgement in this case, to try to bring myself to see the 'reasonableness' of the other side of the argument, or to allow my judgement to be changed.[23]

Were someone then to come to me with a theodicy and argue that, contrary to appearances, the Holocaust was in fact a necessary component in a network of divine purposes, such that its permission is adequately justified by a morally sufficient reason, I will reject that story on the basis of its conclusion.[24] This is

18 See footnote 20.

19 'Developing an aspect of Wittgenstein's thought in On Certainty, I suggest that these regularities condition the concepts used in our reasoning, rather than providing support for it.' Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 166.

20 'My judgments themselves characterize the way I judge, characterize the nature of judgment.' Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 149.

21 'What if it seemed to turn out that what until now has seemed immune to doubt was a false assumption? Would I react as I do when a belief has proved to be false? or would it seem to knock from under my feet the ground on which I stand in making any judgements at all?' *ibid.*, § 492.

22 'I would feel like someone who suspects he is losing his mind and who is still lucid enough to feel the full terror of the realisation that he cannot trust his mind when it assures him that it is not so.' Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 162–63.

23 'The fear of thinking that perhaps there is no such thing as evil is not, as is the fear of thinking the earth might be flat, a fear that one is losing one's capacity for sound judgment. It is the moral fear of becoming the kind of person who seriously doubts the reality of evil. At stake is nothing less than one's moral being.' Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 178.

24 'If something happened (such as someone telling me something) calculated to make me doubtful of my own name, there would certainly also be something that made the grounds of these doubts themselves seem doubtful, and I could therefore decide to retain my old belief.' Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 516.

begging-the-question against theodicy, but I don't think it's a failing to do so.[25] I would do the same to any argument, however convincing, for the flatness of the Earth, for example, and I'd be right to do so.[26] I would do the same to any secular attempt to offer a justification for the Holocaust: Imagine someone attempting to argue that the Nazis had every reason to enact the 'Final Solution', that at the time it was reasonable to infer that the Jewish people, Gypsies, Slavs, homosexuals, etc., deserved it, or that it was a regrettably necessary means to the greater good of some other end, such as uniting international democratic response to fascism, etc., etc., thereby offering morally sufficient reasons for the Holocaust. Imagine their arguments are extremely well prepared and I find myself running out of counter-arguments: Should I bravely follow the argument where it leads and accept their conclusion? I would refuse to on the basis of the conclusion, and I'd consider myself right to do so.

This is clearly very dogmatic and question-begging, since I am flatly denying the possibility of being mistaken in my judgement whilst offering no external justification for my judgement.[27] It also, of course, offers no guarantee that I am correct in my judgement.[28] We know of many cautionary counter-examples: Other eras, cultures, and people will find other things unthinkable and will happily think (and do) things that I consider unthinkable,[29] so this is not the end of reflection or discussion. But in any reasonable discussion there

25 Benjamin De Mesel would take this — my judgement that the conclusion 'denies a moral certainty' — to be a necessary indicator that, for me, morality is absent, in anything but a thin sense, from the moral argument (theodicy) in question, and is therefore rightfully disregarded in any consideration of what I ought to do. For further development of this point see De Mesel, *The Later Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy*, 153–73.

26 As Raimond Gaita points out, the likelihood of me winning a rational argument with a flat-earther is low, since I have not put much preparation into my counter-arguments, as they have. I would likely lose that discussion. The point is not that I should bravely follow the argument where it leads, but 'That protagonists in a discussion should be in touch with reality is a condition of something actually being a discussion rather than a parody of one.' De Mesel, *The Later Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy*, 158.

27 'The difficulty is to realise the groundlessness of our believing.' Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 166.

28 'From its seeming to me — or to everyone — to be so, it doesn't follow that it is so. What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it.' *ibid.*, § 2; 'It would be completely misleading to say: "I believe my name is L. W." And this too is right: I cannot be making a mistake about it. But that does not mean that I am infallible about it.' *ibid.*, § 425.

29 'Cultures are partly defined and distinguished by what is unthinkable in them.' Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 181.

must always be some things that are ruled out of consideration, 'unthinkable not in the sense that no one ever thinks them, but in the sense that they are beyond argument; they are "indefensible" because any serious attempt to defend them would show one to lack the judgment necessary for the proper exercise of reason on the matters in question. Or, in the case of moral matters, because it is wicked even to contemplate them.'[30] The judgement that the Holocaust can be justified by a morally sufficient reason seems to me to be within that category. We can call that a moralising judgement, but I'm not convinced that phrase carries any pejorative weight in this context: we would happily assert that moralising judgement in any context other than when discussing theodicy and the problem of evil. One of theodicy's major failings is that it encourages us to lose sight of these otherwise-uncontroversial moral judgements.[31]

There are always, and must always be, limits to reasonable thought: that is internal to the concept of what it is to think 'reasonably'. If moral thinking is subject to reasonable appraisal (which I believe it is), then moral thinking is subject to the same requirement for reasonable limits as all reasonable thought. The morally reasonable man does not have certain doubts. We see this attitude in paradigmatic cases of anti-theodicy:

> To be 'open-minded' about certain realities, and 'more tellingly' to *insist* on retaining such a contemplative disposition, is to show oneself to be incapable of making certain exigent moral discriminations. In the worst of cases, this incapacity to acknowledge that a particular reality is mind-stopping betokens an irremissable moral blindness, in less serious occurrences it testifies to a real lack of moral imagination, to an unshakeable moral coarseness. But in *all* cases the failure to lend a voice to the cries of the innocent (and there can be few more glaring instances of this failure than the willingness to construct a divine teleology out of innocent suffering) is to have lost the capacity to tell the truth.[32]

I contend, therefore, that we should understand some moral-anti-theodical responses as being necessitated responses, as kinds of 'hinge propositions' around which reasoning about the problem of evil swings. In extreme cases, to reject certain moral judgements is to reject the practice of making moral

30 Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 181.

31 We could, again, draw on De Mesel's work here (De Mesel, *The Later Wittgenstein*) and take this to be a strong indicator that the discussion of the problem of evil, to the extent that it relies on a back-and-forth about the success or failure of theodicy, has become 'thin' and therefore powerless to give us a reason to change our minds on these morally-significant matters.

32 Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Blackwell, 1986), 84.

judgements. This is because these '…regularities condition the concepts used in our reasoning, rather than providing support for it'.[33] It is relevant that theodicy must deal with morally extreme cases (as it must deal with all cases), because we are content to moralise in morally extreme cases, just as we are content to beg-the-question in epistemologically extreme cases. Any sceptical response to the contrary is likely to be met, not with further argument, but with a 'call to seriousness'. This 'call to seriousness' is all the more serious in moral matters, because 'to be morally serious [...] is to fear to doubt the reality of evil because that fear is inseparable from understanding what evil is. [...] The fear of doubting the reality of evil is inseparable from an understanding of the very nature of evil because it is central to our understanding of the kind of seriousness that we attribute to any morality informed by a sense of evil.'[34]

II.

Secondly, it is claimed that moral anti-theodicy does not sufficiently dismantle the speculative metaphysics underlying the problem of evil. Moral anti-theodicy retains a commitment to 'theodicism' — the 'demand that theism is acceptable only if one can produce a theodicy'.[35] Again, I agree that this is correct, and that moral anti-theodicy certainly can be (and is) deployed in a context that assumes theodicism. But, again, I am not convinced that this is much of a failing; or if it is, it's a very limited failing. We are all victims of history, and the discussion of the problem of evil has taken a very clearly-defined route in the recent history of the philosophy of religion: from its origins in the 'God of the philosophers' of the modern period, to the revival of the logical problem of evil (J. L. Mackie), its perceived refutation by the Free-Will Defence (Alvin Plantinga), its evolution into the evidential problem of evil (William Rowe), and the subsequent/current responses in the form of theodicy and sceptical theism. This development had determined the rules of the game in our contemporary philosophy of religion, and it is into this context that the contemporary version of moral anti-theodicy must speak. As such, moral anti-theodicy responds to (or better: within) a version of the philoso-

33 Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 166.
34 Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 179.
35 Snellman, "'Anti-theodicy' and Antitheodicies", 201–202.

phy of religion in which an acceptance of the God of the philosophers, the arguments of natural theology, the problem of evil, and the viability of theodicy has been the overwhelming consensus for some time now. I am stating the obvious here: but dismantling this consensus, and the speculative metaphysics that grounds it, would be a much more far-reaching criticism than merely a morally-motivated response to theodicy. Moral anti-theodicy could be deployed for that greater purpose, but it need not be.

There is a direction of entailment here: It is from pre-Kantian metaphysical speculation that we derive the 'God of the philosophers'; from that we derive the problem of evil; and from that we derive theodicism, generating the need for theodicy. Following moral anti-theodicy, one certainly can collapse the chain of entailments, and *modus tollens* our way back to a rejection of pre-Kantian speculative metaphysics, but this is not the only option. One might wish simply to go back to the drawing board and find alternative ways to solve the problem of evil without resorting to those theodicies that have been shown to be morally suspect.

So whilst it is true that 'moral antitheodicy shows at most that attempts to find sufficient reasons for evils are immoral, not that searching for sufficient reasons and connecting them with God is mistaken at the outset.'[36] I ask: isn't that enough? If moral anti-theodicy manages to show that attempts to find sufficient reasons for evil (theodicy) are immoral, then I think its work is done. Moral anti-theodicy can go further and take the form of a metacritique of the philosophy of religion, but it does not need to. It can have humbler aims and simply be a response to theodicy. In doing this, I think it remains a legitimate response, and as such not going any further is not so great a failing. Moral anti-theodicy is anti-*theodicy*, after all, not anti-theodicism, or antitheism, and certainly not anti-'philosophy-of-religion-as-we-know-it'-ism.

III.

Thirdly, I would like to consider the situation if the above is rejected. Imagine we have rejected the speculative metaphysics underlying the problem of evil, and hence rejected theodicism. We no longer have a compulsion, logical or otherwise, to offer a theodicy, but we might still face other forms of the

36 Snellman, "'Anti-theodicy' and Antitheodicies", 206.

problem of evil that might call for some sort of response. Perhaps we face a religious problem of evil, struggling to maintain faith in our suffering; or perhaps we face a practical problem of evil, struggling to find a way to carry on and overcome evil and suffering when it seems so overpowering. Imagine we are successful in building grammars of religious stories that avoid theodicism yet still manage to respond to the broader forms of the problem of evil: is there still a place for moral anti-theodicy? I think so, but it would depend upon the type of new story offered.

For me, a good example here would be Andrew Gleeson's *A Frightening Love*.[37] Gleeson is an anti-theodicist, and at times obviously a moral anti-theodicist.[38] Yet he presents a positive response to the problem of evil. He believes that the religious believer can overcome the problem of evil 'existentially' by coming to see the world as an act of love. This might be impossible for the unbeliever — and that impossibility might point towards a significant difference between believers and unbelievers — but holding fast to the notion that the world is a work of love, created by a God who is love itself, allows the believer to reconcile their faith with even the most horrendous evils. This is an 'existential' stance, both for the believer and the unbeliever, and therefore to some extent transcends rational argument (once again putting us in the territory of the 'unthinkable to deny'), but it nevertheless 'solves' the problem of evil because 'the believer, in the name of love, exempts God from moral judgement'.[39]

One of Gleeson's central claims that the demands of morality can be overcome by the demands of love: A God of love can be beyond the jurisdiction of morality, because 'love, according to believers, protects God from moral

37 Andrew Gleeson, *A Frightening Love: Recasting the Problem of Evil* (Macmillan, 2012).

38 'The point is that — *pace* theodicy — we cannot, on God's behalf, *morally justify* his creation of a world with such evils on the ground of the goods. It is shouldering the goods with a burden they cannot bear by putting them in a position where they are contaminated by the evils, so that it becomes a serious question whether we now can celebrate them decently at all. In a nutshell: *the lives of children are not for sale*. These questions must be faced. The failure of so much of the theodical literature to press them adequately is too often hidden behind an impersonal pseudo-objectivity of weighing goods and evils. But the point about contamination shows that the image of an economic exchange breaks down here. If I barter my oranges for your apples the apples are unaffected and I get what I wanted: perfectly good apples. But if God or a human being barters a child's life for some general good (and even if the child shares in that good) the good is affected and we get something that we did not bargain for: a moral burden.' Gleeson, *A Frightening Love*, 6.

39 Gleeson, *A Frightening Love*, 79.

accountability, and thus from condemnation, by exerting a claim upon us as authoritative as, or even more authoritative than, morality itself'.[40] In defence of this, he appeals to the analogy of God being 'like a loving parent', and offers examples of human parents responding to the claims of 'love' over and against the claims of 'morality'. In particular, he offers the example of parents conceiving and bearing a child who they know will be handicapped. Gleeson claims that though 'morality' might condemn them for their decision, 'they are borne along by the passion of love, a sort of personal necessity akin to what philosophers have called "moral necessity". The same may be true of God's creation of the world'.[41] He reiterates this point:

> Sometimes what an impersonal morality, or a morality of compassion, will condemn, love will sanction and even demand. For example, parents who conceive and bear a child they know will be handicapped may stand condemned by morality. But morality may thus show itself to be sometimes an insular thing. The parents know something greater: the insatiable love which drives them to create. Just like such human parents, God may create the world, a world he knows must contain terrible evil, in an act of reckless love.[42]

Although slightly off-topic for this discussion, I think it's worth mentioning that only a shallow and impoverished conception of 'morality' would condemn parents for conceiving and bearing a handicapped child. Although I accept the unfortunate reality that contemporary moral philosophy finds nothing strange in the claim that we might rationally and 'morally' *condemn* parents for choosing to have handicapped children, this should indicate to us nothing more than the dire state that contemporary moral theorising is in. It ought to be obvious that there is more to the value of life than physical or mental ability. Claiming that God can be beyond the jurisdiction of a 'morality' in which parents can be condemned for having handicapped children seems to me trivially true: Even *I* am beyond the jurisdiction of *that* morality, so I have no doubt that God could be too.

The deeper point is that 'morality is not the only voice which speaks for humans, including the innocent victims of evil. There is also love'[43] and that 'the importance of love puts God's action in creating the world beyond the ju-

40 *Ibid.*, 104.
41 *Ibid.*, 34–35.
42 *Ibid.*, 35–36.
43 *Ibid.*, 35.

risdiction of morality'.[44] God so loved the world that He created it recklessly, fully in the knowledge that innocents would suffer horrendous evils. Rather than offering a theodicy, Gleeson imagines God asserting His love:

> 'I cannot justify my creating you in a world with such evil in terms of impersonal thought that compels you to accept my actions intellectually regardless of your personal, existential responses. It would be an insult to you to even try. I did it because I love you, and I can only ask you to love me in return.'[45]

This is a response to the problem of evil that does not require theodicy, does not seem to commit to the 'God of the philosophers' metaphysics, and does not seem to endorse theodicism; and yet, for Gleeson, has the power to overcome the problem nonetheless, albeit 'existentially'.

There are various ways one might disagree with Gleeson's argument; relevant for our purposes here is that some of those ways might be moral disagreements reminiscent of moral anti-theodicy. Imagine, for instance, the previous quotation being said 'in the presence of the burning children'.[46] Does it stand in any better stead than the typical statements of theodicy? I am not sure it does; but many might disagree. Alternatively, I find Gleeson's assertion that a claim of love can be more authoritative on us than morality, or that love can have the power to somehow transcend the jurisdiction of morality, to be problematic: not least because we typically appeal to moral concepts in order to differentiate between real and counterfeit forms of love. For example, I am inclined to dismiss abusive forms of 'love' as being counterfeit forms of love, for the sole fact that abusers behave so badly to the one they claim to love. My reaction is simply that if they really loved their loved one, they could not behave abusively towards them; they do behave abusively towards their loved one; therefore, they cannot really love them, whatever they might say about it. In contrast, this line of reasoning does not apply to the parents of handicapped children, because I find it quite easy to imagine them sincerely and genuinely loving their children. Moral concepts are partly constitutive

44 *Ibid.*, 85.

45 *Ibid.*, 99.

46 'No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.' Rabbi Irving Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire', in John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Holocaust: Religious & Philosophical Pmplications* (Paragon House, 1989), 315.

of my judgements in these cases, and therefore it seems to me that a claim of love cannot completely escape the jurisdiction of morality. In light of this, Gleeson's characterisation of the God of love might strike an unbeliever as being more than just 'a hard love. A frightening love':[47] It is reminiscent of an abusive love, a counterfeit form of love.

Were one to be met with such a story, one might be inclined to 'return one's entry ticket' on moral grounds. This would be a moralistic rejection of 'the story that overcomes the problem of evil', and would therefore share significant ground with a moral-anti-theodical response — I would go so far as to say that they are in all relevant respects the same response. But this would not be a response to a 'theodicy', since no theodicy is being offered, and neither would it obviously contain a commitment to theodicism. It would manifest as a more familiar and traditional form of Karamazovian protest atheism, or else anti-theism. Again, however, I would want to say that this is a sufficient achievement: the arguments of moral anti-theodicy are still doing some legitimate work — they *can* still respond to an argument such as Gleeson's — even if they do not respond to theodicy, insist on theodicism, or undermine the underlying metaphysics of the God of the philosophers.

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47 Gleeson, *A Frightening Love*, 151.

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