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BOOK REVIEWS

WHO IS GOD

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Abstract. The Hindu *Brahmanas* record that God's reply to the question 'Who are you?' was simply 'Who': 'Who is the God whom we should honour with the oblation': an indicative, as well as interrogative! Might this also be what Aeschylus intended by his reference to '*Zeus hostis pot'estin*' (Zeus, whoever He is): not an expression of doubt, but of acknowledged mystery? The name by which He is to be called, perhaps ('if it pleases Him'), is not 'Zeus' but, exactly, 'Whoever'. And most famously the God that Moses encountered, asked who He is, answered only 'I am'. What does this apparently evasive response imply for worship and theology in the light of David Hume's enquiry, how an unknowable God differs from an equally unknowable non-God? Rather than asking what God is we can investigate instead what worship is, perceiving our response to the Unknown as itself a revelation. In Orthodox terms, what we can share with God is not His Essence, but His *Energeiai*: not what He Is, but what He does.

I. WHAT IS UNKNOWN FOREVER

The Hindu *Brahmanas* record that God's reply to the question 'Who are you?' was simply 'Who': 'Who is the God whom we should honour with the oblation': an indicative, as well as interrogative![1] Might this also be what Aeschylus intended by his reference to '*Zeus hostis pot'estin*' (Zeus, whoever He is): not an expression of doubt, but of acknowledged mystery? The name by which He is to be called, perhaps ('if it pleases Him'), is not 'Zeus' but, exactly, 'Whoever'.[2] And most famously the God that Moses encountered, asked who He is, answered only 'I am'.[3]

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[1] Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 136, after *Aitareya Brahmana* 3.21, *Rig Veda* 1.121.

[2] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 160; see Leon Goldin, 'Zeus, Whoever He is ...', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 92 (1961), pp. 156-167.

[3] *Exodus* 3.14.

Even in modern times, and without the author's own endorsement, the theme persists: when Frodo asks Goldberry, Tom Bombadil's partner and beloved, who Tom is, she answers 'He is'. Tolkien himself, of course, flatly denied – as a good Catholic – his readers' thought that Tom was intended at least to represent Eru, the One: oldest and fatherless, unfazed by the lure or threat of power, instantly available to offer help against oppression, but confined, by his own will, within the boundaries he has set, so as to allow others their simple chance of freedom. It is claimed, at the Council of Elrond, that Bombadil has less power than Sauron. But Tolkien himself would have admitted that authors are not the only or even the best interpreters, and even the Wise make mistakes[4]! Whether this is a good reading, one might say, who knows! Which is to say, God knows.

Another intriguing literary reference – to which I shall return – is in Kipling's *Kim*. Kim himself, in the aftermath of fever and excitement, is driven to ask of himself again and again, 'what is Kim?'.[5] Wendy Doniger has observed that 'kim' in Sanskrit means 'what?', so that Kim's question amounts to 'What is What': 'a statement rather than a question'.[6]

But I shall be taking my cue from ancient sources rather than more modern ones, and seeking rather to unravel what was meant in the anecdote David Hume quoted:

> According to the famous story, Hiero asked [Simonides] 'What is God?', and [he] asked for a day to think about it, and then two days more; and in that way he continually prolonged his time for thinking about it, without ever producing a definition or description. Could you even blame me if I answered straight off that I didn't know what God is, and was aware that this subject lies vastly beyond the reach of my faculties? You might cry 'Sceptic!' and 'Tease!' as much as you pleased; but having found the imperfections and even contradictions of human reason when it is exercised on so many other subjects that are much more familiar

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[4] See *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. by Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), §144, §153; also *Letters* §19, where (some years before the character was incorporated into *The Lord of the Rings*) he describes Bombadil as 'the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside'; Steuard Jensen 'What is Tom Bombadil': http://tolkien.slimy.com/essays/Bombadil.html (accessed 5 January 2017) firmly rejects even the hypothesis that Bombadil is a god (one of the Valar, in Tolkien's mythology), let alone Eru, the One.

[5] Rudyard Kipling *Kim* (New York: Doubleday, 1901), p. 367.

[6] Doniger, op.cit., p. 607.

than this one, I would never expect any success from reason's feeble conjectures concerning a subject that is so elevated and so remote from the sphere of our observation.[7]

The God – distinct from any lesser, simpler, easily described divinities – that emerges into human consciousness in India, Greece or Palestine is a question-mark, an unanswered and unanswerable question. Even theologians who are usually taken to be fairly robust and literal-minded in their interpretation of scripture share the notion. This is why 'He spreads out Time so long and Heaven so deep ... lest if we never met the dark, and the road that leads nowhither, and the question to which no answer is imaginable, we should have in our minds no likeness of the Abyss of the Father, into which if a creature drop down his thoughts for ever he shall hear no echo return to him.'[8]

Many commentators, perhaps the majority, have glossed the declaration simply to say either that we can have no idea what the origin and explanation of reality may be, or else – a little more constructively – that God is essential being: that which is, without any need for further cause or explanation, 'Oldest and Fatherless'. That cause and origin of all things else must certainly be, but *what* exactly It is in itself, lies outside our comprehension, precisely because to 'comprehend' anything is to see how it arises from a larger or deeper truth. This is not, in itself, particularly strange. Aphoristically, we may know *that* something is long before we know *what* it is (that is, what explanation there is for its existence or its character).[9] 'Dark Matter', after all, has been hypothesised by physicists to explain why galaxies hang together as they rotate, just as the planet Neptune was hypothesised to explain discrepancies between the observed movement of the visible planetary bodies and those predicted in an otherwise successful gravitational theory. Neptune – whatever it might be – was spotted once the astronomers knew where to look. Similarly, Mendelian inheritance was accepted as a fact long before we had any idea how it worked, or what 'genes', as units of inheritance, might be. 'Dark Matter' may eventually be identified by something more than its effects, but till then we may reasonably say that we can be

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[7] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* [1779], and *The Natural History of Religion* [1777], ed. by J. C. A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 51 (Philo speaks), after Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 1.22.

[8] C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Macmillan, 1965 [1944]), p. 218.

[9] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, B.1, 89b24ff.

confident *that* it exists without any idea of *what* it is – except that there is, apparently, much more of it than of any *visible* matter. 'Dark Energy' is yet more opaque – an influence that causes the cosmos to be expanding faster than is otherwise expected, but which features in our theories only as a fudge factor to allow us to retain the basic structure of current cosmology. Either we shall eventually discover what the 'darkness' holds and recognize it as – somehow – of a piece with visible matter and familiar forces, or else we may decide that these seeming entities are only 'imaginary' mathematicals, like the square root of minus-one, ways of making our theories manageable but having no distinct, 'real', referent – very much as Cardinal Bellarmine (April 1615) chose to treat the Copernican hypothesis.

That God is what we do not and cannot know, the utterly unknowable, is itself an answer to one common form of argument occasionally heard even at the conference where this paper was first presented: what would be true if I were God? Richard Owen – the eminent palaeontologist who gave us Dinosaurs – argued that there must be intelligent life on Jupiter (and other similar planets) since there would otherwise be no-one to admire the spectacle of the Jovian moons. William Whewell – who gave us Scientists – acidly responded that we did not know God's plans for other worlds.[10] Atheistical theologians commonly conclude the converse: if things aren't as they imagine 'God' should have them be, then God – so imagined – cannot exist. To which George Berkeley's comment (via his character Crito) seems an apt response: 'he who undertakes to measure without knowing either [the measure or the thing to be measured] can be no more exact than he is modest, ... who having neither an abstract idea of moral fitness nor an adequate idea of the divine economy shall yet pretend to measure the one by the other'.[11] And more generally: 'I do not therefore conclude a thing to be absolutely invisible, because it is so to me. ... [and] dare not pronounce a thing to be nonsense because I do not understand it.'[12] So also Isaac Newton:

> Without all doubt this world could arise from nothing but the perfectly
> free will of God. ... From this fountain ... [what] we call the laws of

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[10] William Whewell, *Of the Plurality of Worlds*, ed. by Michael Ruse (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); 1st published as *Of the Plurality of Worlds: An Essay* (London: John W. Parker, 1853), pp. 183-4.

[11] *Alciphron* (Crito speaks): George Berkeley, *Works*, A. A. Luce & T. E. Jessop (eds), Vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1950 [1732]), pp. 251-2.

[12] *Alciphron* (Euphranor speaks): *Works*, vol.3, p. 229.

nature have flowed, in which there appear many traces indeed of wise contrivance, but not the least shadow of necessity. These therefore we must not seek from uncertain conjectures, but learn them from observations and experiments. He who is presumptuous enough to think that he can find the true principles of physics and the laws of natural things by the force alone of his own mind, and the internal light of reason, must either suppose that the world exists by necessity, and by the same necessity follows the laws proposed; or if the order of Nature was established by the will of God, that himself, a miserable reptile, can tell what was fittest to be done.[13]

'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.'[14]

The unknown, invisible, incomprehensible God is not simply an Hebraic notion. Plotinus, speaking for most Platonists, insisted that an honest inquirer 'will learn *that* it is by means of the intelligible, but *what* it is like by letting the intelligible go'.[15] And this too is in line with a more ancient Hellenic judgment. 'The lord whose oracle is in Delphi [which is to say, Apollo] neither speaks nor suppresses, but indicates'.[16]

II. THE HUMEAN RESPONSE

But if we cannot say what God is, what is it that we are gesturing towards? What is being indicated? If we cannot conclude anything about what God would do or has done, what sort of *explanation* of reality is being offered? All we are left with is simply that things happen: 'the laws of nature' – even supposing we could discover them – are just descriptive. It is, as Wittgenstein remarked, a common modern illusion that 'the laws of nature' actually *explain*.[17] Any hypothesis that has *just anything* as its effect is rather the rejection of all rational enquiry than its support.

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[13] Isaac Newton as represented by Hooykaas, after Cotes' preface to second edition of *Principia*: R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1972), p. 49.

[14] *Isaiah* 55.8: chiefly, in the immediate context, that He pardons the repentant, but the saying has a larger range.

[15] Plotinus, *Ennead* V.5 [32].6, 21-2.

[16] Heracleitos 22B93DK: Robin Waterfield, *The First Philosophers: The PreSocratics and Sophists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 40; see Peter Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Salisbury: Golden Sufi Center, 1999), p. 87: 'the oracles he gave out were full of riddles, full of ambiguities and traps.'

[17] 'At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena' (L. von Wittgenstein,

Which is of course exactly what Whewell said about the Darwinian hypothesis as he first understood it: the idea, for example, that there were once plant-forms fitted to years of different lengths (and only the ones that chanced to match the actual length of the terrestrial year survived) struck him as 'too gratuitous and extravagant to require much consideration'.[18] Bees did not explore every possible geometrical arrangement of their honeycombs before settling on producing hexagonal cells, any more than there were ever snowflakes built on a different template than the familiar six-pointed star. Darwinians can accommodate the criticism. Whewell would have an easier target in more modern attempts at 'explaining' this world here by supposing that all *possible* worlds exist somewhere or at some time. If all *possible* worlds exist then we have no reason to be surprised by any outcome, or even any sudden shift – as we might at first consider it – in what is happening. As I have pointed out many times before, even our notion of what *counts* as a resemblance, or what will count as 'doing the same thing', has no basis in any merely logical understanding. Robert Chambers, writing in *Vestiges of the Natural History of the Creation*, employed Charles Babbage's argument in his *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*[19] to say what was happening in the many biological transformations recorded in the rocks. The 'very same computer program' (as we would now call it) may conscientiously progress from 1 to 2 to 3 to every number up to 100,000,001. The obvious inference is that it will continue 'in like fashion' – yet the numbers that followed in Babbage's simple computer were instead 100,010,002; 100,030,003; 100,060,004; 100,100,005; 100,150, 006 'and so on' until the 2672nd term. A less imaginative scientist might have concluded only that the program was 'defective': Babbage recognized that the defect had only been in our perception. We cannot know till afterwards what was really happening earlier, and so have no way of telling, before the event, when chickens will start laying dinosaur eggs again!

So is there some way of avoiding the collapse of reason, while still

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Tractatus Logic-Philosophicus, D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness (eds) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, 2nd ed.), 6.371.

   [18] William Whewell's *Bridgewater Treatise: Astronomy and General Physics considered with reference to Natural Theology* (London: William Pickering, 1833, 2nd ed.), cited by David Hull *The Metaphysics of Evolution* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 33.

   [19] Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Leicester: Leicester University Press; New York: Humanities Press, 1969 [1844]), after Charles Babbage, *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise Fragment* (London: Frank Cass, 1967 [1837]), pp. 34ff.

remembering that the ultimate cause and context of reality is always beyond our grasp? Christian theologians – for example, Benedict XVI – have insisted that human reason is indeed a model for the universe, if not for God. 'The objective structure of the universe and the intellectual structure of the human being coincide; the subjective reason and the objectified reason in nature are identical. In the end it is "one" reason that links both and invites us to look to a unique creative Intelligence.'[20] When Hume allowed his Pyrrho to enquire 'what peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call thought, that we must thus make it the model of the whole universe?'[21] it was with a view to mocking the idea that God might be *like us* – but that was always a heresy. The real problem with Hume's question is that it leaves us with no reason to think that any 'rational model' we might devise has any resemblance to the *cosmic* order. Why should we suppose that members of a particular hominid species, evolved by Darwinian processes, have any talents beyond those needed to survive and breed in particular terrestrial contexts? 'Darwin's theory makes the testable prediction that whenever we use technology to glimpse reality beyond the human scale, our evolved intuition should break down.'[22] Only if we have been *made* to mirror the cosmic order do we have any chance of doing so.

> Far from undermining the credibility of theism, the remarkable success of science in modern times is a remarkable confirmation of the truth of theism. It was from the perspective of Judeo-Christian theism – and from that perspective alone – that it was predictable that science would have succeeded as it has. Without the faith in the rational intelligibility of the world and the divine vocation of human beings to master it, modern science would never have been possible, and, even today, the continued rationality of the enterprise of science depends on convictions that can be reasonably grounded only in theistic metaphysics.[23]

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[20] Benedict XVI to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, on the occasion of the international congress 'From Galileo's Telescope to Evolutionary Cosmology' (30 November – 2 December 2009), available at: <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091126_fisichella-telescopio_en.html> [accessed 5 January 2017].

[21] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, A. W. Colver & J. V. Price (eds) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976 [1777]), p. 168.

[22] Max Tegmark, *Our Mathematical Universe: My Quest for the Ultimate Nature of Reality* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), p. 5.

[23] Robert C. Koons, 'Science and Theism: Concord not Conflict', in Paul Copan & Paul Moser (eds), *The Rationality of Theism* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2003), p. 82. The point

But the problem still remains: what is the connection between the Unknown One, and the – possibly – knowable Cosmos? If we cannot tell what the Unknown would do, how can we expect that It would endow us with 'reason' or make the universe intelligible to us? How do 'mystics, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the Deity, differ from Sceptics or Atheists, who assert, that the first cause of all is unknown and unintelligible?'[24] We speak of 'Acts of God' or 'Miracles' to indicate what cannot reasonably be anticipated or contained within a universal law accessible to us. How then does 'God did it' differ from 'it happened, and no-one can know why'? How does Plotinus's One, veiled from us by the many forms of beauty,[25] differ from his Matter, equally hidden behind 'golden chains'?[26] Perhaps the difference – or at least a difference – lies in our response. The 'sceptic or atheist' is content to reckon that she has no explanation beyond the banal – non-explanatory – appeal to 'what usually happens'. The 'mystic', while agreeing that the question 'why?' has no discernible answer, is still surprised by wonder, by the conviction that, somehow, the world is oriented toward some good, some attractor.

> The man of science says "Cut the stalk, and the apple will fall", but he says it calmly as if the one idea really led up to the other. The witch in the fairy tale says, "Blow the horn and the ogre's castle will fall"; but she does not say it as if it were something in which the effect obviously arose out of the cause. ... The scientific men ... feel that because one incomprehensible thing constantly follows another incomprehensible thing the two together somehow make up a comprehensible thing. ... A tree grows fruit

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was also made by Henry More: 'It is possible that *Mathematical evidence* it self, may be but a constant undiscoverable delusion, which our nature is necessarily and perpetually obnoxious to, and that either fatally or fortuitously there has been in the world time out of mind such a Being as we call *Man*, whose essential property is to be then most of all mistaken, when he conceives a thing most evidently true. And why may not this be as well as anything else, if you will have all things fatall or casuall without a God? For there can be no curbe to this wild conceipt, but by the supposing that we our selves exist from some higher Principle that is absolutely *good* and *wise*, which is all one as to acknowledge *that there is a God*' (*An Antidote against Atheism* (1653), Bk.1, ch.2: C. A. Patrides (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1969), p. 214.

[24] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* [1779], and *The Natural History of Religion* [1777], ed. by J. C. A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 60 (Cleanthes speaks).

[25] *Ennead* I.6 [1].9

[26] *Ennead* I.8 [51].15

because it is a *magic* tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched.[27]

In the nature of the case we cannot literally *point* to God, any more than we can 'reason' our way to an understanding of God's nature: that would require God to be in one place and not another, over *there,* not *here.* We can – though even this raises questions – point to devotees: if we cannot say what *God* is, can we at least say what worship is? 'To know God, says Seneca, is to worship him. All other worship – that is, all worship that goes beyond expressing one's knowledge that God exists – is indeed absurd, superstitious, and even impious'.[28] But though it is common practice to translate Seneca's aphorism, 'primus est deorum cultus deos credere', as meaning simply that 'the first way to worship the gods is to believe in the gods', to believe 'that they exist', this makes little sense. The devils also believe that much – and tremble![29] My suggestion is rather that the first step in worship is to believe [them] gods – those presences, that is, that can neither injure anything nor themselves be injured.[30] He continued with further requirements: 'the next [step is] to acknowledge their majesty, to acknowledge their goodness without which there is no majesty.[31] Also, to

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[27] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: Fontana, 1961 [1908]), pp. 50f. Chesterton's philosophy of science is examined by Stanley Jaki, *Chesterton: A Seer of Science* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986). See further my 'Science, Chesterton and the Will of the Creator', in Martin Stone (ed.), *Reason, Faith and History: Essays for Paul Helm* (London: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 115-25.

[28] Hume, op.cit., p. 128, quoting Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, 95.50 ('primus est deorum cultus deos credere'). I am not sure – in passing – whether later Thomistic analysis of the different phrases is any help here, except to emphasise the difficulty. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II.2.2c distinguishes 'credere Deo', 'credere Deum' and 'credere in Deum': 'One of these (1) is the material object of faith, and in this way an act of faith is "to believe in a God" (*credere Deum*); because, as stated above (*ST* II-II.1.1) nothing is proposed to our belief, except in as much as it is referred to God. The other (2) is the formal aspect of the object, for it is the medium on account of which we assent to such and such a point of faith; and thus an act of faith is "to believe God" (*credere Deo*), since, as stated above (*ST* II-II.1.1) the formal object of faith is the First Truth, to Which man gives his adhesion, so as to assent to Its sake to whatever he believes. Thirdly, if the object of faith be considered (B) insofar as the intellect is moved by the will, an act of faith is "to believe in God" (*credere in Deum*). For the First Truth is referred to the will, through having the aspect of an end.' See Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), p. 67.

[29] *James* 2.19.

[30] Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 95.49.

[31] 'Deinde reddere illis maiestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla maiestas est'.

know that they are supreme commanders in the universe, controlling all things by their power and acting as guardians of the human race.'[32]

> Would you win over the gods? Then be a good man. Whoever imitates them, is worshipping them sufficiently. Then comes the second problem, – how to deal with men. What is our purpose? What precepts do we offer? Should we bid them refrain from bloodshed? What a little thing it is not to harm one whom you ought to help! It is indeed worthy of great praise, when man treats man with kindness! Shall we advise stretching forth the hand to the shipwrecked sailor, or pointing out the way to the wanderer, or sharing a crust with the starving? Yes, if I can only tell you first everything which ought to be afforded or withheld; meantime, I can lay down for mankind a rule, in short compass, for our duties in human relationships: all that you behold, that which comprises both god and man, is one – we are the parts of one great body. Nature produced us related to one another, since she created us from the same source and to the same end. She engendered in us mutual affection, and made us prone to friendships. She established fairness and justice; according to her ruling, it is more wretched to commit than to suffer injury. Through her orders, let our hands be ready for all that needs to be helped.[33]

And if we can, may not *that* be what 'God' means for us? To worship God it is enough to live as God lives, with unlimited generosity. 'God' is not first postulated or invented as an explanatory hypothesis: rather a particular form of life is recognized as godly.

> There have been many frantic and blasphemous beliefs in this old barbaric earth of ours; men have served their deities with obscene dances, with cannibalism, and the blood of infants. But no religion was quite so blasphemous as to pretend that it was scientifically investigating its god to see what he was made of. Bacchanals did not say, 'Let us discover whether there is a god of wine'. They enjoyed wine so much that they cried out

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[32] The standard edition qualifies this by adding that 'they are sometimes unmindful of the individual', but note that 'unmindful' is an unsupported emendation of the recorded text: see R. W. Sharples 'Threefold Providence: the history and background of a doctrine', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Supplement 78, Vol. 46 (Jan. 2003), pp. 107-127 (p. 115). Seneca may actually have intended that the gods are *mindful* of the individuals. See further Matthew W. Dickie 'Exclusions from the Catechumenate: continuity or discontinuity with pagan cult', *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*, 48 (2001), 417-443, arguing that pagans, like Christians, thought moral character of importance in the cult.

[33] Seneca, 95.50-2.

naturally to the god of it. Christians did not say, 'A few experiments will show us whether there is a god of goodness'. They loved good so much that they knew that it was a god. Moreover, all the great religions always loved passionately and poetically the symbols and machinery by which they worked – the temple, the coloured robes, the altar, the symbolic flowers, or the sacrificial fire. It made these things beautiful: it laid itself open to the charge of idolatry. And into these great ritual religions there has descended, whatever the meaning of it, the thing of which Sophocles spoke, "The power of the gods, which is mighty and groweth not old." [34]

We can *share* in the life of God, His *Energeiai*, without understanding God's essence – the distinction was drawn early in Christian thought[35] and is central to later Orthodox theology – to which I shall return. Earlier philosophers might seem rather to *equate* God's *energeiai* with His essence: 'life and *aion* continuous and eternal belong to the god, for *this is what the god is*'.[36] In Aristotle's vocabulary, God is *Theoria*, and that in turn is something very distant from mere abstract philosophizing.[37] *Theoria* is a pure enjoyment of eternally living beauty: 'enjoyment' rather than the misleading 'contemplation' simply as the latter term suggests

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[34] G. K. Chesterton 'Skepticism and Spiritualism', *Illustrated London News*, April 14, 1906, available from http://www.cse.dmu.ac.uk/~mward/gkc/books/skeptic.html [accessed 5 January 2017]. My guess is that the Sophocles reference is to *Oedipus* 863-71: 'I pray fate still finds me worthy, demonstrating piety and reverence in all I say and do – in everything our loftiest traditions consecrate, those laws engendered in the heavenly skies, whose only father is Olympus. They were not born from mortal men, nor will they sleep and be forgotten. In them lives an ageless mighty god' (trans. by Ian Johnston: https://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/sophocles/oedipustheking.htm, accessed 5 January 2017).

[35] It even appears in Philo, *De Fuga*, 164-5 (glossing *Exodus* 33.23): 'it is sufficient for the wise man to know the consequences, and the things which are after God; but he who wishes to see the principal essence will be blinded by the exceeding brilliancy of his rays before he can see it': *Collected Works*, trans. by F. H. Colson, G. H. Whitaker, et al. (London: Loeb Classical Library, Heinemann, 1929), vol.2, p. 228.

[36] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 12.1072b13f; see also Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, 5.6. For further thoughts see my 'Therapy and Theory Reconstructed', *Philosophy as Therapy*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplementary Volume 66, Clare Carlisle & Jonardon Ganeri (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 83-102.

[37] *Ennead* V.8 [31].5f: 'one must not then suppose that the gods and the "exceedingly blessed spectators" in the higher world contemplate propositions (*axiomata*), but all the Forms we speak about are beautiful images in that world, of the kind which someone imagined to exist in the soul of the wise man, images not painted but real. This is why the ancients said that the Ideas were realities and substances.'

a distance between the observer and the observed. And it is that delight by which we need to be guided. This is not necessarily always to exclude some 'explanatory' element: the point is that we are first introduced to God, or to the lesser gods, when our attention is fixed upon some special way of living. We may advance from that to insist that the God we have encountered, the form of life we have admired, is indeed the only Lord and Creator (in some fashion): we do not *begin* from an arbitrarily postulated Somewhat whose character or commands we only learn much later.[38]

But there is still good reason to distinguish the merely Aristotelian and the Orthodox:[39] the former may easily give the impression that our questions will be answered, that we will or could 'know God'. 'Philosophy begins in wonder',[40] and we are all likely to interpret 'wonder', here, as puzzlement, and so expect that we may one day unravel all the puzzles, from Dark Matter to Divinity, and be able to provide a single coherent account of all that is. We shall see – as Stephen Hawking hopes – that everything is *as* it is 'bound to be' (and everything is also bound to *be*).[41] And on that day the 'wonder' will be no more.[42] But 'wonder' has another

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[38] See Alvin Plantinga, 'Darwin, Mind and Meaning' (1996), on the oddity of supposing that Moses, faced by the Burning Bush, arbitrarily postulated an otherwise unknown Creator of infinite power to 'explain' this! See http://maverickphilosopher. typepad.com/maverick_philosopher/2011/12/articles-by-alvin-plantinga.html (accessed 5 January 2017).

[39] David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2004); see also Constantinos Athanasopoulos & Christoph Schneider (eds), *Divine Essence and Divine Energies: Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2013). I reviewed the latter collection in *Philosophical Quarterly*, 64 (2014), 513-517.

[40] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1.982b12, after Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d

[41] 'Even if there is only one possible unified theory, it is just a set of rules and equations. What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?' (Stephen Hawking, *Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam, 1988), p. 174). The later Hawking seems to have concluded that the 'laws' themselves can somehow compel the existence of the stuff whose motion they describe: see Stephen Hawking & Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (London: Bantam Press, 2010).

[42] Richard Dawkins, as so often, misses the point in saying that 'mysteries do not lose their poetry when solved', and that 'the solution often turns out more beautiful than the puzzle': Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 41. The 'wonder' he would feel once the first puzzlement had abated, and its correspondent beauty, would, on his terms, be no more than an odd hormonal reaction selected by Darwinian evolution as – somehow – more

meaning: it is how we feel (or should feel) in the face of unbounded mystery. 'You shall make no images of anything, to worship them,'[43] and the only answer to the question 'Who is God?' is Who – or in another style, 'Not this, not that': '*neti neti*'.[44] Hume's Demea was partly accurate:

> The ancient Platonists, you know, were the most religious and devout of all the pagan philosophers; yet many of them, particularly Plotinus, expressly declare that intellect or understanding is not to be ascribed to God, and that our most perfect worship of him consists not in acts of veneration, reverence, gratitude, or love but rather in a certain mysterious self-annihilation, or total extinction of all our faculties.[45]

Partly accurate, only: Plotinus was not rejecting intellect, but pointing towards its fulfilment.

> Intellect ... has one power for thinking, by which it looks at the things in itself, and one by which it looks at what transcends it by a direct awareness and reception, by which also before it saw only, and by seeing acquired intellect and is one. And that first one is the contemplation of Intellect in its right mind, and the other is Intellect in love, when it goes out of its mind 'drunk with the nectar'; then it falls in love, simplified

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prolific than its sometime rivals. As Robert Browning's Blougram asked, 'Does law so analysed coerce you much? Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end, But you who reach where the first thread begins, You'll soon cut that! – which means you can, but won't, Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out, You dare not set aside, you can't tell why': Robert Browning, 'Bishop Blougram's Apology', *Men and Women* (1855), lines 834-9. Browning modelled Blougram on Cardinal Wiseman, and some Catholics found the portrait at least unflattering. I am not persuaded that they were right to do so. See F. E. L. Priestly 'Blougram's Apologetics', *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, 15 (1945–46), 139–47; Rupert E. Palmer, Jr 'The Uses of Character in "Bishop Blougram's Apology"', *Modern Philology*, 58:2 (1960), 108-118, available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/434633 [accessed 5 January 2017]; W. Wendell Howard 'Browning, Blougram and Belief', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 13.2 (2010), 79-93 (DOI: 10.1353/log.0.0074).

   [43] *Exodus* 20.4-5; *Deuteronomy* 5.8-9.

   [44] *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 2.3.6: 'The form of that "being" is as follows: Like a cloth dyed with turmeric, or like grey sheep's wool, or like the (scarlet) insect called Indragopa, or like a tongue of fire, or like a white lotus, or like a flash of lightning. He who knows it as such attains splendour like a flash of lightning. Now therefore the description (of Brahman): "Not this, not this". Because there is no other and more appropriate description than this "Not this". Now Its name: "The Truth of truth". The vital force is truth, and It is the Truth of that'. http://www.upanishads.kenjaques.org.uk/Brihadaranyaka_Upanishad_Chapter_Two.html (accessed 5 January 2017). See *Upanisads,* trans. by Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 28.

   [45] Hume, op.cit., p. 58 (Demea speaks).

into happiness (*haplotheis eis eupatheian*) by having its fill, and it is better for it to be drunk with a drunkenness like this than to be more respectably sober.[46]

Religion, like philosophy, begins in wonder: not so much 'Who?', perhaps, as 'Wow!'. This is true even if our response is 'polytheistic': there are many forms of beauty, many 'wonderful' moments. I shall not explore the *ethical* problems created when those forms seem to be at odds, or when – to a mature understanding – we rank them wrongly. In brief,

> Moderns have neglected to subdue the gods of Priam. These gods are visions of the eternal attributes, or divine names, which, when erected into gods, become destructive of humanity. They ought to be the servants, and not the masters of man, or of society. They ought to be made to sacrifice to Man, and not man compelled to sacrifice to them; for when separated from man or humanity, who is Jesus the Saviour, the vine of eternity, they are thieves and rebels, they are destroyers.[47]

In more Plotinian mode, there is a difference between the heavenly and the fallen Aphrodite: only the former is loyal to the Father.[48] In the end all the forms of beauty, all the great attractors, owe their grace to the light of the One:[49] they are only steps, for us, on the way back home. There may even be humanly created works of art that help to lead us home.

> Greatly daring was the wax that formed the image of the invisible Prince of the Angels, incorporeal in the essence of his form. But yet it is not without grace; for a man looking at the image directs his mind to a higher contemplation. No longer has he a confused veneration, but imprinting the image in himself he fears him as if he were present. The eyes stir up the depths of the spirit, and Art can convey by colours the prayers of the soul.[50]

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[46] Plotinus, *Ennead*, VI.7 [38].35, 20-8. I have examined this metaphor at greater length in *Plotinus: Myth, Metaphor and Philosophical Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[47] William Blake 'A Descriptive Catalogue' (1809), *Complete Writings*, ed. by G. Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 571.

[48] *Ennead* VI.9 [9].9, 28ff.

[49] See *Ennead* VI.7 [38].22, 27-32.

[50] Agathias (536-82), W. R. Paton, *Greek Anthology* (London: Loeb Classical Library, Heinemann, 1916), 1.34, quoted by Gervase Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (John Murray: London. 1973), p. 78. Further on icons as gateways to the 'other' world, see C. A. Tsakiridou, *Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity* (Furnham: Ashgate, 2013).

III. THE PERSONAL MYSTERY

Where especially may we encounter mystery? The answer – already implicit in my quotation from William Blake – may serve also to indicate another way of conceiving the difference between Hume's 'mystic' and his 'sceptic': we are to ask or assert that 'Who is God', not 'What is God', even though it is often helpful to consider God as 'the Place', so as to avoid any suggestion that God is one being amongst many. 'Why is God called "the Place" (*hamaqom*)? Because the universe is located in Him, not He in the universe.'[51] The mystery is ubiquitous, but we can understand a little more about it by considering the *personal* encounter.

> A person is a mystery, never totally circumscribed by a definition, that is, as an essence or a "what." A person is not a "what" but a "who," and "who" you are, just as Who God is, is ultimately indefinable, undetermined, and of infinite depth. To say "what" something is, is to circumscribe that something in terms of essence or essential definition; to say "who" is to speak, not of some "thing" which can be defined in terms of its essence, but of some "one," an ultimately uncircumscribable and indefinable "who."[52]

The passage I quoted earlier from Tolkien's story comes close to the same point, though without any special emphasis: when Frodo asks Bombadil who he is, Bombadil replies 'Tell me, who are you, alone, yourself and nameless?'[53] No-one is to be summed up simply as a particular sort of creature, even an accidentally unique one. Josiah Royce even used this fact – that we would not be comforted for the loss of our beloved by the provision even of a humanly indistinguishable twin – to suggest that love requires immortality.[54] Individual identity is not merely a psychological problem, but a 'metaphysical mystery'. 'The lover says that he loves but One. Yet when he tells about her he describes a type.'[55] Royce concluded, in apparent agreement with Plotinus, that we all exist *as fully realized*

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[51] [*Midrash*] *Genesis R.*68: Hyam Maccoby, *Philosophy of the Talmud* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 24.

[52] Vincent Rossi, 'Presence, Participation, Performance: The Remembrance of God in the Early Hesychast Fathers', in James S. Cutsinger (ed.), *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), pp. 64–111 (p. 79).

[53] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Fellowship of the Ring*, op.cit., p. 142.

[54] Josiah Royce, *The Conception of Immortality* (Cambridge, Mass: Riverside Press, 1900), p. 37.

[55] Royce, op.cit., p. 34.

individuals in the 'realm of a reality that is not visible to human eyes'.[56] As Plotinus insisted, 'it is by the one that all beings are beings',[57] and our present, material existence rather conceals our true identities. 'For here below, too, we can know many things by the look in people's eyes when they are silent; but There [that is, in the divine, in the world as it is properly perceived] all their body is clear and pure and each is like an eye, and nothing is hidden or feigned, but before one speaks to another that other has seen and understood.'[58] And it is in this recognition that we also discover God:

> In every sphere, in every relational act, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train of the eternal You; in each we perceive a breath of it, in every you we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its manner. All spheres are included in it, while it is included in none. Through all of them shines the one presence.[59]

The usual assumption, for those who thus emphasise the mystery of personal being, is that it is only in *human beings*, people, that the mystery is encountered. 'We characterize God's mode of being as *personal,* primarily because it corresponds to the experience we have of human personal existence: existence with self-consciousness, with rational relatedness, with ecstatic (active) otherness and freedom from any predetermination.'[60] That is not entirely my own experience, though I accept Christos Yannaras' characterization of God's activity as one of 'personal relationship and loving communion'. Anything at all may suddenly be *there* for us, may wake us up, whether an octopus suddenly looking back at us or a tree suddenly more than a merely leafy plant. 'Each grain of sand, every stone on the land, each rock and each hill, each fountain and rill, each herb and each tree, Mountain, hill, earth, and sea, Cloud, meteor, and star, Are men seen afar'[61] – not because Blake

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[56] Royce, op.cit., p. 75.

[57] Plotinus, *Ennead*, VI.9 [9].1, 1.

[58] Plotinus, *Ennead*, IV.3 [27].18, 19-24.

[59] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996 [1923]), trans. by Walter Kaufmann, p. 150.

[60] Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite,* trans. by Andrew Louth (London: T & T Clark, 2005 [1986]), p. 85.

[61] William Blake, 'Letter to Thomas Butts' (2 October 1800)': Keynes (ed.), *Complete Writings of William Blake*, op.cit., pp. 804-5. Kathleen Raine, *Blake and the New Age* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 116-8 identifies Swedenborg as the source of Blake's conception.

imagined them to be our conspecifics, nor even that they were 'like' us, but because each such thing is more than its own form. Something like the same shock of reality is aptly described by Chesterton:

> Possibly the most pathetic of all the delusions of the modern students of primitive belief is the notion they have about the thing they call anthropomorphism. They believe that primitive men attributed phenomena to a god in human form in order to explain them, because his mind in its sullen limitation could not reach any further than his own clownish existence. The thunder was called the voice of a man, the lightning the eyes of a man, because by this explanation they were made more reasonable and comfortable. The final cure for all this kind of philosophy is to walk down a lane at night. Anyone who does so will discover very quickly that men pictured something semi-human at the back of all things, not because such a thought was natural, but because it was supernatural; not because it made things more comprehensible, but because it made them a hundred times more incomprehensible and mysterious. For a man walking down a lane at night can see the conspicuous fact that as long as nature keeps to her own course, she has no power with us at all. As long as a tree is a tree, it is a top-heavy monster with a hundred arms, a thousand tongues, and only one leg. But so long as a tree is a tree, it does not frighten us at all. It begins to be something alien, to be something strange, only when it looks like ourselves. When a tree really looks like a man our knees knock under us. And when the whole universe looks like a man we fall on our faces.[62]

Its 'looking like ourselves' means mostly that it suddenly becomes real to us, and at the same time utterly alien and mysterious. As I indicated before, God is not an explanatory hypothesis, but the mystery itself of being. A 'personal' relationship, so to call it, does not require or even permit that we *understand* our beloveds, but that we come to share their life without ever, quite, being *them*. So also Martin Buber:

> The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no aspect of a mood; it confronts me bodily and has to deal with me as I must deal with it – only differently. One should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: relation is reciprocity. Does the tree then have consciousness, similar to our own? I have no experience of that. But thinking that you have brought this off in your own case, must you again divide the

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[62] G. K. Chesterton, 'Science and the Savages', *Heretics* (London: Bodley Head, 1905), p. 63.

indivisible? What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself.[63]

IV. SUMMARY CONCLUSION

I follow Orthodox tradition in declaring that God's essence must always lie beyond our comprehension but that we may come to share God's *energeiai* through worship: that is to say, through our acknowledgement of mystery, our being confronted by the reality of His presence.

> The sacred is here and now. The only God worth keeping is a God that cannot be kept. The only God worth talking about is a God that cannot be talked about. God is no object of discourse, knowledge or even experience. He cannot be spoken of, but he can be spoken to; he cannot be seen, but he can be listened to. The only possible relationship with God is to address him and to be addressed by him, here and now – or, as Buber puts it, in the present. For him the Hebrew name of God, the tetragrammaton (*YHVH*), means HE IS PRESENT. *Er ist da* might be translated He is there; but in this context it would be more nearly right to say: He is here.[64]

In this I am, in a way, rejecting the assumption lurking in the theme of the present volume – that 'God is hidden'. By my account He is hidden only in that He is forever present – luminously so for anyone who can, for a while, stop talking, and be turned to face – as it were – the presence merely mirrored in our ordinary concerns.

> When we look outside that on which we depend we do not know that we are one, like faces which are many on the outside but have one head inside. But if someone is able to turn around, either by himself or having the good luck to have his hair pulled by Athena herself, he will see God and himself and the all. ... He will stop marking himself off from all being and will come to all the All without going out anywhere.[65]

> The angels keep their ancient places
> Turn but a stone and start a wing.

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[63] Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 58-9.

[64] Walter Kaufmann in Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 25. I am conscious that there are other possible interpretations of the tetragrammaton, for example that God is one 'who will be what He will': see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. by N. Plaice, S. Plaice & P. Knight (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 1235-6.

[65] Plotinus, *Ennead*, VI.5 [23].7, 9f. The reference is to Homer's *Iliad* (I.197f), where Athena (the goddess of good sense) recalls Achilles from a murderous rage.

> `Tis ye, `tis your estrangèd faces
> That miss the many-splendoured thing.[66]

But I acknowledge also that we can indeed *forget* God's reality, can look away from it even though there is nowhere free of it. And this is perhaps, in our present state, a mercy. Consider some other words of Browning's Blougram:[67]

> Pure faith indeed – you know not what you ask!
> Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,
> Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much
> The sense of conscious creatures to be borne
> It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare.
> Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth:
> I say it's meant to hide him all it can,
> And that's what all the blessed evil's for.
> Its use in Time is to environ us,
> Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough
> Against that sight till we can bear its stress.
> Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain
> And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart
> Less certainly would wither up at once
> Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.

In the Plotinian story we have – partly – chosen to fall down into the world of seeming distance and difference, and so been alienated from our first home and Father. We are wrong to suppose that this world is the only truth, but would also be mistaken to make fond images of that 'other' world from which we may suppose we fell, as though we could reconstruct reality from our own impressions. Even the present delusion has its point, in offering us an almost bearable reminder of the reality we cannot easily face. To see Him, even to catch a glimpse of Him, we had better wait until we really are *like* Him: till then we see Him only in a pool, as it were, or polished silver![68]

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[66] Francis Thompson, 'The Kingdom of God', *Selected Poems* (London: Methuen, 1907), p. 133. See my essay 'Where have all the Angels gone?', *Religious Studies*, 28 (1992), 221-34.

[67] Browning, 'Bishop Blougram's Apology', lines 647-65.

[68] *I Corinthians* 13.12: the 'glass' here is a mirror not a windowpane, and – typically – the ancients would have looked *down* into it: see further my *Plotinus: Myth, Metaphor and Philosophical Practice*, op.cit., pp. 85-86.

Who it is that is God, and the very query, the unanswered and unanswerable question, gives us our first experience of the mystery. And though I earlier faintly disparaged the interpretation of 'wonder' as mere puzzlement, and its associated curiosity for some 'solution', this too is perhaps an element to be remembered. If everything possible happens, arising – in Plotinian terms – from mere matter, from mere possibility, the enterprise of explanation is both pointless and impossible. If enquiry is to have any point we must suppose that there are discoverable truths, that whatever happens is at least being guided, if not determined, by the forms of beauty.[69] We are called to enquire into reality, without supposing that we ever have, or ever shall, achieve a full understanding of that same: we are to be, in a word, unhampered *sceptics*, *zetetics* or enquirers, stripped bare of opinions – as Philo said – so as to encounter God.[70] 'Only those who, having disrobed themselves of all created things and of the innermost veil and wrapping of mere opinion, with mind unhampered and naked will come to God.'[71] In love, we seek always to get closer to the beloved, and that is at once an endless task and one accomplished in the very moment.

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[69] See my 'A Plotinian Account of Intellect', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 71 (1997), 421-32.

[70] See, for a slightly different take on the quest, my 'Living the Pyrrhonian Way', *The Science, Politics, and Ontology of Life-Philosophy*, Scott M. Campbell & Paul W. Bruno (eds) (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 197-209.

[71] Philo, *De Gigantibus*, 12.53-4: *Collected Works*, trans. by F. H. Colson, G. H. Whitaker et al. (London: Loeb Classical Library, Heinemann, 1929), vol.2, pp. 470-3.

WHAT IS APOPHATICISM?
WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT AN INEFFABLE GOD

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Abstract. Apophaticism – the view that God is both indescribable and inconceivable – is one of the great medieval traditions of philosophical thought about God, but it is largely overlooked by analytic philosophers of religion. This paper attempts to rehabilitate apophaticism as a serious philosophical option. We provide a clear formulation of the position, examine what could appropriately be said and thought about God if apophaticism is true, and consider ways to address the charge that apophaticism is self-defeating. In so doing we draw on recent work in the philosophy of language, touching on issues such as the nature of negation, category mistakes, fictionalism, and reductionism.

Apophaticism presents a philosophical approach to God and God-talk that is fundamentally and intriguingly at odds with the one found in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. In contrast with the mainstream 'cataphatic' focus on describing and analyzing God's nature and attributes, apophatic writings take God to elude description and conception. Apophaticism has received a raw deal from analytic philosophers of religion.[1] The works of apophatic writers (or *apophatics* as we will call them) are largely overlooked, despite arguably constituting one of the great medieval traditions of philosophical thought on God, with a significant presence in all three Abrahamic religions. And when apophaticism *is* considered it is usually presented as a strawman, defeating itself by unwittingly conceiving of an ostensibly inconceivable God.[2] We believe that apophaticism, given a proper airing, is a coherent

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[1] By contrast, apophaticism has been very widely discussed by continental philosophers, for example in Jacques Derrida (1992) and Jean-Luc Marion (1995).

[2] See, for example, Alvin Plantinga (2000). By contrast, Jonathan Jacobs (2015) aims for a more sympathetic treatment of divine ineffability, but he ends up looking at a theory somewhat different to apophaticism.

position, valuable both due to its radical contrast with mainstream analytic philosophy of religion, and due to the philosophically important questions which it raises about metaphysics and religious language. This paper aims to be a first step towards putting apophaticism forward as a serious position in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion.

We have two main objectives. The first is to give a clear formulation of apophaticism, and the second is to examine what can and what cannot appropriately be said and thought about God if apophaticism is true. In section 1 we clarify the concept of divine ineffability that is essential to apophaticism, and we introduce what we call the *representation problem*: how can we can say or think anything about God consistently with his being ineffable? The remainder of the paper is dedicated to assessing and developing various ways in which apophatics have responded to this problem. In section 2 we discuss the use of negative sentences to talk about God; in section 3 we consider fictionalist and reductionist responses. Finally, in section 4, we take stock of where this leaves the possibility of legitimate apophatic God-talk.

This is not, of course, a comprehensive treatment of the apophatic position: we will not consider all the permutations of the theory, nor will we get into the arguments in favour of the theory, and we will only focus on one (albeit the most prominent) objection to it: the representation problem. Our approach is historically informed – and, we hope, historically informative – but it is principally driven by two philosophical concerns: to characterize apophaticism as a position, and to set out what apophatics can say about God consistently with that position. We will therefore smooth over some points of historical and theological difference, and ignore certain historical and theological nuances in order to get at what we think is the most philosophically interesting and promising position (or range of positions) available.

I. GOD'S INEFFABILITY & THE REPRESENTATION PROBLEM

Consider the following quotations about divine ineffability which are illustrative of classical and medieval apophaticism:

> Philo of Alexandria (1st century): "[H]e who was conducted by wisdom ... discerns this fact, that God is at a distance from every creature, and that any comprehension of him is removed to a great distance from all human intellect ... God ... may not be named or spoken of, and ... is in every way incomprehensible." (2013, p. 371)

Gregory of Nyssa (4th century): 'The Divine Nature, whatever It may be in Itself, surpasses every mental concept. For It is altogether inaccessible to reasoning and conjecture, nor has there been found any human faculty capable of perceiving the incomprehensible; for we cannot devise a means of understanding inconceivable things.' (2007, p. 146)

Dionysius (5th or 6th century): 'It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding ... Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth – it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial.' (1954, p. 141)

Maximus the Confessor: 'God is one, without beginning, incomprehensible, possessing in his totality the full power of being, fully excluding the notion of time and quality in that he is inaccessible to all and not discernible by any being on the basis of any natural representation ... God can neither conceive nor be conceived but is beyond conception and being conceived.' (1985, pp. 129 & 148)

Moses Maimonides (12th century): '[W]e are only able to apprehend the fact that He is and cannot apprehend His quiddity. It is consequently impossible that He should have affirmative attributes ... in any respect.' (1963, p. 135)

Muḥammad ibn al-ʿArabi (13th century): 'It cannot be known through logical proof ... nor can definition grasp it. For He – glory be to him – is not similar to anything, nor is anything similar to Him. So how should he who is similar to things know Him to whom nothing is similar and Who is similar to nothing?' (2005, p. 33)

Meister Eckhart (14th century): 'God is nameless, because no one can say anything or understand anything about him ... So if I say: 'God is good,' that is not true... And if I say 'God is wise,' that is not true ... If I say: 'God is a being,' it is not true; he is a being transcending being and transcending nothingness.' (1981, p. 206)

In accordance with remarks such as these, the theological secondary literature on apophaticism usually takes its proponents to be committed to some combination of the following three propositions:

(1) We cannot know what God's nature is.

(2) We cannot successfully describe God's nature.

(3) We cannot successfully conceive of God's nature.

Propositions (1), (2), and (3) are then often taken to be closely interrelated. For example, according to Henny Fiskå Hägg:

> What is denied or negated, then, is the possibility both to know and to express the divine nature: God is both greater than, and different from, human knowledge and thought. It also follows that human language is incapable of expressing him. (2006, p. 1)

And Denys Turner, in his seminal theological work *The Darkness of God*, claims:

> It follows from the unknowability of God that there is very little that can be *said* about God: or rather, since most theistic religions have a great number of things to say about God, what follows from the unknowability of God is that we can have very little idea of what all these things said about God *mean*. (2002, p. 20)

It is important to note, however, that there is a significant philosophical gulf between (1) on the one hand, and (2) and (3) on the other. Even if we cannot know that *p*, we may nonetheless be able to mentally or linguistically represent *p*. Contrary to Turner, something being unknowable does not thereby preclude successfully describing or conceiving of it. Something could be unknowable to us (e.g. the weather over London on Feb 1st in the year 23 CE),[3] or to anyone (e.g. the colour of Sherlock Holmes' eyes), consistently with our being able to have thoughts, beliefs, and construct descriptions about it. Someone sympathetic to natural theology, who thought it possible to come up with a believable – and even true – description or conception of God's nature, might agree that we nonetheless cannot *know* that the description or conception is true or accurate. In contrast, if we cannot conceive of *p*, then we cannot even believe *p*, let alone know it. Similarly, albeit more contentiously, it seems that if we cannot linguistically represent *p*, we cannot know *p*.[4] (1), therefore, is a much more modest claim than

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[3] We intend this as an example where the means for finding out the truth of the proposition has been irretrievably lost. It is, therefore, a limitation on our knowledge in principle rather than one that can be overcome by better evidence or further investigation.

[4] One issue here is whether thought requires symbolic representation. Jerry Fodor (1981), for instance, argues that thought takes place in an innate language; in thinking something, a thought is thereby linguistically formulated although the thinker may be unaware of the symbols and grammar of that language. If Fodor is right, then if something cannot be linguistically represented, it follows that it cannot be mentally represented either.

the other two: (2) and (3) each appear to entail (1), but not vice versa. Given these considerations, it seems to us that (1) alone is not sufficient for apophaticism. Rather, it is propositions (2) and (3) which properly capture the radical objectives aimed at by apophatics.[5]

Having characterised apophaticism as consisting of (2) and (3) we must now ask how strong each of those denials is meant to be. One important consideration is that the restrictions on our thought and linguistic powers posited by (2) and (3) should be taken to be modal. That is, the limitations are ones that we are *in principle* unable to overcome, rather than contingent, practical limitations. Being unable to describe God because one has not acquired the relevant linguistic skills, or being unable to think of God because one happens to lack the requisite conceptual sophistication, is not sufficient for (2) or (3) as intended by the apophatics. Apophaticism is not taken to be true by virtue of contingent facts about our circumstances and abilities limitations are not 'merely medical', as Bertrand Russell might have put it (1936, p. 143). Rather, we take (2) and (3) to be saying that there is no extension of our linguistic or intellectual powers that could put us in a position to be able to successfully describe or conceive of God.

If we take the core apophatic claim as being an *in principle* limitation on the describability and conceivability God's nature, this raises the further question of what class of beings this limitation applies to. Does it, for example, apply only to humans or is it a limitation on describability and conceivability *tout court*? Helpfully, a number of apophatic authors discuss the ideas of God that are possessed by angels. In addition to being better informed than us, angels are usually presented as both morally and intellectually superior to humans.[6] The conceptions and descriptions that angels have of God are taken to be as good as it is possible for any

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[5] Medieval apophatics are not always careful in distinguishing between knowing about God and conceiving of him, and thus sometimes talk of our inability to know God when the context makes clear that they have the more radical claim of God's inconceivability in mind. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, for example, says that "all rational beings ... have in them ... a faculty of knowledge, and ... a faculty of love; and God, their maker, is forever beyond the reach of the first of these, the intellectual faculty; but by means of the second, the loving faculty, he can be fully grasped by each individual being" (2001, p. 23). The author thereby conflates the faculty of knowledge with the intellectual faculty, and therefore sometimes expresses the fact that we cannot intellectually grasp or conceive of God by saying that we cannot know him.

[6] See, for example, Aquinas 2006, p. 121.

created being to possess. However, while apophatics often take angels to make judgements about God that are better (in certain respects) than human ones,[7] most apophatics (including the authors cited earlier) take all creatures including angels to be unable to successfully describe or conceive of God. It is this more thoroughgoing version of apophaticism that we will be focussing on, i.e. that there is *no* extension of our descriptive powers or our conceptual capacities that would allow for the representation of what God is like.

Matters become more complicated, however, when we consider whether apophatics think that even *God* can conceive of himself. John Scotus Eriugena answers clearly in the negative: 'How, therefore, can the Divine Nature understand of itself what it is, seeing that it is nothing? ... God does not know of Himself what He is because He is not a 'what', being in everything incomprehensible both to Himself and to every intellect.' (1987, pp. 192-6) Many apophatics, however, seem to dissent from this view. Nicholas of Cusa, for example, writes that: 'God is unknowable either in this world or in the world to come, for in this respect every creature is darkness, which cannot comprehend infinite light, but God is known to God alone.' (1997, pp. 126-7) If God is taken to be an ideal conceiver, surpassing even angels, then (2) and (3) are restrictions on the powers of only created beings rather than limitations on describability and conceivability *per se*. We should not, however, jump to the conclusion that there are two strengths of apophaticism in play. For those authors who say that God understands himself tend to qualify this by adding that God's understanding is qualitatively different to our own. According to Cusa, for instance, God is only 'incomprehensibly understandable' (1997, p. 92). Thus God's 'conceiving' is not an extension of creaturely conceiving, but a different category of thing altogether. In whatever sense God can conceive of or describe himself, then, it is not in our sense of 'conceive' or 'describe'. We therefore take it that paradigmatic apophaticism does not understand (2) and (3) merely relatively, but in terms of God's indescribability and inconceivability *tout court*.[8]

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[7] The judgements need not be representationally more accurate. For instance, angelic thought about God may satisfy superior moral standards to human thought.

[8] It is worth noting that some apophatics take God's indescribability and inconceivability to be grounded in the metaphysical claim that God has no nature at all, or rather, is beyond the having of any nature – as can be seen from the above quotation from Eriugena. In some cases, then, this could be considered a third core element of apophaticism, but we will not deal with it here.

Having characterised apophaticism as requiring (2) and (3), and having clarified how strongly these conditions are taken, how can apophatics consistently engage in discourse about God? This is the 'representation problem'. (2) and (3) claim that God cannot be represented either linguistically or conceptually, so apophatics have to be able to account for how they can engage in God-talk without representing God. A special case of this problem is, of course, how (2) and (3) can *themselves* be believed without self-defeatingly representing God.

Given the difficulty of the representation problem some apophatics go so far as to hint at an eliminativist response. Indeed, apophatic thinking is often presented as a process of progressively rejecting more and more subtle representations of God, requiring both intellectual and moral discipline, portrayed metaphorically as a steep ascent up a mountain. The summit, according to some apophatics, is a relationship with God characterised by ceasing to speak about God altogether. Thus Dionysius writes: 'language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely' (Dionysius 1987, p. 239); and Gregory of Nazianzus: 'let every soul ... reverence in silence only the truth of the Divine Essence (which is) ineffable' (quoted in Eriugena 1987, p.193). However, even those apophatics who sometimes gesture towards silence as an ideal, do not themselves seem to do away with all talk about God[9]. It therefore remains both relevant and pressing to ask: to what extent is continued engagement in religious thought and discourse about God available to apophatics? Answering this question will be the focus of the rest of this paper.

II. TALKING NEGATIVELY

The response to the representation objection that is most commonly associated with apophatics is that of the *via negativa* – a preference for saying what God is not rather than what God is. This approach uses the linguistic device of *apophasis*, which in this context involves speaking of God in sentences that either negate a predicate ascribed to God of the form

(4) God is not *p*.

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[9] Of course, those apophatics most committed to the ideal of silence would be the least likely to have left us books on the subject.

or else use a privative term

(5) God is not-*p*.

typically by constructing an affixal negation (*in-*, *un-*, *-less*) from a predicate expression. For convenience we will call sentences of either of these types *negative sentences* about God.

Negative sentences about God are used extensively by apophatics. The following are some illustrative quotations:

> Dionysius: 'It is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight. It is not in any place and can neither be seen nor be touched. It is neither perceived nor is it perceptible. It suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion.' (1987, pp. 140-1).

> Dionysius: 'It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. ... It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being.' (1987, p. 141)[10]

> Meister Eckhart: 'God is neither good nor better nor best of all.' (1981, p. 257)

> Nicholas of Cusa: 'God is neither nothing nor something.' (1997, p. 212)

> John Scotus Eriugena: '*For* properly speaking there is in Him neither rest nor motion.' (1987, p. 39)

According to Dionysius, 'the way of negation appears to be more suitable to the realm of the divine' (p. 150). Eckhart paraphrases Dionyisus approvingly: 'negations about God are true but affirmations are unsuitable' (1986, p. 70). And Ibn Ṣaddiq endorses the claim that 'It is more correct to reject assertions concerning God than to ascribe anything positive to Him' (2003, p. 122[11]). However, on the face of it, negative sentences about God represent God. So if God cannot be linguistically represented then it seems that there will be no advantage (at least with respect to their being true) in using negative sentences in preference to positive ones.

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[10] Although Dionysius in some cases denies the identification of God with a property, he makes clear that he also intends to deny that God has these properties. For instance, God is not equality and also lacks the property of equality.

[11] This idea is mistakenly attributed to Aristotle by a number of the Jewish medievals (see also, for example, Ibn Pakuda, 2004, p. 134).

2.1. Some important distinctions:
contradictions, contraries, and subcontraries

To get a clearer idea of what apophatics are doing, it is useful to introduce a distinction, given its clearest early articulation by Aristotle,[12] between two sorts of sentence negations: contradictions and contraries. Contradictory sentences are governed by two principles. First, a sentence and its contradictory cannot both be true (the law of contradiction). Second, they cannot both be false (the law of excluded middle). For instance,

6a. God is omnipotent.

6b. It is not the case that God is omnipotent.

are contradictory sentences because they cannot both be true and cannot both be false. Contrary statements, however, are governed by the law of contradiction but not by the law of excluded middle. So while they cannot be jointly true, it is possible for both of them to be false. There are two classes of sentence denials that Aristotle considers that generate contraries rather than contradictories: sentences with non-referring subject expressions and category mistakes. For instance,

7a. The president of England is happy.

7b. The president of England is unhappy.

cannot be true together. However, according to the Aristotelian account, because the president of England does not exist, they are both false. In the following sentences

8a. Red is happy.

8b. Red is unhappy.

the predicate seems to be of the wrong category to describe the subject. They cannot both be true but they are, according to the Aristotelian account, both false. So negations of sentences that make category mistakes, along with negations of sentences with non-referring subjects, can generate contraries. We should note that the status of sentences with vacuous subjects and sentences involving category mistakes are philosophically contentious. For instance, while some agree with Aristotle that category mistakes are false, others, notably Russell (1908), regard them as literally senseless, while Martin (1975) and Thomason

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[12] We will modify Aristotle's treatment to use proposition rather than term logic.

(1972) take them to be meaningful but neither true nor false. We will return to these options later.

So Aristotle presents us with two ways of negating 'God is p'. There is the case – most simply expressed by (4) – where a sentence denies that the predicate p applies to God, yielding a contradictory sentence. There is the case – most simply expressed by (5) – where a predicate incompatible with p is assigned to God (typically one that incorporates a negative component into the predicate expression), yielding a contrary sentence. Given the differences in the logical behaviour of contradictions and contraries, a degree of caution is needed in distinguishing between the superficially similar ways of denying 'God is *p*' given by (4) and (5).[13]

One further distinction is needed. The negation of contrary sentences

8a*. Red is not happy.

8b*. Red is not unhappy.

yield *subcontraries*, which behave in a similar way to contraries except that subcontraries cannot both be false but they can both be true.

The contrary/subcontrary distinction is useful in the following way. In the quotations above and more generally, apophatics are not using negation to contradict sentences about God but, at least in many cases, provide subcontrary pairs or sequences of sentences. For instance, if

9a. God is not being.

9b. God is not non-being.

and

10a. God is not something.

10b. God is not nothing.

involve either category mistakes or are non-referring then, following the Aristotelian account, each pair will be jointly true. That is, they will be

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[13] Although their approaches are in other respects very different, we find a comparable contrast in Russell's distinction between internal and external negation. According to Russell, we can interpret 'The president of England is not happy' in two ways. It could be saying that there is a unique entity that is the president of England who is not happy. In this case the negation is internal to the proposition and has narrow scope, operating on just the predicate expression. This is a contrary to (7a). Alternatively, it might be interpreted as saying that it is not the case that there is a unique entity that is both the president of England and happy. In this case, the negation is external to the proposition and the whole description falls within its scope. This contradicts (7a).

subcontraries rather than contradictories. Now, not all of the negative sentences are combined with denials. For example, Dionysius says both

11a. God is not great.

11b. God is not small.

but 'great' is not the term negation of 'small', since an entity might, for instance, have some intermediate magnitude that is neither great nor small. Whether or not this is a mistake, it seems clear from the context that Dionysius is *not* trying to suggest by this example that God has intermediate magnitude. Presumably he would have no objection to saying

11b*. God is not small and has no intermediate magnitude.

to generate the subcontrary.

Apophatics, therefore, do not in general appear to be affirming contradictory sentences about God. Instead, they are presenting contrary or subcontrary sentences. With these distinctions in place, we will return to the representation problem.

2.2. The representation problem as applied to negative sentences about God

Why might negative sentences about God be preferable to positive ones for an apophatic? As a starting point, let us consider whether there is some systematic difference between what is said by positive and negative sentences about God. There is a long history stretching back to Parmenides and Plato for the view that there an asymmetry between positive and negative sentences, with negative sentences in some way secondary to their positive counterparts. Notably Aquinas takes this view. He proposes that positive sentences signify the ontologically more basic fact of having rather than lacking something, they are epistemologically more basic by signifying composition rather than division, and they have a logical priority. 'With respect to vocal sound, affirmative enunciation is prior to the negative because it is simpler, for the negative enunciation adds a negative particle to the affirmative.' (1962, p. 65) Many apophatics followed this line of thinking. Thus, for example, according to Eckhart, 'privation necessarily follows possession, and negation is based on affirmation' (1986, p. 181), although he does not elaborate further. However, none of these points appear to show that negative sentences are better suited than positive ones for allowing apophatics to consistently talk about an indescribable and inconceivable God. Nor do apophatics

tend to explicitly justify the use of negative sentences with any sustained defence of asymmetricalism. Indeed, Gregory of Nyssa rejects it outright:

> To say that God has no evil in him is the same as calling him good, to confess him as immortal is to say that he lives for ever. We perceive no difference of meaning between these, but mean the same thing by each expression, even though one appears to express a positive thing, the other a negative. (2007, p. 88)

Gregory's first example is unsuccessful – 'not evil' is not equivalent to 'good' since it could also include the state of being neither evil nor good.[14] But his observation that a syntactically negative sentence may express the same thought as a positive one is well taken and presents a problem for asymmetricalism. As Gregory says: 'while the form of the name changes, the devout understanding of the Subject remains consistent.' (2007, p. 88)

Even if there is not a systematic difference in the content of negative sentences as compared to positive ones, are they nonetheless less informative than their positive corollaries? In saying that God is not p, one rejects the positive counterpart – one excludes God's being p – without specifying what the alternative involves. For example, in asserting

12. God does not have a material body.

it seems that the speaker is not thereby committed to a particular account of what God must be like to lack this property; all that it says is that this is *not* what God *is* like.

To the extent that negative sentences about God are less specific about God's nature, then they depend on less specific metaphysical commitments. One reason for using negative sentences, therefore, could be epistemological prudence. Because negative sentences are less informative about God, using negative sentences instead of positive ones reduces the chance of making a mistake. For someone wishing to avoid error in what they say about God, therefore, limiting oneself to negative statements about God looks like a useful tool. However, this is difficult to square with apophaticism. While Eckhart suggests (briefly, and without a defence) that negative sentences are *entirely* uninformative – 'a negative statement provides no truth about the thing to which the

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[14] This point was recognised by Plato (2015, 257B-C): calling something 'not great' does not pick out the opposite of what is great (i.e. what is small) any more than it does objects of an intermediary size.

statement applies'. (1986 n. 178, p. 99) – negative sentences about God do still represent God as being some way or other. If God is not *p*, then God is such that he is not *p*. This may be less informative than a positive sentence about God but it is representational nonetheless. Notably, Maimonides recognises that negative sentences, like positive ones, 'bring about some particularization even if the particularization due to them only exists in the exclusion of what has been negated from the sum total of things that we had thought of as not being negated.' (1963, pp. 134-5)[15] Writing around eight centuries later, A. J. Ayer makes a similar point: 'Why should it not be allowed that the statement that the Atlantic Ocean is not blue is as much a description of the Atlantic as the statement that the Mediterranean Sea is blue is a description of the Mediterranean? ... [T]o say that a description is relatively uninformative is not to say that it is not a description at all.' (1963, p. 47) The epistemic modesty motivation is suitable for someone who thinks that God is very difficult to describe or can be only partially described; it is not appropriate for someone who thinks that God is indescribable. There is no linguistic device, apophasis included, that can make the indescribable describable.

Neither epistemic prudence nor assymetricalism, therefore, look as if they will deliver an account of negative sentences consistent with (2) and (3). There are, however, two other options to consider.

2.3 Metalinguistic negation

One account of negation that has an already established place in the literature on apophaticism is presented by J. P. Williams

> [Neoplatonist] apophasis is a second-order discourse, concerning not just the divine subject, but the discourse which addresses the divine: it generates no statements about God, but statements about theological language. (2000, p. 5)

Williams does not elaborate on how negative sentences that are apparently about God become directed towards religious language. We can, however, understand this account of negation as appealing to a commonplace use of negation – widely discussed in philosophical research on negation – to express an unwillingness to assert a given sentence or class of sentences,

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[15] Though, as might be expected from an esotericist such as Maimonides, he also seems to state the opposite a few pages later: 'negation does not give knowledge in any respect of the true reality of the thing with regard to which the particular matter in question has been negated' (1963, p. 139).

rather than to reject the truth of what is said. This is called *metalinguistic negation*.[16] Negations of conditionals provide a particularly clear range of examples. For a conditional sentence with the form *if p then q*, the negation of it is truth-conditionally equivalent to *p and not-q*. That is,

13. ~$(p \rightarrow q) \equiv p$ & ~q.

However, if we take the conditional (14), it seems that someone who rejects it by asserting (15) need not agree with the conjunction in (16) even though it is truth-conditionally equivalent.

14. If John is given penicillin, he will get better.

15. It is not the case that if John is given penicillin, John will get better.

16. John will be given penicillin and John won't get better.

A plausible explanation of this is that the negation in (15) does not negate the proposition expressed by (14) but instead indicates a disagreement with the assertion of (14). As Grice explains, 'Sometimes the denial of a conditional has the *effect* of a *refusal to assert* the conditional in question' (1989, p. 81). That is, the negation signals a refusal to assert (13) rather than an agreement with (15). As Michael Dummett puts it 'negation might be taken to be a means of expressing an unwillingness to assert 'A'. (1973, pp. 328-30) Here are some other examples:

17. Ben Ward is not a black Police Commissioner but a Police Commissioner who is black. (*New York Times* editorial, 8 January 1983)[17]

18. It's not *possible* that he will win, it is *probable* that he will win.

19. This is not a pair of *pants*, it is a pair of *trousers*.

As with the example of conditionals, negation in these cases is being used to disagree with the assertion of something rather than with the content of what is asserted. In (17), for instance, the negation is not being used to reject the fact that Ben Ward is black and is a Police Commissioner but rather to reject the priority implied by stating these facts in a particular order.

Returning to apophaticism, we can see that it is possible to interpret the negative sentences used by apophatics as employing metalinguistic negation to disagree with the *assertion* of positive sentences about God, rather than using 'ordinary' negation to say that God lacks

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[16] The seminal treatment of this topic is Horn (1989), ch. 6.
[17] Taken from Horn (1989, p. 371).

a certain property. The metalinguistic approach has a couple of significant attractions. First, an apophatic can use metalinguistic negative sentences about God without thereby representing God as lacking a property and thereby falling foul of the representation problem. Rather, the apophatic is rejecting the appropriateness of sentences that represent God. On this account, what is communicated by (9a) is not that it is false that God is being but rather (with a bit of elaboration)

  9b. It is inappropriate to say that 'God is being'.

That is, the point of saying (9a) and other similar sentences is not to offer any insight into God's nature but instead to point up the limits of what we ought to say about God. Subcontraries are being used, on this account, to show that no sentence (negative or positive) is appropriate for representing God.

The second advantage is that metalinguistic negation allows for a consistent statement of the apophatic position itself. For instance, (2) appears problematic if understood as itself saying something about God since it appears both to linguistically represent God and to say that no such representation can be successful. However, understood metalinguistically as saying that it is inappropriate to use sentences that aim to successfully represent God, the position is not self-defeating. Metalinguistic negation, therefore, seems to provide a promising way of understanding the apophatic's position.[18]

Notwithstanding its theoretical advantages, however, the metalinguistic interpretation would make for a highly limited form of apophaticism. Rather than saying that representations of God have mistaken content, apophatics would only be making claims about the impropriety of the use religious language. Some apophatic writings appear sympathetic to a metalinguistic interpretation: according to Eriugena 'that which says: "It is not Truth", clearly understanding, as is right, that the Divine Nature is incomprehensible and ineffable, does not deny that it is, but (denies) that it can properly be called Truth' (1987, p. 49).[19] However, most apophatic authors, Eriugena included, repeatedly contend that various positive claims about God misrepresent God.

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[18] The reason for the impropriety might be – for example – moral or spiritual; they could not, of course, be inappropriate because they are false.

[19] It is interesting to note that there is a group of contemporary descendants of apophaticism – Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion – who seem to embrace the idea that negative sentences about God are actually second-order remarks about what

Indeed, most apophatics are committed to this misrepresentation claim by the arguments which they provide for accepting (2) and (3) in the first place. For example, arguments from God's absolute non-complexity which can be found across Jewish, Christian, and Muslim apophatics, are taken to entail that God actually is indescribable and inconceivable rather than just that it is inappropriate to talk about him in certain ways.[20]

A further problem for the metalinguistic interpretation – at least as a complete account of the apophatic use of negative sentences – is that apophatic writers who use apophasis claim that negative sentences about God are also unsatisfactory and must be rejected:

> Dionysius: 'It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial.' (1987, p. 141)

> Gregory Palamas: 'The excellence of Him Who surpasses all things is not only beyond all affirmation, but also beyond all negation; it exceeds all excellence that is attainable by the mind.' (1983, p. 57)

> Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani: 'Whoever worships God by denying the attributes falls into a hidden anthropomorphism, just as someone who worships Him by affirming them falls into obvious anthropomorphism.' (Quoted in Walker 1993, p. 75)

While some of these comments might be interpreted as metalinguistic denials of metalinguistic denials,[21] it seems more plausible to see them as rejecting positive and negative sentences because they both misrepresent God.

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can and cannot be said about God. Consider, for example, Rush Rhees' remark:' "God is not an object." And this is a grammatical proposition.' (1997, p. 37)

[20] See, for example, Maimonides 1963, Pt I, chaps 51 & 57; Maximus the Confessor, 1985, pp. 143-4; and the pseudepigraphic Muslim treatise *Theology of Aristotle* (quoted in Adamson, 2002, p. 112).

[21] The denials of negations are sometimes seen as irremediably inconsistent and Dionysius' thought has been called 'paradoxical and self-negating.' (Light 1998, pp. 205-6) These comments have also been seen as evidence for apophatics being supporters of dialetheism about religious language (see, for example, Priest 2002, pp. 22-3). Paraconsistent logic is a modification of classical logic that allows for the truth of contradictory sentences; dialetheists believe that some contradictory sentences are actually true. However, as we have noted, we do not find Dionysius saying things like 'God is not-being and God is not non-being'. Nor does he in general endorse contradictory sentences about God.

Is there a different account of negative sentences that can avoid the representation objection while also employing a conventional notion of negation?

2.4 Category mistakes

We have already set the stage for a way of addressing this problem. As we saw in the earlier discussion of contraries and subcontraries, according to the Aristotelian account one of the ways in which subcontrary sentences could be true is if they involve a category mistake. This suggest the following interpretation of negative sentences about God. Suppose that apophatics take greatness, being, order, passion, similarity and *any other* predicate that we may consider, to be categorially inappropriate for God, i.e. as unsuited to God as happiness is to red. (9a) and (9b) are (on the Aristotelian account) true because, if *being* is not a category that applies to God then God is not being and God is also not non-being. Moreover, there is some basis for thinking that at least some apophatics saw claims about God as category mistakes. For instance, according to Maimonides

> even those negations are not used with reference to or applied to Him, may He be exalted, except from the following point of view, which you know: one sometimes denies with reference to a thing something that cannot fittingly exist in it. Thus we say of a wall that it is not endowed with sight. (1963, p. 136, also quoted approvingly by Eckhart 1986, p. 100)

Do negative sentences about God, understood as the denial of category mistakes, avoid the representation problem? The answer to this will hinge on our account of category mistakes. Space precludes our giving a detailed explanation of this topic in this paper. However, even without a full treatment of the topic, we can see the kind of position on category mistakes that apophatics would need to defend.[22]

There are three main position on the status of sentences that commit category mistakes: they are (a) false, (b) lack a truth value, or (c) senseless. Suppose that category mistakes are false (a position defended by Magidor: 2013). So (4) and (5) will both be false. However, it follows that

20. It is not the case that God is *p*

21. It is not the case that God is not-*p*

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[22] For a thorough review of the different theories of category mistakes see Ofra Magidor (2013).

will both be true. As we noted in 3.2, while these negative claims might be less informative than positive ones, they still represent God. The error made in a category mistake is perhaps more serious than a mundane mistake since it betrays a misunderstanding about the essential nature of the thing being described. But learning of such an error is still informative: one finds out, in being told (10a) and (10b) that God does not fit into the same category as other things without being nothing either. If category mistakes are false, therefore, interpreting negative sentences as correcting category mistakes will run into the representation problem. We get to a similar conclusion if category mistakes are neither true nor false (a position adopted by Thomason (1972) and Martin (1975)). If (4) is neither true nor false then (20) will be true, yielding the same problem.

What if category mistakes are literally senseless? Bertrand Russell (1908) thought as much, as did Peter Strawson (1952, pp. 226-7). This also seems to be the most promising account of category mistakes for apophaticism, at least as a way of escaping the representation problem. Its key advantage is that if sentences about God's nature are senseless, then neither stating them nor negating them will represent God; for all these utterances will lack representational content. As such, the representation problem is avoided. There are, however, significant theoretical costs. First, despite its philosophical pedigree, there are serious objections to this account of category mistakes. One problem relates to the compositionality of language. Speakers of languages seem to have the potential to understand indefinitely many sentences, suggesting that the meanings of sentences are composed from the meanings of their parts and grasped by speakers grasping the meanings of constituent expressions. Since we understand the meanings of 'red' and 'happy', and since 'red is happy' appears to be grammatically felicitous, why should we deny that the category mistake is meaningful? Another problem is that 'God is great' and 'Dieu est grand' appear to be synonymous, but this could only be the case if they have the same meaning – entailing that neither is meaningless.[23]

The second cost to the meaningless theory is that it looks very much at odds with what apophatics say. While they say that representations of God are mistaken, that negative sentences about God are preferable to positive ones and often then that the negative sentences should themselves

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[23] For discussion of these objections and a barrage of other problems see Magidor 2013: Ch. 3.

be denied, they do not say that such talk is senseless. It is the inadequacy of meaningful language about God rather than the meaninglessness of such language that most often seems to be being proposed by apophatic writers.

Both category mistakes and metalinguistic negation, therefore, offer theoretical options to apophatics for interpreting negative sentences about God that do not commit the speaker to a position on what God is like. Neither option, however, appears to be endorsed by apophatic writers.

III. TALKING POSITIVELY (OR SEEMING TO DO SO)

Whatever the best interpretation of the apophatics' use of negative language about God, no apophatics we know of limit themselves to only negative sentences. In fact, many apophatics suggest a variety of surprising interpretations of positive sentences about God that neutralise their representational content, at least some of which are usually taken to be more characteristic of a more modern religious antirealism. We will look at two of the main proposals – though they are not the only ones – that we find scattered through a number of apophatic writings, namely fictionalism and reductionism.

3.1. Fictionalism

One way of making statements of the form 'God is Φ' while avoiding the representation problem, is by granting that though these statements do say that God is Φ, they can be used to do something other than to express the belief that God is Φ, without any commitment to God's being Φ. This would be a religious variety of *fictionalism*: the theory that we can legitimately – or even should – engage in a discourse without believing the claims of that discourse. Consider the following comments from Teresa of Avila:

> O God, what must that soul be like when it is in this state! It would fain be all tongue, so that it might praise the Lord. It utters a thousand holy follies, striving ever to please Him Who thus possesses it. (2002, p. 97)

Teresa grants that when the religious person utters such praises as 'God is good' and 'God is wise' they are uttering follies, so she takes these utterances to be making the representational claims that God is

good and that God is wise. The speaker, however, does not utter these sentences to express beliefs about God's nature, but rather, to please God by expressing love for him, which Teresa takes them to be doing by their revelling in God-talk. So without running into the representation problem, a speaker can employ sentences about God, because they are doing so for a purpose other than representing him or expressing beliefs about him.

Gregory of Nyssa suggests a different but still seemingly fictionalist interpretation of claims about God's nature and attitudes. According to Gregory, God 'eludes all attempt at comprehension' (2007, p. 62), and 'all men of sense reckon it is impossible for the ineffable nature to be expressed in the meaning of any words' (ibid, p. 72). Nonetheless, God is variously described in the Bible as rejoicing over his servants, being furious with sinners, being merciful, and the like. Gregory explains this as follows:

> [T]he text informs us in every word of this kind, I believe, that the divine Providence deals with our feebleness by means of our own characteristics, so that those inclining to sin may restrain themselves from evils through fear of punishment, those convicted may not despair when they perceive the opportunity of gaining mercy by change of heart, and those who live rightly may by strictness of conduct take more delight in their virtues, as by their own way of life they give joy to the one who becomes the provider of good things. (ibid, p. 154)

Gregory thus seems to be suggesting that although talk of God's attitudes is strictly false (because it represents God), it can have the pragmatic function of encouraging people to be virtuous and discouraging them from sin. Who exactly are these false statements meant to encourage? Only the unsophisticated masses who do not realise their falsity, or everyone, including the apophatics who understand that they are false? It is not entirely clear from Gregory, though he seems to lean towards the latter option. We might wonder how the use of sentences expressing false beliefs – by people who do not believe them and know them to be false – could possibly influence their behavior for the better, without tempting them to cross the line into belief (even if only intermittent). One answer, suggested by Richard Joyce's fictionalist treatment of ethics (2001), is that by pretending that these sentences are true – by imaginatively engaging in God-talk as one might immerse oneself in a fiction – one can effect

a morally advantageous regulative influence on one's practical thinking and decision making.[24]

Thus Gregory suggests ways of using sentences about God – to express love for God or to encourage moral behaviour – without being committed to their truth or to the belief that God can be represented. It is worth pausing for a moment to consider just how surprising it is to find these positions articulated by medieval philosophical theologians. Fictionalism is generally seen as a modern philosophical theory, and in the philosophy of religion it is usually discussed as a contentious way of responding to atheism. Here we can see that religious fictionalism can serve a different purpose. Rather than legitimizing atheistic engagement in religious discourse and practice for its instrumental value, fictionalism can provide a positive account of the merits of continuing to say and think positive things about God for apophatics who do not deny that there is a God but who find no representation of God's nature to be true.

While fictionalist God-talk avoids the representation problem, there are limits to its usefulness for apophaticism. Specifically, apophatics cannot be fictionalists about (2) and (3) in a way that would help them unless they disbelieve apophaticism! We are therefore still faced with the problem of how apophatics can claim (2) and (3) without falling foul of the representation problem. Fictionalism therefore offers apophatics only a partial solution.

3.2. Reductionism

Another way to engage in religious discourse while avoiding the representation problem is by committing to a reductive account of the meaning of God-talk. The reductive strategy is to find a *reduced* class of statements (in this case ones which are compatible with apophaticism) that give the truth-conditions for statements that seem, on their face, to be about something which is taken to be philosophically contentious (in this case, representations of God). There are at least three different

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[24] Other apophatics – such as Maimonides – have seen false representational beliefs about God's benevolence and justice as being of instrumental moral value not to the apophatics who know that they are false, but rather, only to the unsophisticated masses who do not know that they are false (and who are not able to follow the arguments of the apophatics). As he says, some beliefs expressed in the Bible are "only the means of securing the removal of injustice, or the acquisition of good morals" such as "the belief that God is angry with those who oppress their fellow-men ... or the belief that God hears the crying of the oppressed and vexed." (1904, p. 315)

proposals made by apophatics for what the reduced class might be, namely: (a) negative statements about God, (b) statements about God's actions, and (c) statements about the world. In each of these cases what seem to be positive statements about God's nature, turn out actually to be about something else: about what God is *not* like (rather than what he is like), about what God *does* (rather than what he is), or about the *world* (rather than God).

Because we have already discussed negative statements about God, and because reductions to statements about the world seem to be quite rare, we will focus here on reductions to statements about God's actions. Gregory of Nyssa seems to suggest an idea along these lines in the following passage:

> "[T]he nature of him who Is is ineffable; but he gets his titles from the actions he is believed to perform for our lives ... That this is so, is clearly confirmed by divine scripture through great David, who refers to the divine Nature as it were by special and apt names which are suggested to him by the divine action: 'Pitiful,' he says, 'and merciful is the Lord, patient and rich in mercies.' [Ps. 103:8] What do these words mean? Do they refer to action or to nature? Everyone will agree, it can only be to the action." (2007, pp. 91-2)

The general idea expressed here is spelled out in somewhat more detail by Maimonides, who offers an example of this kind of reductive account for apparently positive descriptions of God:

> "Whenever any one of His actions is perceived by us, we ascribe to God that emotion which is the source of the act when performed by ourselves, and call Him by an epithet which is formed from the verb expressing that emotion. We see, e.g., how well He provides for the life of the embryo of living beings; how He endows with certain faculties both the embryo itself and those who have to rear it after its birth, in order that it may be protected from death and destruction, guarded against all harm, and assisted in the performance of all that is required [for its development]. Similar acts, when performed by us, are due to a certain emotion and tenderness called mercy and pity. God is, therefore, said to be merciful ..." (1904, p. 76)

Thus, positive sentences of the form 'God is Φ' are reduced to sentences of the form 'God performed action Ψ', where Φ is the quality that we would usually attribute to a human agent if that agent were to perform action Ψ. It follows that 'God is Φ' is not made true by a fact about God's

nature but by a fact about his actions.

Religious reductionism has a longer pedigree than fictionalism,[25] though despite this it is rarely acknowledged by analytic philosophers of religion to have a place in the works of important philosophical-theologians in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

One challenge levelled at religious reductionists is why they should continue to speak the way that they do, rather than simply using the reduced class of sentences. That is, if the truth-conditions of apophatics' sentences about God's nature are determined by God's actions *rather than his nature*, why do apophatics not simply speak explicitly about God's actions rather than continuing to talk in terms of God's nature? Why do apophatics insist on talking in such a misleading manner? One justification that apophatics could give for preferring to talk in terms of God's nature, could parallel the pragmatic considerations we saw underlying Gregory of Nyssa's fictionalism (in sec 3.1). That is, reductionist apophatics might consider it to be morally beneficial that actional facts are expressed by means of sentences whose face-value sense is that of standard representational claims about God, because using sentences which engage in a face-value story about a God who is just and merciful – even without committing to the truth of such claims when interpreted at face-value – might help spur its users to greater morality.[26]

Even if the reduction of apparently positive God-talk to statements about God's actions is successful as a reductive theory, it must still be asked whether or not it avoids the representation objection. One problem is that acting involves an agent and it is not clear whether it is possible for what is indescribable and inconceivable to be an agent. One radical response to this concern is to avoid it by reducing sentences about God to statements about natural occurrences in the world rather than to statements about God's actions. In this way apparently representative statements about God have truth conditions which do not involve God at all, and therefore completely avoid the representation problem. It is possible that Maimonides suggests a move like this,[27] but it does not seem to be a common one.

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[25] See Scott 2013, chaps 9 & 14.

[26] There are, of course, many other objections to religious reductionism. For an overview see Scott 2013, pp. 120-3.

[27] See his 1904, Part I, chap 56.

As with the fictionalist proposal, however, it seems that reduction to actions will not be able to account for (2) and (3) themselves. Most fundamentally because it is the non-reduced truth of those statements that motivates a reductionist interpretation of other God-talk in the first place. But also because it is far from clear what statements about God's actions (2) or (3) could plausibly be reduced to. So – as we found with fictionalism – reductionism offers at best a limited response to the representation problem.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE APOPHATIC PROCESS

Where does all this leave the apophatic with regard to God-talk that avoids the representation problem? We have seen that fictionalism avoids the representation problem in most cases, but that it falls down when it comes to the special cases of (2) and (3) themselves. To patch this problem, could apophatics mix-and-match strategies? For example, perhaps the metalinguistic interpretation could be applied specifically to (2) and (3) so they are understood as statements about the propriety of representational talk about God, rather than as self-defeating statements about God's indescribable and inconceivable nature. Thus, in saying (2), for example, one would be communicating that it is inappropriate to try to describe God. The problem here, as we noted earlier, is that the merely metalinguistic interpretation of (2) and (3) seems to undermine the reasons that apophatics have to endorse apophaticism in the first place. For most apophatics, their position is motivated by the concern that representations of God fail in a systematic way: they are not merely inappropriate, they are in error. How can they say this, though, without undermining their own position?

There is, however, a different way of bringing together apophatic concerns about the truth of representations of God with a metalinguistic reading of (2) and (3). Suppose that apophaticism begins as a process of religious engagement and refinement in which successive attempts to represent God's nature, however sophisticated they may be, are each found to be inadequate.[28] Apophatics, engaged in this process, progressively reject each representation of God that they consider. Now, when the apophatic considers

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[28] For a more detailed discussion of this process see Scott (2013): the 'Cartesian' option discussed in Chapter 2 offers another way to escape the representation problem.

22. We can successfully describe God's nature

23. We can successfully conceive of God's nature

what are they to conclude? If they say that (22) and (23) are false then (given certain assumptions about what it is to describe or conceive of God's nature) then the claims will be true, leading to a self-defeating position. However, given that they take there to be such widespread error in any representation of God that is not self-defeating, (22) and (23) are inappropriate things to say and could reasonably be denied metalinguistically. On this account, it is because (22) and (23) is among the very few sentences about God that cannot be false that (22) and (23) should be metalinguistically denied. This radical account of divine ineffability, therefore, is not hoist by its own petard. Of course, whether the medieval apophatics would take this particular mix-and-match solution to accurately capture their own positions, or whether they would be willing to embrace it in order to avoid the representation problem, is another matter.

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DESIRING THE HIDDEN GOD:
KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT BELIEF

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Abstract. For many people, the phenomenon of divine hiddenness is so total that it is far from clear to them that God (roughly speaking, the God of Jewish and Christian tradition) exists at all. Reasonably enough, they therefore do not believe that God exists. Yet it is possible, whilst lacking belief in God's reality, nonetheless to see it as a possibility that is both realistic and attractive; and in this situation, one will likely want to be open to the considerable benefits that would be available if God were real. In this paper I argue that certain kinds of desire for God can aid this non-believing openness. It is possible to desire God even in a state of non-belief, since desire does not require belief that its object exists. I argue that if we desire God in some particular capacity, and with some sense of what would constitute satisfaction, then through the desire we have knowledge – incomplete yet vivid in its personal significance – about the attributes God would need in order to satisfy us; thus, if God is real and does have those attributes, one knows something about God through desiring him. Because desire does not require belief, neither does the knowledge in question. Expanding on recent work by Vadas and Wynn, I sketch the epistemology of desire needed to support this argument. I then apply this epistemology to desire for God. An important question is how one might cultivate the requisite kinds desire for God; and one way, I argue, is through engaging with certain kinds of sacred music. I illustrate desire's religiously epistemic power in this context, before replying to two objections.

I. TYPES OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS AND FRAMING THE ARGUMENT

Two problems have been called 'the problem of divine hiddenness'. One is the widespread non-belief in God's existence among those who are not resistant to relationship with God, which has been used, primarily by John Schellenberg, to argue that God as traditionally conceived

does not exist. The other 'problem of divine hiddenness' is God's non-manifestation to believers. The first is an evidential problem for theists in general: the fact that there are non-resistant people who don't believe in God's existence is taken as evidence of his non-existence. The second is a spiritual problem for theists who, at least at times, do not seem to experience God.

My focus is different again. I am interested in a particular kind of cognitive and affective situation: a specific kind of situation within the broad kind that concerns Schellenberg. The broad kind is that of someone for whom it is far from clear that the God of Jewish and Christian tradition exists, and who therefore does not *believe* he exists. Within this, the *specific* kind of situation that interests me is of someone who, whilst uncertain over God's reality, nonetheless sees God's existence as a live hypothesis (in William James' sense)[1] and even an attractive one. Such a person will want to be open to the inestimable benefits that would be available if God *were* real (i.e., be able to receive and live out those benefits), and I shall argue that certain forms of belief-less *desire* for God can play a role in this. If God is real, then one can know about him *in* desiring him. Rightly ordered desire can thereby start to familiarise the desirer with God's nature, direct her towards him, and propel her onwards in the spiritual quest.

Thus, we are concerned with the possibility of God's reality: specifically, how one's desire for God can help one to be open to benefits that would be available if he were real. Since Schellenberg's divine hiddenness argument seeks to dispense with the possibility of God's reality, I'll proceed on the contentious assumption that the argument is flawed.[2] But even if non-resistant non-belief turns out *not* to be evidence

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[1] A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed'; it makes an 'electric connection with [one's] nature' and 'scintillate[s] with ... credibility'. William James, 'The Will to Believe', in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York, NY: Longmans Green and Co, 1897), p. 2.

[2] The general shape of Schellenberg's argument, and of my case against it, are as follows. Schellenberg argues that if God – characterised as unsurpassably loving – existed, then anyone who tried to have a personal relationship with him would *at that time* be able to do so, and would therefore at that time believe he exists. But some people try to have a personal relationship with God, yet do not believe God exists; therefore, God does not exist. See J. L. Schellenberg, 'Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy', in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*, ed. by Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 13–32 (the version consulted here is an online manuscript, accessed 4th April 2016, http://www.jlschellenberg.com/

against God's existence, many are still left with insufficient reason to believe. If 'doxastic divine hiddenness' is not an evidential problem for theists, it is still a spiritual problem for those interested in religious belief but unable to believe, since on the face of it, it is hard to see how one who does not believe in God's existence might remain open to the benefits that would be available if he were real.

As a way out of this problem, I submit that it is indeed possible to cultivate some amount of openness to God without believing he exists. One can desire God without belief in this sense, since in general it is possible to desire something without believing it exists. In what follows I'll argue that under certain conditions, one can know *in* desiring God something of what he would be like in satisfying the desire; thus, if God *is* real and *would* satisfy the desire, one knows something about God in this capacity, where this knowledge is *available even in the absence of satisfaction* and is therefore imbued with a certain kind of existential significance. (Note that I do not say the desire is *evidence* for God's reality; rather, it is a way of knowing about God *if* he is real.) The desire thus helps establish an epistemic and affective framework for seeking God. My claim therefore forms part of a wider suggestion to those in the situation I have described: engage non-doxastically in religious practice – not, as Pascal urged in the context of his 'wager', to acquire beliefs that one already wants to hold,[3] but rather to give one's awareness the chance to shift in ways perhaps unforeseeable.

When I come to discuss desire-based knowledge about God, I will do so in the particular context of sacred music. Sacred music has the power

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uploads/8/5/6/1/8561683/divine_hiddenness_and_human_philosophy.pdf). I contend that the existence of an unsurpassably loving God *is* compatible with non-belief among those who try for a relationship with him. We'd *expect* God to seek relationship with everyone – thus enabling belief in every non-resistant person – *in this life*, since we think *we* would in his situation. But unsurpassable love only requires God to seek relationship *ultimately* with everyone, even if only after death, thus *ultimately* enabling belief in every non-resistant person – which for all we know may be the case. There may be reasons incomprehensible to us as to why, for some non-resistant people, God is open to full relationship only in the afterlife. He might therefore prevent such people from believing in his existence during their earthly lives. If we cannot comprehend why God wouldn't be open to full relationship with some people in this life, then non-resistant non-belief and non-relationship are *surprising* given his existence. But things that are surprising given God's existence are compatible with his existence, since we cannot expect to know everything about his workings.

  [3] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. by A. J. Krailsheimer, revised edition (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 124–5, no. 418.

to move us profoundly – something often true even of non-believers.[4] One way it can do this for non-believers is by eliciting desire for God, since desire does not require belief that its object exists. There are many sacred works whose music and text can elicit desire for God, and I'll discuss one especially powerful example: Henry Purcell's anthem *Hear My Prayer, O Lord*. I'll argue that by eliciting a desire for God that satisfies certain conditions, sacred music can engender the kind of desire-based knowledge about God that I've mentioned, which does not require belief in God's reality.

II. DESIRE AS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE DESIRED

To show that religious desire can play the role I have outlined, I'll first discuss some non-religious desires, highlighting how they enable knowledge about their objects. Non-religious examples will clarify the epistemically important features of desire, since these features are more clear-cut in such cases than in religious contexts. Once we're clear on the phenomenology and conditions of desire-based knowledge as I present it, we'll turn to their religious application.

We can start with an observation made by Melinda Vadas: desire is both a *present* affect and a *projection* of affect, which are phenomenologically inseparable. In desiring something, I predict I will feel a certain way if satisfied.[5] Mark Wynn develops this insight in relation to the desire for musical resolution, pointing out that here the desire itself gives the desirer knowledge about its object by casting the mind forwards:

> on account of its felt recognition of the tension, the mind is cast forward, in desire, to an anticipated moment of 'resolution' ... the character of this resolution is grasped not musicologically, or in purely auditory terms (after all, it is not available to be heard as yet), but *by way of the felt yearning or longing* which points ... towards what is required if a resolution of this particular musical tension is to be achieved.[6]

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[4] As David Pugmire observes, 'Sacred music seems to have a surprising power over unbelievers ... to ply them ... with what might be called devotional feelings.' See David Pugmire, 'The Secular Reception of Religious Music', *Philosophy* 81, no. 1 (2006), 65.

[5] Melinda Vadas, 'Affective and Non-Affective Desire', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 45, no. 2 (1984), 276–7.

[6] Mark Wynn, *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding: Integrating Perception, Conception and Feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 106 (emphasis added).

In feeling the desire, one is aware of how a satisfying musical resolution would sound. The desire therefore brings with it a kind of knowledge of the resolution's nature before it happens.

Let's look more closely at this sort of experience. The first thing to notice is that the desire for musical resolution is for something *in a particular capacity* – for a chord or note in the capacity of resolving musical tension. The knowledge the desire enables in Wynn's example is knowledge of what something would be like in the capacity of providing satisfaction. With this established, I'll now turn to another form of desire: desire for food. As certain Biblical passages highlight, this can be phenomenologically similar to the desire for God, and it can thus help us develop an epistemology of desire applicable to God.[7] My concern here is the desire for some *particular* kind of food rather than general hunger; and although Biblical hunger-based analogies for desiring God relate more to the *general* desire for sustenance or nourishment than to desires for particular foods, these need not be distinct. This is obvious in the case of food (a desire for a particular food can be a desire for nourishment), but it is also true of desire for God: desiring God in some particular capacity can be seen as desiring some particular aspect of his nourishment or sustenance. Thus, Biblically depicted hunger for God can be phenomenologically similar to the desire for food I use in developing my epistemology.

The desire I have in mind, then, is for some specific food or other. We have all found ourselves in the mood for a particular food – a buttery cinnamon bagel, a juicy strawberry, or whatever it might be. Desiring food in this way, one senses what would constitute satisfaction – including tasting the food's flavour and feeling its texture and temperature in one's mouth. Through this sense as experienced with the desire, one can 'practically taste' the food in question, and this enables knowledge of the kind Wynn describes: the aspects of the food that one knows

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[7] The analogy between hungering for food and desiring God is highlighted at certain points in the Bible. In the Old Testament, see for instance Amos 8:11: "'Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord God, "when I will send a famine on the land – not a famine of bread ... but of hearing the words of the Lord ... '" And in the New Testament, John's Gospel is especially noteworthy for its language of hunger and food regarding God. See Jesus' 'I am the bread of life' address in John 6:22–59, which recapitulates and extends the theme, from the book of Exodus, of the bread that comes from heaven. Biblical translations (except for that used in Purcell's piece to be discussed later) are from the English Standard Version Anglicised.

about through desiring it are those that would bring about what, one senses, satisfaction would involve – for instance, its flavour, texture, and temperature. A vivid example of this can be found in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. In one scene, the protagonist Levin has returned from a hunting trip 'tired and hungry', only to find that his companions have finished off all the provisions. The passage continues, 'Levin had been dreaming so specifically of pirozhki [stuffed buns] that, as he approached their quarters, he could already feel their smell and taste in his mouth'.[8] In the event, Levin does not have the satisfaction of tasting the pirozhki; yet his knowledge of their smell and taste is certainly heightened by his desire for them. We see, then, that desiring to eat a particular food can give the desirer knowledge of what it would be like in the capacity of providing satisfaction. Moreover, because of its inherent sense of lack, this knowledge involves an especially clear recognition of the food's importance to oneself as the desirer.

Now clearly one's sense of what would satisfy the desire is based on past experience: one cannot imagine eating a particular food if one has no experience along those lines. But one need not have experienced anything *exactly like* the projected satisfaction: to imagine what it would be like, it is enough to have had experience *somewhat like* it. I have eaten mango, dark melted chocolate, and solid mint chocolate all separately, but I have never eaten mango covered in melted dark, mint chocolate. Nonetheless, I desire this combination; if I think of it, I can form a sense of how it would taste and feel in my mouth. This sense of what would constitute satisfaction is based on my imaginative powers and an amalgamation of memories, and so the example shows that desire-based knowledge can be rooted in experience merely analogous to whatever would constitute satisfaction. This is important for knowing about *God* through desiring him, since in many cases one will not have fully experienced the satisfaction from him for which one yearns.

It is worth supplementing this account with another kind of desire that shares phenomenological features with desire for God: romantic desire. Like desire for God, this is felt towards a person and would be satisfied by something more than sense experience (even if satisfaction were to come *through* sense experience). Romantic desire is another kind that can give the desirer knowledge as I have been describing it.

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[8] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, revised edition (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 596.

Its affectivity permeates our concepts of the attributes through which (we sense) we would be satisfied. For instance, our notion of 'intimately loving and supportive' acquires a hue of emotional significance in light of our desire and our sense of what would constitute satisfaction: we know how these attributes matter to us in a romantic context. And our knowledge of what the attributes would be in contributing to our satisfaction is thus deepened.

We can now state the conditions for the desire-based knowledge I've described. First, the desire must be for something in a particular capacity; hence, the knowledge is of what something would be like in the capacity of providing satisfaction. Second, one needs some sense of what would constitute satisfaction; and the aspects of the desire's object that one knows about through the desire are those that would bring about this projected satisfaction. And third, in order to have this sense, one must have experienced at least something like the projected satisfaction. Note that belief in the existence of what one desires is not needed for any of these conditions. The knowledge may take the propositional form, 'if x existed, x would be such-and-such in satisfying my desire', where 'such-and-such' denotes attributes grasped in terms of their importance to the desirer.

With these conditions in mind, we can now turn to desire for God.

III. KNOWING ABOUT GOD THROUGH DESIRE: A MUSICAL EXAMPLE

Desire for God, like other desires, can come in degrees of specificity; and it should now be clear that to enable knowledge about God in the way described, a desire must be rather specific. Therefore, to shed light on desire's religiously epistemic power along the lines we've explored, we must consider specific forms of desire for God; and I'll now consider how one such form of desire can yield a particular content of theistic knowledge. What I say will illustrate how desire can work epistemically in a religious context, and the general epistemic components would therefore apply to many other specific forms of religious desire.

One kind of experience that can elicit a longing for God is engagement with sacred music. I do not claim that *all* sacred music does so; such music can express and elicit many affective states. But I take it that one natural response to sacred music is a longing for the fullness of that transcendence at which it so often seems to hint. This is because of

music's capacity for beauty, and also because of how it can combine with text to achieve nuanced and specific expression: through presenting in a certain way a text that *expresses* a specific form of desire for God, music can *elicit* a specific form of desire in the listener. I'll now briefly consider the epistemic capacity of the desire for God in one especially powerful sacred anthem: the desperate cry of Purcell's *Hear My Prayer, O Lord*.[9] The listener's response I'll describe is simply an example of the religious desire that sacred music may plausibly elicit, in order to illustrate music's ability to elicit desire for God, and desire's ability to yield knowledge about God.

The text of the piece opens Psalm 102: 'Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my crying come unto thee'. Purcell's extraordinary music, in its slow build to a final, anguished climax, combines with the text to express a heart-rending longing for God in human distress – i.e., for God in the capacity of compassionately hearing and supporting. The piece does not *elicit* this precise yearning in the listener, since it cannot bring about the distress that is central to such yearning (one would hope not, at any rate). However, it can elicit a corresponding desire. Empathising with the psalmist, one recognises one's own capacity to reach in desperate situations for 'something more'; and, given that this recognition is brought on by a piece of Christian sacred music, one will likely think of this 'something more' as the God portrayed in the piece – the God of Jewish and Christian tradition. The listener's response I have in mind, then, is an *analogue* of desperation: by recognising our capacity for desperation before God, we experience something of that desperation without feeling it fully. This is possible because neither Purcell's music nor the psalmist's text refers to any unfortunate circumstance.[10] Although the piece expresses distress

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[9] There are recordings readily available online, for example at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8E0dt0soWc (accessed 4th April 2016).

[10] For music's inability to refer to specific kinds of circumstance, see, e.g., Aaron Ridley, *Music, Value and the Passions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 110–13. The wider context of Ridley's view is an account of how music can be expressive of affective states, known as the 'resemblance theory': according to this account, music is expressive of affective states by resembling human expressive behaviour – particularly voice and movement. See ibid., chap. 4; and see also James O. Young, *Critique of Pure Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 15–26, for an array of psychological evidence in support of the theory. However, regardless of whether or not one endorses the resemblance theory, it is hard to see how Purcell's music, or any other music, can refer to any particular kind of circumstance; and, given that the text of the piece clearly does not do so either, the piece as a whole cannot refer to any unfortunate circumstance.

and thus *implies* some unfortunate circumstance, it is perfectly possible to listen to the piece and not have any misfortune called to mind. Thus, unlike true desperation, the analogue of desperation before God that Purcell's piece can elicit is not felt *about* any unpleasant circumstance, and is therefore not itself unpleasant.

In this way, without feeling the full force of the psalmist's desperation, one grasps enough of it to form some sense of what would satisfy it – based on past experience of that satisfaction or on analogous experience (typically from interpersonal relationships, where another human being has provided comfort and support in a time of distress). Satisfaction here – an answer to the desperation in Purcell's piece – would involve a profoundly changed, hopeful perspective, a sense of widened possibilities. The attributes God would need for effecting this include deep resourcefulness – enabling him to see hope in an apparently hopeless situation – and the power to convey this hope lovingly to the sufferer. Or to use Rowan Williams' words, in order to satisfy the desperation in Purcell's piece, God would need the power to '[open] the door to a future even when we can see no hope'. It would have to be the case that 'there is nowhere God is absent, powerless or irrelevant; no situation in the universe in the face of which God is at a loss ... God always has the capacity to do something fresh and different, to bring something new out of a situation'.[11] Through desiring God in the way I have described, then, one's notions of attributes such as 'deeply resourceful', 'loving', and 'supportive' acquire a hue of emotional significance in light of the desire and the sense of what would constitute satisfaction: one knows how those attributes matter to oneself in a religious context. And one thereby knows with particular existential sharpness something of what God's nature would be in satisfying the yearning, a sharpness heightened by the lack of God's tangible presence at that time. Thus, if God is real and has that nature, one knows something about God through desiring him.

IV. TWO OBJECTIONS

Objection 1: Can we sense what divine satisfaction would involve without any past experience of it?

I said that in having some sense of what it would be like to be satisfied in the

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[11] Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2007), pp. 44, 16.

psalmist's desperate yearning for God, one can refer to past experiences of one's own that were *analogous* to that satisfaction – notably from interpersonal relationships, where another human provided comfort and support in a time of distress. But it might be objected: can we really have, on the basis of our worldly experience, any sense of what would constitute *divine* satisfaction, and thus knowledge of what God would be like in granting it? Indeed, this objection might be applied not just to the desiring response to Purcell's piece described above, but to desire for God in general. In support of this attack, one might refer to what have become known as 'transformative experiences', roughly characterisable for our purposes as experiences that effect changes in the subject – changes that, in at least some cases, could not have happened in any other way. In a recent paper, L. A. Paul has argued that one such kind of experience is that of having a child; more specifically, this is both *epistemically* and *personally* transformative.[12] That is, the experience of having a child gives a person knowledge of *what it is like* to have a child, knowledge unavailable to one who remains childless; moreover, it radically changes what it is like to be the person in question.[13] Importantly, there are no other experiences that, were one to have them, would allow one to project forward with any accuracy to a sense of what it would be like to have a child of one's own. Any analogous experience one might have (such as looking after other children) is simply not similar enough.[14]

But (the objector might continue), isn't an experience of God similar in this way to that of having a child? The philosopher Thomas Morris no doubt speaks for many believers when he writes that 'the Christian faith ... has on occasion turned my little world upside down.'[15] Surely it is impossible, before experiencing God in such a radically transformative way, to know anything of what it will be like? After all, such an experience is a complete re-ordering of one's priorities, and of where one's worth as a person seems to originate (the experience will likely be *diachronic*, developing over time). It is, so to speak, the inhabiting of a different paradigm, which gives other experiences a significance they would

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[12] L. A. Paul, 'What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting', *Res Philosophica* 92, no. 2 (2015), see esp. pp. 153–62.

[13] Ibid., pp. 156–7.

[14] Ibid., p. 161.

[15] Thomas V. Morris, 'Suspicions of Something More', in *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason*, ed. by Thomas V. Morris (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 8–9.

not otherwise have had. How, then, could anything prior to such an experience of God give a clue as to what it would be like? And to round off the objection, we can situate any experience that seems to come from God – including satisfaction of the desire expressed in Purcell's piece – within this understanding of what it is to experience God. If, so our objector will claim, the profoundly changed, hopeful perspective that would satisfy the psalmist's yearning seems to come from *God*, then it will get whatever significance it has from a wider conception of God's priorities and of how they relate to one's own life. But if one has not already experienced (or seemingly experienced) these things, then one cannot begin to conceive of them – and this makes it impossible to conceive of what it would be to have a changed perspective that seems to come from God, and which satisfies the kind of desperation expressed in Purcell's piece. If one has not had a transformative theistic experience, then one cannot form any remotely accurate sense of what the satisfaction of the psalmist's desire would be like.[16]

To this objection, we can reply as follows. According to a prominent characterisation in the Christian tradition of how experiences of God relate to other experiences, there *are* experiences that can help one to form a somewhat accurate sense of what it would be like to experience God in various ways. This way of thinking has its roots in the Bible, for example in the first Johannine epistle's affirmation that 'love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.'[17] And we find similar ideas elsewhere – Aquinas, for instance, stating that 'we know [God] accordingly as He is represented in the perfections of creatures.'[18] In short, the idea is that from our engagement with others, we can know to some extent what it would be like to relate to God. Moreover, L. A. Paul's example shows that this includes knowledge of what it is like to be personally transformed, in ways that are analogous to the transformations in the life of a believer – such as having one's priorities re-ordered and having another person at the centre of one's life. Having a child is one example, but there are of course others, such as getting married.

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[16] I thank Joshua Cockayne and Amber Griffioen for raising this objection.

[17] 1 John 4:7.

[18] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, online (Kevin Knight, 2008), I, Q13, A2, ad 3, accessed 5th April 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/index.html.

When one engages with the 'live hypothesis' of God's existence within this mode of thinking, the following line of reasoning becomes apposite. If (a) we can know something of what relationship with God is like through our relationships with other people, and if (b) we desire God in a capacity somewhat similar to the ways in which we have experienced interpersonal relationships, then we can know, based on our experience of the world and an imaginative leap, something of what God would be like in satisfying our desires for him. To take the Purcell case: we know that in satisfying our desire for a compassionate presence, humans are loving, supportive, and resourceful, opening up possibilities for hope where we saw none; and we are also familiar with the relational context of the person's concern for us, which gives this changed, hopeful perspective its significance. If we combine our experience of human love, support, and resourcefulness with the idea of God as *infinitely* resourceful (we might see this as an aspect of his omnipotence), then we can form some sense of what it would be like to be on the receiving end of God's resourcefulness – for instance, by imagining having hope opened up for us where no human being could have done so. And to imagine this is just to imagine what it would be like to experience this infinite resourcefulness – i.e., to imagine something of what this infinite resourcefulness is like. If one does this in the midst of a desire for God that is centred on such resourcefulness, then one's (partial) knowledge of what it would be like to experience it will be shot through with personal, emotional significance in the way already described. It is worth stressing once more that none of this presupposes any *belief* in the reality of such divine resourcefulness. The desire-based knowledge may take the propositional form, 'if God existed, God would be infinitely resourceful in satisfying my desire', where 'infinitely resourceful' denotes a divine attribute grasped in terms of its special importance to the desirer.

Objection 2: Isn't this all just wishful thinking?

Even if it is possible, without past experience of divine satisfaction, to have a sense of what that satisfaction would be like, there remains another danger. For couldn't this all be just so much wishful thinking? If one has a desire that is directed at God as one conceives of him, along with a sense of what would constitute satisfaction and resultant, 'existentially sharp' knowledge of what God would be like in granting that satisfaction, couldn't this simply be a matter of knowing how one

would *like* God to be in satisfying one's desire, with no correspondence to God's actual nature if he is real?[19]

In order for a desire to enable the kind of knowledge described here about a God who were real, that desire's satisfaction would need to be something that such a God would bring about: in other words, the desire would need to be rightly ordered towards God. It is true, of course, that desire can go wayward, and this is perhaps especially so of desire for God: here there is an ever-present risk of '[using] God to fill the gaps in our needs and preferences'[20] – a risk of forming ideas about God based on what we *think* he ought to do for us (one might, for instance, desire success, and take God to be one who would grant such a desire).

Part of the point in discussing Christian sacred music was to show one way of ordering one's desires towards things that God, as conceived in the Christian tradition (including its roots in the Hebrew Bible), could be hoped to grant if he were real. As we have seen, because of its capacity to shape a desire with both a specific affective colour and the conceptual content of the text, music is well placed to do this. And in general, one can engage in the Church's music and liturgy, as well as in other practices such as regular meditation or prayer; and this can all happen alongside continued theological reflection on God's nature in light of certain core, definitional divine attributes and the experiences of the tradition's 'cloud of witnesses'. If one does this with a degree of fruitfulness, then there is some hope that one will come to have desires whose satisfaction really would be granted by the God to whom all this engagement points; and these desires would thereby be focused on God as he has been characterised within the tradition in its more spiritually mature forms. The knowledge resulting from such desires would then be about *this* sort of God – and it is this sort of knowledge, I take it, that one would be pursuing in the situation I outlined at the start of the paper, in which the existence of such a God is a live hypothesis.

V. CONCLUSION: DIVINE HIDDENNESS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR SEEKING

I started by describing the sort of situation that concerns me in which God seems hidden: that of not being persuaded of the truth of a given

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[19] My thanks go to Sameer Yadav for raising this objection.
[20] Williams, *Tokens of Trust*, p. 157.

theistic worldview because one does not see enough evidence for it, but of nonetheless being interested in that worldview and wanting to remain open to the potential benefits that would flow from its truth. I also said that if God is real, then desire-based knowledge about him can further this openness by establishing an *epistemic and affective framework* for seeking him. How does this claim relate to the foregoing exploration of religious desire? Through the desiring response to Purcell's piece that I described, one knows something of what God would be like if he were to satisfy the desire (the epistemic framework). The existential significance that permeates this knowledge and enriches one's concepts of the relevant divine attributes will draw one into seeking God more than a thinner understanding of those attributes would. The spiritual quest has personal import (the affective framework). The desperate yearning of Purcell's piece is one of many different kinds of longing for God; and we can note the power of sacred music to elicit a huge variety of them. Other forms of desire will enable knowledge about different divine attributes depending on what would constitute satisfaction, and will frame one's religious engagement accordingly. It should be clear, then, that desire for God in its various forms has a tremendous capacity to ignite, shape, and sustain a journey of religious openness. Because one can desire God without believing in his existence, this journey, and the desire-based knowledge that fuels it, are available even to those from whom God seems too hidden for belief to be a possibility.[21]

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEEP CONNECTION BETWEEN PROBLEMS OF EVIL AND PROBLEMS OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

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Abstract. In the literature on the subject, it is common to understand the problem of divine hiddenness and the problem of evil as distinct problems. Schellenberg (1993, 2010) and van Inwagen (2002) are representative. Such a sharp distinction is not so obvious to me. In this essay, I explore the relationship between the problem(s) of evil and the problem(s) of divine hiddenness.

I. INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS AND PUZZLES

In the literature on the subject, it is common to understand the problem of divine hiddenness and the problem of evil as distinct problems. Schellenberg (1993, 2010) and van Inwagen (2002) are representative. Such a sharp distinction is not so obvious to me. In this essay, I explore the relationship between the problem(s) of evil and the problem(s) of divine hiddenness. The lens through which I will view these two problems is a certain distinction between a problem and a puzzle.[1] It behooves me therefore to say a few words about how I am thinking about this distinction for the purposes of this meditation. In broad terms, I will be exploring dependency relationships between the two purportedly separate issues. I will not do very much *with* my conclusions here. Rather, I am exploring a path for further research. I will only sketch the outlines of one possible application. I will be invoking a "move" (for lack of a better word) mentioned by William Rowe very early in the

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[1] I have in mind a different contrast between these terms than, say Ross (2002). Gellman (1992) also somewhat contrasts puzzlement and problematicity in a different way that I do here.

contemporary discussion of the problem of evil but little discussed in the meantime. Rowe calls it the 'Moore shift.'[2]

Because my thoughts on this subject stem from thoughts on the epistemological puzzle of skepticism, I will briefly discuss it. To that end, consider the following argument.

Skeptical Argument 1

Our evidence supports our ordinary beliefs only if our evidence discriminates between[3] the contents of those beliefs and skeptical hypotheses.

(1) Our evidence does *not* discriminate between the contents of our ordinary beliefs and skeptical hypotheses.

(2) Therefore, our evidence does not support our ordinary beliefs.

This is a very plausible argument. It is a valid argument with two very plausible premises. Premise 1 seems true by definition. On behalf of Premise 2 are presented cases that indicate that our evidence is exactly what it would be in skeptical scenarios.[4] Things would look exactly the same to us if we were brains in vats or the victims of malevolent daemons. Some are driven to desperate measures and embrace externalisms. Disjunctivists adopt radical notions of evidence that sever its natural ties to experience. Reliabilists essentially change the subject, giving us a theory of epistemic justification that makes it utterly puzzling how anyone could ever have worried about skepticism in the first place (See Conee and Feldman 2004). But there are skeptical arguments that successfully sidestep the issue, such as the following.

Skeptical Argument 2

(1) We have no right to affirm our beliefs if our experience would be exactly the same according to alternative hypotheses.

(2) Our experience would be exactly the same according to a number of alternative hypotheses.

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[2] Rowe introduces the term in Rowe (1979). Perry (1999) and Geivett (1993) make prominent use of a Moore-shift-style argument, but few others have.

[3] By "discriminates between" I mean, essentially, favors one over the other.

[4] The basic notion of evidence here is that which is what we have to go on in forming beliefs. Obviously, from the first-person perspective, this consists in our experiences. See Dougherty and Rysiew (2013) for a defense of this view.

(3) Therefore, we have no right to affirm our beliefs.

It is not at all easy to say where this argument goes wrong, and there is a massive, highly-disputed literature on how best to respond to it. But what's really interesting is that there are almost no epistemological skeptics whose skepticism matches the scope of these arguments. Think about that for a second: here we have a clearly valid argument, with one definitional premise, one extremely plausible premise, and no generally accepted understanding of where the argument goes wrong, but almost no one accepts the conclusion. That's a bit odd in a way.

I propose that the explanation of this rather remarkable fact is that we are almost all of us good Mooreans, even those of us who don't advocate Moore's response to the argument (which I think of as puzzle, not a problem, but more of that in a bit). Thus we are untroubled by the argument because we confidently and rightly believe the conclusion false. However, we are puzzled by it, because there is no obvious place where it goes wrong. The essence of Moore's response to the skeptical argument was that he was more convinced of the negation of the conclusion than the conjunction of any philosophy stuff in the premises, however initially plausible sounding. The argument was not a problem *for* Moore, and it is not a problem *for* Mooreans (whether implicit or explicit) (see Kelly 2008). It is, rather, a mere puzzle.

So in rough terms – this is not meant to be an exceptionless generalization or a conceptual analysis – an argument is a problem *for* someone when it is a plausible argument for a troubling conclusion – troubling to that person – and that person is not already in fairly easy possession of warrant for the negation of the conclusion. If one *is* in fairly easy possession of warrant for the negation of the conclusion, then it is a mere puzzle.[5] I will now apply this distinction to arguments for atheism from evil and from divine hiddenness.

II. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In this section, I will present two kinds of (potential) problems of evil. One depends on an argument in the way the other does not.

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[5] Someone might, though, simply lack an inquisitive character and not be easily puzzled.

The Evidential (Potential) Problem of Evil

Let an *omniGod* be a nonphysical substance[6] with intentional power having no limits save logic alone. That is, roughly, a being who can know everything it is logically possible for that being to know and do everything logically possible for that being to do (with the caveat that no possible being could have more intentional power than that being). For short, we will say that being is *omniscient* and *omnipotent.* Given a plausible form of motivational internalism about goodness, omniscience and omnipotence logically entail perfect goodness or *omnibenevolence.* For an omniscient God would know the value of every possible state of affairs. And according to a form of motivational internalism that we might trace to Socrates, agents are motivated to pursue something in proportion to their perceived goodness unless they suffer weakness of will. But, being omnipotent, God will never suffer any weakness of will. The Judeo-Christian and Islamic conceptions of God go much further than this, of course, but classical forms entail at least this much, so any argument against an omniGod prima facie counts as arguments against the Abrahamic God.[7]

Having very briefly described the target and its relation to religious belief, here is an argument that could be a problem for theists.

The Argument from Unjustified Bad States of Affairs (evils)

(1) If there were an omniGod, there would be no unjustified evils.

(2) There are unjustified evils.

(3) Therefore, there is no omniGod.

A few brief comments are in order. Note that the first premise is (theo) logical in nature. Given the background theology, it is a logical truth.

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[6] All I mean to convey by ascribing substancehood is an actually existing entity with causal powers that exists in and of itself, as apposed to, say, a quality or property inhering in something else. It is a form of *independence* in existence. One could further go on and ascribe a more robust form of independence to God, *aseity* or self-existence. I am all for this but won't be discussing it here.

[7] I will bracket a discussion of whether the Judeo-Christian God is an omniGod. All that really matters here, for my thesis, is that the JC-God has more attributes than but at least the attributes of the "God of the philosophers." Because of this, an argument that there is no being having the properties of the God of the philosophers is an argument that there is no JC-God. OmniGodhood here can stand in for whatever extra good-making properties you think the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has over and above the God of the philosophers.

The antecedent entails the consequent. The second premise is an empirical claim. It's a claim about what one can, contingently, find in the actual world. This empirical claim is not obvious, unlike the mere claim that there is *some* evil in the world (the premise minus the term "unjustified") and unlike the first premise (given the background theology). Thus this premise requires evidence, and it is known in advance that this premise cannot be known with certainty but, rather, can only be assigned some probability on total evidence.

Some have thus called this form of the argument the 'evidential' argument from evil (See Howard-Snyder 1996: xi-xx). But there is no sensible contrast with a 'logical' problem of evil. For in this argument, the first premise states an obvious logical incompatibility and the second premise makes a non-obvious claim in need of evidential support. But in the version of the argument where we subtract the word "unjustified" we get the opposite result: the second principle makes a claim no sensible person could deny but the first premise becomes highly questionable and in need of evidential support. Thus the old contrast between an 'evidential' and 'logical' problem of evil isn't really doing any interesting work. This is the only gloss on this argument I will make in this essay.

Thus the argument from evil. But *for whom* might this argument be a problem? It is not a problem for atheists, clearly enough. The most plausible class of people for whom it might be a problem is theists who have some reason to believe the second premise. But it will all depend on how they come by their justification for being a theist in the first place and the balance between the strength of their reasons for being a theist and the strength of their reasons for believing the second premise. Rowe's Moorean shift is precisely the 'move' whereby one's direct warrant for theism swamps the warrant for belief in unjustified evil. For such theists this argument is not a problem, but merely a puzzle (and of course it is a matter of degree, people potentially lying upon a broad spectrum of problematicity and puzzlement). But if one is not in a position to pull off a Moorean shift, one has a problem indeed.

Existential Problem

The literature on the problem of evil contains another problem of evil, often called the 'existential' problem of evil. For the religious believer there is an existential problem of evil sensibly called the "pastoral" problem of evil. Alvin Plantinga puts it this way:

> Faced with the shocking concreteness of a particularly appalling example of it in his own life or the life of someone close to him, a believer may find himself tempted to take towards God an attitude he himself deplores; such evil can incline him to mistrust God, to be angry with him, to adopt towards him an attitude of suspicion and distrust, or bitterness and rebellion. This is a *pastoral*, or *religious*, or *existential* problem of evil (Plantinga 1992: 39).

But then there is an existential problem that is a bit different. No one puts it better than Yehuda Gellman.

> The problem of evil that philosophers deal with is an intellectualized construction upon a basic human experience of God's non-existence. For I want to argue that just as there is a human experience of God's existence, there is likewise and just as surely a human experience of God's non-existence. And the latter is to be found in humanity's experience of evil. (Gellman 1992: 211-12)

As a result, says Gellman, 'The experience of evil provides prima-facie justification for God's non-existence' (Gellman 1992: 214). In this experience, God, we might say, 'seems absent.' There is no inference, no argument that moves from facts about evil to alleged facts about God. Rather, there is simply an experience of evil such that in that experience, God seems absent. We will come back to this in some detail shortly. First, however, I want to present a parallel contrast in the argument from divine hiddenness.

III. THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

Just as there is an evidential (potential) problem of evil stemming from a discursive argument and an existential problem of evil stemming from an experience, so there is an evidential (potential) problem of divine hiddenness stemming from a discursive argument and an existential problem of divine hiddenness stemming from an experience.

Epistemic problem

The simplest form of the argument from divine hiddenness goes like this:

> If there were an omniGod, there would be no non-culpable disbelief.
> (1) But there is some non-culpable disbelief.
> (2) Therefore there is no omniGod.

Similar to our argument from evil, the first premise of the argument from hiddenness is supposed to be a theological truism (though it has been questioned extensively[8]). And the second premise is an empirical claim. It is very plausible and might seem obvious at first until one starts to think about what basis they have for making such a judgment. Though I don't think this is a very strong argument, I do think divine hiddenness can present a serious problem, as we shall see shortly. First, though, we will look at another version of the problem.

Existential problem

The existential problem of divine hiddenness is encountered when one either lacks any sense of God's presence or senses his absence. The notion of sensing an absence is somewhat obscure and contentious but, I think, helpful. I don't insist that it isn't reducible to more basic notions, but I do think the phenomenology is substantively different. It could be, for example, that sensing absence is a function of expectation.[9] If one expected to see something in a room – not consciously, but by habit – it's absence could grab their attention. Many readers will have experienced that "Something has moved, hasn't it?" moments. For now, I'll ask the reader's charity.

The epistemic problem is one of belief and evidence alone. Though belief and evidence are implicated in the existential problem of hiddenness, the problem goes beyond that. For evidence can be indirect. In the existential version, there is a directness at the heart of the problem. It's not just that God is missing from the list of things one has sufficient evidence for. I have sufficient evidence for the existence of my wife, but she's not currently *present*, and is a kind of absence-from-my-experience that has features not had by evidential-absence-from-my-justified-ontology. Here is a classic example from Saint Mother Theresa.

> God, who am I that You should forsake me? The child of your love – and now become as the most hated one – the one You have thrown away as unwanted- unloved. I call, I cling, I want – and there is no One to answer – no One on Whom I can cling – no, No One. – Alone. The darkness is so dark...The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable. – Where is my faith? – even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness &

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[8] See the classic collection, Howard-Snyder and Moser (2002), and Poston and Dougherty (2007).

[9] Thanks to Brandon Rickabaugh for this suggestion.

darkness. – My God – how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing… I am told God loves me – and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul…What are You doing My God to one so small? (Mother Teresa 2007: 186–87)

Now there is a kind of paradox here illustrated by the following little verse.

> The other day upon the stair
> I met a man who wasn't there.
> He wasn't there again today.
> Oh how I wish he'd go away.

It also reminds of the definition of the "New atheist" as someone who is very angry at God for not existing. For the words in a way suggest both belief that God exists and assertions of his absence. In the case of St. Mother Theresa, I think it is clear she believes that God is real, not make believe, but that she is being denied the vision of him she once had. This would be analogous to my lamenting that my wife will not come home to see me, and is instead choosing to remain at a great distance. This feeling is captured well by the psalmist:

> Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1)

At times the experience is event that God is deftly dodging out of sight at every turn.

> Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. (Job 23:8-9)

In this kind of existential hiddenness, the subject is not asserting that God is not among the things there are, not asserting that God is missing from the list of existing things, non-imaginary things.

IV. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND THE PROBLEM OF HIDDENNESS

I now wish to talk about the relationship between these two pairs of possible sources of trouble for traditional theists. First, note that it is not easy to distinguish the existential problem of evil and the existential problem of hiddenness. Both are characterized by the encountering of an experience which seems to reveal God's absence in the world. In the experience of certain horrific evils, we might say, God is hidden

in evil. It may be that they are in fact the same problem under two guises. Or it may be that careful analysis can show that they are not identical problems but rather only importantly overlap. I leave that as homework.

The main burden of this final section of this essay is to pick up Gellman's thread and spin it into a fabric of some extent. First, though, I wish to make a few observations about the logical relation between the two arguments.

First, suppose existential hiddenness did not occur. That is, suppose you had a strong sense of God's abiding presence. Then you would have enough conviction in the falsity of the conclusion of the argument from evil that the argument would constitute a puzzle, not a problem. You could do a Moorean shift. So in this sense, the problem of evil depends upon the problem of hiddenness. In the terms of attachment theory, our sense of wellbeing in the presence of evil depends on having a secure attachment to God, in virtue of previous events of sensing God's presence.[10]

More specifically, note that "S suffers" (in a way that seems to S to lack justification) is logically equivalent to the following disjunction of conjunctions:

((S suffers & S feels God's assuring presence) v (S suffers & S does NOT feel God's assuring presence))

The first disjunct is going to have trouble generating a problem for S. For its second conjunct is going to (at least tend to) provide a defeater for S for the problem its first conjunct is supposed to get her into. That is, it enables a Moorean shift, which lands us in a puzzle, not a problem.

But the second disjunct is a conjunction of the basis for the empirical premise of the argument from evil and the basis of the existential problem of hiddenness. So it appears that S's sense of seemingly pointless suffering doesn't do any work all by itself. It needs to be conjoined with that S does NOT feel God's assuring presence. Since that second conjunction is also not by itself a very strong basis for an inductive argument for atheism from evil, it appears that the only way to generate a real problem of evil is by *combining* the empirical premise and the hiddenness premise. In addition to these logical relations there are also some deeper lessons to which I now turn.

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[10] See Bowlby (1969) and Bretherton (1992). This was pointed out to me by Brandon Rickabaugh.

The common sense problem of evil

Unjustified evil[11] logically entails that there is no God. That is semantically equivalent to saying that every possible world with unjustified evil is one where God is absent.[12] God and unjustified evil are non-compossible, they never occupy the same logical space. There is an analogous phenomenon in our emotional lives. Sometimes two things cannot co-exist in our emotional world, they are emotionally non-compossible. The presence of one emotion in our life excludes another. For example, one cannot simultaneously stand in awe-admiration of something and also despise-and-deplore it. There are times when God and the holocaust are like this for me. My world can't contain them both. If one exists, the other doesn't (and the latter clearly isn't the candidate for denial). There are a number of recent news items that follow me around like hungry jackals, mocking my faith. I'm like a weak member of the herd, lagging behind, prime for being taken down.

It seems that experiencing horrendous evils[13] is non-compossible with experiencing joy or perhaps hope. Therefore, I will use the nearby term "horrific evils" to refer (approximately) to those evils that have this emotionally exclusionary effect on one.[14]

So let 'H' state that one of these horrific evils has occurred, and let 'G' state that God exists. An instance of the argument from evil from a particular horrific evil would say that H and G are noncompossible – that H logically excludes G – and then conclude, by way of affirmation of H – that not G. An argument from any particular horrific evil will be weak by the nature of the case: we know so little about the details of any case and noseeum inferences are no good. However, even though a particular argument from a particular horrific evil might be *logically*

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[11] I'm using the broad, intuitive notion here: there needs to be a *sufficient reason* for God to permit any bad state of affairs. What counts as a sufficient reason will vary by user.

[12] If God exists and God is a necessary being, then no possible world will have any unjustified evil. So a perfectly precise statement of the situation would need to have recourse to impossible worlds or perhaps some situation-theoretic model. The point, I take it, is perfectly clear, however.

[13] The term 'horrendous evils' has acquired a technical sense in the work of Marilyn Adams (see Adams 2000 and 2006). Horrendous evils are those that when experienced cause us to wish we had not been born.

[14] To be clear, this is a relation-x is horrific to y at t-not a monadic property of events or states of affairs.

weak, it could nevertheless be emotionally very strong.[15] That is, our emotional world may not be able to accommodate both H and G. Thus, if H is quite salient to us, the possibility of G will seem quite remote.

From emotions to reasons

I am inclined to think normative reasons are motivating reasons for the usual reasons some people think that (Dancy 2000), though I realize this is controversial. I'm sanguine about the possibility of translating what I say below into alternative reasons-discourse. This thesis combined with my view of emotions – things that motivate – I am inclined to take reasons to be a species of emotion (and somewhat inclined to think that all emotions are reasons, though they need not always be good reasons). But I will not assume that here. Rather, I will only assume what I think is hardly contestable: that emotions can *provide* (in a number of ways) reasons.[16]

Much of our evidence (I am inclined to think most of it) consists in what is commonly described as 'taking' things to be a certain way. Either the same phenomenon by a different name or a similar phenomenon is sometimes described as 'seeing as.' When we take something to be the case or see something as having a certain characteristic, we might also say the world 'appears to us' to be a certain way.[17] I call these takings or seeings as or appearances or even "seemings"[18] as evidence because they clearly justify belief.[19] If there is one position in all of philosophy to which I will never give any quarter, it is disjunctivism.[20] At any rate, it seems clear that emotions affect how we take the world to be, color how

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[15] Bruce Russell tends to argue from particular horrific evils. See, for example, Howard-Snyder (2002) and Pojman (2008). Tooley (2015) thinks this is the best way to run the argument. For reasons too lengthy to get into here, I think he is mistaken about that, but see Dougherty and Pruss (forthcoming).

[16] On the relationship between emotions and reasons see Robert Roberts (1988, 2013), and Michael Brady (2013).

[17] The "adverbial" theory of perception is but one way of precisifying this. See, for example, Chisholm (1977).

[18] See Tucker (2013) for several takes on seemings.

[19] The claim here is not that they are the *only* things that justify belief, but only that they are *among* the things that justify belief. See Huemer 2001, Swinburne 2001, Conee and Feldman 2004, and again, the Tucker volume.

[20] Although, see Pritchard (2012) for an interesting, creative, and more sympathetic discussion of it. On any theory of justification for which blamelessness is insufficient (disjunctivists usually say that narrow mental content only excuses from blame for lack of justification), I am more interested in "blamelessness" than "justification."

we see it, give it a certain character or appearance. Thus the emotions – even if they don't *constitute* evidence (as I am inclined to think) – impart a certain character to our experience, thus determining to a considerable extent what we have reason to believe.

V. THE COMMON SENSE PROBLEM OF EVIL

This epistemological perspective forms the basis for seeing how the existential problem of evil can give rise to an evidential problem of evil. I have called a simplified version of Swinburne's formulation of the atheistic argument from evil (Swinburne 1998: 19-20) the 'common sense problem of evil' (Dougherty 2008, 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, Dougherty and Walls 2013). Swinburne's formulation is a masterful example of how to carefully craft a deductively valid argument taking every consideration into account. It is, however, much more complicated than a representative argument by any but the very most sophisticated and informed atheists. Nevertheless, the insight at its core is simple enough. Speaking of the inquiring atheist, Swinburne writes, 'It might seem to him that the horror is so great that under no circumstances would God have any right to let it occur' (1998, 28)[21]. Such horrors are described by Ivan Karamazov (Dostoyevsky 1880: 245-46), and they turn the stomach of any properly functioning human. Swinburne writes 'Many of us are surely often in this situation, and there would be something wrong with us morally if we were not' (1998: 29).

Importantly, for my present purposes, this perspective on the world isn't the result of ratiocination simple or complex.[22] It is a visceral reaction to reality. In the grips of such an experience we *take* there to be no God, we see the world *as* incompatible with God, the horror appears directly to be utterly unjustifiable by any possible greater good.[23] These experiences are colored by our emotional constitution – as they ought to be – and as basic experiences give us reasons to believe their propositional contents,

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[21] Swinburne also considers some other relevant possible basic starting points, but I find them each problematic in various ways, considerably more problematic than the impermissibility version. See also Plantinga 2000: 14, for a similar line of thought.

[22] Caroline Paddock pointed out to me that it is always Dostoyevsky's *philosophers* who are skeptics.

[23] These are not necessarily meant to be alternative descriptions of one and the same reality, but they may well be descriptions of various facets of one and the same reality. Alternatively, they may be relevantly similar situations or three theories of one observed reality. It's just hard to tell.

unless we have reason to think they are misleading (that is, in this case, unless we have a theodicy).

One other epistemological ingredient in the present discussion is a principle that Swinburne has used in one way or another throughout his reflections in philosophy of religion, a principle he tends to call 'The Principle of Credulity' (1979, 1998, 2001, and 2004). One form he gives the principle is this.

Principle of Credulity
Other things being equal, it is probable and so rational to believe that things are as they seem to be (and the stronger the inclination, the more rational the belief) (1998: 26).[24]

I myself do not find the notion of full belief or of binary justification or rationality as a property of it helpful except when nothing much hangs on precision. One or two small but significant items may hinge on a bit greater precision here, so I will briefly canvass my alternative picture beginning with the following principle.

Reasons Commonsenseism (RC)
If it seems to S that P with strength D, then S thereby has a *pro tanto* reason of strength D to believe P.

I only want to make a few clarifications. First, in my terminology, there is a difference between its seeming *that P* and it's seeming *as though P*. If it seems *that* p, then if you are properly functioning you will be inclined to affirm P. If it merely seems *as though* P, there is no such default. To illustrate, consider the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion. Due to the optical illusion, they seem *as though* they were different lengths. But to anyone who knows about the illusion, there will be no temptation to believe that they are. The *proposition that* the lines are different lengths will get no epistemic 'oomph' from the seeming as though, in light of awareness of the illusion. In general, sensory experiences *enable* but do not *constitute* seemings. And I am using 'seemings' in this context as a catch all term for seeming *that*, takings, seemings as, and ways the world appears to be.

By a '*pro tanto* reason' I only mean the fairly literally translated reason of "just so much" weight. Such reasons can range widely in strength and can always be outweighed by further evidence. Note that, similarly to

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[24] Swinburne goes on to revise the principle in certain ways, but they need not concern us here.

Swinburne's formulation of the Principle of Credulity, the epistemic strength is in proportion to the magnitude of the psychological property from which it arises. The guiding notion here is, again, that our evidence is what guides us in the formation of our attitudes towards representations of the world (and, of course, ideally guides the unconscious process of forming those representations). And in the end, we have nothing more than our own perspective to guide us, though I hasten to add that a crucial part of our perspective involves other people both in how they, often unbeknownst to us, influence our perspective (provided by our senses, memory, and other faculties) and how their testimony helps build our perspective. In the end, we can only see through our own eyes.

With these clarifications in mind, consider the following versions of the Common Sense Problem of Evil (CSPOE). I will formulate them with respect to some given horrific evil E, which we will assume to has occurred, though as I point out above, that is not the only or necessarily the best way to do it. We might also be able to let 'E' name the largest complex amalgam of evils we are capable of attending to in one act of the mind. However, because I don't believe there is any such thing as a sum of all evil, I personally think of E as at most a disjunction of the claims about the suffering of particular individuals. For it is to *individuals* that God owes justice or, if, like me you follow Marilyn Adams, the real issue is that it is towards *individuals* that the God of Christian theism will show loving kindness in all things.

CSPOE Schema
(1) It strongly seems to S that E's occurring is absolutely incompatible with an omni-God's existence.
(2) Therefore, by RC, S has a strong reason to think there is no omni-God.

The important thing here is that this is not an inference S *makes*. It is an inference we make *about* S *in light of* RC. Given RC and S's take on the world, she just *thereby* has a strong reason to doubt that there is a omni-God. There is no so-called 'noseeum' inference (See Wykstra 1984), and she needn't have ever heard of skeptical theism or it's skeptical theses (Bergmann 2009), much less be convinced by it.[25] Standard skeptical theism, which is supposed to prevent you from ever getting

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[25] And note that the common sense problem of evil remains even if the skeptical theist *insists* that she *must* be improperly functioning.

non-inferential reasons for theism, appears to be inconsistent with RC.[26] So much the worse for skeptical theism. Alvin Plantinga captures the thought well. After cataloguing some particularly horrific evils, he says

> wouldn't a rational person think, in the face of this kind of appalling evil, that there just couldn't be an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good person superintending our world? Perhaps he can't give a demonstration that no perfect person could permit these things; perhaps there isn't a good probabilistic or evidential atheological argument either: but so what? Isn't it just apparent, just evident that a being living up to God's reputation couldn't permit things like that? Don't I have a defeater here, even if there is no good antitheistic argument from evil? (Plantinga 2000: 484).

The schema for the problem isn't, as such, a problem *for* anyone. It all depends upon the value of the variable 'S'. As Swinburne says, *we* are often in this position, so a particularly salient version of the problem is the first-personal version.

CSPOE First Person
(1) It strongly seems to *me* that E's occurring is absolutely incompatible with a omni-God's existence.
(2) Therefore, by RC, *I* have a strong reason to think there is no omni-God.

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[26] At least according to the application of skeptical theist. For example, Bergmann argues, "Thus, Swinburne misconstrues the skeptical theist's response. He thinks the skeptical theist's aim is to show that the likelihood of some evil or other on theism might for all we know be higher than it initially appears. And he replies that similar remarks show that it might for all we know be lower than it initially appears. Since, according to him, it's just as likely to be higher than it initially appears as it is to be lower than it initially appears, it's reasonable to go with initial appearances. But in fact, the skeptical theist's response is that we aren't justified in thinking the probability judgment initially appears the way Swinburne says it appears. Clear thinking and reflection on ST1-ST4 reveal that there's no particular value or range (short of the range between 0 and 1) that the probability in question appears to be (Bergman 2009: 387)." The inconsistency is not entailed merely by the skeptical theists skeptical theses. Wykstra (1984), the font of skeptical theism, obtains his original but now often-modified CORNEA principle via additions to Swinburne's Principle of Credulity. He now explicitly defends a probabilistic understanding of CORNEA. See Wykstra (2007) and his 'Skeptical Theism, Abductive Atheology, and Theory Versioning' in Dougherty (2014). But he still defends it with a parent analogy, which is criticized in Dougherty (2012).

If one is a theist, then the problem may (and perhaps should!) start at home. This is not to suggest for a moment that the reason outweighs all other reasons or isn't undercut somehow or that it remains constant. It is perfectly consistent for a theist to remain a theist in good cognitive standing and still have this problem. For example, the theist may have an undercutting defeater in a Theodicy or a rebutting defeater in natural theology, or both. These qualifications are consistent with the first-person problem being a big problem.[27]

However, even if we work through our personal intellectual difficulties and their social and experiential foundations, we all care about other people. And sometimes, other people we care about struggle with difficulties in belief. Thus, the third-personal version of the common sense problem of evil is salient.

CSPOE Third Person
(1) It strongly seems to Dolores that E's occurring is absolutely incompatible with a omni-God's existence.
(2) Therefore, by RC, Dolores has a strong reason to think there is no onmi-God.

If Dolores is your friend, and she is a theist, she has a problem. And the problem, though emotional in origin, has become an evidential problem because of the reasons-generating power of emotions. And in a kind of emotional feedback loop, Dolores might suffer emotionally from confronting this evidential problem.

And if you are a theist and you are in dialogue with someone concerning belief, you may have to face this issue yourself. Then it becomes a second-personal problem. You must read this version as though you were speaking it to your good friend Dolores.

CSPOE Second Person
(1) It strongly seems to you that E's occurring is absolutely incompatible with a omni-God's existence.
(2) Therefore, by RC, you have a strong reason to think there is no onmi-God.

If you are a religious person yourself, then you will, if you are compassionate, want others to share in the blessings of belief. So you will

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[27] I have little if anything to say to fideists for whom having a strong reason to think there is no God is literally not a problem worth taking seriously.

want to address this problem with your friend. Skeptical theism is mute in this case. Many are helped by natural theology or theodicy (I know I am), but as this evidential problem has emotional sources, one can also try to point out the beautiful things in the world and usher them into a loving religious community and introduce them to powerful religious literature (Tolkien has done more for me on the problem of evil than about anyone) (See Stump, (2010), and Dougherty (2014c)).

Some people have personal proclivities toward one or another of these forms for addressing the common sense problem of evil. Some scientifically – or logically – minded people will feel more equipped to pursue the route of natural theology and be more satisfied by it (see Rickabaugh and McAllister (forthcoming) and Dougherty and Rickbaugh (forthcoming)). Some more literarily-minded people will prefer other rounds. Some (like me) will find them all attractive and be variably satisfied by versions of all of them.

Many of us will face all three versions of the common sense problem of evil. Hopefully, the religious path and the path of intellectual integrity will coincide, and, hopefully, as we walk this path it will help religious theists minister to those with whom we are in dialogue, regardless of where they are on the theism spectrum. The bottom line is that skeptical theism, in any of its standard forms, has nothing to say to the common sense problem of evil. Rather, what we need is a return to theodicy, natural theology, and proclamation of the goodness of the world, whether in history or fiction.

CONCLUSION

So it looks like the *problem* of evil is either indistinguishable from the problem of divine hiddenness (at the existential level) or, at the argumentative level, cannot make the leap from puzzle to problem unless hiddenness is already a problem. Yet perhaps the most common vehicle for existential hiddenness is existential evil, that is, the having of an experience that emotionally and imaginatively excludes God. It appears, then, that, in the standard case, at least, the two arguments are intimately bound together, and that most of the weight of the problem of evil rests on existential hiddenness.

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WAGERING AGAINST DIVINE HIDDENNESS

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Abstract. J.L. Schellenberg argues that divine hiddenness provides an argument for the conclusion that God does not exist, for if God existed he would not allow non-resistant non-belief to occur, but non-resistant non-belief does occur, so God does not exist. In this paper, I argue that the stakes involved in theistic considerations put pressure on Schellenberg's premise that non-resistant non-belief occurs. First, I specify conditions for someone's being a non-resistant non-believer. Then, I argue that many people fulfil these conditions because, given some plausible assumptions, there is a very good pragmatic reason to be a theist rather than an atheist. I assume it is more likely that theists go to heaven than atheists, and I argue there is a non-zero probability that one can receive infinite utility and a method of comparing outcomes with infinite utilities in which the probability of each outcome affects the final expected values. Then, I show how this argument entails there is no good reason to think that there are very many non-resistant non-believers.

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of divine hiddenness is defended today by J.L. Schellenberg. He argues that divine hiddenness supplies an argument for the conclusion that God does not exist, as follows:

S1. If God exists, he is perfectly loving.
S2. If a perfectly loving God exists, then non-resistant non-belief does not occur.
S3. Non-resistant non-belief occurs.
S4. No perfectly loving God exists [from S2, S3].
S5. Therefore, God does not exist [from S1, S4].[1]

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[1] Schellenberg (1993), (2005a), (2005b).

The idea is that, if God exists, the fact that he is perfectly loving would cause him to have a 'bias for relationship' with his creatures. He would do everything he could to be in relationship with them. However, it seems like in order for a person to have a relationship with God, that person must believe God exists. But God's existence is not obvious; many people fail to believe simply because there isn't sufficient evidence or because of other factors for which they are not blameworthy. Schellenberg calls these people 'non-resistant non-believers'. They would love to know God and have a relationship with him if he existed, but they simply do not think there is enough evidence to reasonably believe God exists. The most salient characteristic of non-resistant non-believers is that they are not culpable for their nonbelief.[2] Because non-resistant non-belief occurs, this gives us reason to think that a perfectly loving God does not exist.[3]

Traditionally, Schellenberg's argument has been challenged in two main ways. Many have denied premise (S2), saying that God might be perfectly loving but allows hiddenness for some greater good. Another response is to deny (S3) and claim that we do have evidence that God exists, so rationality prescribes belief in God – some people have just blinded themselves to the evidence. In this paper, I will not argue that premise (S2) is false or that premise (S3) is false; rather, I will argue something weaker: that there is no good reason to think that there are very many non-resistant non-believers. This conclusion entails that there are fewer non-resistant non-believers than many people will *prima facie* think, and also that there are fewer non-resistant non-believers than Schellenberg assumes. However, this might seem insignificant. After all, as long as an argument is valid, the only way to attack it is by denying one of its premises. However, there are three reasons why my thesis significantly counts against Schellenberg's argument.

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[2] Schellenberg does, in some places, refer to them as 'non-culpable non-believers,' but he seems to use 'non-resistant non-believers' more frequently, so I will adopt his terminology. However, non-culpable non-belief might actually be a better word choice. Rea (in conversation) has pointed out that one can be resistant to a belief without being culpable. (This parallels the point made by Wainwright [2001] that reasonable nonbelief and non-culpable nonbelief come apart). For example, I may be inculpably resistant to a racist belief because I think it would be immoral for me to hold it. (Schellenberg might respond to Rea and Wainwright that there are certain propositions, such as 'God exists' for which resistance always implies blame). The main point here is that the culpability, rather than the resistance, is the important factor for Schellenberg; this will be captured in the condition I give for non-resistant non-belief on page 3.

[3] Schellenberg (1993), (2005a), (2005b).

The first has to do with the way Schellenberg's argument is set up; I think formulating the hiddenness argument deductively may be problematic. Of course, deductive arguments are nice and clean and easy to respond to (i.e. as long as the argument is valid, argue against one of its premises). The worry about framing Schellenberg's hiddenness argument deductively is that, as a deductive argument, it cannot capture the intuition that *the number non-resistant non-believers matters*. Consider three worlds:

World 1: There are no non-resistant non-believers.

World 2: There is one non-resistant non-believer; nonresistant nonbelievers are an extremely small percentage of people in the world.

World 3: There are 8 billion (or some arbitrarily high number) non-resistant non-believers; everyone or almost everyone in this world is a non-resistant non-believer.

Notice that the third premise is a claim about existence; it essentially states $\exists x$ (x=a non-resistant non-believer). For this reason, the argument does not distinguish between the non-resistant non-belief in World 2 and in World 3. Do we really want to say that we are in the exact same evidential situation with respect to theism in both worlds? This seems implausible, and I think this is good evidence that the simple deductive hiddenness argument is too coarse grained.

Someone might resist the above by insisting that the existence of *just one* non-resistant non-believer significantly lowers the probability of theism. Once we know one exists, theists have a big problem on their hands, so the number of non-resistant non-believers, as long as it is non-zero, isn't that weighty. In response, I want to note that everything I've said is consistent with the probability of theism in World 1 being much higher than in World 2. The probability of theism might even take a huge drop from World 1 to World 2, and a much smaller drop from World 2 to World 3. For example, one might think the probability of theism in World 1 is 0.6, while it's 0.2 in World 2 and 0.1 in World 3. This is consistent with what I'm arguing. My main concern is that Schellenberg's original formulation of the hiddenness argument will not allow us to capture any differences in the probability of theism between Worlds 2 and 3.

Suppose that the number of non-resistant non-believers matters for the probability of theism (and not just in the zero to one case). If this is right, something like the following seems true:

> **Inductive Hiddenness Proposition (IHP)**: The probability of theism is inversely correlated with the amount of non-resistant non-belief that occurs.[4]

Given IHP, it becomes clear why my thesis, that there are not very many non-resistant non-believers, is significant. The less non-resistant non-belief there is, the less non-resistant belief counts against theism, and the less Schellenberg's argument lowers the probability of theism.

Even if someone completely rejects this first reason my thesis counts against Schellenberg, there are two other reasons my thesis is significant that do not depend on taking the hiddenness argument inductively. The first is the role my thesis plays in a larger argument that (S2) is false. Suppose God allows hiddenness for some greater good. For example, suppose it is very valuable that humans have free will, but that some humans make free decisions that cause God to be hidden for other humans (who are non-resistant non-believers). Consider again World 2 and World 3. It is plausible that, given theism, World 3 is a worse state of affairs than World 2. So, the good of free will might outweigh the bad of a small amount of non-resistant non-belief, such as in World 2, but not a huge amount of non-resistant non-belief, such as in World 3. This example generalizes: if there are fewer non-resistant non-believers, at least some greater goods defences will become more plausible. Thus, an argument that there are fewer non-resistant non-believers than one might *prima facie* think can be combined with a greater goods defence to make an outright denial of (S2) more plausible.

One might worry that this sort of response depends on there being a substantial difference between Worlds 2 and 3. However, this difference is not an *evidential* difference – a difference in the probability of theism – but an *axiological* difference – a difference in the value of

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[4] Note that the rate at which the probability of theism drops may not be the exact same as the rate at which non-resistant non-belief increases. As I noted earlier, the probability of theism may take a huge drop when the number of non-resistant non-believers goes from 0 to 1. The point is just that as one number increases (the number of non-resistant non-believers) the other decreases (the probability of theism). I am not making any claims about the rate at which this happens.

the worlds, given theism. So, this response depends on World 3 being a worse state of affairs (given theism) than World 2. This is a notably different assumption than the one that played a large role in my first line of reasoning. It also seems pretty plausible to me, but if one is also not convinced, there is a third way my argument is significant that doesn't depend on either kind of difference between Worlds 2 and 3.

This third way involves an argument against Schellenberg that ultimately denies premise (S3). One natural way to argue that *there are no non-resistant non-believers* is to give arguments that make the number smaller and smaller, until one has established that there are none. My argument can be combined with other arguments against the occurrence of non-resistant non-belief to ultimately establish that there are no non-resistant non-believers. This is a relatively simple response, but of course, has the cost of denying that non-resistant non-belief occurs, a proposition that strikes many as implausible.

So, there are at least three ways my thesis can significantly weaken Schellenberg's argument. But why think there are not very many non-resistant non-believers? In this paper, I argue that non-resistant non-belief is uncommon, but I argue this from a novel angle. Most people who have responded to Schellenberg have taken the word 'non-resistant non-belief' to have a narrow scope – referring to only epistemic norms. In other words, non-resistant non-believers are blameless because they have fulfilled their epistemic duties with respect to the proposition 'God exists'; resistant non-believers are culpable because of their epistemic failures. For example, resistant non-believers' beliefs may not be based on evidence, they may have failed to fulfil their evidence gathering duties, or they may be engaged in self-deception. Their blamelessness or blameworthiness can be traced back to their doxastic attitudes or another distinctly epistemic factor.

However, I want to examine Schellenberg's arguments taking 'non-resistant non-belief' to have a larger scope, one that also takes prudential norms into consideration. I take prudential norms to be a function of probability and utility, while epistemic ones are merely about probability. Resistant non-believers are blameworthy because of a means-end failure; their culpability is not necessarily traced back to something distinctly epistemic (although it could be, because prudential rationality has an epistemic component). So, rather than arguing that there is sufficient *epistemic* reason for people to believe in God, I argue that there is

sufficient *prudential* reason to form belief in God.[5] Because many people have such a strong pragmatic reason to believe in God, God is not hidden for those people, so they are not non-resistant non-believers.

My argument does not depend on producing sound arguments that God exists; rather, it depends on a story about why it is prudentially rational to believe in God. I intend to show that the prudential rationality of theism comes down to a particular probability judgment that most people will accept. Specifically, when prudential norms are considered, Schellenberg's argument is no longer about the probability of theism vs. the probability of atheism. Rather, it is about the probability atheists will receive benefits in the afterlife vs. the probability that theists will receive benefits in the afterlife.[6] This drastically changes the hiddenness debate.

The paper is structured as follows. In *section II*, I outline and explain my basic argument. In *section III*, I defend the second premise of my argument, arguing that if one wants to increase one chances of receiving infinite utility in the afterlife, one should be a theist. In *section IV*, I respond to objections, and in *section V*, I explain specifically how my argument counts against Schellenberg.

II. THE BASIC ARGUMENT

The fundamental claim I want to defend in this paper is the following: given the success of (a version of) Pascal's Wager, there is no good reason to think that there are very many non-resistant non-believers. In other words, resistant non-belief is a fairly common phenomenon. Important for my argument is the concept of *resistant non-belief*. This is also salient for Schellenberg, but to my knowledge, he never provides formal conditions for being a resistant non-believer. To both illuminate what counts as resistant and to be as clear as possible, I offer the following sufficient condition for a resistant doxastic attitude:

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[5] Here, I do not mean for 'epistemic' and 'prudential' failures to exclude moral failures. In this paper, I will assume there can be instances of epistemic and prudential failures that are also moral failures. In fact, most of the epistemic/prudential failures I am interested in are also probably moral ones; I am suspicious that there is such a thing as non-moral culpability. For more on this, see Dougherty (2012).

[6] Even if one questions the probability assumption, this paper still shows how the Schellenberg problem, when prudential reasons are taken into consideration, turns into a surprising and interesting debate about the nature of the afterlife.

S is resistant with respect to a proposition p if

(1) (i) S believes <she has a stronger reason to believe p than to hold any other doxastic attitude toward p> OR (ii) S is blameworthy for lacking the belief in (i),

(2) S has control over her doxastic attitude toward p, and

(3) S chooses not to believe p.

Note that this is merely a sufficient condition for a resistant doxastic attitude – there may be other ways for someone to be resistant as result of a doxastic attitude they have. However, all I need is a sufficient condition because I just want to argue that many people fulfil the above condition. Nonetheless, resistant belief may occur in other ways.[7]

I will argue that many non-believers fulfil (1) because they have a stronger reason to believe God exists than to hold any other doxastic attitude toward the proposition, and they are either aware of this or are culpable for not being aware of it. My basic argument is as follows:

(1) One should perform the action that maximizes EV.

(2) Cultivating belief in God maximizes EV.

(3) Therefore, one should cultivate belief in God [1,2].

Premise 1: I will simply assume this premise for the sake of this paper. I know challenges have been brought to this premise in several paradoxes such as the St. Petersburg paradox,[8] the Pasadena paradox,[9] etc. However, the 'maximize EV' norm is a classic and orthodox norm for prudential rationality and has quite a bit of intuitive appeal. For this reason, I do not take this to be a highly controversial assumption. Either way, it is an assumption of my argument; defending this premise lies beyond the scope of this paper.[10]

Premise 2: This premise states that S's cultivating belief in God maximizes expected value. This is because S's being a theist increases the probability S will receive infinite utility (presumably, in the afterlife). I will spend the rest of the paper defending this premise, because I take it to be the

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[7] Thanks to Blake McAllister.

[8] See Martin (2013).

[9] See Nover and Hajek (2004).

[10] Later in this paper, I will suggest that the maximize-EV norm should be modified in the infinite case. However, my main suggestion is not a denial that one should maximize expected value, but that one should *calculate* expected value differently when infinite utilities are involved.

most controversial part of the argument. When I say I will defend this premise, I will take myself to show that the premise relies on a particular judgment about the probability of outcomes that most people will accept: namely, that the probability of an afterlife in which theists receive infinite rewards and atheists do not is more probable than an afterlife in which atheists receive infinite rewards and theists do not. Alternatively, this could be added as an assumption of my argument. Either way, being a theist will be prudentially rational for any person who accepts the crucial probability judgment. Since most people will accept the crucial probability judgment, most people will have a strong prudential reason to cultivate theistic beliefs, and so more people will fulfil condition (1) than it might seem *prima facie*.

III. DEFENDING PREMISE 2

My defence of (P2) has three elements. (i) There is a non-zero and non-infinitesimal probability that <there is afterlife in which it is possible to receive infinite utility>, (ii) the traditional way expected values are calculated should be modified to accommodate infinite utilities and (iii) the probability that <theists receive infinite utility in the afterlife and atheists do not> is higher than the probability that <atheists receive infinite utility in the afterlife and theists do not>. I will argue for (i) and (ii), assume (iii), and then explain how (P2) follows from (i) – (iii).

3.1. The Possibility of Infinite Utility

To defend premise 2, I must first establish that there is some non-zero, non-infinitesimal probability that one can receive infinite utility. Of course, if there is no chance one could receive infinite utility, then one has no reason to care which actions might be relevant for it – so all actions, including those related to one's beliefs about theism, would be irrelevant to receiving infinite utility. Since it seems implausible to suppose one might receive infinite utility during one's earthly life, I will assume if one receives infinite utility, it will happen the in afterlife (if there is one, of course). Let's called the proposition *there is an afterlife in which it is possible to receive infinite utility* the Infinite Utility Proposition (from here on, IUP).

Since we are worried here about pragmatic considerations (i.e. actions that would maximize expected value) and the value here we are worried about is infinite, then all that is needed for the decision matrix

is that the probability of IUP is greater than zero and not infinitesimal. This is because, when calculating the expected value of an action A, the probability of a state of nature is multiplied by the utility one would gain if they performed A given that state of nature occurs.[11] Since the utility in question here is infinite, as long as IUP has a non-zero, non-infinitesimal probability, actions relevant to that the outcome will have an infinite expected value.[12]

Before I argue that Pr(IUP)>0 and non-infinitesimal, I first want to note that, if there is an afterlife, there seems to be more than one way to receive infinite utility in it. One way would be to receive finite utility for an infinite length of time, i.e. 10 utiles a day for all eternity. This might satisfy some who think that receiving infinite utility in a finite amount of time would be some sort of impossible 'supertask' for a finite person.[13] However, others might have the intuition that it is metaphysically possible for a finite person to experience infinite utility in a finite amount of time, maybe at the beatific vision or as part of Divinization. One might even think infinite utility is possible in an atemporal state. For example, Eleonore Stump argues that God's existing atemporally is consistent with His mind's having a variety of faculties, experiences, and activities, such as knowing things and even experiencing emotions.[14] One might think the afterlife is like that for human beings – humans have an infinitely valuable experience of being united with God, even without the passage of time. Any of these versions of the afterlife is also consistent with premise two. It is important to reiterate, however, that even if humans can receive infinite utility in a finite amount of time (or atemporally), I am assuming that this cannot occur in one's earthly life. But premise two is still relatively ecumenical; it is open to multiple ways of receiving infinite utility, and does not depend on the possibility of persons performing supertasks.

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[11] 'State of nature' is misleading. Not only is it misleading for decision making in general (a state of nature can include possible decisions by other persons) but it also is specifically misleading in this context, as it may seem odd to think of different possible afterlives as different states of nature. However, I will retain the term because it is part of standard decision theory terminology.

[12] I will be using 'expected value' and 'expected utility' interchangeably in this paper.

[13] One worry for this view is that there will never be *a time* at which I have received infinite utility. In response, it seems like there is still a clear and meaningful way in which the person in this scenario receives infinite utility, even if it there is no time at which it is completed. For more on this objection, see Vander Lann, (MS).

[14] See Stump and Kretzmann (1981: 18-19).

But do we have reasons to think that IUP has a non-infinitesimal probability greater than 0? I think we do, for several reasons. One reason to give it a non-zero probability is that, regularity [one of the axioms of probability] states that only contradictions should receive probability 0; some people go even further and argue that no proposition should receive probability 0. However, even if some propositions are given probability 0, IUP does not seem like a likely candidate.

Two, there is an argument from peer disagreement that IUP not be assigned a zero or infinitesimal probability. Many smart people, including philosophers, theologians, and people who study religion believe IUP. While this may not give us reason to assign IUP a high probability, it seems like a reason not to assign it probability 0 or an infinitesimal probability.

Three, when one considers the large number of actions available to an all-powerful Being, this should also increase the probability of IUP. Since most stories about the afterlife are theistic, considerations about what actions are possible for an all-powerful God seem relevant when assessing the probability of IUP. If God exists, the probability that it is in his power to cause a person to experience infinite utility seems greater than 0 and non-infinitesimal.

In sum, the person who rejects IUP has a difficult burden of proof. If he wants to give it probability 0, he must argue that some non-contradictory propositions should be assigned probability 0. Two, he must overcome all the arguments from peer disagreement that IUP should not be assigned probability 0/infinitesimal. Three, he must argue that the probability of IUP is zero or infinitesimal, even given the vast array of actions available to an all-powerful Being. This burden of proof seems very difficult to overcome, and in the meantime, it seems fair to conclude that Pr(IUP)>0 and non-infinitesimal.

So, given that IUP has a non-zero, non-infinitesimal probability, we have a decision theoretic reason to be concerned with our post mortem destiny. But what actions are relevant to our post-mortem destiny? I will argue that one such action is the cultivation of theistic beliefs.

3.2. An Objection from Hajek

(P2) also depends on responding to an objection from Alan Hajek that relates to problems infinite utility creates for the expected value

equation.[15] To understand the objection, recall a simple version equation for expected value, where [S1, S2 ...] are possible states of nature:

The expected value of an action A =
Pr(S1) * (utility of performing A | S1) + Pr(S2) * (utility of performing A | S2) + ...

Note that, for each state of nature, the relevant probability is multiplied by the relevant utility. Hajek points out that, given the equation, if the utility in question is infinite, the probability is irrelevant, as long as it is non-zero. For this reason, it isn't clear why one should directly believe in God rather than perform another action, A*, that is consistent with one's eventually coming to believe in God. As long as the probability that one will come to believe in God given that one performs A* is non-zero,[16] one's performing A* has an infinite expected value.[17]

Hajek is correct to note that this is a problem, but rather than being a problem for arguments that one should believe in God given expected value considerations, it is an argument that we should not treat all infinities equally. Consider a scenario where there are two doors you can pick from. For each door, there is a possibility you will receive infinite utility. However, if you pick door number 1, the probability you will receive infinite utility is 0.000001. If you pick door number 2, the probability you will receive infinite utility is 0.999999. For both doors, if you don't receive the infinite utility, you will be annihilated. The decision matrix is as follows:

	Heaven	Annihilation	EV
Door 1	0.000001*ω	0	ω
Door 2	0.999999*ω	0	ω

If we assume that infinity multiplied by anything is infinity, both doors have the same expected value. However, this is clearly counterintuitive – it seems like one should obviously pick door number 2.

Hajek's argument and this thought experiment show that, in cases involving infinite utilities, we will need to modify the way we calculate

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[15] Hajek (2003).
[16] And, presumably, non-infinitesimal.
[17] Hajek (2003: 30-31).

the expected values so that probabilities make a difference in the final expected values. One possible way to do this is to take the probabilities of each state of nature and then treat the utilities as a limit function, making the utilities bigger and bigger until the expected values stand in a consistent ratio to each other. I have argued for a method similar to this one elsewhere.[18] There are other ways to capture these differences as well. Bartha has a version that involves taking ratios between different sizes of infinities, and Chen and Rubio have suggested a method that involves using surreal numbers.[19] Whichever method you prefer, the point is that we must use an expected utility function that captures the differences in probabilities, so that all options consistent with the possibility of getting infinite utility don't turn out to have the exact same expected value.

Hajek considers these options but rejects them because he believes they are inconsistent with parts of Pascal's theology.[20] Specifically, he cites textual evidence that Pascal was committed to salvation (the utility of the afterlife) being the greatest thing possible. If salvation is the greatest thing possible, reasons Hajek, then the utility of the afterlife cannot be reflexive under addition.[21] Here's why: if ω represents the value of salvation, then $\omega+1$ cannot be more valuable than ω. So $\omega+1$ cannot be even ordinally larger than ω. The same sort of reasoning would seem to apply to multiplication: if ω is the value of salvation, 2ω cannot be more valuable than ω. However, if the utility of the afterlife is not reflexive under either addition or multiplication, we cannot distinguish between 0.999999ω and 0.000001ω, and so we are forced to be indifferent between door 1 and door 2. This result seems absurd, so we should reject some part of the above reasoning.

First, I think we should clarify what it means for salvation to be 'the greatest thing possible'. Changing the probability I will get something doesn't seem to change the value of the thing itself; it may change other things, such as what actions would be rational for me, but it doesn't bear on the intrinsic worth of the object. So, suppose salvation is the greatest thing possible; I see no reason to conclude from this that I should be indifferent between a 0.01 chance at it and a 0.99 chance at it. Hajek's argument seems to fail to distinguish between the value of something and

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[18] See Jackson and Rogers 'Salvaging Pascal's Wager' (MS).
[19] See Bartha (2007) and Chen and Rubio (MS).
[20] Hajek (2003: 45-47).
[21] Hajek (2003: 47).

my chance at getting that thing. Incorporating probabilities into decisions relevant to one's salvation is consistent with a strong conception of the maximal value of salvation. Second, 'greatest thing possible' is somewhat vague, and weaker versions of Pascal's assumption are consistent with the doctrine that different people get different afterlife benefits, i.e., your salvation is ordinally or cardinally bigger than mine.[22]

The lesson we should take from Hajek is this: the probability of an outcome, even an outcome with an infinite utility, matters. For two outcomes that both have infinite utilities, all else equal, the one with the higher probability has a higher expected value than the one with lower probability. Second, an outcome with a low probability and an infinite utility will always have a higher expected than an outcome with a high probability and a finite utility.[23] Put another way: when ranking the expected value of outcomes, the ones with infinite utility will always be ranked above the ones with finite utility, and among the ones with infinite utility, the ones that are more probable will be ranked above the less probable.

3.3. Theism and Maximizing Expected Value

Now, I want to argue that one should cultivate theistic beliefs in order to maximize expected value. Note what we have established so far:

  (i) There is a non-zero probability that there is an afterlife in which it is possible to receive infinite expected utility.

  (ii) Our modified expected value equation will (a) always rank outcomes with infinite utility higher than those with finite utility

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[22] For example, Jonathan Edwards suggests that the happiness each person's experiences in the afterlife is relative to their capacities (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol 2., p. 902). For example, I may only be able to experience 8 units of happiness a day, while someone else has the ability to experience 10 units of happiness a day. So, in heaven, we will all receive our 'maximum capacity' for happiness, but people are equipped with different capacities. This is one way to maintain that for each person, salvation is the greatest thing possible (relative to their capacities) but that we each still receive different utilities.

[23] For example, if we use a limit function, the religions with finite utilities will 'drop out.' If we use surreal numbers, our final values will include ordinally ranked infinite numbers, and every finite number will be ordinally ranked below all the infinite ones. So, even with a new method of calculating expected value, it is relatively easy to see that outcomes involving infinite utility will be privileged.

and [after (a) has been applied] (b) rank outcomes with higher probability over those with lower probability.[24]

At this point, I want to add my crucial probability judgment that I alluded to in the explanation of premise (P2):

(iii) The probability that <theists receive infinite utility in the afterlife and atheists do not> is higher than the probability that <atheists receive infinite utility in the afterlife and theists do not>.

(i) – (iii) are all we need for a full defence of premise (P2). To see why, consider a hypothetical agent, S, who is considering whether to take actions that cultivate theistic beliefs or atheistic beliefs. Consistent with (i), S believes there is a non-zero probability that there is an afterlife in which it is possible for her to receive infinite expected utility. Since we assumed at the beginning of the paper the afterlife is the only means by which it is possible to receive infinite expected utility, the only states of the world we will consider are those that involve the afterlife.

Let's suppose (leaving open the question of whether God exists or not) S considers three possible afterlives:

A1. Theists receive infinite utility; atheists do not.

A2. Atheists receive infinite utility; theists do not.

A3. Atheists and theists receive the same (infinite) utility.

Note that if A3 is the case, it won't matter if S cultivates theistic or atheistic beliefs. As long as A1 and A2 have non-zero probabilities for S, A3 is irrelevant. Therefore, we needn't consider A3; A1 and A2 are the only afterlives relevant for S's decision. Thus, all we need is that the $\Pr(A1) > \Pr(A2)$, which is assumed by (iii), and then, in order to maximize expected value, S should cultivate theistic beliefs.

The decision matrix for the above reasoning is as follows:

	Theists receive infinite utility, atheists do not (p)	Atheists receive infinite utility, theists do not (p')	EV
Theism	$p\omega$	$p'(-\omega)$	$p\omega + p'(-\omega)$
Atheism	$p(-\omega)$	$p'(\omega)$	$p'(\omega) + p(-\omega)$

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[24] A more complex expected utility equation could also account for different sizes of infinity (i.e. countable infinity, uncountable infinity, etc.) For the sake of simplicity, I will assume all the outcomes refer to the same size of infinity.

That p > p' is established by (iii), the crucial probability judgment. Given this, [pω + p'(-ω)] will be greater than [p'(ω) + p(-ω)], and so in order to maximize expected value, one should cultivate theistic belief.

I explain how this conclusion interacts directly with Schellenberg in section V, but first, I respond to some objections to the above argument.

IV. OBJECTIONS

An initial objection to the above is that belief is often taken to be involuntary.[25] Attempts to believe in God for practical reasons do not guarantee that one will actually end up forming beliefs in God. So, even if many people fulfil conjunct (1) of the condition for non-resistant non-belief, they do not fulfil conjunct (2). These people, then, are not resistant, and the problem of hiddenness is unchanged.

First, even though most people do not think that we have direct control over our beliefs, we still clearly have some kind of indirect control over what we believe. We can control our belief-forming habits, what we pay attention to, what we read, who we spend time with, etc. Note that earlier in the paper, I formed the decision in question about what beliefs one should *cultivate*, indicating that it will be a process, rather than an immediate decision. So, we should do everything we can to cultivate belief in God. Even if one does not successfully cultivate full belief in God, it seems that one who attempted to do so and committed one's life to God in other ways would be more likely in a position to receive an infinite reward than one who didn't. Additionally, note that it is difficult to predict how successful an attempted conversion will be; one might claim that coming to believe in God would be impossible or at least very difficult, but in many cases, one cannot know this for sure until one sincerely tries. Finally, religious texts support the idea that those who attempt to cultivate theistic beliefs will succeed.[26]

A second way one might object to my argument is as follows: belief should only be concerned with truth. God wouldn't reward someone for believing for a decision theoretic reason; that's believing in God for a bad reason. For example, W.K. Clifford famously said that it is always wrong, everywhere, to believe without evidence.[27] More recently, Antony Flew

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[25] See, i.e. Williams (1970) and Scott-Kakures (2000).
[26] Matt 7:7, Jer 33:3, Deut 4:29, Rom 10:13, James 4:8, Heb 11:6.
[27] Clifford (1877: 5).

and J.L. Mackie have advanced versions of this objection. Flew argues that believing on sufficient evidence is to reject a principle 'fundamental to personal and intellectual integrity'[28] and Mackie argues that trying to cultivate belief for Pascalian reasons is 'to do violence to one's reason and understanding'.[29]

In response, I would first like to note that this seems like more of an objection to (1), my first premise, which I take myself to have assumed rather than argued for. However, one still might worry that something is defective if our belief forming habits are overly encroached by the prudential.

First, I want to note that, as stated above, I am not saying we should spontaneously and intentionally believe on the basis of my argument, but rather that we should take actions that will cause (or probably cause) our beliefs to change in certain ways. Thus, the relevant decision isn't about what to believe, but about what belief-forming habits to cultivate. But should prudential considerations play into our belief forming habits? I think they obviously should. Simple reflection on one's doxastic habits shows that prudential considerations: i.e. the importance of a belief, what's at stake given that belief, etc., seem like important guides for belief formation. For example, every time one considered any proposition p, they could simple form the belief 'p or not p.' Additionally, one could read and believe every proposition in the phonebook. Both of these strategies would be effective ways to form lots of true beliefs, but they both seem silly to us. This is because prudential norms, not merely epistemic ones, are relevant to for one's habits of belief formation.[30]

If one still isn't convinced, I offer the following case. The mafia kidnaps your family and is going to kill them all unless you meet their demands. Their condition is that you take a pill that will give you the following false belief: the 500th digit of pi is 2. (It is actually 1.) It seems clear that you should take the pill; this is a case where you should cause yourself to form a belief for a non-epistemic reason.

Third, I want to note that, even if someone takes herself to be breaking an important epistemic rule if she tries to change her beliefs for a decision theoretic reason, this can actually be incorporated into the utility function by calculating a cost for breaking the rule and subtracting

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[28] Flew (1976: 64).
[29] Mackie (1982: 202).
[30] See Grimm (2008: 726) and Feldman (2000).

it from the utility of that option. This might not be necessary in many cases, but it is also important to note that it is possible to incorporate the cost of believing on a non-epistemic basis into the expected utility equation.

Finally, I want to note that even if someone's theistic beliefs are irrational, this doesn't seem to automatically rule out their having a meaningful relationship with God. A relationship can be meaningful even if one person's belief that the other exists is unjustified. For example, suppose sceptical arguments convince me to withhold belief that my mother exists. I also have an irrational belief that magic 8-balls are infallible; I ask the 8-ball if my mother exists, and it answers 'yes'. On this basis, I come to believe in the existence of my mother. I call her and tell her I love her; I visit her and we spend time enjoying each other's company. I see no reason to think this can't be a meaningful relationship, even if my belief in my mother's existence is unjustified. [31]

A third objection involves the consideration that there are many different religions that are mutually exclusive. This seems troubling, because given only what I have argued above, it is unclear which religion one should pick.[32] This worry includes the fact that in my sample decision matrix at the end of section III, (p) and (p') do not exhaust the probability space. My response to this is twofold. First, the main reason Schellenberg thinks God wouldn't allow non-resistant non-belief is because it seems difficult, if not impossible, to have a relationship with a being you do not believe exists. However, general theistic beliefs seem to allow the believer to have at least some sort of relationship with God. It is very unlikely that any single person has every theological doctrine correct – many people have deep, meaningful relationships with God with many incorrect beliefs about Him. For many people, basic theistic beliefs would be sufficient for a relationship with God; theists will often not count as non-believers in the sense relevant for Schellenberg's argument.

Second, if one can argue that the objective probability of one religion is higher than the others, when combined with my argument, there will be a powerful decision theoretic reason to cultivate belief in that religion.

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[31] Some have suggested that God would prefer atheists who don't believe for epistemic reasons to theists who believe for prudential reasons. However, religious texts suggest this is not the case – they emphasize belief in God simpliciter, not epistemic belief to the exclusion of prudential belief.

[32] Versions of this objection are made by Sober and Mougin (1994), Cargile (1966), and Mackie (1982: 203).

Of course, cultivating theistic beliefs is an important first step, as my argument shows. But it also shows that we have a decision-theoretic reason to favour religions with an infinite utility and a high probability. Arguments that raise the probability of a particular religion, then, are potentially quite significant when considered alongside my argument above.

V. A RESPONSE TO SCHELLENBERG

So far, we've established that it is prudentially rational to cultivate theistic beliefs. How does this interact with Schellenberg's original argument? Consider the first conjunct of the condition for resistant non-belief:

(1) (i) S believes <she has a stronger reason to believe p than to hold any other doxastic attitude toward p> OR (ii) S is blameworthy for lacking the belief of (i).

Suppose my argument that one should attempt to be a theist is correct. It still seems like I haven't established that a large majority of people actually fulfil condition (1). It could be that, in fact, it is prudentially rational to cultivate theistic beliefs, but a very small number of people actually believe this (and so many do not fulfil (i)). Additionally, among those who are don't believe this, it is implausible that they are culpable for lacking this belief (and so many others do not fulfil (ii)). Why think that there are very few non-resistant non-believers?

Consider the first disjunct of (1). Then consider the set of all the people that have considered arguments for theism (or arguments for Pascal's Wager) and find them compelling or convincing. Many of these people will fulfil condition (i). Arguments that God exists or arguments that compel one to cultivate theistic beliefs may reduce the number of non-resistant non-believers.[33]

However, this is only a small number of people. What about the second disjunct of (1), condition (ii)? When is one blameworthy for lacking a belief? Even if it is true that many people should cultivate theistic beliefs, that doesn't mean they are blameworthy for failing to do so. They may not be aware of their obligation, or there may be other factors that excuse them. Still, I think there are other features of the above Pascalian argument that can closely tie it to blame, namely, the stakes involved in theism. Consider the following principle:

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[33] See Rota (2016).

> *Blame-Stakes Principle (BSP)*: For all the propositions S should believe, all else equal, the higher the stakes are with respect to a proposition p, the more likely it is that S is blameworthy for not believing the proposition p (or for not doing everything she can to ensure she believes that p).

To see the plausibility of BSP, I will give two examples. Suppose my friend Sarah tells me she is hungry. I tell her that I have a sandwich she can have. I know the sandwich is made with either peanut butter or almond butter, but I don't know which. But it doesn't really matter; she likes both. I give her the sandwich and she eats it. This is a typical low-stakes scenario where I am not blameworthy for lacking the belief about what exactly the sandwich contains. In a second scenario, suppose the sandwich is made with peanut butter. I know Sarah absolutely hates peanut butter – it is one of her least favourite foods, and the mere thought of it makes her gag. It seems like I should check, form the belief <the sandwich is made with peanut butter >, and not give Sarah the sandwich. In this second situation, if I give her the sandwich without checking its contents, it is more plausible that I am blameworthy. Third, suppose I know that Sarah is deathly allergic to peanut butter – so allergic, that if she eats the sandwich, she will need to be rushed to the emergency room and probably die. In this case, it is completely clear that if I don't check to see what is in the sandwich and form the corresponding belief, I am culpable. Because of the exceedingly high stakes involved in the proposition <the sandwich is made with peanut butter>, I am responsible if I fail to form a belief about the sandwich's contents. This example shows that my failure to fulfil my duties with respect to propositions I should believe is more likely to make me culpable as the stakes get higher.

What if I am unaware of the high stakes surrounding a proposition? In some cases, this may make a difference – if, in the second scenario, I didn't know Sarah hated peanut butter, then it is plausible that I'm not culpable for giving her the sandwich without checking its contents. However, in other cases, the stakes are so high that I'm culpable for my ignorance, even if I don't have an explicit belief about the stakes. For example, in the third scenario, even vague, inconclusive evidence that Sarah is deathly allergic to peanut butter should cause me to check. I needn't have a categorical belief about the stakes; my suspicion of the mere possibility of the high stakes is enough for my culpability. Thus, I needn't have an explicit belief about the high stakes of a proposition to be culpable for my doxastic attitude toward it.

Another case to motivate BSP: Suppose you are hiking and you come to a shallow, wide ditch that is 6 inches deep. You want to get to the other side, and for fun, you decide to see if you can jump across. The bottom of the ditch is covered in soft grass, so there is almost no chance of getting hurt if you fall. You have self-esteem issues and are notoriously pessimistic about your abilities, especially your long jumping abilities. Epistemically, you should believe that you can make the jump, but the stakes are so low that it doesn't really matter if you form the belief or not; you are not blameworthy.

Alternatively, suppose you are hiking with your child, and you come across a wide chasm. This chasm is hundreds of feet deep. You can jump across, but the only way your child can get across is if you throw him. If you don't throw him, you can't get back to base camp and he will definitely die. You are pessimistic about your throwing abilities, but this is your only chance of survival. If you do everything you can to convince yourself you will successfully get him across the chasm, you can cultivate the courage to throw him. You should believe you can make the throw successfully, and, since inevitable death of your son is the other option, it is plausible that you are blameworthy if you don't.[34] This example is analogous to the wagering example in that the stakes are high, you have a forced choice, the evidence for the proposition is inconclusive, and because of the high stakes, you are blameworthy if you don't do everything you can to cultivate the belief in question.

Above, I have argued that many people should cultivate the belief that God exists. Additionally, for those that accept the crucial probability judgment, <God exists> is a high stakes proposition – in fact, among those with the highest stakes, because the stakes are infinite. As mentioned above, people needn't explicitly hold beliefs about these stakes to be culpable; when the stakes are very high, an awareness of even the possibility of high stakes can be sufficient for culpability. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that more people may be aware of these stakes than one might think. In a CBS poll of American adults, 83% of people indicated they believed in either heaven or hell,[35] and, in another surprising study, 32% of people who identify as atheists and agnostics

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[34] This example is inspired by the mountaineer example in William James' 'The Will to Believe,' Part X, section 31.

[35] 'CBS News Poll: Americans' Views on Death.' CBSNews. (April 2014).

indicated they believed in an afterlife.[36] I suspect these numbers may be even higher in many places outside the US.

Now, consider the set of people who accept the crucial probability judgment. Chances are, as the surveys above indicate, quite a large number of them at least believe an afterlife is possible, and many explicitly believe in life after death. It seems like almost everyone who believes in an afterlife and accepts the crucial probability judgment would be aware of the high stakes surrounding their beliefs about God. Of course, many of these people might not be convinced they should simply do whatever they can to cause themselves to believe in God. For example, they might have a firm conviction that their beliefs should always be based on evidence. (While I argue this is false in the objections section above, I admit it has intuitive appeal.) These people may not be culpable for failing to do everything they can to cause themselves to believe in God, but they are culpable for not taking theism more seriously. They see that what one chooses to believe about God potentially has momentous consequences, but they live their lives giving God little to no thought. Surely, a subset of this group is culpable for their failure to take theism seriously, and as a result, they are resistant non-believers. Because so much hangs on one's beliefs about God, many of the world's non-believers are actually resistant.

So, because so much is at stake with respect to belief in God, it is plausible that many people are culpable for ignoring questions about God's existence. Those who do so are practically irrational. Many of these people are resistant non-believers. Here is another way to look at it: there are high risks and high rewards that surround the question of God's existence. The stakes are so high that many of the people who ignore these stakes and fail to believe in God are actually resistant.

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that God is not hidden because we have a decision-theoretic reason to believe in him. I have first argued that belief in God is prudentially rational as long as (i) one assigns IUP a non-zero, non-infinitesimal probability, (ii) we modify the way expected

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[36] 'Survey: 32% of Atheists & Agnostics Believe in an Afterlife.' The Skeptics Guide to the Universe. (2014).

value has been traditionally calculated to accommodate infinite utilities and (iii) the probability that <theists receive infinite utility in the afterlife and atheists do not> is higher than the probability that <atheists receive infinite utility in the afterlife and theists do not>. Then, I have shown why the widespread duty to cultivate theistic beliefs, along with theism's high stakes imply it is likely that many non-believers are resistant.

While this result functions as a partial response to Schellenberg, there is room for further research. As noted at the beginning of the paper, for a full response to the *deductive* version of Schellenberg's argument, one would need to combine my argument with another argument that those who don't count as resistant by my lights are, in fact, resistant. Or, one could argue that, even if they aren't resistant, there is some greater good that justifies God's allowing non-resistant non-belief. While, hopefully, my argument makes either of these tasks easier than they otherwise would have been, completing these tasks could provide a complete response to the deductive version of the hiddenness argument. Second, as I note in the objection section, one could give arguments that raise the probability of a particular religion, and that would give one reason to cultivate beliefs in a particular religion. While I do not think this is necessary for responding to Schellenberg, it would enhance my basic response above.[37]

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HESCHEL, HIDDENNESS, AND THE GOD OF ISRAEL

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Abstract. Drawing on the writings of the Jewish thinker, Abraham Joshua Heschel, I defend a partial response to the problem of divine hiddenness. A Jewish approach to divine love includes the thought that God desires meaningful relationship not only with individual persons, but also with communities of persons. In combination with John Schellenberg's account of divine love, the admission of God's desire for such relationships makes possible that a person may fail to believe that God exists not because of any individual failing, but because the individual is a member of a larger community that itself is culpable.

'This is an age of spiritual blackout, a blackout of God. We have entered not only the dark night of the soul, but also the dark night of society. We must seek out ways of preserving the strong and deep truth of a living God theology in the midst of the blackout.'[1]

'A time is coming – declares my Lord God – when I will send a famine upon the land: not a hunger for bread or a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the Lord. Men shall wander from sea to sea and from north to east to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.'[2]

INTRODUCTION

According to the argument from divine hiddenness, the existence of non-resistant non-believers poses a special problem for theistic religions

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[1] Abraham Joshua Heschel, 'On Prayer', in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, edited by Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), pp. 257-267.

[2] Amos 8:11-12 (Jewish Publication Society).

that describe God as perfectly loving. Below I develop a response to this argument from a particular Jewish perspective, relying especially on the thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose writings have not been significantly explored in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion.[3] According to this perspective, God seeks meaningful personal relationships, not only with individual persons, but also with communities of persons. I claim that it is constitutive of meaningful individual relationships that members of the relationship are vulnerable in certain ways to the actions and attitudes of those with whom they are related, and that the same goes for relationships with communities. This general picture helps blunt the force of the hiddenness argument, because it offers at least one kind of explanation for the existence of non-resistant non-believers that is grounded in divine love. Moreover, the combination of divine vulnerability and the nature of group relationships gives us an independently valuable form of interdependence both between human beings and between human beings and God. I do not contend that the picture developed here solves all cases of divine hiddenness, or that the argument from divine hiddenness does not still somewhat reduce the probability of traditional theisms. I contend more modestly that these considerations should at least be part of any successful overall approach to the problem.[4]

I. SCHELLENBERG'S ARGUMENT FROM HIDDENNESS

J.L. Schellenberg defends by far the most thorough and powerful version of the hiddenness argument.[5] One of the many interesting features of

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[3] Recent work by Howard Wettstein provides a happy exception to this fact. See *The Significance of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially chapters 5 and 7. Wettstein writes that in earlier life he was 'too rigidly analytical to appreciate Heschel' (p. 5).

[4] I am offering what Dustin Crummett calls a "partial response" to the problem. See Dustin Crummet, 'We Are Here To Help Each Other', *Faith and Philosophy*, 32:1 (2015), pp. 45-62.

[5] Less-developed arguments that trade on similar themes can be found elsewhere, e.g. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong's 'Argument from Ignorance' in William Lane Craig and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong's *God? A Debate Between a Christian and an Atheist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 101-105. Sinnott-Armstrong writes, 'If there were an all-good and all-powerful God who could act in time, then we would have better evidence than we have. He could easily reveal himself by appearing before us. Giving us better evidence would not harm us. Why would such a God hide?' (p. 104).

the argument is the specificity of its target, relative to the more general target of more well-known theistic and atheistic arguments. Schellenberg rightly implores philosophers of religion to philosophically reflect on a conception of God that is more authentic and particular to the religious life than bare classical theism, and it is this focus that makes the problem of divine hiddenness especially salient.

Here is a brief (and simplified) summary of how Schellenberg poses his puzzle to an enriched theism. In addition to the classical omni-properties (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence), many religious persons and traditions attribute to God the property of perfect love. Schellenberg plausibly conceives of perfect love as including a desire for and openness to significant consensual relationships with persons. 'God, if loving, seeks *explicit*, *reciprocal* relationship with us, involving not only such things as Divine guidance, support, and forgiveness, but also human trust, obedience, and worship.'[6] That God merely 'seeks' and does not necessarily achieve such relationships is essential to the argument. Schellenberg rightly acknowledges that God must respect the autonomous human rejection of such relationship, so that 'a loving God, out of respect for our freedom, might well allow us to shut him out altogether.'[7] But for those who are not resistant to God, we should expect God to be open to an 'explicit, reciprocal' relationship. Thus, the only thing standing between a non-resistant person and actually entering into a relationship with God is that person's own initiation. Any non-resistant non-believing person who tries to enter into relationship with God will be successful.

How does belief enter the picture? It is plausible that propositional belief that God exists is a necessary condition for the robust kind of relationship just described. This is not to deny that there are relational values in the neighbourhood that are non-doxastically available to us. Like many philosophers, I think that faith, rightly understood, is one such value.[8] One non-doxastic way to understand faith is as a kind of volitional, practical, and hopeful attachment to something, whether it be a person or ideal. There may be less robust forms of relationship to God

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[6] John Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 18.

[7] Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness*, p. 27.

[8] See Daniel Howard-Snyder, 'Does Faith Entail Belief?', *Faith and Philosophy*, 33:2 (2016), 142-162, for a fairly comprehensive scepticism regarding the view that faith requires belief. Thanks to Terrence Cuneo for pointing me to this paper.

(and other persons) available to those who have this kind of non-doxastic faith. However, I agree with Schellenberg that it is difficult to imagine how explicit, reciprocal relationship involving support, obedience, worship and Schellenberg's several other *desiderata* could occur without belief that God exists. So I prefer to take on board Schellenberg's necessary condition on relationship. That being said, even supposing that some people are able to enter into this robust kind of relationship with God *via* non-doxastic faith, it is not very plausible that there is *no* one for whom lack of belief is a decisive barrier to relationship with God. Though it is not always noticed, the problem of divine hiddenness remains a challenge for theists even if belief is not always a necessary condition for relationship with God. Even if belief is a necessary condition for at least some non-believer's belief in God, hiddenness poses a problem.

Given the conjunction of some belief condition and Schellenberg's analysis of a perfectly loving God, theism predicts that non-resistant non-believers who try but fail to enter into relationship with God simply do not exist.[9] In virtue of exhibiting perfect love alongside the other omni-properties, God would only permit non-belief in cases of either resistance or failure to enter into a relationship with God. Unfortunately for theism, however, it seems overwhelmingly probable that non-resistant non-believers of the relevant sort do exist, disconfirming theism.[10]

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[9] In order to accommodate the weaker belief condition above (that for at least one non-resistant person, lack of belief that God exists is a decisive barrier to relationship with God), 'non-resistant non-believers' can be modified as, 'non-resistant persons who lack relationship with God.' Alternatively, we could read 'non-believer' as a person who lacks either the belief or non-doxastic faith required for robust relationship. For simplicity's sake, I retain Schellenberg's formulation throughout.

[10] One option for responding to Schellenberg's argument, popular in certain theological circles, is to deny the existence of non-resistant non-belief altogether, instead claiming either (1) that everyone at bottom believes in God; or (2) that although some people do not believe in God, every such person at bottom is in a state of resistance. Such a view combines an extravagantly bold claim regarding the psychologies of nearly everyone who ever lived (that they are either believers or resistant non-believers), plus a massive discounting of innumerable individuals' testimonies about their own psychology and experience. And so while I am happy to agree that this is a metaphysically possible explanation of divine hiddenness, I do not think it is a very epistemologically tenable one. But see Paul Moser's *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) for an interesting development of a view like this. According to Moser, God would only reveal God's self to persons who are appropriately attuned or oriented toward receiving evidence from a person such as God – and this attunement includes fairly specific traits like humility and openness to

And so it is that the adoption of a richer, more authentic theism results in vulnerability to the following argument from divine hiddenness[11]:

(1) If God exists, then God is perfectly loving toward persons. [Premise]

(2) If God is perfectly loving toward persons, then God is open to being in an explicit, reciprocal relationship with non-resistant persons. [Premise]

(3) If God exists, then God is open to being in an explicit, reciprocal relationship with non-resistant persons. [From 1 and 2]

(4) If God is open to being in an explicit, reciprocal relationship with non-resistant persons, then no non-resistant non-believers, who try but fail to enter into relationship with God, exist. [Premise]

(5) If God exists, then no non-resistant non-believers, who try but fail to enter into relationship with God, exist. [From 3 and 4]

(6) There is at least one non-resistant non-believer who tries but fails to enter into relationship with God. [Premise]

Therefore,

(7) It is not the case that God exists. [From 5 and 6]

Sometimes philosophers will respond to Schellenberg's argument without making explicit which steps in the argument they are bringing into question. To avoid this pitfall, let me make my strategy explicit immediately. I will be considering two aspects of a Jewish conception of God, *viz.* God's relational love for, and hence vulnerability to, groups of persons. Proper consideration of the nature of groups, combined with an analysis of perfect love that Schellenberg otherwise accepts, shows that premise 2 is false, because there is at least one condition in which God's openness to relationship with persons does not follow from God's perfect love for them.

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total submission to God. As I understand Moser's view, most if not all non-believers count as 'resistant' in that, on his system, they must lack the requisite character traits for receiving the 'purposively available' evidence from God.

[11] This formulation is a simplification of what Schellenberg offers in, "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy," in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*, edited by Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 13-32 (pp. 24-25).

II. HESCHEL'S HIDDEN GOD AND COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY

Abraham Joshua Heschel responded to the second World War, and the Shoah [Holocaust] in particular, partly by claiming that the community of Europe (or at least the communities within Europe responsible for the Shoah), over the course of centuries, exiled God and awareness of God from their midst.

> Through centuries [God's] voice cried in the wilderness. How skillfully it was trapped and imprisoned in the temples! How thoroughly distorted! Now we behold how it gradually withdraws, abandoning one people after another, departing from their souls, despising their wisdom. The taste for goodness has all but gone from the earth.[12]

Heschel is not describing God as being simultaneously present and absent, or offering a diagnosis of the loss of the usefulness of the concept of God to human beings. Rather, Heschel describes this phenomenon as an actual 'exile' of God, and one that is not wholly voluntary on God's part. 'God who created the world is not at home in the world, in its dark alleys of misery, callousness and defiance.'[13] Surprisingly (and offensively, to classical philosophical and theological temperament), Heschel seems to intend that we take his words literally. 'God did not depart of His own volition; He was expelled. *God is in exile.*'[14] Heschel's provocative understanding of divine exile is not just an isolated device to explain God's absence; it is also an essential component in his understanding of the function of the religious life. 'Our task is to bring God back into the world, into our lives. To worship is to expand the presence of God in the world.'[15] Some of the specific spiritual disciplines, like prayer, serve to achieve this purpose, to welcome God back. Heschel writes, 'I pray because God, the *Shekinah*, is an outcast. I pray because God is in exile, because we all conspire to blur all signs of His presence in the present or in the past.'[16] Such excerpts are easily multiplied. At the core of Heschel's remarks on God's absence is the thought that, together and over time,

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[12] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1951), p. 152. Cf. Abraham Joshua Heschel, 'The Meaning of this War', in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, edited by Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), pp. 209-212.

[13] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 156.

[14] Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, p. 153.

[15] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 157.

[16] Heschel, 'On Prayer,' p. 260.

human beings can, through both actions and omissions, remove (or help to bring back) God.[17]

There is more than one way to interpret and develop Heschel's conception of the communal acts that exile God. This ambiguity is due partly to the fact that Heschel's writing often aims to achieve a certain existential or phenomenological effect in the reader, sometimes at the expense of analytical clarity.[18] First, perhaps every member of a community can act so as to cause God to depart from that community, the community responsible for the exiling. This interpretation closely links the victims of God's absence to an action for which they each share some responsibility. Second, perhaps some but not all members of a community can act in a way that causes God to leave the whole community. Maybe God leaves the community on account of its representative members, e.g. its religious or political leaders. Or maybe God leaves the community on account of some of its members, even if they are not representative.

As long as some but not all members of a community can exile God, then there may be innocent victims of God's absence. On all of the above interpretations, there is some link between those who suffer God's absence and those whose culpable actions cause God's absence. On one interpretation, the link is identity – the victims of God's absence just are the individuals who caused it. But on others, the link is more innocent, being either representation or shared membership. The interpretation on which every member's action contributes to God's exile might seem morally better to many philosophers than the others, at least insofar as

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[17] See Shai Held's *The Call of Transcendence* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013) for a thorough discussion of an ambiguity in Heschel's writings between what Held calls 'ontological' and 'epistemological' hiddenness, already evidenced even in the few passages I've referenced. Ontological hiddenness is the absence of God. Epistemological hiddenness is just the lack of human awareness of God. Held thinks that both lines of thought are present in Heschel and adopts the project of reconciling them. In this paper, I am mainly interested in the ontological stream of Heschel's thought, though both provide the theist with resources for thinking about Schellenberg's argument. Cf. Schellenberg's similar conceptual distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' hiddenness in John Schellenberg, 'Divine Hiddenness,' in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edition, edited by C. Taliaferro, P. Draper, and P. L. Quinn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), pp. 509-518 (p. 509).

[18] See Edward K. Kaplan, 'Heschel as Philosopher: Phenomenology and the Rhetoric of Revelation,' *Modern Judaism*, 21:1 (2001), on what Kaplan calls Heschel's 'phenomenological writing.'

it seems more fair that God would prevent the innocent from suffering God's absence. Nevertheless, the other accounts, and in particular the one in which even non-representative members can exile God, is precisely the sort of picture that seems to animate Heschel's writings on God's relationship to the world.

These ideas complicate our picture of the relationship-oriented desires of a perfectly loving God. On Judaism as Heschel conceives it (as on many of the more 'covenantal' versions of Christianity) God does not only, or even primarily, desire and participate in relationships with individuals *qua* individuals. But that is not because God is non-relational or non-loving. Rather, God is also related to and loves communities, e.g. Israel (or the Church). Part of God's relationship-seeking, loving nature, on this conception, is the desire to exist in mutually helpful and morally significant relationships with communities of human beings, not just individual human beings. Just like in individual-individual relationships, individual-community relationships allow that one member may push away the other. Here is the most important point: unlike individual persons, communities can perform actions to which not all of their constitutive members have contributed or even consented. Trivially, an individual person contributes to the actions that she performs, but she need not always contribute to an action performed by a community of which she is a member, a community whose fate is nevertheless necessarily bound up with hers.

Recall that Schellenberg allows that an individual might cause God to be hidden from her own conscious life, since such a possibility is a necessary condition of a genuine, meaningful relationship between that person and God. This individual allowance does little for a theist wanting to respond to the argument from divine hiddenness, because by definition it leaves untouched the problem of non-resistant non-believers. But when we expand our notion of perfect love to include love of communities, we see that individuals who are, at least *qua* individuals, innocent of actions that drive out God, can nevertheless be caught up in the effects of the actions of related others who perform this driving out on behalf of the community.[19] While this arrangement might seem somewhat unfair to many philosophers and non-philosophers alike,

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[19] In his reading of Martin Buber, Robert Adams discovers a similar theme. According to Adams, Buber sees God's 'hiding' as '... a process in *human* history, a *social* or *cultural* and thus still a human fact, though perhaps not in the *individual* human mind ... There

dual vulnerability – of human individuals, on the one hand, and God, on the other – is partly constitutive of a genuine, meaningful relationship between God and communities of human persons, just as it is between God and an individual.

Because God loves communities and desires relationship with them, and because these kinds of relationships are valuable, God has at least some reason to permit God's self, as well as human persons, to continue to exist in this vulnerable state. To preserve the authenticity of God's relationship to communities and God's vulnerability, it must be possible for human actions to have communal and not only individual import. If God always maintained an equally strong relationship with each non-resistant person everywhere, then the significance of God's relationship to human communities would be greatly diminished. This would not be a wholly bad state of affairs, but it would be lacking along at least one valuable dimension of human and divine experience.[20]

Because this dimension of human and divine experience is itself valuable, it need not only serve the purpose of thinking about divine hiddenness. This view incorporates an independently valuable picture of our moral lives that makes it appealing apart from the aid it provides us in trying to solve Schellenberg's problem. If Heschel is right, then my individual actions and state of being do not only have potential consequences for my own experience of God, but they have potential consequences for others' experiences as well. This expanded circle of moral responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of not only myself but of others is an attractive feature of the position.[21]

is human responsibility, individual as well as social, for the eclipse' (Robert Adams, 'The Silence of God in the Thought of Martin Buber', *Philosophia* 30:1-4 (2003), 51-68 (p. 60)).

[20] This kind of point about relationships is not foreign to analytic philosophy of religion. Eleonore Stump, for example, defends petitionary prayer partly on the grounds that a meaningful, non-overbearing relationship involves making some of one's actions conditional on the other participant's asking for things. Because this kind of relationship is good, God has at least some reason to knowingly withhold good things from human beings in light of their not having asked for them. See Eleonore Stump, 'Petitionary Prayer', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16: 2 (1979), 81-91. The point here is that this important insight, typically applied to individual relationships, applies to group relationships as well.

[21] Cf. a provocative remark by Terence Cuneo in 'Another Look at Divine Hiddenness', *Religious Studies*, 49 (2013), 151-164: '[I]f I understand the argument [from hiddenness] correctly, its strategy is to claim that, given what we know about the nature of love and what theists say about God and God's relationship to human beings, God would

There is an additional way in which God's relationship to groups rather than individuals is good. Relationship to groups of human beings satisfies, in Heschel's terminology, a 'divine need'. According to Heschel, God is unwilling to be alone.[22] God is also in need of human fulfilment of the commandments: 'the God of Israel is ... in need of man's integrity.'[23] The fact that God desires and needs relationship not only to human individuals, but to human communities as well, itself bestows some worth on those relationships. In addition to being a valuable part of human experience, these relationships are a valuable part of divine experience. Indeed, they in part motivate God to create the world. So these relationships bear some value in virtue of their satisfaction of the good desires and needs of a good being. But they in turn bear value in that it is good for us to satisfy such needs. Just as it is good to provide water for those who are thirsty, not only good for the one whose thirst is quenched but for the one who provides, it is good to provide meaningful relationships to those who lack them – not only good for the one who receives but for those who provide.

My remarks about the good of interdependence echo what has been said elsewhere in the literature on divine hiddenness under the banner of what Schellenberg calls "responsibility arguments."[24] Although the goodness of responsibility partly explains why relationships with communities are themselves good independently of explaining hiddenness, my argument is not, fundamentally, a responsibility argument. In a responsibility argument, the fact that it is good for us to be partly responsible for each other serves as God's reason for allowing non-resistant non-belief. But in my argument, it is the fact that God loves and desires relationship with communities that serves as at least one reason why God might allow non-resistant non-belief. Insofar as God

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not actualize a world that included non-resisting non-believers. But if this is so, the proponent of the argument must be prepared to concede, for argument's sake, certain things that theists say about God and God's relation to human beings. Among the things that theists say is this: no one is brought into proper relationship with God, others, and the natural world alone. Your actions may abet or impede my ability to relate rightly to God, you, and the natural world. This is the theme, prominent in the Christian east, of the *solidarity of salvation*.' (p. 164 n. 6)

[22] Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, p. 91.

[23] Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, p. 245.

[24] See especially Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 192ff; Travis Dumsday, "Divine Hiddenness and the Responsibility Argument," *Faith and Philosophy*, 12:2 (2010), pp. 357-371; and Crummett, "We are Here to Help Each Other".

seeks relationship with communities, God risks communal resistance, and insofar as communities resist, their individual members are at risk of ignorance of God. Rather than a trade-off between relationship with God and other goods, my argument highlights a potential trade-off between two kinds of valuable relationship with God.[25]

III. OBJECTIONS

Some resistance to this picture may arise due to a characteristically Western emphasis on individualism and autonomy, which corresponds to a de-emphasizing of culture, community, the spirit of the age, and related phenomena that affect the religious life of individuals. On Heschel's view, while we may certainly suffer the absence of God partly due to our own individual failings, we suffer it not only due to them. As creatures embedded in multiple communities, what we experience, know, and feel is to that extent also in the hands of others. Thus I am partly responsible not only for my own attunement to experience of God, but for my neighbor's as well. But not only that. I am part of communities which themselves, *qua* communities, have effects on my own life.

In addition to accommodating the value of relationships with community, another advantage of this picture over a solely individualistic picture is that it accommodates much of our collective religious experience (or lack thereof), at least in the West. Charles Taylor's grand project in *A Secular Age* illustrates this point nicely.[26] In that work Taylor charts the development of 'secularism' in his special sense, which is the new reality that most people can with relative ease envision their lives as deeply non-religious. This development serves to undercut the kind of surety and givenness of religious life and experience available in previous eras. On a very large scale, then, we can read Taylor as explaining one mechanism by which individuals' abilities to believe that God exists can be undermined by collective actions and processes which, crucially, are themselves attributable to no particular individual.

Some might worry that these sorts of pictures, and in particular Heschel's picture of a God whose presence in individual human lives is vulnerable to communal action, place an undue – indeed,

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[25] Thanks to John Schellenberg for pointing out to me that I need to distinguish my argument from responsibility arguments.

[26] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

unloving – burden on human beings. While it seems to me that Heschel's view does place more responsibility on us for others than what we might like, it actually mitigates our burden as individuals. Although we contribute to the cultures of the communities in which we live, as individuals we typically exercise very little direct control over them. For those non-resistant persons who do not believe, and even for those who believe but cannot believe very strongly, this explanation provides some degree of comfort. The dual appeal to communal responsibility and divine vulnerability makes one's non-belief or doubt intelligible: you fail to believe strongly or at all partly because communities in which you are embedded have failed in certain respects, or because you live in a 'secular age'. But this means that you are not especially to blame for this condition, at least not *qua* individual. In fact, when Heschel writes on the topic of sustaining faith, it is obvious that he does not expect most individuals to continuously experience a subjective awareness of God. Heschel writes that 'I believe' means 'I remember', and that experiences of God's presence 'are not common occurrences'. Rather,

> In the lives of most people they are as meteors which flare up for a moment and then disappear from sight. There are, however, people for whom these flashes ignite with them a light which will never be extinguished. Faith means: If you ever once merit that the Hidden One appears to you, be faithful to Him all the days of your life. Faith means: To guard forever the echo which once burst upon the deep recesses of our soul.[27]

At least for those of us who live in an age and culture guilty of the collective failures identified by Heschel, we should not feel as if we are individually to blame for our religious malaise.

In thinking about objections to the apparent fairness of allowing individuals to suffer God's absence due to failures not necessarily their own, it is worth being reminded (as Schellenberg sometimes reminds his readers) that the argument at issue is not the argument from evil and suffering, in which context this kind of picture is less plausible. Consider a person who endures some horrendous evil; it may seem morally objectionable that God's reason for allowing this person to suffer is simply that their community is unfaithful to God in some way. Perhaps some

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[27] Abraham Joshua Heschel, 'Pikuach Neshama: to Save a Soul', in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, edited by Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), pp. 54-67 (p. 64). Cf. Heschel, *Man is not Alone*, p. 165.

suffering can be justified like this, but it does not seem that the worst kinds and instances can be. Perhaps some readers feel an analogous resistance to this approach in the case of divine hiddenness. But when it comes to individuals merely lacking belief in God, it is at least not obviously bad that this would depend partly on the actions of the communities of which they are part. It is an open question whether other great harms come to individuals due to the communal failures that exile God. It's true that if such harms take place, then a problem for theism surfaces; but this is just the problem of suffering brought about by the means of hiddenness, not the problem of divine hiddenness itself. Provided that the phenomena of hiddenness and suffering can be separated, as I think they can be, then the objection in question is not appropriately aimed at a solution to the hiddenness problem.

The approach of this paper may elicit an additional significant objection, important enough to warrant consideration here, though far too complex to treat fully. Some traditional theists will think that the picture I have painted of Heschelian Judaism, according to which God is not only related to both individuals and groups, but is genuinely vulnerable to and in need of them, is incompatible with any philosophically acceptable version of theism. Any philosophically acceptable conception of theism, so this objection says, cannot allow that God is vulnerable or lacking in any way, because such a conception violates the necessary truth that God is perfect. If a perfect being is a being who is wholly self-sufficient and incapable of needs, then the picture sketched above is not one on which God is perfect.

As I noted at the beginning, the problem of divine hiddenness arises partly due to a sensible emphasis on taking the rich content of lived religion more seriously. This sometimes involves engaging a tapestry of values and possibilities in which philosophers' problems have often already been incorporated. Religious pictures, though often universal in their scope and application, are inherently idiosyncratic. Any attempt to raise problems for these idiosyncratic systems must take this into account. We cannot, with one hand, offer an intellectual objection to a lived religious system, yet with the other hand deprive that system of its own intellectual resources.

Furthermore, religious systems sometimes make claims not only about history, metaphysics, and applied ethics, but also about values themselves. Heschel's religion, for example, makes claims about the pervasive, radical dependency we have on each other, and the value of

being interdependent in this way. It is part of Heschel's Judaism that it is good to be partly responsible for – to be needed for – the religious life of my neighbour, and to be needed even by God. And it is part of this Judaism that part of God's love and need is a love and need for communities, whether Israel, the nations, or the world. The objection in question presupposes that a state of interdependence of this kind is less perfect than a state of pure independence. This presupposition seems unwarranted, especially in light of the apparent goodness intrinsic to interdependent relationships.

Ultimately the best response for a thinker like Heschel to the objection in question is to say that the criticism really shows the moral and theological inadequacy of philosophical theism.[28] Heschel's own writings draw a sharp distinction between the 'God of Israel' and the 'God of the philosophers'. Heschel writes, 'The God of Israel is a *name*, not a notion.'[29] A name 'describes', whereas a notion 'evokes'. According to Heschel, a fundamental semantic difference between the Jewish and philosophical God is that the former is named as a particular 'individual', whereas the latter is whatever happens to satisfy a concept that 'applies to all objects of similar properties' – in principle, whatever being satisfies the concept counts as God. The God in whom Heschel is interested answers to concerns fundamentally different from the God of philosophy.

> A first cause or an idea of the absolute – devoid of life, devoid of freedom – is an issue for science or metaphysics rather than a concern of the soul or the conscience. An affirmation of such a cause or such an idea would be an answer unrelated to our question. The living soul is not concerned with a dead cause but with a living God. Our goal is to ascertain the existence of a Being to whom we may confess our sins, of a God who loves, of a God who is not above concern with our inquiry and search for Him; a father, not an absolute.[30]

Human beings know God, not by 'timeless qualities', but by the 'living acts of God's concern'.[31] Readers may recognize here echoes of Pascal, who writes:

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[28] In this Heschel would find allies in contemporary feminist philosophy of religion. See, e.g. Sarah Coakley, "Feminism and Analytic Philosophy of Religion", *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, edited by William J. Wainwright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 494-525.

[29] Heschel, *Man is not Alone*, p. 269.

[30] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp. 125-6.

[31] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 21.

> The God of Christians does not consist in a God who is merely the author of geometrical truths and of the order of the elements. ... He does not consist simply in a God who exercises his Providence over the life and property of men, so as to grant those who worship him a happy span of years. ... But the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the god of Christians is a God of love and consolation; he is a God who fills the soul and heart of those whom he possesses; he is a God who makes them inwardly aware of their wretchedness and his infinite mercy; who unites himself to the depths of their soul; who fills their soul with humility, joy, confidence, love; who makes them incapable of any other end but himself.[32]

But it is more likely that Heschel is continuing in the tradition of the medieval Jewish philosopher Judah Halevi, who likewise writes:

> The philosophers' proof methodologies led them to believe in a god who neither helps nor hinders; he is not aware of our prayers or sacrifices, nor our devotion to or rebellion against them. ... None of these philosophers can identify their god by its definitive name. But one who has heard God's words, commands, and admonitions, and has heard the reward for serving Him and the punishments for sinning against Him – such a person is able to call God by his definitive name, which describes the Entity that has spoken to him.[33]

If Schellenberg's argument from hiddenness is to challenge forms of theism beyond the usual bare theism targeted by analytic argumentation, then it must take into account the decidedly *non*-philosophical nature of some of the most prominent manifestations of religious life and thought. By 'non-philosophical' I do not mean 'anti-philosophical', or anything that involves the abdication of one's rational faculties. Rather, I mean that we should take into account all of the materials from religion that may or may not have been delivered by philosophical analysis. And when we do that, we see that the force of the hiddenness argument is at least mitigated by taking seriously God's desire to be in relationships with communities of persons.

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[32] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. by Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), S690, pp. 227-8.

[33] Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari: In Defense of the Despised Faith*, trans. by N. Daniel Korobkin (Northvale: Roman and Littlefield, 1998), 3.2-3, p. 201.

V. CONCLUSION

In summary, if a loving relationship with an individual includes vulnerability to being pushed away, then there is a plausible parallel phenomenon in a loving relationship to a community. But it is also metaphysically plausible that not everyone in a community need individually contribute to the collective actions of the community of which they are part. This fact, conjoined with the great good of spiritual interdependence, provides for a Jewish (and, more specifically, Heschelian) contribution to explaining the existence of non-resistant non-believers.[34]

MOSES MAIMONIDES ON JOB'S HAPPINESS
AND THE RIDDLE OF DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE

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Abstract. The paper explores the nature and role of divine transcendence in Maimonides by focusing on the figure of Job as he is understood by him. In the first part, I discuss Maimonides' diagnosis of Job's suffering. In the second, I focus on Maimonides' analysis of the nature of its defeat, and the manners in which that defeat involves the mediation of divine transcendence and hiddenness. In the third, I discuss some of the difficulties involved within the picture presented in the second part, namely, Maimonides' seeming commitment to two incompatible conceptions of divine transcendence. I argue that the incompatible accounts need not be harmonized since the *Guide of the Perplexed* is not a textbook that attempts to provide a doctrine concerning the nature of divine transcendence and its relation to the world. Rather, its purpose is to *present* a riddle, the great riddle of divine transcendence, around which Jewish life, as he understands it, is built. This riddle, for Maimonides, cannot be solved or dissolved; rather, it has to be recognized and embraced.

The purpose of the paper is to explore the nature and role of divine transcendence in Maimonides by focusing on the figure of Job as he is understood by him. I will explore the ways in which Maimonides attempts to undermine the religious protest that is voiced by Job, the ways in which he construes Job's defeat of suffering, and how these are related to his conception of the intellect as the *locus* in which God's transcendence is mediated.

The paper contains three parts. In the first, I discuss Maimonides' diagnosis of Job's suffering. In the second, I focus on Maimonides' analysis of the nature of its defeat, and the manners in which that defeat

involves the mediation of divine transcendence and hiddenness. In the third part, I discuss some of the difficulties involved within the picture presented in the second part, namely, Maimonides' seeming commitment to two incompatible conceptions of divine transcendence. I argue that the incompatible accounts need not be harmonized since the *Guide of the Perplexed* is not a textbook that attempts to provide a doctrine concerning the nature of divine transcendence and its relation to the world. Rather, its purpose is to present a riddle, the great riddle of divine transcendence, around which Jewish life, as he understands it, is built. This riddle, for Maimonides cannot be solved or dissolved; rather, it has to be recognized and embraced.

I. JOB'S SUFFERING

An encounter with the book of Job faces us with a knight of protest. Job does not experience God's hiddenness. He experiences God as present in every single moment, taking every effort to torment him in every possible way:

> Let me be for my days are a breath. What is man that you make much of him that you fix your attention upon him? You inspect him every morning, examine him every minute. Will you not look away from me for a while, let me be till I swallow my spittle? (7: 16-19)

Job does not lovingly submit to the divine afflictions. He feels humiliated by the divine attack, perceiving it as a divine assault against him, as a divine abuse. He protests. He complains to God: 'Does it benefit You to defraud, to despise the toil of Your hands, while smiling on the counsel of the wicked?' (10:3). He states: 'God has wronged me; He has thrown up siege works around me. I cry, "Violence!" but am not answered; I shout, but can get no justice.' (19:6-7). I have argued elsewhere that Job does not retract the content of his accusations after the divine revelations. His protest comes to a halt as a result of his realization that there is no point in addressing God any longer; I have argued that the book of Job ends with Job's forgiving God, while refusing to be reconciled with Him (Verbin 2010).

Various readers of the book of Job, however, interpret the scope of Job's protest and its significance differently. Indeed Maimonides downplays the meaning and role of Job's protest, judging it insignificant, perceiving

it as resulting from Job's ignorance of God. In his *Guide of the Perplexed*, he makes the following comments concerning Job and his protest:

> The latter [Job] said all that he did say as long as he had no true knowledge and knew the deity only because of his acceptance of authority, just as the multitude adhering to the Law know it. (III/23, p. 492)[1]

And:

> The most marvellous and extraordinary thing about this story is the fact that knowledge is not attributed in it to Job. He is not said to be a wise or a comprehending or an intelligent man. Only moral virtue and righteousness in action are ascribed to him. For if he had been wise, his situation would not have been obscure for him ... (III/22, p. 487)

Maimonides, here, clearly maintains that Job's protest results from his ignorance; it is due to his ignorance that his situation had seemed obscure to him.

Maimonides seems to presuppose, in these passages, a distinction between pain, disease and loss, on the one hand, and the suffering that they characteristically produce, on the other. The distinction is, I believe, a helpful one and the two are to be conceptually distinguished. Pain is a sensation, which is located in a specific bodily organ. It is not intentional; it does not involve concepts, judgments or beliefs. Suffering, unlike pain, is not located in a specific bodily organ. It defines the person as a whole. When one suffers, suffering overtakes one's whole being; it defines the suffering person as a sufferer. Moreover, suffering, unlike pain, is intentional. We suffer *from* something, just as we are afraid *of* something or angry *at* someone. Suffering is not a mere physical mechanistic response to stimulation of a certain type; it involves concepts, judgments or beliefs. It involves, e.g., the sufferer's belief that what he or she is enduring, the pain or the loss, is bad, undesirable, of negative significance. Had it not been for these beliefs or judgments, the sufferer would not have been a sufferer. He or she may have been in great pain; he or she may have lost property, social status etc. Without considering the loss as a significant one, s/he would not have suffered on its account.[2] Suffering, therefore, involves a way of looking at something or evaluating

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[1] All reference to Maimonides within the text are to Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

[2] Childbirth, which involves a great deal of pain and, often, joy and happiness at the same time, is a useful example of the conceptual distinction between pain and suffering.

something, which is often accompanied by various sensations that show themselves in characteristic ways of acting, and which are related to various psycho-physiological processes.[3]

Job, according to Maimonides, did not suffer due to his loss of property and children nor did he suffer due to his disease and pain. Job suffered due to his faulty way of understanding his pain and loss, due to his faulty way of relating to the facts:

> The latter [Job] said all that he did say as long as he had no true knowledge and knew the deity only because of his acceptance of authority, just as the multitude adhering to the Law know it. But when he knew God with a *certain knowledge*, he admitted that true happiness, which is the knowledge of the deity, is guaranteed to all who know Him and that a human being cannot be troubled in it by any of all the misfortunes in question. While he had known God only through the traditional stories and not by the way of speculation, Job had imagined that the things thought to be happiness, such as health, wealth, and children, are the ultimate goal. For this reason he fell into such perplexity and said such things as he did. (III/23, pp. 492-493)

Pain, for Maimonides, has to do with matter, with the frailty of our body, which is subject to time, to change, to disease and to death. Both the wise and the unwise are susceptible to the contingency of matter, to aging, injury and death; the lives of both involve pain due to the matter from which they are created:

> All passing away and corruption or deficiency are due solely to matter ... Similarly every living being dies and becomes ill solely because of its matter and not because of its form. (III/8, p. 431)

Although both the wise and the unwise are vulnerable due to their bodily existence, the unwise are more so. The unwise are immersed in matter; being immersed in matter, they indulge in practices that are harmful to the body, that bring about and enhance disease, pain and sorrow. Maimonides believes that self-produced evils are the most prevalent ones:

> The evils of the third kind [i.e., self-produced evils] are those that are inflicted upon any individual among us by his own action; this is what happens in the majority of cases ... This kind is consequent upon all vices,

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[3] For more on the distinction between pain and suffering, see, e.g., Edwards 2003 and Cornevale 2009.

> I mean concupiscence for eating, drinking, and copulation, and doing
> these things with excess in regard to quantity or irregularly or when the
> quality of the foodstuffs is bad. For this is the cause of all corporeal and
> psychical diseases and ailments. (III/12, pp. 445-446)

Physical indulgence, for example, results in physical illness as well as
in various vices that lead the unwise to pursue unnecessary aims the
attainment of which involves a greater dependency on chance, greater
risks, and, therefore, a greater deal of pain and sorrow:

> With regard to the diseases of the soul due to this evil regimen, they
> arise in two ways: In the first place, through the alteration necessarily
> affecting the soul in consequence of the alteration of the body, the soul
> being a corporeal faculty ... and in the second place, because of the fact
> that the soul becomes familiarized with, and accustomed to, unnecessary
> things and consequently acquires the habit of desiring things that are
> unnecessary either for the preservation of the individual or for the
> preservation of the species; and this desire is something infinite ...
> Thus every ignoramus who thinks worthless thoughts is always sad
> and despondent because he is not able to achieve the luxury attained
> by someone else. In most cases, such a man exposes himself to great
> dangers, such as arise in sea voyages and the service of kings; his aim
> therein to obtain these unnecessary luxuries ... (III/12, pp. 445-446)

If we wish to avoid unnecessary pain, disease and loss, our form, our
reason is to rule our physical impulses:

> He [God] granted it – I mean the human form – power, dominion, rule
> and control over matter, in order that it subjugate it, quell its impulses,
> and bring it back to the best and most harmonious state that is possible.
> (III/ 8, p. 432)

Some are successful in doing so:

> There are among men individuals to whose mind all the impulses of
> matter are shameful and ugly things, deficiencies imposed by necessity ...
> A man should be in control of all these impulses, restrict his efforts in
> relation to them, and admit only that which is indispensable. He should
> take as his end that which is the end of man *qua* man: namely, solely
> the mental representation of the intelligibles, the most certain and the
> noblest of which being the apprehension, in as far as this is possible, of
> the deity, of the angels, and of His other works. These individuals are
> those who are permanently with God ... (III/8, pp. 432-433)

The life of such a person who is 'permanently with God' is a happy one. Such a person is characteristically free from ailments, both physical and psychic; he is characteristically free from both sickness and sorrow. Moreover, his form no longer struggles to quench matter; it no longer needs to control it. It reaches a state in which it transcends matter. The individual of perfect apprehension then comes to live a somewhat divided life, living in two parallel plains: one that has to do with his ordinary actions and interactions: eating, drinking, caring for his livelihood etc.; the other, which remains uninterrupted by the former, has to do with his contemplation of the divine name:

> And there may be a human individual who, through his apprehension of the true realities and his joy in what he has apprehended, achieves a state in which he talks with people and is occupied with his bodily necessities while his intellect is wholly turned toward Him, may He be exalted, so that in his heart he is always in His presence, may he be exalted, while outwardly he is with people, in the sort of way described by the poetical parables that have been invented for these notions: I sleep but my heart waketh ... (III/51, p. 623)

The defeat of suffering is intrinsically related to reason's capacity to transcend matter, in this way, and turn to God. When matter is transcended, the pain and loss that are related to matter are transcended along with it while the intellect is filled with the joy of apprehending God.

Although our reason can transcend matter and the pain to which it is susceptible, it cannot eliminate the pain. Although all illnesses, physical and psychical are self-produced, although 'the cause of all corporeal and psychical diseases and ailments' is our own actions, it does not follow that pain can be eliminated by wisdom. Natural disasters may injure us; we may fall prey to others' wrongful actions. Even the wise prophet may have to endure the pain of execution that directly results from his flawless actions *qua* prophet:

> But the nature of that intellect is such that it always overflows and is transmitted from one who receives that overflow to another one who receives it after him until it reaches an individual beyond whom this overflow cannot go and whom it merely renders perfect, as we have set out in a parable in one of the chapters of this Treatise. The nature of this matter makes it necessary for someone to whom this additional measure of overflow has come, to address a call to people, regardless of whether

that call is listened to or not, and even if he as a result thereof is harmed in his body. We even find that prophets addressed a call to people until they were killed – this divine overflow moving them and by no means letting them rest and be quiet, even if they met with great misfortunes. (II/57, p. 375)[4]

The pain that such a prophet experiences, however, produces no suffering. The prophet's bodily existence subsists on a different plain.

Thus, while pain and loss cannot be completely abolished, the suffering and sorrow that they characteristically produce can be done away with. Ascribing no particular significance to the well-being of his body or to its subsistence, the wise person does not suffer by the injuries that afflict it or by its loss. His intellect transcends his body while contemplating the divine name, disregarding the pain and the loss, considering it insignificant and external to its very being. The contemplative life is, therefore, the happy life, and the happy life is the contemplative life. Suffering, for Maimonides, is, thus, a symptom of a bad life. It is defeated – it is abolished – by wisdom, by knowledge.

II. JOB'S HAPPINESS

Maimonides, however, has famously emphasized God's transcendence, His hiddenness, both to our reason and to our senses. He has famously insisted that God's nature cannot be known:

> all men, those of the past and those of the future, affirm clearly that God, may He be exalted, cannot be apprehended by the intellects, and that none but He Himself can apprehend what He is ... (I/59, p. 139)

Given God's hiddenness, what can the Maimonidean sage know? What kind of knowledge constitutes the Maimonidean sage as a sage? What kind of knowledge did Job acquire, which had liberated him from suffering?

It may appear as if the Maimonidean sage possesses two types of knowledge: propositional knowledge and non-propositional knowledge.

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[4] I judge this paragraph, along with Part III/22, 23 and the description of the climactic deaths of Moses Aaron and Miriam in III/51 as conclusive evidence for the thesis that Maimonides was committed to the 'contemplative' conception of divine providence. According to this conception, the individual of perfect apprehension who enjoys God's providence to its fullest is not protected from physical harm but from the suffering that it may bring forth.

It may appear as if the propositional component can be expressed by means of Maimonides' negative theology. The Maimonidean sage, presumably, knows that he cannot apply any positive attribute to describe God. He cannot describe God as eternal, omnipotent, omniscient or perfectly benevolent.

The *Guide* seems to contain arguments that purport to justify that inability. These arguments, however, rely on sub-arguments that function as presuppositions concerning God's nature, e.g., that God is one, perfect and eternal. In other words, Maimonides implicitly assumes various truths about God's nature. He states, for example:

> With regard to those three groups of attributes – which are the attributes indicative of the essence or of a part of the essence or of a certain quality subsisting in the essence – it has already been made clear that they are impossible with reference to Him, may He be exalted, for all of them are indicative of composition, and the impossibility of composition in respect to the deity we shall make clear by demonstration. (I/52, p. 116)

If these presuppositions are true then the conclusions that follow from them, namely, that we cannot ascribe any perfections to God, that we cannot state that God is in-composite, immutable, eternal etc., are false. If the presuppositions concerning God's nature are false, then they cannot justify Maimonides' conclusions. Thus, the Maimonidean sage cannot be defined as a sage by possessing propositional knowledge of what God is or is not.

Realizing that, Lorberbaum argues that the utterances of the *Guide* are poetic. They do not make statements that can be true or false but they attempt to bring about a change in the ways in which we speak about God and worship Him by the use of poetic means (Lorberbaum 2011).

Seeskin argues that the *Guide* has propositional content, albeit a flawed one. Its propositions miss the mark:

> Obviously Maimonides would not say that every claim we make about God is nonsensical. But he would say that the claims we make about God are best understood as steps on the way to something higher: a perspective from which we see that strictly speaking nothing we say about God can be true. (Seeskin 2000: 35)

I have elsewhere argued that the propositions of the *Guide* cannot be merely false; their failure, and the failure of each and every utterance about God (if it is to be understood as truly *about* God) is categorical,

for Maimonides, and, as such, deeper than the failure of falsity; it is incoherent nonsense (Verbin 2011).

Whether the utterances of the *Guide* are poetic, meaningless or simply deficient, it appears that the knowledge that the Maimonidean sage possesses cannot be understood as propositional knowledge of what God is or is not.

Although the Maimonidean sage is not in possession of propositional knowledge about God, although he cannot speak *about* God, he can *refer to* God.[5] He can do so by means of God's proper name, YHWH:

> All the names of God, may He be exalted, that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions. There is nothing secret in this matter. The only exception is one name: namely *Yod, He Vav, He*. This is the name of God, may He be exalted, that has been originated without any derivation, and for this reason it is called the *articulated name*. This means that this name gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence, may He be exalted. On the other hand, all the other great names give their indication in an equivocal way, being derived from terms signifying actions the like of which ... exist as our own actions ... Generally speaking, the greatness of this name and the prohibition against pronouncing it are due to its being indicative of the *essence* of Him, may He be exalted, in such a way that none of the created things is associated with Him in this indication. (I/ 61, pp. 147-148)

The Maimonidean sage who has cleansed his mind of the false images of God that it tends to produce can contemplate the divine name. It is this content-less mystical contemplation of what cannot be said in meaningful propositions but can only be shown that constitutes the Maimonidean sage as a sage.[6, 7] It is in that contemplation that divine transcendence is mediated and suffering is defeated.

Maimonides uses different metaphors for the non-propositional, mystical contemplation of God, among which are the metaphors of 'beauty' and of a 'bright light':

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[5] On meaning and reference in Maimonides, see Benor (1995: 347).

[6] This is, of course, a reference to the early Wittgenstein's distinction in the *Tractatus*, between what can be said and what can only be shown. See Wittgenstein 1988.

[7] I am here joining the minority of interpreters who read the *Guide* as philosophical mysticism. A prominent proponent of this interpretation of the *Guide* is David Blumenthal (Blumenthal 2006).

> all the philosophers say: We are dazzled by His beauty, and He is hidden
> from us because of the intensity with which He becomes manifest, just as
> the sun is hidden to eyes that are too weak to apprehend it. (I/59, p. 139)

And elsewhere:

> Sometimes truth flashes out to us so that we think it is day, and then
> matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves
> again in an obscure night, almost as were at first. (I/Introduction, p. 7)

In his discussion of divine providence (whose nature too, Maimonides
construes in terms of the human capacity for apprehending God)
Maimonides characterizes the climactic moment of apprehension to
which Moses, Aaron and Miriam have ascended, a moment during which
they transcended language and the world, transcended their body and
its contingency, transcended suffering and sorrow, in terms of 'intense
passionate love', in terms of a 'divine kiss':

> [W]hen a perfect man is stricken with years and approaches death, this
> apprehension increases very powerfully, joy over this apprehension and
> a great love for the object of apprehension become stronger, until the
> soul is separated from the body at that moment in this state of pleasure.
> Because of this the Sages have indicated with reference to the deaths of
> Moses Aaron, and Miriam that the three of them died by a kiss ... Their
> purpose was to indicate that the three of them died in the pleasure of this
> apprehension due to the intensity of passionate love. (III/51, pp. 627-628)

The Maimonidean sage is wholly protected from the sea of chance, from
every type of harm. Nothing and no one can undo him. Nothing and
no one can cause him terror and distress and separate him from God.
He is happy in the pleasure of his passionate loving intellectual mystical
apprehension of God. Death and dying too, whether they are caused by
the arrows of the battlefield, the snare of the fowler or by natural causes,
are not agonizing experiences for the individual of perfect apprehension.
For him, the moment of death is a moment of intense pleasure and
love, during which his intellect is freed from its attachment to the body,
freed to contemplate the divine name more fully than it could ever have
contemplated it when it was attached to a body.[8]

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[8] It is, thus, clear that for Maimonides, there is no tie between faith and suffering.
Loving God rightly, too, does not produce sorrow. On the contrary, it produces a great
deal of joy. It liberates the individual of perfect apprehension from the world while his
body remains susceptible to the laws that govern it. It does not involve any sacrifices.

Maimonides's Job too, after the divine revelations, had acquired such liberating mystical knowledge, and transcended the pain and the loss that he had endured by means of that knowledge. Transcending his previous misconceptions about God and about the genuine causes of his suffering, he had acquired true happiness and ceased to protest. Maimonides believes that from within that elevated state Job retracted his complaints and accusations, stating 'I recant and relent being but dust and ashes' (Job 42:6); he believes that it is in reference to that elevated state that the book of Job has God say to Job's friends, 'You did not speak correctly as did My servant Job' (Job 42:7).

III. THE RIDDLE OF TRANSCENDENCE

Maimonides' discussion of the divine attributes involves three dimensions of transcendence: linguistic, epistemic and metaphysical: Maimonides seems to deny the possibility of speaking about God, knowing anything about Him, as well as of being in any relation whatsoever to Him. The metaphysical dimension shows itself particularly in the *Guide* I/52, where Maimonides explicates God's metaphysical transcendence in relation to His incorporeality:

> There is no relation between God, may He be exalted, and time and place; and this is quite clear. For time is an accident attached to motion, when the notion of priority and posteriority is considered in the latter and when motion becomes numbered, as is made clear in the passages especially dealing with this subject. Motion, on the other hand, is one of the things attached to bodies, whereas God, may He be exalted, is not a body. Accordingly there is no relation between Him and time, and in the same way there is no relation between Him and place. (I/52, p. 117)

Thus:

> There is, in truth, no relation in any respect between Him and any of His creatures ... How then could there subsist a relation between Him, may He be exalted, and any of the things created by Him, given the immense difference between them with regard to the true reality of their existence, than which there is no greater difference? (I/52, p. 118)

Nothing that truly matters is given up. It involves our coming to see rightly. It involves our shedding our ignorance, our misperceived views about what does and does not matter; it involves a happy mystical contemplation of the divine name during which God's transcendence is mediated and the sage is released from his/her body while everything stays in place.

While the non-propositional mystical content of the apprehension that eliminates suffering seems compatible with the linguistic and epistemic limitations that Maimonides discusses, it fails to cohere with the metaphysical limitations. While the mystical apprehension does not provide the sage with anything that he could say or know *about* God, it places him in relation with God, thereby compromising God's metaphysical transcendence. In other words, if there is a mystical, non-propositional contemplation of the divine name, which 'gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence' (I/61, p. 148) then there is a relation between God and human beings.

The mystical moment of contemplation of the divine name that defeats suffering and modifies divine transcendence, is related to a variety of issues in the *Guide*, among which are prophecy, providence, cosmology and creation. Maimonides' account of these themes is derived from his metaphor of the divine intellectual overflow, in terms of which these concepts are developed. It is clear that if there is an overflow of divine intellect into creation in general, and into the happy philosopher/prophet who is capable of absorbing it in his mystical contemplation in particular, then absolute transcendence is modified in the operation of a variety of mechanisms. Maimonides seems to be committed to the metaphor of the overflow of divine intellect:

> This term, I mean 'overflow' is something also applied in Hebrew to God, may He be exalted, with a view to likening Him to an overflowing spring of water ... For nothing is more fitting as a simile to the action of one that is separate from matter than this expression, I mean 'overflow'. (II/12, p. 279)

Thus, two incompatible positions regarding divine transcendence clearly appear in the *Guide*. Is Maimonides committed to God's absolute transcendence, to His having no relation to the world, or is he committed to the existence of a divine intellectual overflow that flows into creation?

Blurring the distinction between the epistemological and the metaphysical dimensions of transcendence, Gruenwald characterizes the dilemma of divine transcendence with the following words:

> On the one hand, there is the idea of God's absolute and incomprehensible transcendence, according to which he is beyond the direct and positive cognition of man. On the other hand, we have the idea of the divine overflow which emanates from God through the Active Intellect and which under certain, though rare, conditions reaches out to man, who in

turn finds in it a stimulant and means of being elevated to that self-same Active Intellect. We may see the Active Intellect as the meeting place of the emanating divine overflow with the human intellect ... (Gruenwald 1991: 145)

The tension between the 'absolute transcendence concept' of the deity and the 'qualified transcendence concept' was treated in a variety of ways by Maimonides' scholars.[9] Recognizing the tension, Davies attempts to provide an interpretation that harmonizes the two conceptions, embracing a careful version of the 'qualified transcendence concept'. Addressing the linguistic and epistemological dimensions of divine transcendence, he argues that

Maimonides's account of God's knowledge should be seen as an account of the unlimited perfection of knowledge ... Maimonides is able to consider God to be an intellect without compromising his explanations of religious language; both can be held in tandem and in harmony. (Davies 2011:103)

Even-Chen views the tension as 'essential and indubitable' and argues for the qualified transcendence concept, maintaining that Maimonides' true position is that God is an intellect (Even-Chen 2008: 19-45). Pines argues for an esoteric sceptical reading which rejects the qualified transcendence concept and opts for absolute transcendence. He denies that metaphysical knowledge is possible, insisting that the purpose of the *Guide* is ethical and political (Pines 1979); Reines too, argues for the absolute transcendence concept, which renders the traditional notions of providence and prophecy 'imaginary fantasies' (Reines 1986).

Over and against these interpretative strategies, some wish to preserve the dialectic nature of the *Guide*, insisting that Maimonides is committed to both positions. Viewing the tensions within the *Guide* as resulting from Maimonides' commitment to both philosophy and the Law, Gruenwald states:

In trying to account for Maimonides' differing positions we should not resort to apologetic harmonization, nor should we press too hard to unearth 'either-or' solutions which restrict the area of dialectical implications ... The ultimate question regarding Maimonides'

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[9] I am here following Reines in characterizing the tension between the different conceptions of transcendence as between an 'absolute' and a 'qualified' concept of transcendence. See Reines 1986.

philosophical thought is whether there is more than one set of tracks that
lead to the top of the mountain ... Since in several cases ... Maimonides'
deliberations move in circular form, we do more justice to the master's
thought if we adopt such an attitude rather than an esoteric mode of
reading Maimonides, or artificial harmonization. (Gruenwald 1991:
154-155)[10]

While I find Gruenwald's position helpful in taking seriously both
horns of the dilemma of divine transcendence, I believe that it fails to
provide us with a strategy for understanding and interpreting the *Guide*.
How are we to understand the purpose of the *Guide*, if Maimonides
presents, argues for, and endorses two incompatible positions regarding
divine transcendence in it? A biographical explanation that appeals to
Maimonides' commitment to both philosophy and the Law is of no use
in this context.

I would like to propose a different interpretative strategy for
understanding the *Guide*. I propose that we approach the *Guide* as a great
riddle.[11] Approaching it as a riddle entails that we are not to attempt
to harmonize its contradictory accounts of transcendence nor are we
to dispense with any horn of the dilemma of divine transcendence. It
entails that the *Guide* is not to be read as a textbook that provides us
with a doctrine (or two doctrines) concerning divine transcendence,
with propositions that are to be evaluated as true or false, justified or
unjustified. Rather, as a riddle, its purpose is to present the fundamental
dilemma of divine transcendence in its most poignant form, insisting
that the great riddle of divine transcendence admits of neither a solution
nor a dissolution. The *Guide's* complicated and incompatible threads
regarding divine transcendence call its ideal reader to embrace the riddle,
to leap into it, pointing out that the riddle is embodied in Jewish life.[12]

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[10] Gruenwald's metaphor of the different tracks that lead to the top of the mountain
is problematic too, since different conceptions of the nature of the 'top of the mountain'
appear in the *Guide*, as he himself notes, in relation to philosophy and prophecy.

[11] Approaching the issue of transcendence in the *Guide* as a great riddle is inspired
by Cora Diamond's treatment of Anselm's proof in her 'Riddles and Anselm's Riddle'
(Diamond 1995) and particularly by Patt-Shamir's work on the role of riddles in religion
(Patt-Shamir 2003).

[12] Thus, in portraying the riddle, Maimonides portrays a complicated picture of
a complicated form of life, which contains both the concept of 'absolute transcendence'
which renders problematic the metaphysical consolations that are sought within one's life
with God, along with the principles of right conduct that insist on bringing the idea of
absolute transcendence to bear on human life, in order to shape, reform and redeem it.

In his *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein referred to a variation of Maimonides' great riddle of transcendence with the following words: 'The "experience" which we need to understand logic is not that such and such is the case but that something is; but that is no experience ...' (Wittgenstein 1988: T, 5.552). In his 'Lecture on Ethics', he referred to an experience/apprehension/ contemplation of 'something' transcendent and of absolute value as a 'paradox', focusing on the experience of 'wonder at the existence of the world'. As an experience, it is a contingent fact that takes place in time and space. As such, it is in the world, an immanent fact in it. Yet, it is presumed to be of 'something' transcendent, i.e., 'outside' the world, 'outside' space and time, and as such, of absolute value. It is, thus, a 'paradox':

> But when I say they are experiences, surely, they are facts; they have taken place then and there, lasted a certain definite time and consequently are describable. And so ... I must admit it is nonsense to say that they have absolute value. And I will make my point still more acute by saying 'It is the paradox that an experience, a fact should seem to have supernatural value. (Wittgenstein 1993: 43)[13]

Wittgenstein insisted that the verbal expression which we give to such an experience is nonsense (Wittgenstein 1993: 41).

Similarly to Wittgenstein, in Maimonides too, the climactic moment of apprehension of the divine name that defeats suffering, in which the great riddle of transcendence reaches its climax, is described as a paradox: it is a moment during which the dichotomies between transcendence and immanence, time and eternity, contingency and necessity collapse.

In attempting to gesture at this great riddle, (not at its solution) Maimonides runs against the boundaries of language, against the walls of the cage, as Wittgenstein puts it (Wittgenstein 1993). Like Wittgenstein, he, too, embraces silence:

> Glory, then to Him who is such that when the intellects contemplate His essence, their apprehension turns into incapacity; and when they contemplate the proceeding of His actions from His will, their knowledge turns into ignorance; and when the tongues aspire to magnify Him by

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[13] Kierkegaard too, emphasized the role of paradox and the absurd within the life of faith in his analysis of the figure of Christ and what it takes to follow him in his *Practice in Christianity* (Kierkegaard 1991). For the role of the absurd in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and how it relates to the riddle of the binding of Isaac, see Patt-Shamir 2003.

means of attributive qualifications, all eloquence turns into weariness
and incapacity. (I/58, p. 137) [14]

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INFINITE STRIVING AND THE INFINITE SUBJECT: A KIERKEGAARDIAN REPLY TO SCHELLENBERG

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Abstract. In this paper I argue – pace J. L. Schellenberg – that it remains the case for Kierkegaard that infinite striving, properly understood, is essential to the relationship with God, who remains the Infinite Subject, one necessarily hidden for defensible logical, ontological, and existential reasons. Thus Kierkegaard's arguments for the hiddenness of God as a logically required ingredient in the relationship that human beings are called to undertake with God can withstand Schellenberg's criticisms.

The influence of J. L. Schellenberg's *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* has been far-reaching, perhaps even transformative of the contemporary scene in philosophy of religion. Among the many potential objectors he treats, Schellenberg seems to have a proverbial soft spot for Søren Kierkegaard.

Schellenberg's account of the Dane's viewpoint, which is brief and overly reliant on idiosyncratic interpreters like Louis Pojman and Robert Adams, who advance oddly literalistic and highly contestable views, is prefaced by his sketch of a Kierkegaardian picture of subjectivity. Following that sketch, the main part of Schellenberg's recapitulation of Kierkegaard explains how hiddenness according to the Dane has both a positive function to stimulate the striving and passion definitive of subjectivity and a negative function to militate against the self-deceived complacency that would inevitably result if the subject imagined God could be related to objectively, as if God were merely another object in the world. Of course ultimately Schellenberg argues that Kierkegaard's arguments do not amount to an actual rebuttal.

Nevertheless, Schellenberg admits Kierkegaard is perhaps the most formidable opponent of his view. While his treatment of Kierkegaard

is respectful, it does not include some crucial elements of the Dane's thought that if properly understood will give persons interested in the issue of divine hiddenness further reason to explore Kierkegaard's thought as a resource against Schellenberg's version of the argument.

When discussing Kierkegaard, Schellenberg concentrates his criticism on premise (6) of what he calls (somewhat prejudicially) the Deception Argument, so this paper will present two rejoinders that defend the soundness of premise (6) against Schellenberg.

Recall that premise (6) reads: "If strong, objective evidence of God's existence were made available to them, human beings would form (false) beliefs entailing that subjectivity is of no great importance."[1] The reason this premise is important is that the remainder of a key argument that Schellenberg attributes to Kierkegaard rests upon it. From this premise it is a short distance to the conclusion that "if strong, objective evidence of God's existence were made available to them, human beings would not become subjective,"[2] a crucial failing on Kierkegaard's view. Because people are generally indisposed to become the single individual standing alone before God, to become the self that they can only be by achieving the highest possible relationship of which human beings are capable, the relationship with the divine, then Kierkegaard can argue that a certain amount of striving is required to attain the ideal for humanity, a striving that divine obviousness would render unnecessary.

Interestingly Schellenberg gives quite a bit of credit to Kierkegaard. With respect to what he has called the Stimulus Argument, which supports the positive work of inciting human beings to seek out the hidden God, Schellenberg concedes that Kierkegaard's version is an improvement on Pascal's and admits further that "Kierkegaard can claim that faith ... *logically* requires Divine hiddenness: if we accept his concept of faith *at all*, we ipso facto accept the necessity of Divine hiddenness for its instantiation."[3] Similarly, when summarizing what he has called the Deception Argument, which supports the negative task of defeating

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[1] J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason,* 1st edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 164-65. Admittedly this paper addresses only Schellenberg's arguments in this book, which opened a debate that has continued since, and Schellenberg himself has advanced his own continued refinements and improvements to his thinking in the years since its initial publication. He has, however, not returned to sustained discussion of Kierkegaard's arguments, so this paper engages only that limited topic.

[2] Ibid., 165.

[3] Ibid., 158.

the possibility that human beings could acquire false beliefs about God and thus lapse into complacency if God were not elusive, Schellenberg again admits that Kierkegaard's "arguments do indeed provide possible rebuttals for the prima facie case we are considering, for each suggests that God has reason *not* to put his existence beyond reasonable nonbelief for all human beings at all times."[4] It seems to me then that Schellenberg gives more ground to Kierkegaard than to any of his other interlocutors, and a defense of Kierkegaard then could have outsized impact on the success of Schellenberg's argument. I thus concentrate in what follows on responding to Schellenberg's arguments that Kierkegaard's claims ultimately fail.

The first reason Schellenberg claims that they fail is because Kierkegaardian faith cannot be plausibly viewed as an outweighing or offsetting good.[5] I do not think that Kierkegaard would claim that faith was an outweighing or offsetting good of the sort that Schellenberg describes. Not because Kierkegaard does not think faith is supremely important – clearly it is – but because a necessary condition of attaining Kierkegaardian faith is that one refuse the crude calculus of "outweighing" and "offsetting" that Schellenberg depends upon.

For Kierkegaard, faith is an attitude that transforms the whole of the believer's life and relationship to others and to her experience. The passionate concern of faith is not for the quantitatively maximally great good available but for God and for the believer's eternal happiness at rest in God, which is the absolutely great good, which is to say, it is qualitatively higher than any other available good. If we remain only with the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the only work of Kierkegaard's that Schellenberg deals with in any detail, we find its pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, making this very point:

> An eternal happiness relates itself with pathos to an essentially existing person, not to a speaker who is courteous enough to include it on the list of the good things for which he supplicates. Usually people abhor denying that such a good exists; so they include it but, just by *including it*, show that they do not include it. I do not know whether one should laugh or weep on hearing the enumeration: a good job, a beautiful wife, health, the rank of a councilor of justice – and in addition an eternal happiness, which is the same as assuming that the kingdom of *heaven*

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[4] Ibid., 161-162.
[5] Ibid., 162.

is a kingdom along with all the other kingdoms on *earth* and that one
would look for information about it in a geography book.[6]

Kierkegaard's claim about the value of passionate faith then is not that it
outweighs or offsets competing goods but rather precisely that no such
comparison between the absolute good and relative goods is possible.

By the same logic, we can respond to Schellenberg's objection that
"it is hard ... to see why such an *intense* form of inwardness should be
idealized ... Such intensity seems too narrow, excluding as it does many
other good things in life which a loving God might wish us to experience
and enjoy."[7] This again is a misreading, and it is a great misfortune that
Schellenberg cites at this point not Kierkegaard himself but Robert
Adams, from an essay published 40 years ago.[8] Adams again mistakenly
imagines that what Johannes Climacus means by an infinite passion or
interest is a quantitative maximum, such that the life of religious faith
becomes one of grossly irresponsible risk-taking. On Adams's and
Schellenberg's caricature of Kierkegaard, the faithful person deliberately
seeks out as many states of affairs to be uncertain about as possible and
then flings herself indiscriminately and with reckless abandon at the
slightest vanishing hope. Adams sniffs in disapproval that "in a tolerable
religious ethics some way must be found to conceive of the religious
interest as inclusive rather than exclusive of the best of other interests."[9]
Indeed. Fortunately, this is exactly Kierkegaard's view.

Not only is religious passion not one passion among others, and its
object not one among others, but as absolute the eternal happiness found
in God alone and the faithful person's infinite passion for it is inclusive of
other goods. The best example I can use comes from *Fear and Trembling*,
in a passage where Kierkegaard's pseudonymous persona, Johannes
de Silentio, asserts that God demands "absolute love" but immediately
clarifies by saying

Anyone who in demanding a person's love believes that this love
is demonstrated by his becoming indifferent to what he otherwise
cherished is not merely an egotist but is also stupid ... For example,

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[6] *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to* Philosophical Fragments, vol. 1, tr. Howard V.
and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 391.

[7] *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 162.

[8] Robert M. Adams, "Kierkegaard's Arguments against Objective Reasoning in
Religion," *The Monist* 60 (1976), 228-243.

[9] Quoted at *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 163.

a man requires his wife to leave her father and mother, but if he considers it a demonstration of her extraordinary love to him that she for his sake became an indifferent and lax daughter etc., then he is far more stupid than the stupid. If he had any idea of what love is, he would wish to discover that she was perfect in her love as a daughter and sister, and he would see therein that she would love him more than anyone in the kingdom.[10]

The point of this example I trust cuts directly against Schellenberg and Adams. God is not a jealous, possessive, and abusive husband who confiscates all our other interests and loves in favor of his own exclusive enjoyment. When Kierkegaard speaks of absolute love he means a love that is not exhaustive but transformative. Far from enjoining a monomaniacal intensity, Kierkegaard's God insists on fidelity to other responsibilities. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that the absolute love of the believer for her God impels her to redoubled energies in her loves for others and cultivations of diverse passions and projects. This redoubling in fact would itself be evidence of the absolute nature of her primary devotion. To stick with de Silentio's example of marriage, the participants in the absolute relationship of the marriage partnership are prepared to take delight not just in the love that each has for the other but in the general expansiveness of love as it is shared preeminently of course in the marriage but by extension to others as well. Neither God nor a loving husband wants single-minded devotion that inhibits other goods and their pursuit but wants the full flourishing of the beloved, a prize that can only be won if the primary love relationship doesn't stifle other loves and passions but in point of fact provokes them in turn to even more profound intensification.

The mistake that Schellenberg and Adams make is to assume that love is a zero-sum game. On their mistaken premise that passion has to be apportioned out from limited supplies into a narrow range of potential channels, a possessive bullying posture – whether from the divine or from a human so-called lover – is almost inevitable. If love is finite, if each of us has so much passion that we are forced by scarcity to expend parsimoniously, then of course in order to convince me that you really love me I need to see you stop loving someone else, as if love shared with them is automatically not love shared with me.

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[10] *Fear and Trembling*, tr. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 73.

But obviously the experience of the truly mutually devoted couple exposes this mistake for what it is; there is not only so much love to go around. Love is infinite and expansive; the more it is shared the more there is to share. Surely this is the only right way to represent the divinity, not as a jealous control freak. So if God demands absolute love, and it would seem to be the case that God indeed does, it is demanded in such a way as to result in the expansion of love generally, both empowering lovers to love and enabling the reciprocation of love.

On this point I am seconding and extending an argument already made by M. Jamie Ferreira, who has identified a significant problem with Schellenberg's critique of Kierkegaard, namely, that he seems to think Kierkegaard is making a psychological claim about the motivation of belief, when in fact the claim is based on the grammar of the absolute.[11] The hiddenness of God is for Kierkegaard not a psychological stimulus to the would-be believer but an inherent ingredient in what Kierkegaard means when he speaks of God as absolute.

Ferreira identifies this problem as a critical error on Schellenberg's part, since this confusion mistakes an important ontological point for a merely psychological description; the latter is easier to dismiss, the former harder to overcome. This paper seeks to expand upon Ferreira's claim, for its legitimacy is not merely confined to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (the one text she focuses on in her rejoinder to Schellenberg) nor is it restricted to the issues she concentrates on.

To widen the scope of the grammar of absoluteness, and its implications, it is necessary to reject the fundamental starting point of Schellenberg's argument, which he reminds his readers in the preface to the paperback edition, is "reflection on Divine love."[12] For the Kierkegaardian viewpoint this paper seeks to develop, there can be no *a priori* reflection on divine love, because we do not know what divine love entails. On the contrary, the revelation of divine love as it is provided in Scripture often involves the most shocking reversals and upsetting of seemingly plausible basic principles. Perhaps nowhere are these dynamics more conspicuously in view than in the "hard sayings" of Jesus

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[11] M. Jamie Ferreira, "A Kierkegaardian View of Divine Hiddenness," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Synder and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 164-180. See especially 165, 169-70.

[12] *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, viii.

in the Gospels, which enjoin hatred of family, division, self-mutilation, and other apparent horrors in the name of love. On my reading of the celebrated and controversial teleological suspension of the ethical from *Fear and Trembling*, the entire point of this conceptual move is to mark the limits of humanly constructed visions of what the good life would consist in.

Yet Schellenberg seems to have in mind another concern. As I read him, his objection is that Kierkegaard seems to call for wholesale devotion to risk and sacrifice, to a life without reward or consolation of any kind, offered madly to an unresponsive deity. He may (as Ferreira seems to think) be interrogating what seems to be Kierkegaard's assumption that intensity of pursuit must match extremity of object, but it seems to me that the concern is somewhat more straightforward, namely, that such a life of risk and sacrifice is simply inhuman and puritanically self-denying. In place of what he seems to perceive as overly rigid austerity, Schellenberg suggests that "a life of gradual development and transformation, involving risks and sacrifices but other goods as well … seems to more nearly conform to the Christian ideal."[13]

Once again, however, this is not a point against Kierkegaard but a confirmation of his very thinking. For support I need avert only to the justly famous portrait of an imagined contemporary knight or hero of faith conjured by Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*. According to this crucially important image, the most striking thing about the hero of faith walking the streets of Copenhagen is that there is nothing striking about him at all. He looks more like a tax collector than a saint, he takes pleasure in everything around him, even the most pedestrian goings-on, and most important of all, he gives no evidence of being particularly religious. Over a lengthy two-page description the only observation that Silentio makes about the knight of faith's overt religiosity is that he goes to church and sings lustily. Yet this person he insists is the perfect picture of someone who is living the life of faith. Indeed the stereotype of the Christian believer as a mirthless and unworldly self-flagellator could not be further from Kierkegaard's mind. It is no mistake that throughout the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Climacus militates against monasticism as an ersatz Christianity, a failure to live Christianly in the world in favor of a blameworthy retreat from the everyday and all

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[13] *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 163.

the pleasures and pains that belong to the quotidian, from the small to great.[14]

It is just such a life of fullness and embrace that Kierkegaard commends as entirely characteristic of faith, the passion that plumbs depths unsuspected by acting merely "as if" there were a God, which is the depleted position that Schellenberg claims is Kierkegaard's last available recourse and a redoubt that cannot be preferred to the state of affairs that Schellenberg calls belief. This is certainly true; acting "as if" there were a God when one knows intellectually that there is not (or at least knows that there is no reason to think there is a God) is not a course of action Kierkegaard would commend. But again, Schellenberg misunderstands a basic point of Kierkegaardian epistemology. Like many other readers of Kierkegaard, he seems to think that the Dane advocates a kind of choice whereby one decides "against all odds,"[15] that the point is to will against countervailing evidence. It would be more accurate to say however that for Kierkegaard choice is what terminates reflection, which left unchecked is an in-principle endless process. Particularly when it comes to decisions that demand passion, where an ethical or religious issue is at stake, the decision involves not so much settling on the pros or settling on the cons but setting aside the business of tallying pros and cons altogether.

Consider again Kierkegaard's favorite sort of example, marriage. I can reflect on whether or not I should marry Person X and gather information on the subject of marriage from married persons, I can read books about how to have a successful marriage and so forth, I can make a long list of pros about Person X's attractive and admirable qualities and an equally long list of cons about the annoying and imperfect things about Person X, but none of this is fully determinative for what I decide about what to do with Person X, whether to marry or not. A decision to marry might look naively like deciding that the pros outweigh the cons; by the same logic, a decision not to marry might look naively like deciding that the cons outweigh the pros. But I think Kierkegaard's view on this is that in either case I have decided – with the assistance of course

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[14] *Fear and Trembling*, 38-40.

[15] *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 155. Even some more sympathetic and well-informed readers make this error. See Andrew Cross, "*Fear and Trembling*'s Unorthodox Ideal," *Philosophical Topics* 27.2 (1999): 227-53, 237; see also John Lippitt, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kierkegaard and* Fear and Trembling (London: Routledge, 2003). 70, 71, 75.

of careful reflection – but I have decided and to decide means to regard reflection's assistance as being at an end. If I decide to marry Person X to be at all sensible I have to acknowledge for instance that there is a chance that Person X will hurt me very deeply, that they will betray my trust. If I decide to marry Person X in view of that possibility, then we would never say I am deciding "against all odds." Instead I am not playing the odds anymore; I recognize that there are risks, and I accept them. This is why after all we pledge to marry until death parts us; it's a salient and sober reminder that the person to whom you are committing yourself will in fact die, and so no marriage has a proverbial "happy ending." We don't delude ourselves into thinking we are avoiding the "cons;" instead we accept the cons with pros, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health. That's not acting "as if" we are really loving or being loved in return; that's believing in the face of objective uncertainties.

Once again a qualitative change of attitude is called for by Kierkegaard. Interestingly Vigilius Haufniensis, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*, directly juxtaposes the faithful person with the inveterate gambler, who is the true type of the person who resolves "against all odds." The committed gambler in his view is never completely disabused; she plays on believing, holding out hope for the one time fate will smile on her, and recognizing that loss is part of the nature of the game; she won't walk away from the table, no matter how deeply she sinks into debt. For her, wedded to fortune as she is, loss and gain don't matter. When all is fate, then the next turn of the card could always reverse her fortunes. By contrast, the faithful person rests not stoically in fate but joyfully in the arms of providence. This is not a change of perspective on some particular set of experiences but a reorientation of posture toward actuality itself. To be a believer in providence though is to reinterpret the ups and downs of life not as the inscrutable vagaries of fate but as the dispensations of a loving power at work in my life, bringing even evils to a good issue. The faithful person doesn't choose against the odds; she doesn't play the odds at all.[16]

As an expansion of this basic epistemological point, I would further indicate that from Kierkegaard's perspective, the situation with respect to evidence is in a way rather more dire even than Schellenberg recognizes. At this stage in the argument he thinks the best Kierkegaard can do

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[16] *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 159-62.

is put on an act in the face of insufficient evidence, but according to Kierkegaard all evidence is radically ambivalent. Because of this faith is always twinned by doubt, which in Kierkegaard's estimation of its best practitioners, has something very definitely in common with faith; both attitudes are what he would call "second immediacies," not spontaneous uncontrollable feelings but acquired passions, and both take up a posture toward the whole of experience where both the doubter and believer have to acknowledge that that very experience is unpredictably correlated to their respective postures. In short, for Kierkegaard, a person could survey the whole of experience and conclude that life is an endlessly variegated tapestry of beauty and joy obviously bequeathed to us by an infinitely loving and gracious creator and with as much reason conclude that life is a sustained horror show of pain and despair inflicted on us by a sadistic cosmic bungler. Further reflection on either side of this basic argument has little power to either reinforce or diminish doubt or faith, both of which are controlling attitudes that dictate how we reflect on evidence rather than products of reflection on uninflected evidence. Contrary to Schellenberg's caricature of the faithful person as one who doggedly sticks to her beliefs in the face of overwhelming defeating evidence, it is the fatalist who according to Kierkegaard can never be disabused, no matter how many losses she suffers. The fatalist, like a committed gambler, is always ready to play again in the barest hope of a hollow victory.

It is on this basis that I would respond to Schellenberg's appeal to specifically "*religious evidence*," which he claims could supply what is missing if objective evidence is to be denied us on the basis of the need to establish a right relationship between the human being and the deity. He writes, "we must once again stress that *religious experience* could provide the necessary evidence, and that, so far from leading to the formation of beliefs entailing that subjectivity is of no importance, such experience could *inspire* subjectivity."[17]

This is unfortunately question begging on the face of it. Appealing to religious evidence will hardly solve the problem when what is already precisely in question is what sort of evidence counts as "religious," that is, sufficiently convincing to establish the existence of God. What Schellenberg seems to mean by religious experience is whatever experience would be adequate to establish the existence of God, which in circular fashion is itself required for the possibility of having religious experience.

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[17] *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 166.

Leaving that aside, I think Kierkegaard would in a way agree: It is quite possible that our experience can lead us to deeper awareness of God and appreciation of who God is and thereby inspire deeper subjectivity. One thinks most readily of Abraham's experience of readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac and, far more important, his expectation that he will receive him back again. One of the central insights offered by de Silentio is that Abraham does what he does both for God's sake and for his own, which he claims amount to the same thing.[18] So of course Abraham acts in response to the hidden God's demand, but he also receives a restored and deepened relationship with that very God, whose character is disclosed more fully as a result of what takes place on Mount Moriah. One of the central insights afforded by Abraham's harrowing encounter is that, as he puts it, "The Lord will provide." This seems to be true even when we don't know how it could be true or in what form God's provision could present itself. It is for this reason that faithful confidence in God's provision probably cannot be grounded to the degree that Schellenberg seems to think is required, having set the bar quite high indeed.

But just because God is hidden to some extent doesn't mean we get nothing for all our striving. Kierkegaard's writings are full of examples, like Abraham, who indeed attains a higher level of subjectivity thanks to his faith, or like the merman, also in *Fear and Trembling*, who transforms his life in response to the invincible innocence of Agnes, or the maiden in *Philosophical Fragments* who wins the joy of loving, and being loved by, the king. Kierkegaard was fond of the gospel of Matthew, and he remarks on the parable found there of the rich young ruler that "that rich young man should have given away everything, but if he had done so, then the knight of faith would have said to him: By virtue of the absurd, you will get every penny back again – believe it!"[19] Definitive of faith in fact is not sacrifice but reward. Sacrifice is perfectly within the sphere of capability for stoics and pagans and despairing persons according to Kierkegaard. What makes faith *faith* is not readiness to sacrifice but expectation of receiving everything back again. Admittedly this happens in a transformed way, and again in ways we cannot predict, but it is overwhelmingly clear from reading *Fear and Trembling* alone if nothing else, that experiential evidence is available to the believer, who has her reward, a reward the world of objectivity cannot supply.

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[18] *Fear and Trembling*, 59.
[19] Ibid., 49.

The world of objectivity cannot supply such a reward for two reasons: first, God as the Infinite Subject can never fully appear in the world of objectivity. For this reason Climacus quips that "True inwardness does not demand any sign at all in externals;"[20] second, to relate to God as the Infinite Subject demands that we do so in a manner ultimately incommensurate with the manner by which we relate to objective truths.

Much of what Schellenberg has to say against Kierkegaard misses the mark because he does not take on board a remark from Kierkegaard's journals that Christianity is not a doctrine but an "existential-communication."[21] The sort of striving then that Kierkegaard commends is not finally a striving toward greater conceptual clarity but a striving to be like Christ. As Sylvia Walsh helpfully clarifies, "To say that Christianity is not a doctrine is not, however, to deny that it has doctrines but only to insist that it is not to be identified with them or with an objective understanding of them."[22] It is precisely this objective understanding however that Schellenberg constantly tries to ground, a project that Kierkegaard would say is of limited value in the first place. Schellenberg is right though that "if the God met in experience is the infinite Subject of Kierkegaard's writings, there will be no end to the process of 'coming to know God' even for the one who has believed from the start."[23] This is true but only if the process of coming to know God is fundamentally different from the interminable process by which we try to gain exhaustive objective knowledge of some content or doctrine. The process of coming to know God however is one of personal transformation, as I become more *like* God, an ongoing and limitless task of sanctification that requires some intellectual understanding of what Christianity teaches to be sure[24] but cannot be reduced to that intellectual understanding. Climacus most emphatically of the pseudonymous authors militates against the notion

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[20] *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 414.

[21] *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and tr. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967-78), 484.

[22] Walsh, Sylvia, "Kierkegaard's Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, ed. John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 293.

[23] *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 167.

[24] Again see Walsh: "Yet Climacus also maintains that if one is a Christian one must know what Christianity is and be able to say what it is by comparing it with one's earlier life when one was not a Christian" (293) and again, "For Climacus, and presumably for Kierkegaard also, one can know what Christianity is without being a Christian, but one cannot be a Christian without knowing what Christianity is" (283).

that one can "approximate" truthful living as a Christian in the same sense that a group of scientists can articulate more and more clearly the truth of their theory about, say, the natural world. Because of the insurmountable distinction between objective and subjective truth, the truth-conducive procedures of scientific inquiries for example, or historical research, cannot be applied to subjective concerns with the legitimate hope of yielding the same reliable results.

No one has explained this more clearly perhaps than M. G. Piety, whose brief treatment of the subject in her essay "The Epistemology of the *Postscript*" has the added benefit of explaining how (and this is a point long overlooked by Kierkegaard commentators who have not appreciated a terminological distinction in Kierkegaard's Danish) a believing person might approach subjective truth by *living it out*. As Piety writes, "According to Kierkegaard, however, ethical and religious prescriptions are actualized by an individual, not in the sense that his 'historical externality' is made to correspond to them, but in the sense that he has truly willed such correspondence. To agree with the substance of ethical and religious prescriptions is to make a conscious, or inward, effort to bring one's existence into conformity with them."[25] Though such a process is necessarily unfinished for an existent self always in becoming, the demand to so bring one's existence into conformity is not thereby diminished, and the resulting conformity can, as Piety makes clear, be deemed a kind of approximation, though of a different kind from the approximation attained by ever greater certainty in scientific or historical investigation. In the case of ethical or religious truths, "one has no guarantee that the apparent probability of the correspondence of a particular statement about actuality to the reality to which it refers is objectively vindicated – in the sense that, the more probable the correspondence appears, the closer he is to its absolute determination. That is, an increase in the apparently probability of the correspondence brings the subject no closer to establishing genuine correspondence."[26]

I conclude then by asserting that it remains the case for Kierkegaard that infinite striving, properly understood, is essential to the relationship with God, who remains the Infinite Subject, one necessarily hidden for

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[25] M. G. Piety, "The Epistemology of the *Postscript*," in *Kierkegaard's* Concluding Unscientific Postscript: *A Critical Guide*, ed. Rick Anthony Furtak (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 201.

[26] Ibid., 200.

defensible logical, ontological, and existential reasons. Schellenberg is to be congratulated for forcing a more articulate and careful elaboration of these reasons, but Kierkegaard's arguments for the hiddenness of God as a logically required ingredient in the relationship that human beings are called to undertake with God can withstand his criticisms.

HOPE AND THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE SILENCE

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Abstract. The silence of God either by itself or in circumstances of profound suffering can induce hopelessness and despair, eroding a person's ability to act in ways conducive to her own good. Given the role of hope in human agency, the loss of hope is an event of a significant moral and personal concern. And the standard responses to the problem of divine hiddenness may not address the existential crises occasioned by God's silence. This paper seeks to develop and address this challenge by evaluating two potential responses to the problem of despair-inducing experience of divine silence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of divine hiddenness is among the most significant challenges to the rationality of religious belief.[1] There are many who seek evidence concerning God's existence, but fail to find sufficient grounds for belief. And this lack of compelling evidence raises concerns about the underlying justification for the claim that God is perfectly loving. If there were a God who created persons and desires their good, wouldn't he make his presence more obvious? At a minimum, wouldn't God provide clear signs of his existence for any person who is willing to believe? The challenge for theists is to find ways to reconcile the rationality of their belief in divine love with the experience of divine hiddenness.

One of the central strategies theists employ to address this challenge is to articulate reasons a perfectly loving God may have for remaining hidden.[2] If God has justifying reasons, then divine hiddenness is neither

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[1] For a collection of essays framing the problem of divine hiddenness along with a number of replies see Howard-Snyder and Moser (2002).

[2] For a sample of recent responses to the problem, see Cuneo (2013); Maitzen (2006); McBrayer and Swenson (2012); Moser (2004); Parker (2014); Poston and Dougherty (2007); Rea (2009, 2012); Timpe (2014); and Tucker (2008).

inconsistent nor incompatible with divine love. One could argue, for instance, that if God were to make his presence more obvious, the person would not be able to approach him freely and from the proper motivation.[3] Overwhelmed by evidence of God's existence, the person may approach God out of fear of punishment or the hope of reward rather than out of love for God. Thus, the experience of hiddenness enables a person to align her will properly to God.

Others have argued that epistemic distance could lead to the development of important states of character essential to union with God.[4] Divine hiddenness may enable the cultivation of a deeper form of commitment to or faith in God. Likewise, the felt absence of God may be essential to developing the virtues of patience and perseverance. Finally, if union with God moves the person toward friendship and solidarity with those God loves, the experience of divine hiddenness might be crucial to cultivating an empathetic concern for others. This experience may make one more attuned and responsive to the suffering of others.

These replies may go some way toward untangling the intellectual knot posed by divine hiddenness, but it is not clear that they address a related challenge: the existential weight of divine silence.[5] Michael Rea notes that the notion of hiddenness implies either that God deliberately conceals God's presence or that God's presence has been concealed "to such a degree that those from whom it is hidden can't reasonably be expected to find it" (2009, 78). But the fact that many people lack sufficient evidence for belief in God does not justify the charge that God is hidden in either of these ways. Rather, it indicates only "that God hasn't made a special effort to ensure that most of his rational creatures detect (as such) whatever signs of his existence there might be or whatever messages he might be sending us" (2009, 78). God's failure to make this effort becomes an existential burden for those who suffer because of divine silence. And a defense of the rationality of theistic belief alone may provide only small comfort for those who feel the weight of God's silence.

Within the Christian tradition, there are good reasons to focus on existential concerns related to divine silence. As Nicholas Wolterstorff

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[3] See Moser (2004) and Murray (1993).

[4] Or, one might argue that God's silence establishes a kind of good that obtains independent of whether the agent experiences silence as a benefit. For more along these lines, see Rea (2012).

[5] Rea (2012) and Timpe (2014) directly address the problem of divine silence. See Parker (2014) for a critique of Rea (2012).

(2002) observes, the God revealed in scriptural narratives is a God "who is not only capable of speaking but has on many occasions spoken" (215). And God reveals himself as the creator of individuals for whom he desires an abundant life. In light of this expressed intent, God's selective reticence in some contexts is curious. Wolterstorff laments, "Suffering and life duration have gone agonizingly awry with reference to that intent" (2002, 221). And he joins his voice with scriptural narratives like the story of Job, many of the personal and corporate laments expressed in the Psalms, as well as Jesus's cry of abandonment from the cross.[6] These texts give full voice to the desolation caused by the silence of God.

There are modern voices within the Christian tradition that raise similar worries. In his *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis writes,

> ... go to [God] when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. (Lewis 1961, 17-18)[7]

And Helmut Thielicke writes,

> The silence of God is the greatest test of our faith. We all know this...Can we not all sing about this today? Can we not shriek it out? Is not God silent about Stalingrad? What do we hear above and under its ruins? Do we not hear the roar of the artillery, the tumult of the world and the cries of the dying? But where is the voice of God? When we think of God, is it not suddenly so quiet, so terribly quiet, in the witches' kitchen of this hell, that one can hear a pin drop even though grenades are bursting around us? There is neither voice nor answer. And even if I think I hear God – hear him in the judgment as the One by whom the proud waves are stayed (Job 38:11) – he is silent again the next moment when I have to ask: Why this man, my brother or my husband? (Thielicke 2010, 28).

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[6] For a novel discussion of Jesus's cry of dereliction, see Stump 2013.

[7] In an earlier draft, I incorporated some of Mother Teresa's expressions of her suffering on account of divine silence. In comments, however, Paul Moser suggested that Mother Teresa's experience of felt abandonment was an answer to her (perhaps imprudent) prayers to identify with Christ's experience on the cross. I agree that Mother Teresa's case is unique and, for this reason, I have not included her experiences of desolation and dejection in this essay. Nonetheless, I think her expressions of suffering on account of God's silence point to the real difficulties associated with enduring this experience. See Kolodiejchuk (2007) for an account of Mother Teresa's spiritual struggles with divine silence.

These authors raise the complaint that divine silence can be one of the most acute forms of suffering. God would not be so silent if God were truly loving. God would find a way to communicate signs of his love to those who persistently plead for his care. But God's silence fractures their ability to trust; their hopes dissipate. In the midst of otherwise harrowing experiences of loss or grief, persons experience the silence of God as a burden that compounds their sorrow. Some may even come to believe that divine silence is an indication that God is indifferent to their plight. Lewis observes,

> Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not 'So there's no God after all,' but 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer. (Lewis 1961, 18).

The silence of God either by itself or in circumstances of profound suffering can induce hopelessness and despair, eroding a person's ability to act in ways conducive to her own good. The standard responses to the problem of divine hiddenness may not address the existential crises occasioned by God's silence. The person may find herself without the willingness to remain open to the possibility that God is good, let alone to approach God with the kind of humility and selfless concern proper to the alignment of her will to God's. She may fear that God is indifferent or worse and, as a result, be unable to approach God from a motive of love. Without hope, it is not clear that she will possess the patience and perseverance essential to develop the kinds of commitment, faith, love, or empathetic concern divine silence might otherwise make possible. It is not clear how one can understand the love of a God who permits demoralizing experiences of divine silence.

In this paper, I take up the task of developing and addressing this challenge. In section 2, I frame the challenge in light of recent discussions of the nature of hope and its connection to human agency. According to this view, hope is a fundamental human need the loss of which can permanently damage a person's ability to act for her own good. In section 3, I provide an explicit statement of the problem of despair-inducing experiences of divine silence. In section 4, I develop and assess two replies to this challenge. Part of the task of this section is to show how a Christian might address this challenge without questioning the underlying conception of the relationship between hope and human agency. Ultimately, I contend that these defenses do not adequately

address the existential force of the problem. It seems that an adequate response may require critical appraisal of the conception of hope underlying the challenge. In section 5, I conclude by noting how the traditional distinction between hope as an affective response and hope as a theological virtue complicates the Christian understanding of the relationship between hope and human agency. I briefly map a few of the ways this Christian understanding of hope might provide resources to address the problem of despair-inducing experiences of divine silence.[8]

II. HOPE, AGENCY, AND HUMAN NEED

The problem of despair-inducing experiences of divine silence assumes that the loss of hope can undermine a person's ability to act for her own good. For this reason, those who advance this challenge must presuppose a conception of hope according to which its presence in human life is an important good. The burden of this section is to sketch an account that displays the value of hope. Recent discussions in contemporary analytic philosophy have highlighted hope's function in human agency as an important aspect of its value.[9] Rejecting a common view that hope can be reduced to a mere complex of desires and beliefs, much of the recent discussion has focused on describing hope's distinctive nature along with its characteristic patterns of feeling, expression, and activity.[10]

Consider, for instance, a parent's hope that a cure will be found for her terminally ill child. The experience of hope in this case goes beyond mere desires for and beliefs about its possibility; her hope manifests itself in the way the parent engages in activities aimed at realizing a cure even when its possibility is remote. She may research the disease, inquire about the latest studies, seek out alternative forms of therapy, and cultivate a rich life of prayers while sitting with her daughter to offer promising

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[8] A full development of this defense would require a separate paper. I have developed this response in a companion essay. Please see Cobb (2017).

[9] Contemporary analytic philosophy has only recently begun to devote sustained attention to the significance of hope. For recent discussions, see Bovens (1999); Cobb (2015, 2016, 2017); Govier (2011); Gravlee (2000); Lear (2008); Martin (2008, 2011, 2014); McGeer (2004, 2008); Meirav (2008, 2009); Pettit (2004); Shade (2001); Snow(2013); van Hooft (2011); Walker (2006); and Webb (2007).

[10] For a clear articulation of this common view, see Day (1969). For criticisms of this view, see Bovens (1999); McGeer (2004); Meirav (2008, 2009); Martin (2014); Pettit (2004); Shade(2001); and Walker (2006).

words of comfort. And if none of these secure for her the object of her primary concern, hope enables the parent to restructure and reconfigure the goals she seeks in ways that enable her to cling to the good implicit in her original desires.

Victoria McGeer (2004) and Margaret Urban Walker (2006) offer instructive analyses of these characteristic patterns of hope. McGeer begins by noting the crucial relationship between hope and the exercise of human agency. Hope is often at the root of human motivation and activity. But limitations in human agency can be, and often are, those features of human experience that trigger hope. In fact, there are times when person hopes for things completely beyond what she could possibly accomplish through her own agential powers. Nonetheless, McGeer claims that in these cases, there is still an "aura of agency" within the hopeful person (2004, 103). Hopefulness, she maintains, is primarily about the process of engaging with and inhabiting one's agency. She writes,

> hoping is a matter, not only of recognizing but also of actively engaging with our own current limitations in affecting the future we want to inhabit. It is, in other words, a way of actively confronting, exploring, and sometimes patiently biding our limitations as agents, rather than crumpling in the face of their reality. (McGeer 2004, 104).

Humans don't just exert their agency; they explore its parameters. "In hoping," she writes,

> we create a kind of imaginative scaffolding that calls for the creative exercise of our capacities and so, often, for their development. To hope well is thus to do more than focus on hoped-for ends; it is crucial to take a reflective and developmental stance toward our own capacities as agents – hence, it is to experience ourselves as agents of potential as well as agents in fact. (McGeer 2004, 104-105)

Walker emphasizes similar features of the richness and complexity of hope's role in human agency. On Walker's account, hope is an affective attitude characterized by a syndrome of desires, perceptions, attendings, expressions, feelings, and activities (2006, 48). She contends that hope's distinctive function is to recruit and mobilize a person's attention, emotion, and cognitive capacities toward the pursuit of a hoped-for outcome. Hope motivates and energizes the person, creates incentives and heightens the imagination to look for routes to the realization of

a desired outcome, facilitates greater self-awareness and restructuring of goals, and endows the agent with resolve and resilience to continue even in the midst of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In most cases, hope causes a person to act in ways that might facilitate the realization of the good she seeks. Even in those circumstances where her agency is irrelevant to the realization of a desired outcome, hope issues in characteristic thoughts and expressions that take the realization of this good as their intended object. Walker rightfully notes that people "have varied and characteristic ways they try to invite, affect, or produce an outcome for which they hope, even when the outcome is not open directly, or at all, to their own effort" (2006, 49).

This syndrome analysis is not a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the locution "*S* hopes that *p*," but it does characterize core features of hope. Specific hopes involve a *desire* for a *good yet to be realized* which one believes is *possible* though its realization is *uncertain* and may be *difficult to obtain*. But more than this, hope is a kind of *attitude* one possesses concerning the future and the means by which her good may be secured. In this sense, hope is charged with a sense of *attentiveness* and *agential efficacy*. Hope contains "dynamic tendencies to attend to or be attuned to what is hoped for in a way that tilts or propels us toward making it so" (2006, 47).

Walker acknowledges that there are risks associated with hope. A person may hope for something she believes can be attained but which is no longer possible. Likewise, the person may falsely believe that she possesses sufficient power to secure a hoped-for outcome. In this sense, her hopes would be misplaced and unreasonable. Nonetheless, Walker maintains that this is neither a significant practical concern for the person nor is it a unique worry concerning hope as an affective attitude. Any emotion can tempt a person to act in unreasonable ways. A hope based upon just the slight chance of fulfillment may tempt a person to engage in imprudent or dangerous actions, but this is not sufficient to counsel against hope in desperate circumstances. Hope is more than a good for the agent; on her account, it is a human need especially "where that is all there is against inertness, terror, or despair" (2006, 57). The death or loss of all hope is crucial threat to human agency; without hope, a person may not be able to endure the difficult and tragic circumstances that characterize her life.

Walker's discussion of the death or loss hope focuses on a range of cases of moral evil including genocide, rape, and torture. But she acknowledges

that this loss may be the result of the "grinding and cumulative effects of the everyday institutions and practices that discriminate against people or exclude them because they belong to groups that are 'second-class' or despised" (2006, 65). Any of these types of events can create a sense of despondency and despair that paralyze the person. The loss of hope can stunt the person's abilities to engage in effective agency, diminishing the person's ability to make choices and to act in ways that contribute to her flourishing. This loss may even lead a person to act in ways that are self-destructive or which permanently damage her agency. Despair-inducing experiences assault a person's hopeful reserves such that, from her perspective, it is practically impossible to hope. Those who raise the problem of despair-inducing experiences of divine silence hold that God's failure to communicate can cause just this kind of hopelessness and despair.

III. DIVINE SILENCE AND THE LOSS OF HOPE

Divine silence could induce despair by itself, but more than likely it will do so as a constituent element of the experience of significant suffering. In relatively comfortable circumstances, or even in circumstances that are not characterized by extreme suffering, a person's reserves of hope are often sufficient for her to resist despair. While specific hopes may be disappointed, persons are remarkably resilient. The danger is not specific disappointments but an assault to the conditions essential for maintaining hope. And it is the experience of significant suffering, whether temporary or enduring, that is most often a substantive threat to these reserves.[11]

Divine silence is problematic, in part, because of its potential for eroding these reserves. In an experience that would otherwise be despair-inducing, an agent could maintain some hope if God would make God's presence known. If God were to communicate God's presence in a way that would be meaningful, a person could find a hope sufficient to sustain

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[11] It is important to note that experiences that could induce despair are often the experiences that ground traditional formulations of the problem of evil. And here, there are important connections to draw between the problem of evil and the problem of divine silence. Although the problem of hiddenness can be distinguished from the problem of evil, much of the personal force of the problem of evil may derive from the fact that God seems silent in the midst of harrowing circumstances of suffering. If God were not hidden, it is not clear that the problem of evil would be as salient for the agent.

her through the experience of suffering. The fact that God is silent leaves the person in doubt about God's love. It is the weight of the perceived silence of God that gives to the problem of divine silence much of its existential heft.

If hope is both a good essential to human flourishing and a human need, then the loss of hope is a morally significant event. A person who fails to demonstrate a proper kind of concern for those conditions that erode or diminish the reserves of hope demonstrates a kind of callousness toward the person who is suffering. A person who is capable of addressing those factors destroying the conditions essential to maintaining hope ought to work towards their correction or defeat. In cases, where correction is beyond a person's direct control, she ought to seek to ameliorate their effects. She ought to protest against the harms they cause. Moreover, an individual demonstrates proper concern for those who are in danger of losing hope only to the extent that she seeks to offer both consolation and solidarity. The failure to act in these ways is both a moral failure and a failure of love.

If these claims are true with respect to human persons, then, arguably, they are true with respect to a personal God who is unlimited in both goodness and love. A perfectly loving God who intends the good for individual human persons and who knows how the loss of hope can undermine human agency would seek to address the causes of the loss of hope by defeating them, ameliorating their effects, protesting against them, and offering consolation and solidarity to those who are in duress. It is unclear how to reconcile the claim that God is perfectly loving with the possibility that agents undergo despair-inducing experiences because of divine silence.

The most salient features of this statement of the problem concern God's apparent failure to protest against the causes of loss of hope and to offer consolation and solidarity to those who suffer. The perceived silence of God in these contexts is deafening. If a loving God exists, it is within God's power both to protest against those features of the world that assault the reserves of hope and to offer consolation in the midst of these attacks. The perceived silence of God in these contexts seems to be positive evidence against a God of perfect love and goodness.

Given the ways in which divine silence may cause an agent to lose all hope, Christians ought to do more than display how religious belief in divine love might be compatible with experiences of divine silence. They need to find a way to address the fact that divine silence might hinder or

harm human agency and, thereby, undercut human flourishing. In the next section, I evaluate two potential replies to this challenge. In order to appraise these replies carefully it will be helpful to provide a formal reconstruction of the argument:

(1) God is perfectly loving if and only if God demonstrates loving concern for any person *S* in conditions where *S* is in danger of losing all hope (*C*).

(2) God demonstrates loving concern for *S* in *C* if and only if God acts to ensure that *S* can sustain some hope in *C*.

(3) There are experiences of divine silence which (i) place *S* in danger of losing all hope and (ii) in which God does not act to ensure that *S* can sustain some hope.

(4) So, God does not demonstrate loving concern for *S* in these conditions. [From 2, 3]

(5) So, God is not perfectly loving. [From 1,4]

Much of the force of this argument depends upon the truth of premise 3. Both of the replies I consider in the next section challenge this claim, but I conclude that neither adequately addresses the existential burden of divine silence. In the final section of the paper, I suggest that this is related to their tacit endorsement of the underlying account of the relationship between hope and human agency.

IV. CHALLENGING THE PROBLEM OF DESPAIR-INDUCING EXPERIENCES OF DIVINE SILENCE

There are a number of ways one might respond to this argument, but I will focus my appraisal on Premise 3. One way to challenge the truth of Premise 3 is to critique the presupposition that persons can lose all hope. Even if there are experiences of extreme suffering that significantly impair the person's agential efficacy and persons can act in ways that are destructive to themselves in these contexts, it is not clear that these experiences can destroy or erode *all* reserves of hope. Consider the fact that minimal changes in circumstances can reveal that there are reserves of hope remaining even though a person had started to feel hopeless.

The erosion of hope may create a temptation to think that the future is hopeless; actions based on this thought would reflect a stance that the future is devoid of possible goods. But these actions depend upon an interpretation a person gives to her experience. She construes her experience as one in which it is impossible for her to be hopeful.

She may not be responsible or blameworthy for this interpretation; it may be the result of prolonged difficulty and suffering. Nonetheless, this interpretation is just one possible construal of her experience.

There are cases in which a person either fails to see or sets herself against the goods still available to her as potential objects of hope. Divine silence may be a constituent part of this experience, but it is the person's failure to see possibilities still open to her that acts as the triggering cause of despair. Given that her construal is not determined by the experience itself, one can argue that she retains the power to resist despair even in cases where God's silence is sustained over a long stretch of time. The upshot of this response is that the person's (perhaps inculpable) construal of her experience as hopeless is the triggering cause of the loss of all hope. If there are no circumstances under which a person can lose all hope without this kind of construal, then divine silence alone cannot be such that it endangers the person's fundamental capacities for retaining some residual hopefulness.

According to this response, premise 3 is false because there are no experiences in which divine silence *by itself* endangers a person's hopeful reserves. But there are reasons Christians should not endorse this response. First, there is no compelling reason to deny the possibility that a person could lose all hope. Even if humans are remarkably resilient, they are, nonetheless, radically fragile beings. And some are much more frail than others. A person's hopes may be one of those fragile elements of the human psyche. Denying the claim that there are experiences of this kind would require challenging the first-person perspectives of many who experience divine silence.

Second, even if humans have a minimal reserve of hope that cannot be destroyed, what the agent undergoes as hope dwindles may be such that it permanently damages her capacity to engage in expressions and activities that are conducive to her good. A repository of hope, however slim, may allow one to abide every assault, but it doesn't follow that one can abide every assault in ways that are compatible with flourishing. If God's concern for the agent is not merely for her survival, then Christians ought to reject this response. They should acknowledge the possibility that individuals can experience utter desolation or hopelessness. And they should endorse the view that individuals can experience despair in part because of their inability to detect any sign of God's presence with them.

Third, the claim that a person's construal of her experience is the triggering cause for her loss of all hope lacks sufficient justification. It may be true that some persons in circumstances of extreme or on-going suffering falsely construe their experience as hopeless, but it is not clear that this applies *in every case*. And from the perspective of a person who loses all hope, it is the silence of God that triggered this despair. Noting that her construal of her experience as hopeless may be inculpable does not adequately address the difficulty she faces in trying to endure the silence of God. Although there may be times when one must correct a person's construal of her experiences, it is not clear that this response is generalizable to every case of hopelessness.[12]

There is a second way to challenge premise 3: one can argue that it lacks sufficient epistemic grounding. In this context, one must ask whether individuals are in an epistemic position to infer that God does not act to ensure an agent's ability to sustain hope in the midst of divine silence.[13] The experience of divine silence is compatible with a number of ways in which God could be directly present to the person even without her awareness. Within the experience of divine silence, it may be that God is speaking directly but the agent fails to hear or fails to hear the message as a communication from God. Or, God could be present to the agent in a way that the agent lacks the present capacity to grasp but could later come to understand. Consider an analogous case involving human love. There are numerous experiences in which human love goes unnoticed or undetected in the midst of suffering. In this experience, one may take a friend to be absent but later come to see that she was silently present. Perhaps divine concern operates in the same manner; God may be a silent presence. God makes his presence known but in a way that the person will come to see and appreciate only in retrospect as she considers her experience from the perspective of future insights.

This skeptical defense may provide some reason for epistemic caution. One should not assert that one knows that God does not act directly to ensure that an agent can sustain hope. But it is not clear that it addresses the existential force of the original challenge. Given the contexts in which divine silence may trigger a loss of hope, the fact that God could

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[12] I would like to thank Kevin Timpe for emphasizing this point.

[13] There are important connections here to skeptical theist defenses in the literature on the problem of evil. For a set of recent essays on skeptical theism, see Dougherty and McBrayer (2014).

be silently present does not offer the kind of protest or consolation the person might expect to see from a loving and all-powerful God. It is not clear how the suffering person could treat the possibility that God is silently present as a reason for hope.[14]

Furthermore, this response derives much of its force from analogous experiences with human love. A loving but silent friend may reveal that she has been silently present in the midst of suffering; she can offer an account of both her presence and her reasons for remaining silent. Given their love for each other, the sufferer can appreciate both the silent presence of her friend as well as her reasons. But unless there is a strong foundation of love and trust, it is not clear that something similar could be said of God. In cases of dwindling or eroding hope, especially in cases where the person has been enduring prolonged agony, it is not clear that a person would have any reason to hope that God will make God's presence known in this way. How long is it reasonable for the person wait until God makes God's presence known? And the longer God waits, the more difficult it would be to understand and appreciate God's reasons for waiting. Perhaps God's refusal to reveal his silent presence in these circumstances is to foster the virtues of patience and perseverance. But why would God sacrifice the hope of the human agent in order to cultivate these virtues? It is not clear that this defense of God's direct (though silent) activity to ensure a person's hope adequately addresses the existential force of the problem.

There is another possibility to which Christians may appeal. God may act to sustain a person's hopes through indirect means. For instance, Christians could invoke scriptural and theological considerations as a positive reason for the person to remain hopeful in the midst of God's silence. Appealing to the incarnation, Christians could argue that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus portrays a clear picture of a God who protests the causes of suffering and who offers consolation and comfort in the midst of anguish. One could encourage the sufferer to identify with the pain and anguish of Jesus as a way of finding meaning buried within her suffering. And one could argue that God has delegated the responsibility for protesting the causes of the loss of hope and offering consolation to the Church. Drawing on these resources, Christians could maintain that there is evidence that God expresses love and concern for

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[14] This is consistent with the fact that some might treat this as a reason for maintaining hope. I would like to thank Kevin Timpe for emphasizing this point.

those who suffer both through direct activity in the person and mission of Jesus and, now indirectly, through God's chosen means, the Church. Thus, there may be positive reasons to think that the current experience of divine silence does not indicate a failure of divine love.

Moreover, there are communal practices that might count as a form of indirect or mediated presence even in the context of divine silence. These practices provide means by which persons can experience God's loving concern even if they do not immediately recognize this as the presence of God. For instance, the sufferer may experience the presence of God as mediated through liturgical practices or the Eucharist. By these means, she could access God's love even in the midst of silence.[15] Although God is silent, participation in these practices could secure a person's ability to maintain hope.

Although these responses may be promising, it is not clear that they provide the affected person with a reason to hope that God is, in fact, concerned with her good. Drawing hope from scriptural narratives would require the agent to place at least some provisional trust in the hopes expressed in the narratives and theology of the Christian tradition. And those who undergo prolonged experiences of divine silence may have very little reason to venture on these promises. It may be true that *if* one trusts the claims of revealed theology, one may have positive reason to think that God is lovingly present in spite of God's silence. But this will not be sufficient for those who currently lack the ability to place their hope in anything at all. And there will be very little motivation to engage in this act of trust if the person lacks independent reason to think that God is perfectly loving.[16]

Moreover, participating in religious practices does not guarantee that a person can sustain a reserve of hope essential to her well-being. It might be sufficient in some cases, but there may be other cases in which it will fail. And if the person lacks sufficient reserves of hope, it is not clear that she will see a point in participating in these kinds of activities. If God's silence itself has been part of the reason for her hopelessness, there would be no reason for her to engage in obvious expressions of religious devotion. God may have provided means by which she could

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[15] Cuneo (2013) also challenges the notion that experience of the presence of God requires conscious awareness of this presence as the presence of God.

[16] Additionally, it is not clear how this would address cases in which those who are committed Christians (i.e., Mother Teresa) experience the agony of feeling God-forsaken.

sustain hope, but she may lack a sense for their availability as live options for her. Through no fault of her own, the person may refuse to participate and, thus, remove herself from a space in which she could experience God's loving concern in the midst of silence. This defense is not sufficiently sensitive to existential obstacles that stand between her and her participation in these religious practices.

The problem of divine silence raises both intellectual and existential challenges. In this section, I have canvassed two potential responses. Although they may address some features of this intellectual problem, neither is sufficiently sensitive to the existential import of the problem of divine silence. Perhaps the inadequacy of these replies reflects their tacit endorsement of the underlying account of the role of hope in human agency. In the conclusion, I offer a brief sketch of the kind of defense that challenges this implicit account of hope's function. A full defense of this response would require a separate paper, but here I provide a brief map of one way a Christian might construct such a reply.[17]

V. CONCLUSION

I framed the problem of despair-inducing experiences of divine silence in light of an attractive contemporary account of the relationship between hope and human agency. On this view, hope is an affective response to perceived goods. It issues in characteristic patterns of activity, attention, emotion, feeling, perception, and thought. These patterns are related to hope's functional role in human agency. Let's call this form of hope, "natural hope."

There are important ways in which a Christian conception of the nature of hope complicates this account of the connection between hope and human agency.[18] The tradition distinguishes between hope as a passion, or what I have called "natural hope," and hope as a theological virtue.[19] Both forms of hope involve the anticipation of a good that is future, possible, and difficult to obtain. As a passion, hope is an affective response to a perceived finite good that urges the agent forward toward

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[17] For a full defense, see Cobb (2017).

[18] For broad discussions of the theological virtue of hope see Mattison (2012); Roberts (2007) and Walls (2012).

[19] St. Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologica offers the locus classicus for this distinction. For discussion of St. Thomas's views see DeYoung (2014, 2015); Doyle (2012); Lamb (2016); Pieper (1986); Pinches (2014); and Schumacher (2003).

the realization of this good. This passion can equip her with patience to face obstacles that stand between her and this good. Like natural hope, the theological virtue of hope seeks a good that is future, possible, and difficult to obtain – namely, eternal union with God. For Christians, this is the ultimate object of hope and the true source of fulfillment or joy. But the theological virtue of hope is also a *hope in* God, a kind of reliance on or trust in God to bring one into union with him. And as a theological virtue, this hope is a gift of God infused into the will.

Note that the theological virtue of hope differs from natural hope in that (i) its origin is external to the person's desires and will, (ii) the conditions for its appropriation consist in a person's openness and sensitivity to God, (iii) the possession of this gift is that which enables the person to place her hope in God, and (iv) God himself is the agent who secures the fulfillment of this hope. The contribution of the individual person to the maintenance of her own hopes is relatively minimal: she must engage in activities that would enable her to remain open to the gift of hope. The reception of this gift enables her to place her trust in God. By placing her trust in God, she enacts an aspect of the ultimate good that she seeks – that is, union with God.

This distinction shows that one must differentiate between the ultimate good, which is good for the person in an unqualified sense, and proximate goods, which are good only insofar as they are ordered properly toward one's ultimate good. Natural hopes for proximate goods are misaligned if they do not orient the person toward union with God as her ultimate good. In this sense, natural hopes are not an unqualified good in the life of the agent. Likewise, it is not clear that sustaining natural hope would be a fundamental need essential to a person's flourishing. Sustaining one's natural hopes are less important to a person's true good than her openness to God's gift of the virtue of hope. If the person's ultimate good is union with God, then it is the possession of this virtue rather than the possession of natural hope that is a fundamental need for human life.

This brief overview of the traditional Christian distinction between natural hope and the theological virtue of hope has significant implications for understanding the role of hope in human agency. There are two consequences in particular I would like to emphasize. First, one must attend carefully to the distinction between the objects of one's natural hopes and the object of theological hope. Natural hopes are for

perceived, finite goods; although these objects are good, they are not ultimately satisfying. Theological hope takes as its object full union with God. And it is this hope that constitutes true flourishing. If a person's natural hopes are misaligned or disordered, they can distract or obstruct her attaining her ultimate good.

Second, the value of one's natural hope is not intrinsic; it derives its value from the manner in which it prepares a person for possessing the theological virtue of hope. Given that natural hope often produces within the person dispositions for biding her limitations and the obstacles that keep her from realizing her good, natural hopes scaffold both patience and perseverance as well as a kind of receptivity to the assistance of others. All of these dispositions are essential to remaining open to the gift of the theological virtue of hope.

Introducing the distinction between natural hope and the theological virtue of hope creates a need to clarify the premises of the problem of despair-inducing experiences of divine silence. Recall the argument:

(1) God is perfectly loving if and only if God demonstrates loving concern for any person S in conditions where S is in danger of losing all hope (C).

(2) God demonstrates loving concern for S in C if and only if God acts to ensure that S can sustain some hope in C.

(3) There are experiences of divine silence which (i) place S in danger of losing all hope and (ii) in which God does not act to ensure that S can sustain some hope.

(4) So, God does not demonstrate loving concern for S in these conditions. [From 2, 3]

(5) So, God is not perfectly loving. [From 1,4]

Premises 1 and 2 make explicit the requirements of perfect love in contexts where a person is in danger of losing all hope. Premise 1 holds that God is perfectly loving just in case God demonstrates loving concern to agents tempted by despair. But the premise leaves unspecified whether the loss in question is theological rather than natural hope. And given the nature of the theological virtue, it is not clear what it would it mean for the person to lose this virtue. According to the traditional view, the theological virtue is a gift and its reception requires openness to the giver. Loss of the theological virtue would require setting of one's will against the possibility of receiving this gift. In this respect, one does

not lose the theological virtue; one abandons the virtue of hope for the vice of despair.[20]

Premise 2 holds that God demonstrates loving concern just in case he acts to ensure an agent's ability to sustain hope in these conditions. But does God's loving concern require that he ensure the person's ability to sustain natural hope? Or, does God's love focus exclusively on the person's ability to persevere in openness to the gift of the theological virtue of hope? Given the distinction between proximate and ultimate hope, God might allow a person to lose all natural hope if this is essential to cultivating an openness to the gift of the theological virtue of hope. After all, a person may have misaligned or disordered hopes. In these conditions, divine silence may be an essential corrective for a person who has placed too much weight in the realization of finite goods.

Finally, one can raise similar concerns about premise 3 according to which there are experiences of divine silence that endanger a person's hope but God does not act to ensure her hope. Has God failed to do so with respect to her natural hopes or the theological virtue of hope? God can demonstrate serious concern for a person's ability to remain open to the gift of hope through indirect means unrelated to sustaining the capacity for natural hope. The presence of friends, or a Church, or participation in religious practices themselves might be sufficient to sustain a person's capacity to remain open to God even in contexts where there are no natural hopes to which she can cling.

The work of developing a full response to the problem of despair-inducing experiences of divine silence requires attending to the existential burdens of persons who suffer because of God's silence. The loss of natural hope can injure a person's ability to think of her life in meaningful terms and to seek her good. But before one can assert that divine silence is in tension with divine love, one needs to consider the distinction between natural hope and the theological virtue of hope. The loss of natural hopes may be essential to cultivating a capacity to receive the gift of theological hope. And the value of natural hope derives from (i) its alignment with the person's true, or ultimate, good as well as (ii) its role in preparing a person's dispositions for appropriating this gift. The loss of natural hope may make it difficult for the person to sustain these dispositions, but this is compatible with divine concern if God acts

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[20] For a thorough discussion of theological despair in the classical discussion of St. Thomas Aquinas, see DeYoung 2015.

either directly or indirectly to sustain a person's capacity to remain open to God.[21]

The defenses canvassed in this paper might address some features of the intellectual puzzle of the problem of divine silence, but they leave much of the sorrow attending divine silence untouched. For this reason, Christians ought to seek a more robust defense – one that is sensitive to the suffering caused by the loss of hope and which offers consolation to those who suffer. One way of developing such a defense involves distinguishing between natural hope and the theological virtue of hope. This may be the best hope for addressing the existential weight of the problem of divine silence.[22]

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[21] In Cobb (2017), I maintain that God works through indirect means to provide this kind of scaffolding for the theological virtue of hope.

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'ONCE FOR ALL': THE TENSE OF THE ATONEMENT

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Abstract. Does a proper understanding of the Atonement – the restoration of mankind's relationship with God as a result of Christ's sacrifice – require a particular conception of time? It has been suggested that it does, and that the relevant conception is a 'tensed' or 'dynamic' one, in which distinctions between past, present and future reflect the objective passage of time. This paper examines two arguments that might be given for that contention, and finds that both may be answered by appeal to the asymmetry of causation. The Atonement leaves us free to think of all times as equally real, as traditionally they are for God.

I. THE FINALITY OF THE ATONEMENT

Therefore, heavenly Father,
We remember his offering of himself
Made once for all upon the cross;
We proclaim his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension;
We look for the coming of your kingdom,
And with this bread and cup,
We make the memorial of Christ your Son our Lord.

These words from the Communion service[1] are a reminder of Christ's sacrifice in atonement for the sins of man. And the significant phrase 'once for all' expresses both the uniqueness and the finality of that

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[1] The passage is taken from the *Alternative Service Book* (Church of England 1980: Rite A, p. 132). Compare the thematically corresponding part of the prayer of consecration from the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* (preserved in Rite B of the ASB, p. 191): 'Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction

atonement. A single act of sacrifice of this kind was sufficient for all time to redeem us. No further sacrifice would be necessary. The temporal import of these words is unmistakable: the death of Christ completes a process in time, and in so doing effects a permanent change in our relationship to God. The words reflect a quite fundamental idea in Christian theology. As Richard A. Holland has pointed out in his study of time and the Incarnation, the notion of completeness and finality is emphasized in plainly temporal terms in scripture:

> That the work accomplished in Jesus' earthly life is completed is an essential element of the theological context of the Incarnation. Important passages of Scripture such as Heb 10:12-14 highlight the fact that Christ's earthly mission was accomplished and is now finished: 'But this Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one suffering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.' That Christ's work is finished and complete is stated literally in the phrase 'one sacrifice for sins forever', which idea was first conveyed in the very words of Christ as he hung on the cross, 'It is finished.' [John 19:30] It is also made clear in the imagery of Jesus sitting down at the right hand of the Father, signifying that he needed to perform no other work to accomplish the goal of salvation. Additionally, the completion is seen in the scriptural account of the transformed state of the redeemed man. It is found in Ps 103:12, which states, 'As far as the east is from the west, So far has he removed our transgressions from us;' and 2 Cor 5:17, which says 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.' These passages and others indicate a finality: a transformation achieved through the work of Christ that brings about a new standing before God. (Holland 2012: 183-4)

Compare the second of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion: '... who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us.'

Holland's argument is that this temporal representation of Christ's sacrifice has consequences for our understanding of God's relation to time. For if we conceive of God as timeless, so that all times are equally present to him, then there is no sense in which sin has been permanently removed: 'But if this is so [if, that is, all times are eternally

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for the sins of the whole world; and didst institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again ... '

present to God], then the important work of atonement has never been fully accomplished. Sin *has not been* removed; and Christ hanging on the cross is an ever-present feature of God's life' (Holland 2012: 184). Implicit in Holland's argument is that the language of finality, and the conception of atonement it conveys, is not merely temporal, but *tensed*: our unredeemed state is said to have been consigned to the past. And that in turn implies something about reality, that in some objective sense our unredeemed state is past as a result of Christ's sacrifice. It is this objectively tensed aspect of sin and sacrifice that is incompatible with a timeless God.

My concern in this paper is less with God's relation to time, as the suggestion that the theological understanding of the Atonement requires a certain 'dynamic' view of time itself, namely the view that time's passage is an objective feature of reality, and not merely of our perspective on that reality. Would this be problematic? Arguably, it would, for two reasons. First, it is often suggested that this dynamic conception of time conflicts with modern physics, and in particular the principle of the relativity of simultaneity. If this (admittedly contested) suggestion is correct, then there is a case for supposing Christology also to face a conflict with modern physics. Second, it might be thought that a dynamic conception of the Atonement introduces an internal theological conflict. Even conceding Holland's argument that the Incarnation makes untenable the traditional view of God as timeless, there remains the principle that, in some sense, all times are present to God: that is, the tensed distinctions of past, present and future so crucial to a dynamic conception simply have no meaning for a perfectly rational God. As Spinoza expresses the idea: 'In so far as the mind conceives a thing under the dictate of reason, it will be equally affected, whether the idea be of a thing present, past, or future.' (*Ethics*, IV. lxii) The relation between time and the Atonement is a matter of no small import.

Here then is my question: does the doctrine of the Atonement contain as an essential element a particular metaphysical view of time? In what follows, I shall examine this 'dynamic' view – or as I shall call it, in more neutral terms, the *A-theory* – in more detail, and consider the theological prospects for a rival view of time's passage, the *B-theory*.[2] The suggestion that the doctrine of Atonement makes most sense given the A-theory of

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² The theories derive their names from J. E. McTaggart's (1908) distinction between two ways in which we order events in time: the A-series, which runs from the distant past

time is one I shall compare with a famous argument of Arthur Prior's, that certain of our emotional responses, and relief in particular, are intelligible only when we conceive of time in tensed terms, an argument which subsequent writers have appealed to in support of the A-theory.[3] I begin, then, with Prior's argument.

II. PRIOR ON TIME AND EMOTION

What is now often referred to as the 'old B-theory' of time asserts that tensed expressions, which represent an event or other object as past, present or future, can be translated into tenseless ones.[4] So, for example, according to the 'token-reflexive' version of this view, an utterance of 'It is now raining' is equivalent in meaning to 'Raining is simultaneous with this utterance' (the 'is' here does not imply temporal presence). 'Now', in other words, is treated as a token-reflexive expression, on a par with 'here' and 'I'. A related notion is that tensed expressions are incomplete, and require explicit mention of a date to complete them, offering another tenseless analysis of the tensed expression. Against this, Prior pointed out that our natural expressions of relief resist either kind of analysis:

> One says, e.g. 'Thank goodness that's over!', and not only is this, when said, quite clear with no date appended, but it says something which it is impossible that any use of a tenseless copula with a date should convey. It certainly doesn't mean the same thing as, e.g. 'Thank goodness the conclusion of that thing is Friday, June 15, 1954', even if it be said then. (Nor, for that matter, does it mean 'Thank goodness the conclusion of that thing is contemporaneous with this utterance.' Why should anyone thank goodness for that?) (Prior 1959: 17)

This much-quoted passage does indeed seem to provide an effective reply to any attempt to explain the meaning of tensed utterance in purely tenseless terms. But does it have a further, metaphysical significance?

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to the distant future; and the B-series, which orders events by means of the relations of temporal priority and simultaneity.

  [3] See, e.g. Cockburn (1997).

  [4] The view is associated with Bertrand Russell, C. D. Broad and Nelson Goodman. The version presented here is closest to the formulation in Broad (1921: 335). Russell (1915: 212) invokes a psychological factor (relation to an experiencing subject), and Goodman (1951) employs dates. The various analyses are critically discussed in Gale (1968): see especially Chapters II and IV. For metaphysical reasons Broad later came to the view that tense could not be eliminated in this way.

Proponents of the '*new* B-theory', which gained currency in the 1980s, pointed out that the irreducibility of tensed expressions to tenseless ones in terms of meaning was entirely compatible with the thesis that the *truth-conditions* of tensed statements could be given in tenseless terms.[5] So the assertion that a certain event was past could be made true by the temporal relation between that event and the assertion, in contrast to any objective pastness of the event, even though that relation was not what the speaker intended to convey. An analogy with mental language may be helpful. If physicalism is true, what as a matter of fact makes it true to say that x is in pain is some purely physical fact: a neurophysiological state of x's brain. But this does not imply that utterances of the kind are equivalent in meaning to some statement about brain states. The analogy has its limits, however. For although, if physicalism is true, the truth-makers of mental state attributions are physical states, we may stop short of insisting that the truth-*conditions* of mental state ascriptions should be stated in purely physical terms. We might, that is, want to allow that, in some other possible world, such ascriptions are made true by the states of a Cartesian soul, or some such. But the B-theorist, who says, not merely that tensed statements have truth-makers describable in purely tenseless terms, but also that their truth-conditions are so describable, is not making room for worlds in which time passes in reality.

The new B-theory, in short, is a theory about what time is really like, not a theory about what we intend to convey when we say such things as 'We spent Easter in Cornwall last year. It rained.' However, it might be thought that the new B-theory is unstable.[6] If part of what is conveyed by tensed statements cannot be reduced to tenseless terms, should this not be reflected in the truth-conditions? The B-theorist is obliged to say something about meaning. Here, the distinction between type and token sentences is important. While allowing that the meaning of individual *tokens* of tensed utterances cannot be conveyed by any tenseless sentences, she wants to say that the meaning of tensed types can be completely conveyed by a tenseless truth-conditional schema. So, for example:

A token u of 'e is past' is true if and only if e is earlier than u.

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[5] See especially Smart (1980), Mellor (1981) and Oaklander (1984).

[6] Just this has been argued by Quentin Smith (1993). His view is that no tenseless statement is adequate to convey the truth-conditions of a tensed statement.

We talk here of a truth-conditional *schema*, rather than truth conditions, as tensed types, lacking as they do any temporal contexts, do not have truth-values, and so cannot have truth-conditions (i.e. the conditions which would be necessary and sufficient for their truth). The implication of such a schema is that different tokens of a tensed type will have different truth-conditions, and may as a result have different truth-values. The sense in which tense is irreducible, then, is this: no tenseless statement capable of truth is adequate to convey the conditions under which every token of a given tensed type is true. Tensed statements have a context-sensitivity which tenseless statements lack, and it is this structural difference which makes them non-equivalent. It is also this context sensitivity that we exploit when we use tensed expressions.

A move of this kind gives the lie to the suggestion that, if the B-theory were correct, our tensed language would be systematically misleading, in implying that events are objectively, and not merely perspectivally, past, present or future. If the truth-conditional schema above, and ones like it, capture the conditions under which we can make correct tensed assertions, and our grasp of these conditions are what is required for mastery of tensed expressions, then our ordinary tensed language has no such implication, viz. that there is in reality a passage of time. Nor does it imply that there is *no* passage of time. For the right-hand side of the biconditional above need not be supposed to capture the most fundamental facts about time. The A-theorist, who believes in the objective passage of time, may also embrace the above schema – but will insist that the fact that *e* is earlier than *u* supervenes upon more fundamental facts such as *e*'s being past when *u* is present.

Let us grant that Prior's 'Thank goodness that's over!' is an effective counterexample to the old B-theory. Is it also an effective counterexample to the new B-theory? An early 'new B-theory' response to Prior's example is Mellor's (1981), according to which we can treat the utterance as consisting of two parts:

'Thank goodness!' and 'That's over'

The first of these is simply an expression of emotion, and is not truth-evaluable. The second is a tensed statement, which, since its truth-conditions are statable in tenseless terms, does not imply that the event in question is objectively past in some non-perspectival sense. So there is no counterexample to the B-theory here. However, this response will not do. As Murray MacBeath (1983) points out, 'Thank goodness that's

over' does not plausibly divide in this way, for – as Prior implies – one is thanking goodness *for the fact that* the event in question is over. And since it is not plausible to suppose one is thanking goodness for the supposedly equivalent tenseless facts, it appears to follow that one is thanking goodness for the fact that the event has really receded into the past, which in turn implies the real passage of time.

It is not enough for the B-theorist to point out that, whatever one might imply by such an expression, it cannot possibly show that time does pass in reality, since any belief may turn out to be mistaken. Such a defence just adds further support to the notion that the B-theory is at odds with our ordinary thought and language. Further, it suggests that a convinced B-theorist cannot, on pain of irrationality, sincerely utter 'Thank goodness that's over!', which would be an unhappy consequence. So there is certainly a challenge here. However, a reason to think that emotional reactions like these do not require any particular metaphysics of time to rationalise them is provided by considering corresponding reactions associated with other kinds of indexical thought. On seeing someone else pick the short straw when some particularly uncongenial task is being allocated, one might utter (or more likely just think) 'Thank goodness that's not me!' But it would be a very peculiar move to take this as intimating a particular metaphysics of the self, on which the world contains a host of 'I' facts not reducible to anything expressible in non-indexical language. For there seems no room here to resist the notion that the meaning of assertions containing 'I' is wholly given in such truth-conditional schemata as the following:

Any token, uttered/thought by S of 'I am F is true iff S is F.

(I ignore here temporal context-sensitivity. The point is simply that the 'I' is eliminable without loss of content.) This gives us reason to suppose that Prior-like examples of 'Thank goodness that's (insert indexical expression)' don't have metaphysical implications. Indeed, it is not at all clear that Prior's original point was that they do. But what, then, rationalises utterances of 'Thank goodness that's over' if not (belief in) the objective passage of time?

Let us suppose that a convinced B-theorist has had an unpleasant experience and is, now entirely understandably, relieved that it has ended. If not too distracted to engage in metaphysical reflection at that moment, she may be aware that the experience is not over in any non-perspectival sense: it is simply earlier than her memory of it. But in a purely

perspectival sense, it is over. Why is this not enough to justify her relief? For experience is irreducibly perspectival: temporally, spatially and personally perspectival. What she experiences she experiences as happening to *her* ('to *me*' as she would put it), as *now* and as *here*. That perspective is available to her in a way in which the non-perspectival facts underlying the experience are not. And when she expresses relief she does so in response to that experience. Why should the fact that the experience is a result of perspective do anything to undermine, or make irrational, that expression?

The moral so far, then, is that the personal and emotional importance we attach to things being over neither implies, nor requires for the rationality of such an attachment, that anything is over in the A-theorist's sense of being objectively and non-perspectivally past. But is this moral applicable to our temporal attitude to the Atonement?

III. A MORAL GRADIENT?

To rehearse the challenge to the B-theory posed by the Atonement, the general form of argument can be presented as follows:

  (1) The Atonement resulted from a final, once-for-all sacrifice for our sins.

  (2) For the Atonement to have been final in this sense, our unredeemed state must be objectively past.

  (3) The B-theory denies that anything is objectively past.

Therefore:

  (4) Our understanding of the significance of the Atonement requires a rejection of the B-theory.

Even if successful, the argument does not establish that the B-theory is *in fact* false, merely that belief in the doctrine of the Atonement requires a commitment to the A-theory. The B-theorist might object to (3) on the grounds that the theory provides perfectly objective truth-conditions for the truth of such statements as 'Our unredeemed state is past', but it is clear that what 'objectively' means in the context of this argument is 'in a non-perspectival sense'. The pastness of our unredeemed state must not merely be a matter of perspective for it to have been truly final.

Could the B-theorist's response to the 'Thank goodness that's over' case be of service here? In other words, perhaps the suspect premise is (2).

It is enough, that is, for the Atonement to be past from our perspective, since it is its significance for us that matters. We can quite rationally exclaim 'Thank goodness our unredeemed state is past' without having to subscribe to the metaphysical (as opposed to phenomenological) passage of time. But now this response seems quite inadequate for this case. We might indeed feel proper relief that the Atonement has restored our broken relationship with God. But that relief (unlike the relief at the passing of some unpleasant experience) is not simply to do with how things seem to us. The restoration of our relationship with God transcends all experience. So if it is important for our unredeemed state to be objectively over, as opposed to simply being earlier than any given assessment of its state, it seems that this will indeed involve commitment to the A-theory. Nevertheless, (2) is the most contentious premise, and as it is not self-evident, further argument is necessary. We will look at two possible arguments in favour of (2), what we might call 'the moral progress argument', and 'the open future argument' respectively.

The first of these draws attention to the contrast between moral progress and moral regress. Take Christian in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He leaves home, despite the entreaties, and eventually insults, of his family, to seek eternal life. But his way to the Celestial City is beset by dangers and temptations: the Slough of Despond, Doubting Castle, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and many others. He grows in stature as the narrative progresses, becoming ever stronger in resisting the specious reasoning of the various (clearly doomed) characters he meets on the way. His story is one of moral and spiritual progress, from sin to salvation. He thus represents our intended path. Contrast his story with that of one of the darkest of Shakespeare's tragic characters, Macbeth. At the beginning of the play, no-one has a word to say against him, as we hear accounts of his exceptional bravery and loyalty. But the promise of the crown of Scotland leads him to regicide, the first step on a downward path. To make his potion safe, he orders further murders, including that of his former fellow general, Banquo. In the end, he is sick with self-disgust, but can see no option but to continue: 'I am in blood/Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, /Returning were as tedious as to go o'er' (Act III, Scene 4). Macbeth's story is one of moral regress and psychological disintegration.

It is perhaps rather obvious that Christian's condition is preferable to Macbeth's, but suppose that there were two individuals, P and R, such that every stage of moral development in P's life had a counterpart

in R's life, so that how good or bad P was at a given stage, R was in exactly the same condition at some stage in his life. Once we see these stages in order, however, it appears that whereas P's life shows steady improvement, R's shows steady deterioration. Even though in terms of overall goodness and badness they are comparable, we would say that P's life was objectively better than R's. However, the A-theorist may insist that, on the B-theory view, all we have in each case is a *moral gradient*. The various stages of moral character form an order. To say that P's life is one of progress and R's one of regress is (for the B-theorist) a perspectival way of thinking of things. A hill may be described as 'uphill' or 'downhill' only from the perspective of someone looking in one direction rather than another. In itself, the hill is merely a gradient. To explain the fact that P's life is objectively (and not merely perspectivally) better than R's we need to be able to describe P's as an objectively improving life and R's an objectively deteriorating one. To make it entirely explicit: P's morally inferior state is objectively in the past, whereas for R it is the morally superior state that is objectively in the past. And that, of course, is only something that A-theorist can say.

Thanks to the Atonement, our fallen state is in the past, so the life of mankind overall (despite some fallen souls) is one of progress, not regress.

Let us now turn to the second argument in favour of (2).

IV. THE OPEN FUTURE AND THE METAPHYSICS OF ATONEMENT

So far, we have simply been concerned with the question of the passage of time. But there is arguably a more fundamental issue which bears on the significance of the Atonement, and that is the ontological asymmetry between past and future. Indeed, one powerful reason to think that the passage of time is a non-perspectival matter is that only thus can we preserve the objective difference between past and future. There is, as we might put it, a fact of the matter as to what has happened: the past is part of reality (though obviously not of present reality), and is what makes objectively true our past-tensed statements. In contrast, there is no fact of the matter as to what *will happen*. The future is not part of reality, and cannot make true our future-tensed statements. Those future-tensed statements that are true, if there are any, are made true by present (or past) fact. And one might argue further that this ontological openness

of the future is required if we are to be genuinely free to determine the future (though here, admittedly, the fallacies of fatalism may lurk). More generally, we might connect the openness of the future with the possibility of genuine causation: what a cause does is to bring its effect into reality.[7]

Suppose that the future is open in this sense: that it consists simply in a range of possibilities, no one of which is yet actual. Room is then made for a metaphysical conception of the transformative effect of the Atonement. For during the time of our fallen state and broken relationship with God, the Atonement is still in the future, and not part of reality. Once Christ's sacrifice is made, the Atonement becomes part of reality, and God is reconciled to humanity for all time – and here we might read 'for all time', or 'once for all', as looking backwards as well as forwards. That is, the reconciliation covers the past as well as the present and future. No part of time is unaffected by the transformation. (Despite appearances, this does not imply that the past has been changed in the sense that intrinsic features of past times have now been made other than what they were: that would be impossible. Rather, past individuals now stand in a different relation to God as a result of the Atonement.)

The crucial question, then, in respect of our fallen state at any given time, is whether the Atonement is or is not part of reality at that time.

On the B-theory, there is no such ontological asymmetry between past and future. This follows from the fact that 'past' and 'future' are, on this theory, purely relative, perspectival terms. 'The past' simply refers to times earlier than the time of speaking; 'the future' to later times. With no passage of time, there is no scope for any change in what is real. For 'real' is not similarly perspectival.[8] On this theory, then, the Atonement, if real at any time, is real with respect to all time: its reality does not change over time. It seems that we are left with a choice between two uncongenial possibilities: (i) since the Atonement is at all times part of reality, and since the Atonement is sufficient for restoring our relationship with God for all time, then at no time is God unreconciled to humanity; (ii) since the sin that broke our relationship with God is at all times part of reality, and since that sin separates us from God, then at no time are we reconciled to God. To recall Holland's remark: 'the important work of

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[7] This entirely natural view is perhaps the biggest challenge to the B-theory, but exploring it here would take us too far afield.

[8] This natural assumption is sometimes challenged, however. See, e.g., Dorato (1995).

atonement has never been fully accomplished. Sin *has not been* removed; and Christ hanging on the cross is an ever-present feature of God's life' (2012: 184). Either way, there is no change from fallen to redeemed state for man. Man is forever – or never – reconciled with God. If we take the first of these options, the difference the Atonement makes can then only be conceived in counterfactual rather than temporal terms: if the Atonement had not occurred, man would at no time be reconciled to God. If we take the second, then the Atonement makes no difference. We then have a further argument which suggests that the passage of time is essential to our understanding of the Atonement, for only if time passes can we make room for the ontological asymmetry between past and future that makes the Atonement a genuinely novel part of reality when it occurs.

That concludes the case for the A-theory's account of the Atonement. It is time now to hear the other side.

V. A QUESTION OF CAUSALITY

To summarise the story so far:

The discussion of Prior's 'thank goodness that's over' case was intended to show that the B-theorist's denial of the real passage of time is entirely compatible with the irreducibly tensed nature of a significant part of our mental lives, our emotional lives in particular. For our tensed beliefs about the world are, for the B-theorist, a reflection of our perspective on the tenseless facts which constitute the truth-conditions for those beliefs. No revision to our ordinary ways of thinking and talking is necessary. Our emotional responses to tensed beliefs (such as the relief we feel when we believe that some unpleasant experience is over) can continue to be seen as rational, given that our experience of the world is perforce temporally (and personally and spatially) perspectival. But the B-theorist cannot straightforwardly carry this strategy over to the Atonement, because the significance of the Atonement is not simply an experiential one. We may, indeed, feel relief on being told that our relationship with God has been restored, but that is just incidental. The important thing is that our relationship really has been restored, independently of any belief to that effect. Two arguments were presented in favour of an A-theoretic account of the Atonement:

> *The moral progress argument*: the B-theory can allow only that our relationship with God exhibits a moral gradient. Our fallen state

precedes our reconciled state: there is no further fact of progress *from* fallen *to* reconciled state.

The open future argument: for Christ's sacrifice to transform our relationship to God in time, it must become part of reality – that is, it was once unreal, but then became real, and this in turn requires an objective asymmetry between past and future: the past is real, the future not. But the B-theory cannot allow such an asymmetry.

I want to suggest now that the B-theorist can respond to both of these arguments by appeal to the asymmetry of causation.

The moral progress argument implies that the B-theorist can offer an account only of temporal order, but not of temporal direction. There is no sense, that is, that events run from earlier to later, rather than vice versa, because that can only be conferred by the direction of the passage of time. But the B-theorist is not obliged to concede that the direction of time has to be viewed in such dynamic terms. There is an important asymmetry between earlier and later times in that what happens at earlier times can causally affect what happens at later times, but not vice versa. The direction of time, in other words, is grounded in the direction of causation.[9] So there is an objective, and not merely perspectival difference between the Pilgrim's story of moral progress, and Macbeth's story of moral regress. For the Pilgrim, the state of being burdened by sin and the tendency to succumb to temptation is causally antecedent to the state of being saved. For Macbeth, loyalty, courage and friendship are causally antecedent to betrayal, murder, cynicism and psychological disintegration. These objective causal differences, which make neither explicit nor implicit appeal to time's passage, are sufficient for us to recognise the pattern of Pilgrim's life as superior to Macbeth's. Similarly, the case of mankind, where the fallen state is causally antecedent to the reconciled state, is, by virtue of that causal direction, one of progress.

The reply to the open future argument takes a similar form, but is prefaced by a counter-challenge: what metaphysical mechanism does the A-theorist suppose is involved in Atonement? This is not fully answered by offering one of the various moral accounts of the Atonement, for example the ransom, satisfaction or penal substitution theories. Such an account might answer the question: 'In what way does

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[9] The B-theorist is not committed to a causal theory of time-order, but that account of time order can do a great deal of explanatory work, grounding not only the direction of time but also asymmetries in our temporal experience. See Mellor (1981), (1998).

Christ's sacrifice bring about atonement for our sins?' That is, of course, an urgent question, but it doesn't immediately settle the further, and perhaps somewhat more abstract, question, 'What kind of effect does that sacrifice have?' The first question is a moral question, and raises the tricky issue of how the sacrifice of an innocent being can change our own moral standing in the eyes of God. That is not a question I have tried to address here because it seems to me largely orthogonal to the topic of this paper: the relationship between the Atonement and the metaphysics of time.[10] But the second question (at least, as I intend it) is a metaphysical question. To focus it somewhat: is the effect of Christ's sacrifice a causal or a non-causal one? If the former, then it is at least intelligible, in that we can relate it to the way in which our own actions have effects. But if the mechanism by which Christ's sacrifice brings about the restoration of our relationship with God is causal, then it is not Christ's sacrifice simply being part of reality that constitutes Atonement, but rather the causal consequences of that sacrifice. And since there is no backwards causation, those consequences can only appear *after* the sacrifice, not beforehand. So even though, on the B-theory, all times are equally real, this does not imply that there is no change in our relationship to God over time. If, then, we opt for a causal account, we are not faced with a choice between God being at all times reconciled to humanity, and God being at all times unreconciled to humanity. The fallen state of man is brought to an end by the sacrifice of Christ, the causal (and therefore temporally later) consequence of which is reconciliation with God. No appeal to an open future is necessary.

But what of the earlier suggestion that the Atonement somehow works backwards, redeeming mankind for all time, past as well as future? If backwards causation is impossible, then does this not require a non-causal notion of the consequences of Christ's sacrifice? This thought, however, is misguided. There is a sense in which the Atonement works backwards and a sense in which it does not. The sense in which it does is to make it the case now that God is reconciled with all of humanity – past, present and future humanity. This is entirely compatible with the

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[10] This needs some qualification. On one model of the Atonement, namely the moral exemplar account, on which Christ saves us by giving us an example of a perfect life, it is evident that the mechanism whereby we are saved (which requires an active response to Christ's life) cannot work backwards in time, as it is straightforwardly a causal process. See, e.g. Graham (2010) for a discussion of this and other accounts of Atonement.

effects of Christ's sacrifice being later than their cause. The sense in which it does not is the sense in which the past is somehow changed intrinsically, so that it is now – but not previously – the case that past humanity *was already* reconciled to God, prior to Christ's sacrifice. But this is not a sense we want anyway, since this kind of changing the past is, as we have already noted, impossible.

We have critically examined two arguments for the suggestion that an understanding of the Atonement requires a view of time as objectively passing. Though plausible, neither argument stands up to scrutiny. The B-theorist, who denies objective passage, can account for the relevant phenomena (the idea of humanity progressing *from* fallen *to* redeemed state, and the asymmetry between *before* and *after* Christ's sacrifice) by appeal to a causal theory of time order. Now, I do not simply presume that these arguments are exhaustive. There may well be other considerations. But I challenge those who favour an A-theoretic conception of the Atonement to produce them. I also concede that causal theories of time order are not uncontroversial. But they do not actually conflict with the A-theory, so the B-theorist cannot be accused of begging the question in appealing to them. (Indeed, it is not obvious that this objection would be warranted even if there were a conflict with the A-theory, for if the A-theorist is entitled to offer an explanation of the relevant asymmetries in A-theoretic terms, the B-theorist is entitled to offer a rival account.)

This conclusion should be congenial to those who take God to be indifferent to tensed distinctions, and who suppose that for him all times are of equal intrinsic significance. The Atonement, I suggest, gives us no reason to disagree with Spinoza's dictum 'In so far as the mind conceives a thing under the dictate of reason, it will be equally affected equally, whether the idea be of a thing present, past, or future.'[11]

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ON PROPOSITIONAL PLATONISM, REPRESENTATION, AND DIVINE CONCEPTUALISM

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Abstract. Gould and Davis (2014) have recently argued for the claim that Propositional Platonism is mistaken since it is not able to explain how a proposition comes to bear its representational properties. But, say Gould and Davis, if Propositional Platonism is mistaken, then Divine Conceptualism must be true and we should therefore identify propositions with the contents of a divine mind, i.e., God. In this paper, I argue that Gould and Davis' argument against Propositional Platonism fails since it depends upon a number of assumptions that the Propositional Platonist need not accept.

I. GOULD AND DAVIS' ARGUMENT

Call "Propositional Platonism" the view according to which propositions are (minimally) abstract, mind and language-independent, truth-bearing entities. In their "Modified Theistic Activism" (2014), Gould and Davis have recently advanced an argument which, if correct, shows that Propositional Platonism is mistaken. Their argument goes as follows. According to Gould and Davis, if Propositional Platonism is true, then propositions must be abstract representational entities; that is, they must be *of* or *about* things. And this, say Gould and Davis, is an essential property of propositions, for if propositions failed to be representational, propositions couldn't be *about* anything, and so bear a truth-value. As Gould and Davis (2014) put it:

> In short, propositions ... are intentional objects; they are of or about things. And this is an essential property of propositions; for if they lacked this property, they could not possibly be claims or assertions of any kind, they could not represent anything, in which case they could not be true (/false). (p. 52-53)

Now, if propositions are abstract representational entities, then, say Gould and Davis, they will be *structured* entities. For example, if the proposition expressed by (1):

(1) *Quine* is wise.

is an abstract representational entity, then, say Gould and Davis, the proposition expressed will be a structured entity or *n*-tuple, one that has as its constituent components properties, relations, and concrete individuals. Specifically, if the proposition expressed by (1) is an abstract representational entity, then, say Gould and Davis, it will have as its constituents *Quine*, *the property of wisdom*, and *the exemplification relation*.[1] As Gould and Davis put it, the proposition expressed by (1) will contain:

> an admixture of concrete particulars and abstract objects. On the concrete side of things, (1) would contain *Quine himself* as a constituent. But its other ingredients would include the (abstract) property of wisdom, along with the (abstract) exemplification relation Quine stands in to that property. (p. 53)

Now, if propositions are structured abstract entities that have as their constituents properties, relations, and concrete individuals, then, say Gould and Davis, propositions must derive their representational properties solely *from* these constituents. So, since the proposition expressed by (1) contains as constituents *Quine*, *the property of wisdom*, and *the exemplification relation*, (1)'s representational properties must be derived solely from these constituents. As Gould and Davis put it: "... whatever intentionality [(1)] enjoys is inherited or derived; it will be a function of (1)'s parts, each of which is essential to it." (p.53). But, say Gould and Davis, the constituents of the proposition expressed by (1) plainly *fail* to be representational, for the constituent <Quine> in (1) is not in any way *about* Quine. But now, say Gould and Davis, if the constituents of the proposition expressed by (1) fail to be representational, then, by extension, the proposition expressed by (1) as a *whole* fails to be representational as well. As Gould and Davis put it:

> Since Quine is not *of* or *about* anything, since he does not represent anything (even himself), the mere fact that something contains him will

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[1] Hence, the proposition expressed by (1) can be represented as:
(1') Exemplification (Quine, wisdom)

not make that thing about Quine. You might as well argue that Harvard's philosophy department was about Quine because it contained him as a member. The point is: *just in himself*, Quine, while impressive in many ways, is an intentional flop. (p. 54)

But now, if the proposition expressed by (1) fails to be representational, it follows, say Gould and Davis, that Propositional Platonism must be mistaken and therfore should be rejected. Formally, the argument that Gould and Davis present against Propositional Platonism goes as follows:

II. THE GOULD/DAVIS ARGUMENT
AGAINST PROPOSITIONAL PLATONISM

(P1) If Propositional Platonism is true, then propositions are representational, truth-bearing entities.

(P2) If propositions are representational, truth-bearing entities, then propositions are structured entities.

(P3) If propositions are structured entities, then propositions have as their constituents properties, relations, and concrete individuals.

(P4) If propositions have as their constituents properties, relations, and concrete individuals, then the representational properties of a proposition (and by extension, its truth-conditions) must be explained solely in terms of these constituents.

(P5) It's not possible to explain the representational properties of a proposition (along *with its truth-conditions) in terms of these constituents.*

(P6) Therefore, Propositional Platonism is mistaken.

Gould and Davis go on claim that, since (P6) is true and Propositional Platonism doesn't contain the conceptual resources to explain the representational properties of propositions whereas Divine Conceptualism *does* contain such resources, we should reject Propositional Platonism in favor of Divine Conceptualism and identify abstract propositions with the contents of a divine mind, i.e., God.

Gould and Davis' argument – which has recently received critical attention from Craig (2014), Welty (2014), Yandell (2014), Shalkowski (2014), and Oppy (2014) – is deductively valid and, if sound, amounts to a wholesale refutation of Propositional Platonism. In what follows,

however, I want to argue that Gould and Davis' argument against Propositional Platonism (hereafter "Platonism") depends upon at least five assumptions that the Platonist need not accept. If I'm right about this, then Gould and Davis' argument against Platonism fails and that, accordingly, we need not endorse Divine Conceptualism and identify abstract propositions with the contents of a divine mind.[2]

2.a. Gould and Davis' First Assumption

The first controversial assumption upon which Gould and Davis' argument depends is this:

(a1) *On Propositional Platonism, propositions must be representational in order to be the bearers of truth-values.*

Gould and Davis apparently think that (a1) is somehow self-evident or obviously true. Indeed, Gould and Davis go so far as to claim that being representational is an "essential" property of abstract propositions. But is (a1) even true? Recent work by Speaks (2014) indicates that (a1) is in fact false and that the Platonist need not be committed to the claim that propositions must be representational in order to be the bearers of truth-values. Glossing over details, Speaks' account goes as follows. Consider the monadic predication:

(2) Smith talks

Call the proposition expressed by (2) PROP, and suppose that the content of "Smith" is a certain person, Smith, and the content of "talks" is the monadic property of talking. (In this case, we can call Smith and the property of talking the constituents of PROP.) So what is PROP, according to Speaks? According to Speaks, PROP is a *property*. That is, on Speaks' account, the proposition expressed by (2) just is the property of *being such that Smith instantiates talking*. And, according to Speaks, PROP is true provided that the property of *being such that Smith instantiates talking* is in fact instantiated. Generalizing, on Speaks' account, propositions are properties which are true iff those properties are instantiated; on Speaks' account, "propositions are true with respect to a world w iff were w actual, that property would be instantiated" (2014, p.76).

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[2] I should note that the objections that I develop in this paper are, so far as I can tell, logically independent of those advanced by Craig, Welty, Yandell, Shalkowski, and Oppy.

According to Speaks, viewing propositions as properties fits with much of our ordinary talk about propositions. We might say, says Speaks, that believing a proposition is taking the world to be a certain way. But if "ways things are" are *properties*, this indicates that having a belief is taking a certain propositional attitude toward a property; if "ways things are" are properties, then the objects of mental states and speech acts are themselves properties.

What is central for our purposes is this: On Speaks' account, propositions (construed as properties) have truth-conditions, and are abstract, but they are not *about* anything – propositions are not *representational* entities. Beliefs, assertions, and so on, says Speaks, have truth-conditions and are representational, and they are representational because of their relations *to* propositions; but propositions themselves are not representational entities. They are simply entities that are true or false, and fundamentally so. Speaks' view, then, does away with the traditional idea that a proposition must be a representational entity, i.e., an entity that represents things as they really are. Indeed, according to Speaks, to say that something is true just in case it represents the world as being some way is a mere *platitude*, and a platitude that ought to be given up, for who, says Speaks, says the platitude must apply to everything that is true or false? Says Speaks (2014, p. 221):

> On my view, it is a platitude that a sentence is true *iff* it represents the world as being some way, and the world is that way – what it is for a sentence to represent the world as being some way is for that sentence to have a certain property – a way things could be – as its content, and what it is for the world to be that way is for the property to be instantiated. *But no such claim holds about the truth of propositions.*[3]

Doing away with the idea that propositions are representational entities may seem like a cost. But, as Speaks stresses, there is also a real benefit here; since the idea that an abstract entity can be representational has seemed to many to be a bizarre one, "if we can give an account of truth … without making use of entities of this sort, this is a good thing" (Speaks, 2014, p. 78).

The salient point here is this: Gould and Davis assume that (a1) is obviously true and that the Platonist is somehow committed to the claim that propositions must be representational in order to be the bearers

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[3] Italics added.

of truth-values. But, if Speaks' account is correct, then the Platonist is not so committed, for, on Speaks' account, propositions are abstract, *non*-representational truth-bearing entities. Since Gould and Davis fail to provide any reasons for thinking that Speaks' account is in any way mistaken or not worthy of serious consideration – indeed, since Gould and Davis fail to even consider how Speaks account undercuts the truth of (a1) – we must conclude that (a1) is false, or, at the very least, not obviously true.[4]

2.b. Gould and Davis' Second Assumption

The second controversial assumption upon which Gould and Davis' argument depends is this:

(a2) *On Propositional Platonism, propositions are abstract entities whose constituent components are properties, relations, and concrete individuals; on Platonism, propositions are to be given a specifically Russellian analysis.*

To be sure, Platonists often claim that a Russellian analysis of propositions is correct and that relations, properties, and concrete individuals, serve as the constituent components of propositions. But is the Platonist somehow *committed* to a Russellian analysis, as Gould and Davis' (a2) indicates? Contrary to Gould and Davis' (a2), there is in fact a wide range of *non*-Russellian structured analyses of propositions available to the Platonist.

For instance, the main alternative to the Russellian account is the broadly Fregean account according to which propositions are structured abstract entities that have as their constituent components, not relations, properties and concrete individuals, but rather *senses*. More fully, Frege held that simple linguistic expressions such as proper names have a *sense* (or "Sinn"), where the sense of a linguistic expression is the thing or object in the world that the expression serves to pick out; to use Fregean terminology, the sense of a linguistic expression is the *mode of presentation* that determines the referent of that linguistic

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[4] Let me stress here that I am not claiming that Speaks' account is true. Rather, I am merely claiming that, by failing to consider Speaks' account, Gould and Davis imply that it's somehow *obvious* that propositions must be representational in order to be truth-value bearers. But, if Speaks' account is corect, then, contrary to Gould and Davis, it's *not* at all obvious that propositions must be representational in order to be truth-value bearers.

expression.[5] Frege extends this analysis to complex linguistic expressions such as propositions as well. According to Frege a complete declarative sentence also possesses a sense, where the sense of a declarative sentence is a *proposition*, or in Frege's words, a "thought." Moreover, and most importantly for our purposes, on the Fregean account, the proposition associated with or expressed by a declarative sentence is determined wholly by the senses of its subsentential components and of how those components are syntactically arranged. As Burge puts it, (2005), on what we might call *Fregean Semantic Atomism*, the meaning or sense of a complex expression is "functionally dependent only on the senses of its logically relevant component expressions" (p.85). Or, as King (2011) puts it, on the Fregean account, "the proposition/thought expressed by a sentence is a function of the senses of the words in the sentence and how they are put together." The salient point here, then, is this: Fregeans *agree* with Russellians that propositions are structured abstract entities, but hold that the constituents of propositions are not objects, properties, and relations, but rather senses or modes of presentation.[6]

An altogether different structured account is the broadly Moorean-inspired *structured-concepts* account provided by Swartz and Bradley (1979, pp. 87-97). Very roughly, according to the Swartz/Bradley account, propositions are structured abstract entities whose constituent components are *ordered concepts*.[7] For example, on the Swartz/Bradley analysis, the constituents of the proposition expressed by:

(4) Muhammad Ali is an Olympic skier

are the contingently applicable concepts of *being Muhammad Ali* and *being an Olympic skier*, where a concept is, roughly speaking, an open sentence which contains a gap such that, when the gap is filled with an appropriate expression, the resulting sentence expresses something

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[5] So, for example, the sense of the proper name "Barack Obama" is, for Frege, the entity in the world that the name "Barack Obama" picks out or stands for. Here one might think of the sense of the name "Barack Obama" as some identifying descriptive content that serves to uniquely pick out the person Barack Obama.

[6] Note: on the Fregean account, senses are abstract objects.

[7] Where concepts are expressible by those words which feature in a kind of open sentence. An open sentence in general is a sentence which contains a gap such that when the gap is filled with an appropriate expression, the resulting closed sentence expresses something that is true or false. See Swartz and Bradley (1979) pages 88-89 for more on concepts.

that is true or false.[8] Hence, on the Swartz/Bradley analysis, the conceptual constituents of the proposition expressed by (4) are the members of the set:

> {*being Muhammad Ali*, *being an Olympic skier*}

which may be expressed by saying:

> the item of which *being Muhammad Ali* is the concept has the attribute of which *being an Olympic skier* is the concept.

or, even more formally:

> there is an item x such that x falls under the concept of *being Muhammad Ali* and x falls under the concept of *being an Olympic skier*.

Generalizing, Swartz and Bradley write that, if we let the Strawsonian locution:

> "*ass* { ... }

represent the idea which assigns attributes of which certain constituents are the concepts to items of which other constituents are the concepts, we can say that the structure:

> *ass* {*being Muhammad Ali*, *being an Olympic skier*}

just is the proposition expressed by (4). On the Swartz/Bradley analysis, then, a proposition *just is* its constituent concepts standing in the proposition-yielding relation.[9] The salient point here, then, is this: Swartz and Bradley *agree* with Russellians that propositions are structured abstract entities, but hold that the constituents of propositions are not objects, properties, and relations, but rather ordered concepts. And of course, there are other well-known structured accounts.[10]

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[8] The particular kind of open sentence which can express a concept is that in which the gap is to be filled either (1) by a referring expression of some kind or (2) by a sentence expressing a proposition. So, for instance, the open sentence: " ... is an Olympic skier" is a concept-expressing sentence, on the Swartz/Bradley analysis.

[9] Note: Concepts are, along with Fregean senses, abstract objects.

[10] There is Lewis and Cresswell's *structured intensions approach*, where propositions are identified with structured intensions; there is Zalta and Menzel's *algebraic approach* where propositions are identified with zero-place relations. And there are other analyses still.

Generalizing, the worry here is this: according to Gould and Davis' (a2), the Platonist is somehow committed to the claim that propositions are structured abstract entities that have as their constituent components properties, relations, and concrete individuals.[11] But this assumption, as we've just seen, is manifestly false, for there is in fact a wide range of non-Russellian structured analyses available to the Platonist. Since Gould and Davis fail to provide any reasons for thinking that any of these competing analyses are mistaken or not worthy of serious consideration – indeed, since Gould and Davis fail to even consider *any* of the main alternatives to the Russellian account along with the contemporary defenses of these accounts – we must conclude that Gould and Davis' (a2) is false.

2.c. Gould and Davis' Third Assumption.

The third controversial assumption upon which Gould and Davis' argument depends is this:

(a3) *On Propositional Platonism, propositions are structured abstract entities*.

But we might question whether the Platonist is even committed to the structured account of propositions *in the first place*. To be sure, the structured account is the dominant account of propositions; but it is a mistake to assume, as Gould and Davis' (a3) indicates, that the Platonist is somehow committed to such an account for, as a number of theorists have pointed out, the Platonist is free to eschew the structured account altogether and construe propositions as *unstructured* abstract entities. For instance, according to Bealer's (1993) seminal work on propositions, propositions are unstructured, ontologically primitive sorts of *abstracta*. More fully, Bealer associates with each proposition a decomposition tree, where such a tree highlights "which logical operations on which entities (individuals, properties, relations) a given proposition is the result of" (Bealer in Carrara and Sacchi, 2006, p. 20). By showing which logical operations a given proposition is the result of, Bealer is able to provide a detailed algebraic structure to propositions. However, and this deserves underscoring, although Bealer is able to provide a detailed

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[11] At the very least, since Gould and Davis confine their attention *solely* to the Russellian analysis, (a2) indicates that the Russellian analysis is somehow the only serious or viable structured analysis of propositions and that any alternative analysis can be safely ignored.

algebraic structure to propositions, Bealer *denies* that propositions have constituent components. This is because, as I just indicated, Bealer holds that propositions are metaphysically simple abstract entities that contain no constituents whatsoever (Carrara, and Sacchi, 2006, p. 20). If Bealer's so-called "primitive entity" account of propositions is right, then, although it's possible to attribute a structure to propositions, propositions are ultimately *irreducible* to their constituents.

An alternative unstructured account of propositions is the possible worlds account according to which propositions are identified with sets of metaphysically possible worlds. More fully, some Platonists have identified each proposition with the set of possible worlds in which that proposition is true, or identified propositions with functions from possible worlds to truth-values. As Stalnaker puts it: (2008): "...it seems reasonable to use sets of possible worlds, or (equivalently) functions from possible worlds into truth-values, to play the role of propositions in our theory" (p.148). So, for example, the proposition expressed by the sentence:

(5) Bill sleeps.

just is, according to the possible worlds account, the set of worlds in which the referent of <Bill> is a member of the set of things that sleep, or, equivalently, a function f that maps a possible world w to the value True *iff* Bill sleeps in w. Now, although sentence (5) is structured and each part of the sentence is of a determinate semantic type (an individual constant and a monadic property), the proposition expressed *by* (5) is not structurally isomorphic to sentence (5), for a set of possible worlds is not a *linguistically* structured entity at all (Collins, 2011, p. 8).

Indeed, it is worth mentioning that the Platonist possesses reasons for being skeptical of the structured account of propositions *in the first place*. Here's why; It is widely held that the semantic value or meaning of a complex expression is determined by the semantic values of its constituents and the way in which that those constituents are structurally arranged. Formally, according to the so-called Principle of Compositionality (PC):

PC: The semantic value of a complex expression e is composed out of the semantic values of e's constituent components and the way in which these components are structurally arranged.

Now if, as Keller and Keller (2014) have recently noted, PC is in fact true, then the structured account of propositions along with Gould and Davis (a3) immediately follows. Keller and Keller's argument proceeds as follows. Suppose that PC is true and that the semantic value of a complex expression is composed out of the semantic values of its components and the way in which these components are structurally arranged. But, since propositions *just are* the semantic values of complex expressions, it follows that a proposition is composed out of the semantic values of a complex expression's components and the way in which these components are structurally arranged, and so is a structured entity. Formally, Keller and Keller's argument goes as follows:

> *The Compositionality Argument*
> (1) PC: The semantic value of a complex expression *e* is composed out of the semantic values of *e*'s components and the way in which these components are structurally arranged.
>
> (2) A proposition is the semantic value of a complex expression *e*.
>
> (3) Hence, a proposition is composed out of the semantic values of *e*'s components and the way in which *e*'s components are structurally arranged, and thus is a structured entity.

It's important to note that this argument is typically cited as the main reason for adopting the structured account. Since the argument is deductively valid and since (2) is not in dispute, the acceptability of this argument hinges entirely upon premise (1). Proponents of the structured account support (1) by pointing to the *productivity*, *understandability*, and *systematicity* of language, and argue that (1) is the best, or only, way to explain these features.[12] Recent work by Keller and Keller (2014), however, strongly indicates that (1) is in fact *false*; Keller and Keller claim that (1) is either subject to a range of counterexamples or depends upon a number of highly controversial assumptions. But now, if (1) is mistaken and (1) is the main reason for adopting the structured account, then, say

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[12] According to Keller and Keller, a representational system *L* is *productive* "just in case finite beings can use *L* to produce an infinite number of meaningful complex expressions; it is *understandable* just in case someone competent with *L* (i.e., who grasps the finite lexicon and grammatical rules of *L*) is capable of understanding complex expressions of *L* she has never before encountered; and it is *systematic* just in case whenever someone competent with *L* is capable of understanding an expression *e* of *L*, she is capable of understanding systematic variants of *e* (expressionsobtained by permuting the constituents of *e*)".

Keller and Keller, the fundamental rationale for adopting the structured account of propositions is radically undercut. But now, if the fundamental rationale for adopting the structured account is undercut, then Gould and Davis' (a3) is *also* thereby undercut, and thus, the Propositional Platonist possesses reasons for rejecting the structured account.

The point here is this; according to Gould and Davis' assumption (a3), the Platonist is somehow committed to the claim that propositions are structured abstract entities. But this assumption is false, for, as we've just seen, the Platonist is free to forego the structured account altogether and construe propositions as atomic, unstructured abstract entities. Moreover, if, as I just indicated, the arguments of Keller and Keller against the Principle of Compositionality are correct, then the Platonist possesses an undercutting defeater for (a3), i.e., a reason for thinking that the basic grounds for adopting the structured account of propositions are inadequate. Since Gould and Davis fail to provide any reasons for thinking that the unstructured approach to propositions or the arguments of Keller and Keller against the structured account are in way mistaken, the Propositional Platonist is justified in rejecting (a3).[13]

2.d. Gould and Davis' Fourth Assumption

The fourth controversial assumption upon which Gould and Davis' argument depends is this:

> (a4) *On Propositional Platonism, a proposition's truth-conditions must be explained solely in terms of the representational properties of its constituent components.*

So, on Gould and Davis' (a4), the truth-conditions of a proposition is to be explained solely in terms of the representational properties of its

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[13] To be fair, Gould and Davis do briefly consider the view according to which propositions are "simple, brutely intentional Platonic" Forms, thus implying something like the unstructured account. But Gould and Davis quickly dismiss this view on the grounds that such a view "hardly squares with what we all learned at Socrates' knee, viz., the Forms are neither "propositional" (p.55) nor "representational" (p.55). By way of response: firstly, Gould and Davis here fail to provide an *argument* for the claim that unstructured propositions – "the Forms", as Gould and Davis call it – cannot be representational. And secondly, even if one were to grant Gould and Davis the claim that the Forms are neither propositional nor representational, it hardly follows that propositions on *Bealer's* account or the *possible worlds* account or some alternative unstructured account are neither propositional nor representational.

constituent components; on Gould and Davis' (a4), the truth-conditions of a proposition must *built up* from the representational properties of its constituent components.

Briefly, there are at least three lines of response to (a4) available to the Platonist, each of which undercuts (a4). Firstly, note that if Speaks' account of propositions sketched earlier is at all correct, then (a4) is false. Specifically, if Speaks' account is correct and a proposition is a property that bears the truth-value True *iff* that property is instantiated, then, contrary to Gould and Davis' (a4), the Platonist can account for a proposition's being true without even appealing to the idea of representation.

Secondly, there is no reason to suppose that the Platonist is committed to anything like (a4) for, as we saw in Section 2.c., the Platonist can explain the truth-conditions of a proposition wholly in terms of an *un*structured account of propositions – say, the possible worlds account. So, to recall an earlier example, the proposition expressed by the sentence:

(5) Bill sleeps.

just is, on the possible worlds account, a function *f* that maps a possible world *w* to the value True *iff* Bill sleeps in *w*; the proposition expressed by (5) *just is*, on the possible worlds account, the set of possible worlds at which the proposition expressed by (5) is true. Now, although sentence (5) is linguistically structured, the proposition expressed by (5) isn't structurally isomorphic to sentence (5) for a set of possible worlds isn't a linguistically structured entity in the first place (Collins, 2011, p. 8). Hence, contrary to Gould and Davis' (a4), it's possible to explain the truth-conditions of a proposition wholly in terms of an unstructured account of propositions.

Thirdly, note that if the arguments of Keller and Keller against the Compositionality Argument discussed in the previous section are correct, then the Propositional Platonist possesses an undercutting defeater for the claim that propositions are structured entities that contain constituents. But if the Platonist possesses a defeater for the claim that propositions contain constituents, then the Platonist thereby possesses an undercutting defeater for Gould and Davis' (a4) – for the claim that a proposition's truth-conditions should be explained in terms of its constituent components – for, according to the arguments of Keller and Keller, there are no good reasons for supposing that propositions contain constituent components *in the first place*.

The point here is this; on Gould and Davis' (a4), the Platonist must explain the truth-conditions of a proposition wholly in terms of the representational properties of its constituent components. But this, as we've just seen, is false, for, firstly, if Speaks' account of propositions is right, then the Platonist can account for a proposition's being true without even appealing to the idea of representation; secondly, the Propositional Platonist can explain the truth-conditions of a proposition wholly in terms of the unstructured possible worlds account; and lastly, if the arguments of Keller and Keller are correct, then the Platonist possesses an undercutting defeater for the claim that propositions even contain constituent components. Since Gould and Davis fail to provide any reasons for thinking that these responses are mistaken – indeed, since Gould and Davis fail to even consider these potential responses to (a4) – we must conclude that (a4) is false or not obviously true.

2.e. Gould and Davis' Fifth Assumption

The fifth and most important assumption upon which Gould and Davis' argument rests is this:

(a5) *Since the Propositional Platonist isn't able to explain the representational properties of a proposition in terms of its constituent components, a wholesale rejection of Propositional Platonism is justified.*

Let's follow Gould and Davis and suppose that the Platonist is in fact committed to the claim that propositions are abstract, structured, representational, truth-bearing entities, and that the representational properties of propositions (so-construed) must be wholly derived from their constituents (where the constituents are properties, concrete objects, and relations). And let's also suppose (along with Gould and Davis) that the Platonist is not in any way able to explain how the representational properties of a proposition is derived from its constituents; that is, let's suppose that the Propositional Platonist is not able to explain the *relation of representation*. We might now ask: does it follow from these two assumptions that a *wholesale rejection* of Platonism is justified, as Gould and Davis' (a5) indicates? I don't think it does follow. A number of Platonists have responded to (a5) by claiming something along the following lines: even if the Platonist were to concede that no clear answers are forthcoming as to how an abstract proposition manages to

derive its representational properties from its constituent components, Platonism is (all things considered) still rationally justified since construing propositions as abstract, mind and language-independent, truth-bearing, representational entities performs a range of explanatory work that no competing account of propositions can. Specifically, the Platonist will claim that, even if she isn't able to explain how an abstract proposition comes to bear the relation of representation, her commitment to Platonism is still, all things considered, rationally justified since Platonism:

- provides a plausible explanation of how the same semantic-content can be expressed by different people uttering different sentence-tokens of different languages;
- provides a plausible explanation of how the same semantic-content can be believed by different people;
- provides a plausible account of how mental states gain their representational content;
- provides a plausible account of alethic modality – of necessity, possibility, contingency, and so on.
- makes intuitive sense of our ascriptions of truth and falsity.

And so on. In short, since Platonism elegantly and powerfully simplifies, unifies, and systematizes our thinking about language, thought, and communication, a commitment to Propositional Platonism is warranted even if no explanation is forthcoming as to how an abstract proposition manages to bear its representational properties independently of all minds and language.

To some it may seem mysterious, odd, or even bizarre as to how an abstract proposition can bear its representational properties independently of all minds and language. And perhaps it *is* mysterious as to how an abstract proposition manages to do this. But it scarcely follows from this that a wholesale rejection of Platonism is justified or warranted, as Gould and Davis's (a5) indicates. Since Platonism is an "impressively powerful account of language, thought, and communication" (Jubien, 1993, p. 103), and since there is (at present) no comparatively powerful rival account of propositions, it is rationally justified to accept Platonism even if the relation of representation remains a completely mysterious one. As Jubien (1993) bluntly puts it, since the overall case for Platonism is so impressively strong, we ought to "try to get used to the mystery"

(p. 103) of representation. If this line of reasoning is correct, then perhaps the Platonist should ultimately claim that the relation of representation functions as one of the *primitive terms* in her overall, though presently incomplete, theory of propositions.

The claim that the relation of representation ought to function as a primitive term within the Platonist's overall theory of propositions has frequently been made and defended in the literature. And, as I just pointed out, the relation of representation is not a primitive chosen *ad hoc*, but a relation that is needed specifically for explanatory purposes. But now, if the Platonist is justified in claiming that the relation of representation functions as a primitive within her overall theory of propositions, then, it seems, Gould and Davis need to provide an argument for the claim that the Platonist is *not* so justified. But, surprisingly, Gould and Davis *fail* to provide just such an argument. Indeed, the idea that the relation of representation might function as a primitive within the Platonist's overall theory of propositions is not even considered by Gould and Davis. Since Gould and Davis fail to provide an argument for the claim that the Platonist is not justified in claiming that the relation of representation functions as a primitive in her overall theory of propositions, we then possess a reason for thinking that (a5) is false or not obviously true.

III. CONCLUSION

According to Gould and Davis, the Platonist is committed to assumptions (a1)-(a5). But, if the foregoing is correct, then the Platonist need not be committed to *any one* of (a1)-(a5). The Propositional Platonist need not be committed to the claim that propositions must be representational in order to be the bearers of truth-values; to the claim that propositions must be given a Russellian analysis; to the claim that propositions must be structured abstract entities; to the claim that the representational properties of propositions must be explained in terms of their constituents; to the claim that, since the Propositional Platonism isn't able to explain the relation of representation, Propositional Platonism itself should be rejected. Since the Propositional Platonist need not be committed to any one of (a1)-(a5), we thereby have good reasons for thinking that Gould and Davis' argument against Propositional Platonism fails and thus, by extension, that we need not identify abstract propositions with the contents of a divine mind. Put differently, since Gould and Davis

fail to engage with the relevant literature that directly challenges the range of assumptions upon which their anti-Platonist argument rests, we must conclude that Gould and Davis' argument against Propositional Platonism does not succeed, and therefore that the inference to Divine Conceptualism is blocked.[14]

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COMMON CORE/DIVERSITY DILEMMA, AGATHEISM AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

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The essay "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma: Revisions of Humean Thought, New Empirical Research, and the Limits of Rational Religious Belief" is a bold argument for the irrationality of "first-order" religious belief (that is, the belief that adherents to particular religions have). However, unlike those associated with "New Atheism," the paper's authors Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican claim both that there are prospects for rational "second-order" religious belief (a religion-neutral belief in a designer of some sort) and that religious belief and practice can play a positive role in human life. In response to Thornhill-Miller and Millican, Janusz Salamon has argued that first-order religious belief can be rational, although not via the methods that philosophers who have typically defended the reasonability of faith have appealed to. Both papers are fascinating discussions of the epistemology of religious belief in general, and of the rationality of such commitment in light of modern science and religious disagreement in particular. In this paper, I'll object to a few points made in each essay and argue that neither paper provides good reason to be dubious about the religious belief being rational along traditional lines.

I. THORNHILL-MILLER AND MILLICAN'S DILEMMA

Thornhill-Miller and Millican (hereafter TMM) argue that what they call the "Common Core/Diversity Dilemma" shows that first-order religious beliefs are irrational. That is, the standard religious beliefs of the practioners of all the various theological traditions are not rationally held. But it doesn't follow from this, they claim, that there might not be some rational religious belief. So called "second-order" religious belief is essentially the deistic conviction that there is a designer, full stop.

The ground of such belief, they aver, is the fine-tuning argument. Because the universe is fine-tuned for life, and it is argued by some, the best explanation for such fine tuning is that the universe is designed for life, one might rationally conclude that although all first-order religious claims (or nearly all of them at any rate) are irrational, one might rationally believe in an abstract designer.

It seems to me that the argument that TMM give for the irrationality of first-order religious belief can be objected to at several points. Furthermore, I'll maintain that even if their argument were sound, one could still reasonably hold out hope for a more robust rational religious belief than what they think is possible. To begin, let's have a look at their main argument.

A key claim TMM argue for is what they call the "Common Core/ Diversity Dilemma."

> That in so far as religious phenomena (e.g., miracle reports, religious experiences, or other apparent perceptions of supernatural agency) point towards specific aspects of particular religions, their diversity and mutual opposition undermines their evidential force; while in so far as such phenomena involve a 'common core' of similarity, they point towards a proximate common cause for these phenomena that is natural rather than supernatural (p. 3).

Although not a traditional dilemma, the apparent problem is this: any phenomenon that seems to evidentially support a *distinctive* claim of a *particular* religion is undermined by the fact that there are other similar phenomena that would seem to evidentially support distinctive claims of other religions (i.e,. claims of other religions that are inconsistent with the claim being supported by the first-mentioned phenomenon). On the other hand, those phenomena that might be thought to support claims that all religious traditions have in common are best explained by proximate natural causes. So to put the point in the form of a dilemma, we get this:

> P1. Every purported religious experience is either (i) religion specific (that is, taken to support a distinctive claim of a particular religion) or (ii) religion general (that is, taken to be part of a common core of experience had by participants of various religious traditions).

> P2. If a purported religious experience E is religion specific, its epistemic efficacy is undermined by the fact that there are experiences

had by those in other religious traditions that equally support claims incompatible with the religion specific claim that E supports.

P3. If a purported experience E is religion general, then its epistemic efficacy is undermined by the fact that there is a proximate cause of E that is natural rather than supernatural.

C1. Therefore, the epistemic efficacy of every purported religious experience is undermined (i.e., no religious experience makes religious belief rational).

A few words are in order about this argument as I've stated it. I mean "religious experience" to be meant in a rather broad sense so that it includes all that TMM include in their characterization of "religious phenomena" – that is, miracle reports, religious experiences, or other apparent perceptions of supernatural agency. Also, when TMM say that the "diversity and mutual opposition of religion specific phenomena undermines their evidential force," I take them to mean that the *prima facie* rational support that such religious phenomena provide are epistemically defeated by the fact that there are other equally tenable experiences that support incompatible religious claims. So it is consistent with their dilemma that these experiences themselves provide some evidential support but that the support is undermined by the competing experiences.

While I believe the argument as I've stated it accurately portrays the dilemma that PMM mean to defend in their essay, the conclusion they reach in their essay is considerably stronger than the conclusion I've stated in C1. For the argument as I've constructed it is perfectly consistent with first-order religious belief (again, that's belief in any particular religious tradition) being epistemically rational or justified. The conclusion that their dilemma supports is only that religious phenomena of the type PMM have characterized does not provide ultima facie rational support for first-order religious belief. Yet their argument is clearly meant to say that there are no grounds of any kind for rational first-order religious belief. And to get that conclusion we have to add an additional premise. This, I take it, is how the argument ends.

P4. The only rational ground for first-order religious belief is religious experience.

C2. Therefore, first-order religious belief is not rational.

II. EVALUATING THORNHILL-MILLER AND MILLICAN'S DILEMMA

The argument as stated is valid so if one doesn't accept the conclusion, one will have to reject a premise. So let's consider the argument a premise at a time.

With one proviso, I'm willing to accept P1. One might understand "religion specific" as meaning unique to a particular religion. So a Roman Catholic's vision of Mary would be a clear enough instance of a religion specific experience in this first sense: it's an experience that might provide rational support for Roman Catholicism but that won't for other religious traditions. But if this is how we are to understand "religion specific" then the disjunction of P1 is clearly not exhaustive. For there can be experiences that support more than one religious tradition without supporting all of them. One who has an experience of God as personal will thereby have some *prima facie* rational support for any of the theistic traditions but will not have such support for pantheistic religions. So there are really three kinds of relevant experience: that which *prima facie* supports a single religion, that which *prima facie* supports multiple religions but not all religions, and that which *prima facie* supports all religions (i.e., the common core). I propose to understand "religion specific" to cover the first two sorts of experience. As long as that which an experience supports is inconsistent with a religious tradition, it falls under the "religious specific" category.[1] With this understood, I take P1 to propose an exhaustive dichotomy.

P2 is also initially problematic. The mere fact that there are others who have experiences that support religious beliefs inconsistent with the one's own does nothing to undermine the *prima facie* rationality provided by one's experience. When religious communities are epistemically isolated from each other, their competing, inconsistent beliefs may well be mutually rational. So P2 will have to be understood not as claiming that the mere fact that there is "diversity and mutual opposition" of religion specific experiences undermines rational support; rather, the problem comes when individuals from each community know of, or at least believe, that such a diversity exists.

So understood, is P2 plausible? Well, it certainly bears a striking resemblance to a point often made in the literature on epistemic

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[1] TMM never discuss just what they take to constitute a religion or whether everything that one might count as a religion should be taken to be on an epistemic par with all others.

disagreement: if I have an experience that leads me to believe that P and I know that you have an experience that leads you to believe ~P, and I have no more reason to think my experience is trustworthy than I have for thinking yours is trustworthy, then if I continue to believe P with the same conviction I had prior to knowing about your experience and belief, then I'm irrational. Consider David Christensen's case of people dividing a dining tab.[2] Several people have dinner and agree to split the tab evenly. Two of the diners do the math but come up with different results. On the assumption that each takes the other to be equally good at such calculations, both should withhold belief once the disagreement comes to light. The question of interest in the present context concerns the degree to which members of different religious communities have no more reason to trust their experiences than they do the experiences of those in other communities.

A case can be made for thinking that members of a community may have more reason to trust their experiences than they have for trusting the experiences and resultant beliefs of others. For one thing, people have much more experience with their traditions and with other members of their religious community. On the assumption that the people they know are generally reliable and well-intended, they will have greater reason to trust what they have to say than they will have to trust those with whom they are unfamiliar. This will be true particularly in cases in which the communities are mostly separated and when members of the various communities know little about each other.

P2 also assumes a general parity among the practioners of various religions regarding the experiences they have and the beliefs they form on the basis of them. But that is, of course, an empirical matter for which TMM offer no evidence.

So I think that P2 is rather too broad and makes an unsupported empirical assumption. Still, I'm prepared to acknowledge that the more one learns about the diversity and depth of religious experience among various world religions, the more one has reason to question the veracity of the religion specific beliefs so formed. And while no evidence has been marshalled for the parity assumption, I'm prepared to grant it (at least regarding the main world religions). We could reword P2 so that it explicitly states that it is the *known* "diversity and mutual opposition" of experience and belief that undermines the prima facie rationality

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[2] Cf. Christensen 2007.

of the respective beliefs, but for brevity's sake, I'll leave it as stated but understand it with this emandation.

P3 asserts that the *prima facie* rationality of religion general experiential beliefs is defeated because recent research strongly suggests that such experiences and the beliefs based on them have natural, proximate causes. That there are natural proximate causes of religious experience isn't particularly surprising nor is it obvious how this fact impinges on questions of epistemic rationality. Among the data that TMM cite and discuss have to do with meditative and introvertive religious experience, near death experiences, our hypersensitivity to perceiving agency in nature, and egocentric and confirmation bias. This is a diverse group of topics and I certainly don't have the space to engage with the literature here. But others have had a good deal to say about the cognitive science of religious belief and experience that TMM do not address. And many of these authors take a far less skeptic view the matter.[3] But since I'm not presenting arguments against TMM's skeptical understanding of the data, I'll draw no conclusions here about the plausibility of this premise.

In order to get TMM's final conclusion, we had to add P4 which says that religious belief can be rational only if it is grounded in experience. Given the history of natural theology in the philosophy of religion, it surprising that TMM apparently think that only experientially-based reasons can make first-order religious belief rational. Why might they think that? We get a clue in the following passage:

> But such a position [i.e., second-order theism] will fail to satisfy the vast majority of believers, including even those philosophers who (like F.R. Tenant, Basil Mitchell, and Richard Swinburne) aim to establish their theism on the basis of a 'cumulative case' that supplements the theistic arguments with an appeal to historical records and contemporary experience as providing evidence of specific supernatural intervention in human history.[4]

So TMM apparently think that the standard theistic arguments taken by themselves will not be sufficient to make first-order religious beliefs (that is, beliefs that are specific to particular religions) rational; in order for beliefs of the Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, etc., to be rational, there will have to be experiences and resultant beliefs that are

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[3] See Barrett and Church 2013, Clark and Barrett 2011, and Schloss and Murray 2009.
[4] Thornhill-Miller & Millican, 2015, p. 4.

specific to those traditions. And those religion specific beliefs will need to be justified via "historical records and contemporary experience."

With two significant caveats, I will provisionally grant this claim. Consider, for example, the case of Christianity. Even if *a priori* arguments were sufficient for establishing or at least rationally grounding generic theism, it would seem that Christians' belief that Jesus Christ was God incarnate who performed miracles and who rose from the dead is grounded, at least originally, in the experience of those who witnessed the life of Christ and who believed they experienced him post resurrection of Jesus. Still, I suppose this isn't strictly speaking necessary: it could have happened that Jesus (or any other religious figure) lived in obscurity (if at all) and that at a later time someone had an experience that she took to be a supernatural message about the life, works, and significance of Jesus. But even in such a case, it seems as though the original grounding of these claims (assuming they aren't simply knowingly made up by a charlatan) would come from religious experience – that is, from an experience that the person who has it takes to be supernatural.

Be all of that as it may be, I have two caveats. First, although perhaps in order for a specific religion to get off the ground (as it were) there will need to be experiences that are taken to be supernatural, such experiences are not generally necessary for a person to have religion specific beliefs. The most common means of coming to have religious belief is via the testimony. Whether such testimony is the proselytizing of strangers or the lessons that one learns in one's church, mosque, synagogue or other place of religious practice, a standard way in which religious beliefs are passed on is not through experience that people take to be supernatural, but rather through what one is told by others (and, of course, sometimes it is a combination of the two). The fact that religious belief not only can be but often is grounded in testimony is significant because testimony is standardly taken to be a rationality conferring process. Of course, the matter is complicated and not all forms of testimony are on an epistemic par with one another. But if it is generally rational to base beliefs on testimony, then it could well provide rational support for religious beliefs, and so P4 would turn out to be false.

There is a catch, however. Given the claim that I'm willing grant provisionally – namely, that specific religions generally require some alleged supernatural experience at least for the purpose of getting established – an important question now is this: if a contemporary believer bases her belief on testimony, is it necessary that the beliefs of the testifier

trace back some way or other to a purported supernatural experience? If so, then testimony will not be a means for belief to be rational if TMM's dilemma is right. While as with pretty much any philosophical issue, there are competing views regarding the epistemology of testimony. But a standard perspective is that where rationality is concerned, there need not be unbroken chains of justification. That is, a testifier might not be rational in her belief, but sincerely assert that P and a hearer might thereby come to rationally believe that P. So, even if TMM's argument might cause problems for the rationality of specific religions in a general, person-neutral sense, many believers might be rational in their beliefs.

Now for the second caveat: if the teleological reliabilism of Alvin Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology is right, then the grounding of one's belief neither needs to be experiential itself nor even trace back to anything experiential. In fact, one needn't accept Plantinga's particular form of reliabilism: any kind of purely externalist theory will entail that what makes a belief epistemically acceptable doesn't have to do with anything experiential; rationality (or at least justification or warrant) has to do with having that are reliably connected to the world. But to stick for the moment with Plantinga's position, what will make any belief warranted ultimately is not that it is derived from our experience but because it is the product of a properly functioning, reliable, truth-aimed belief forming process operating in an appropriate environment. On Plantinga's view, any proposition at all can be warranted provided that those conditions are met. Furthermore, while Plantinga often talks of mundane religious experience when he gives examples (e.g., that upon seeing a sunset behind a mountain peak one might come to believe that there is a benevolent creator), the condition that must be satisfied for warrant makes no reference to anything the subject experiences. That is, the content of the experience isn't what generates the warrant of the belief; it is the belief's being formed by a properly functioning, truth-aimed, reliable process operating in the appropriate environment.

To sum up our discussion of the dilemma: we've seen reason to think that each premise is problematic as it is stated. By my lights, the main problems with the dilemma are the following: (i) while the fact that there are competing experiences and beliefs among major religions, it is not clear that this fact alone serves to defeat the *prima facie* rationality that religious experiences provide, even when this disagreement is generally known; (ii) the epistemic impact of the findings of the cognitive and

social sciences pertinent to the religion general experiences is far from clear; the fact that there are naturalistic proximate causes doesn't imply that such experiences are not veridical; and (iii) even if there are problems with the rationality of beliefs base on alleged supernatural experience, religion specific beliefs can, for all TMM have argued, be rational either via testimony or because externalism is true.

Before concluding, there is one other point worth mentioning. TMM maintain that their dilemma leaves only what they call "second-order" religious beliefs as potentially rational since both religion specific and religion neutral beliefs and experiences are defeated. And second-order religious belief of the sort they specify is, as they recognize, essentially just deism. The world has been brought about by a designer who wanted it to produce life, but who is otherwise unknowable and is not involved in the operation of the universe.[5] But absent a careful critique of the standard arguments for the existence of God, this surely isn't a conclusion they are in a position to draw.

Let's consider the ontological argument. It purports to show that there exists a being than which nothing greater is possible. Plausibly, if such a being exists it is a personal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent being who is not only the ground of our existence but is also the fount of morality. Even if all of this is true, no specific claims of any particular theistic religion follows. But the deistic deity of TMM's second-order religion is far surpassed. An Anselmian God is a being that is fundamentally worthy of worship and service, and to whom one would be drawn to pray.

Many are (reasonably) suspicious of all varieties of ontological argument. But the standard cumulative case arguments, while not providing reason for any particular religious tradition, give one much better reason to accept a full-blown theism as opposed to a minimal deism. Combining strands from the cosmological argument, the design argument (including the fine-tuning argument), and the argument from morality, the cumulative case argument also stands a chance of providing rational support for an extremely powerful designer who is the ground of morality. Again, this falls short of a defense of any first-order religion but the content is much richer than the extremely thin second-order religion described by TMM.

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[5] TMM equate second-order theism with deism on page 4 at the beginning of the first full paragraph.

III. SALAMON'S AGATHEISM

In his fascinating essay, Janusz Salamon paints a somewhat rosier picture of the prospects of rational first-order religious belief. According to Salamon, religious belief should be looked at most fundamentally as axiologically grounded and as "identifying the Ultimate Reality religiously conceived with the ultimate good which is postulated as a transcendental condition of our axiological consciousness through which we perceive and evaluate the goods at which our actions are aimed and towards which our hopes are directed."[6] Salamon's idea (which he calls "agatheism") is that the fundamental religious inspiration is a sense that there is an ultimate good that transcends the physical world, and hence will forever remain unexplained by the sciences. By itself, this will give us a more substantial concept of the Ultimate Reality than the sparse deism imagined by TMM, but it will be quite a bit thinner a notion than the traditional theism of classical Western theism. But from this starting place, different traditions will fill out their worldviews in different ways, holding fast the conviction that the deepest (or highest) truth about the deity is its ultimate goodness which underlies our axiological consciousness. Salamon thinks that as long as the doctrines of particular religions do not conflict with what we know to be true from the sciences, then if they are internally coherent, they are sufficiently rational. One might even speak of religious certainty, although it must be kept in mind that religious certainty is more like moral certainty than it is like the kind of certainty on aspires to in science; the latter is objective whereas the former is subjective. Finally, a virtue of agatheism, as Salamon sees it, is that it allows for diverse first-order religious traditions to be rational inasmuch as they are all on an epistemic par (where they are consistent with the undisputed findings of science).

So much for my quick, and undoubtedly unsatisfactory, overview of what I take to be Salamon's main position. One thing that Salamon and TMM agree on is that standard arguments for the existence of God are unhelpful when it comes to the rational acceptability of religious belief. Salamon address this point more straightforwardly than TMM do so I want to have a look at what his reasons are for being skeptical of their epistemic force. I'll conclude by arguing there are reasons to be dubious of the ecumenical conclusion that Salamon thinks agatheism confers on the rationality of first-order religious beliefs.

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[6] Salamon 2015, p. 201.

Salamon thinks that he has an a priori argument against the success of the arguments of natural theology. He writes:

> To begin with, one can argue *a priori* against the availability of proofs or conclusive arguments regarding God's existence, since the very concept of such proof or conclusive argument appears to be incoherent, as by definition God transcends human concepts, hence what is being grasped in human concepts which are applied to God cannot be God as God really is. Therefore the theistic arguments may at most serve as 'pointers' ... or 'paths' ... that may direct human thought *towards* God, without *reaching* God, because the concept of God itself – involving such qualifications as 'perfect' or 'infinite' – stipulates that God as God as really is, is out of reach of the human mind. Only divine mind can grasp God, thus argument for the existence of the referent of a human concept of God, one cannot conclusively establish the existence of God."[7]

There are, I think, two big problems with the argument in this paragraph. First, our inability to construct an argument for God's existence doesn't follow from the fact that God "transcends human concepts" unless one means more by "God transcends human concepts" than Western theists have generally meant. The fact humans lack the conceptual wherewithal to fully understand the divine nature doesn't show that they are incapable of providing decent arguments that there exists a being with some of the attributes traditionally applied uniquely to God. Given how extremely complex and mind-boggling the physical world is turning at to be, it is altogether possible that humans aren't capable of fully understanding it; but it doesn't follow that we can't provide arguments for its existence and that it has some of the properties it has.

The second big problem with Salamon's argument against natural theology is the assumption that if there are no proofs or *conclusive* arguments for God's existence, then the best one can hope is for them is to serve as 'pointers' or 'paths' (whatever precisely those metaphors mean in this context). But at least since 1967 with the publication of Alvin Plantinga's influential book *God and Other Minds*, philosophers of religion haven't expected, even in the very best of cases, for the theological arguments to have the epistemic weight of conclusive proofs (which can be understood as logically valid arguments the premises of which are compelling to any rational person).[8] And it isn't as though natural

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[7] Salamon 2015, p. 208.
[8] Cf. Plantinga 1967.

theology is unusual in this respect: outside of mathematics, conclusive proofs are rare. In the absence of such knock-down arguments, there is still the possibility of an argument's providing good reason or evidence for its conclusion. Contemporary philosophers who defend the arguments of natural theology (e.g., Richard Swinburne and William Lane Craig) take themselves to be offering strong although inductive reason for believing in the God of traditional theism (and, in the case of Swinburne and Craig, even for historical Christianity).

Salamon thinks the case against *a posteriori* (or "empirical") arguments for God's existence is even easier to make since "there is no way one could deduce from finite effects the existence of an infinite Divine cause."[9] (But again, there is a huge chasm between deduction on the one hand, and merely pointing on the other. And while the principle that a finite effect will never entail an infinite cause seems right, that's not the claim of the natural theologian. One way to think of the matter is like this: theistic traditions posit an aspatial, atemporal, omnipotent, morally good infinite creator. The natural theologian might then appeal to the Big Bang and say that science teaches that there was a first moment of our universe and the best explanation for that is that there is a non-natural cause; because prior to the Big Bang, there was no space or time, the cause might be aspatial and atemporal; because of the vastness of the universe, the cause must be extremely powerful; because of fine-tuning, the cause must be intelligent; because humans have a clear sense of morality and value, and yet these seem to be non-natural (i.e., not the kind of phenomena that science will ever be able to study), their source must be non-natural. In short, there is a broad range of phenomena that are better explained by the theistic hypothesis than they are by naturalism. Therefore, there is a strong inference to the best explanation for theism.

My purpose here is *not* to defend the claim that there are good *a priori* or *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence. My point instead is that quick, transcendental arguments of the kind that Salamon offers fail to provide an adequate ground for rejecting them in one fell swoop. If I am right about this, then Salamon's claim that the only way in principle to ground theistic belief is "by reasoning from human axiological consciousness"[10] is mistaken.

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[9] Salamon 2015, p. 208.
[10] Salamon 2015, p. 211.

Having argued that natural theology cannot be the rational ground of religious belief, Salamon then argues that first-order religion can yet be epistemically in the clear in virtue of a kind of "justificatory descent" from the main agatheistic claim that the Ultimate Reality is ultimate goodness. From this proposition, believers might think that God is the source of all that exists or that God will reveal himself since he will want what is best for us. Exactly how these inferences go and the way the concept of the divine and its relation to us is filled out will be different from religious traditional to religious tradition. And these beliefs will be rational not because of any kind of argument from natural theology but rather because the primary agathestic insight is justified and given the experience of the believers in their particular traditions, the more particular beliefs will have a kind of conditional rationality. Yet since the relationship of the more specific religious claims is a pointing to the Ultimate Reality rather than a deduction from a first principle, the first-order believer will not take her first-order claims as anything like scientifically-confirmed truth. Hence the various traditions should look with interest and appreciation of perspectives that differ from theirs, since they are all, in a deep sense, doing the same thing: pointing to the Ultimate Reality as best they can.

I think Salamon's perspective is deeply interesting and, in many ways, attractive. It is very hard to look at the great religions of the world and not think that there is a common reality to which they are all attempting to point. I'm also significantly drawn to the idea that one can be a rational, full participant in a particular religious tradition even while one recognizes that there are other, incompatible religious traditions with fully rational participants.

Despite its attractiveness, the perspective that Salamon is offering doesn't strike me as a picture of how, for example, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus can all be rational in the differing beliefs *that they actually hold*. Rather, I think Salamon's conception is revisionary. That is, I would find it plausible if the right way to think about first-order religious believers were as follows: instead of holding their competing religious doctrines as true, the faithful were to genuinely believe in a good Ultimate Reality and then think something like "the lens that I prefer to see the Ultimate through is A, but I recognize that what one sees depends on the lens one uses, and so the lenses B, C, D, E, and F of other traditions offer different, but equally valid views of

the Ultimate." But I don't think this is how most of the faithful think about their specific religious beliefs. Rather, I take them to *genuinely* believe not only that "God is good" is *true,* but that, e.g., when Christians affirm that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" and Muslims believe "Muhammad is God's final prophet" they don't typically think that these are essentially metaphors or equally accurate ways of describing God's relation to the world.

If I am right about that, then even if something like justificatory descent from the primary agatheistic belief occurs, the convictions that it generates are genuine beliefs. And if that's right, they have truth-values, and beliefs that are logically inconsistent with them cannot be true if they are. So if I know that others have beliefs that are inconsistent with my religious beliefs, and if I have no reason to think my tradition is epistemically superior to the traditions of others, then rationality would seem to require that I have less confidence in my beliefs than I would have. Although I'd like to draw a different conclusion in such cases, it is hard to see how competing perspectives don't reduce the rationally of one's belief at least to a degree.

CONCLUSION

The essays by TMM and Salamon are important and interesting contributions to the epistemology of religious belief. While TMM are considerably more skeptical than Salamon is, both sides are to be commended for engaging in this discussion with a spirit that is simultaneously true to their convictions while taking seriously, and even empathetically, the position of their intellectual opponents. I hope that this conversation is only beginning.

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Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief,* Oxford University Press, 2012

The epistemology of testimony is one of the most explored fields in the contemporary philosophy of knowledge. Sometimes the question of evidence leads to the problem of epistemic authority, although not systematically and often merely as a corollary. Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski moves in the other direction: in examining the question of authority, she confronts the problem of the right to believe in testimony. The question examined in the book is this: 'If I am a conscientiously self-reflective person, should I ever treat another person as having a kind of normative epistemic power that gives me a reason to take a belief preemptively on the grounds that the other person believes it?' (p. 103) She answers yes. In Christian religions, and in other religions as well, epistemic authority plays a crucial role. First, we are supposed to believe revealed claims on the authority of God speaking through a book; additionally, many Christians think that we are supposed to believe claims on the authority of the Church.

There is a way to defend epistemic authority on the basis of *anti-individualism* in epistemology: namely, the thesis that our thoughts are constitutively what they are in virtue of relations between the individual in those states and a wider reality, including the testimony of the people around us. There is also a *political* defence of religious authority. Joseph de Maistre advocated a theocracy in which religion was to play a highly pivotal role, teaching the subjects blind respect for authority to the complete exclusion of any individual reasoning. Linda Zagzebski says nothing of such defences, epistemological or political, of religious authority. She evidently hopes to give a 'friendlier' account of authority – one that will not appear disturbing in a postmodern context. She explicitly says that she defends 'the existence of epistemic authority on grounds that almost all modern philosophers would accept' (p. 2). Her aim is to reconcile two ideas that seem incompatible: *epistemic authority*, on the one hand, and epistemic *autonomy* – which she introduces through references to Descartes, Locke and Kant and understands as an important contribution of Modernity – on the other.

Zagzebski adopts 'the point of view of the subject' – a self-reflective person who asks herself how she could get the beliefs she accepts through reflection (p. 2). 'We do not like to be dominated' (p. 27), she says (even if Montaigne's friend, Étienne de La Boétie, maintained precisely the opposite a long time ago). For Linda Zagzebski, 'When I am conscientious, I will recognize that the fact that someone else believes *p* gives me a *prima facie* reason to believe *p* myself, and I have a stronger reason when I conscientiously judge that she has the same qualities I trust in myself, or when my trust in her is based on trust in my emotion of epistemic admiration for her in some circumstances' (pp. 103-104). She defends this view in the first four chapters of the book, where the notions of 'self-trust' and 'trust in others' are analyzed. The other chapters of the book examine 'the authority of testimony', 'epistemic authority in communities', 'moral authority', 'religious authority', and also the question (very popular today) of epistemic disagreement, and finally the question of autonomy of the self, which is in any case implicit in each chapter.

Zagzebski says that examples of extreme religious egoists – those who think that another person's belief never gives me a reason to believe the same – are legion in contemporary philosophy. But what she calls 'standard religious epistemic egoism' (p. 183) – the view that another person's belief gives me a reason to believe it, but only if I have evidence in favour of her reliability as an epistemic source – is an even more widespread idea. Zagzebski examines the *consensus gentium* argument for belief in God, showing how it could follow from the necessity of my epistemic self-trust in other people's belief in God. 'A parallel argument can be given for atheism', she claims, which renders the *consensus gentium* argument from self-trust the friendliest kind of argument that a theist could propose to the atheist. But she also defends the *Justification of Religious Authority Thesis*: 'The authority of my religious community is justified for me by my conscientious judgment that if I engage in the community, following its practical directives and believing its teachings, the result will survive my conscientious self-reflection upon my total set of psychic states better than if I try to figure out what to do and believe in the relevant domain in a way that is independent of Us.' (p. 201) So religious authority is justified in the same manner that epistemic authority is justified in general: on my own judgment, on the condition that my judgment is *conscientious*. And this is the reason why opposition between epistemic autonomy and epistemic authority is rejected.

Zagzebski's book is full of brilliant analyses. For example, the third chapter, 'Trust in Emotions', shows why and how 'a conscientious person should treat emotion dispositions the same way she treats her epistemic faculties' (p. 86). Another example, about religious matters, is the distinction between three models of religious tradition: one reducible to chains of testimony; another that is based upon the recipient's experiences; and a third based upon the recognition of a high point in the past that constitutes what must be preserved by the transmission. Zagzebski has also interesting remarks about the debated question of doxastic voluntarism (she defends a version of it), saying that she does not see 'that it is any harder to believe on command than to believe testimony' (p. 5).

Clearly, in attempting to reconcile epistemic autonomy with epistemic authority, a crucial role is given to the self, in particular to the conscientious self. This self examines its own thoughts and weighs their epistemic value. It takes charge of itself and corrects itself. This self is a really a good epistemic person! It becomes more and more harmonious through introspecting itself, 'and hence in some deeper way, more a self' (p. 33). So the notion of self-trust is finally identified as a sort of transparency of consciousness to itself: 'one of the things I do when I am conscientious is to look for reasons or evidence of my beliefs.' (p. 57) Here we have moved closer to Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Transparency of the Ego* than to Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*! No *akrasia* for this gentle self, taking care of himself or herself with a benevolent eye to other selves. 'The self that investigates, reasons, reflects, and sometimes changes its mind, is myself.' (p. 208)

This is an intensely interesting view. But if you are simply not convinced of the existence of something (or someone) called 'the self', perhaps believing this to be one of the more ridiculous creations of modern thinkers from Descartes to Bergson and beyond, and if you also subscribe to the arguments advanced by moral philosophers against the possibility of self-transparency along with Wittgensteinian arguments against exploits of self-attention to oneself, then you will not be convinced by Zagzebski's attempt to reconcile epistemic autonomy and epistemic authority. What is meant exactly by the expression 'my mode of access to my conscientiousness'? If you suppose such an access to such an entity as 'my consciousness', then the problem of authority becomes rather easy: be serious, look carefully at your reasons for believing things, and you will find that, in some cases, epistemic authority makes sense.

But the problem is to know what it means exactly to be conscientious about one's reasons, and also what it means to be conscious of one's own conscientiousness.

There is another, very different, account of self-trust, understood not as conscientiousness but as a virtuous disposition. A reader of Linda Zagzebski's book, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), might have expected to find that sort of dispositional account developed in her new book. It would have been interesting also to explore *vices* in this domain: when self-trust is not at all relevant, when acceptance of epistemic authority is not a good thing, in contrast to those cases where such self-trust and acceptance constitute virtuous behaviour. But such is not the direction that Zagzebski has taken in *Epistemic Authority*. The distinction proposed between theoretical (third-person) reasons and deliberative (first-person) reasons also reflects her new direction. 'Nobody but you can have your experience.' (p. 65) Fine, but is this a deep remark on the nature of consciousness, or is it a grammatical remark, as Wittgenstein suggests? And does it mean that we have experience, or consciousness, of our own experience? That first-person reasons can be distinguished from impersonal reasons surely does not necessarily imply such an internalist and introspective account of the human mind. And is it also true that 'a community is like a self in that it has beliefs, historical memory, and reasoning faculties, and it has self-trust' (p. 222)? That we can predicate properties of collective entities – e.g. that we can say 'This football team is quite good' – does not establish that a community is an *individual* or 'like a self', and even less that it *is* a self.

Even if Zagzebski's new book is interesting, and in many respects brilliant, it is deeply unconvincing, because it grounds epistemic authority on a doctrine of the transparency of consciousness, a doctrine that, in the current climate of philosophical thought, is perhaps even more doubtful than an adherence to epistemic authority itself.

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J. A. Van Slyke, *The Cognitive Science of Religion,* Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011

James A. Van Slyke is assistant professor of psychology at Fresno Pacific University. The aim of his book is to develop an alternative for the causal reductionism which he claims to be widespread in current cognitive science of religion (CSR). CSR is a diverse field, so Van Slyke limits his discussion to the *Standard Model in the Cognitive Science of Religion* as it was described by Pascal Boyer (Boyer, Pascal, 'A Reductionistic Model of Distinct Modes of Religious Transmission', in *Mind and Religion: Psychological and Cognitive Foundations of Religiosity* by H. Whitehouse and R. N. Mccauley. Walnu Creek: Altamira Press, 2005,). Van Slyke distinguishes three important aspects of this *standard model*:

> First, cognitive explanations are *general,* meaning that they are cross-cultural and would apply in any religious or cultural environment. The focus is on cognitive systems that process religious information, not the social contexts in which they are embedded. Secondly, cognitive accounts are probabilistic, meaning that the probability of a particular religious concept remaining in a culture is dependent upon how much those concepts match up with the way cognitive inference systems process information. Thirdly, cognitive accounts are 'experience distant', meaning that the experiential and explicit accounts of religion are different from the actual processes that make them memorable (pp. 9-10, italics in the original).

Van Slyke's main problem with the standard model is its reductionism. Many scientists have argued that the *standard model in the cognitive science of religion* shows that religious belief is nothing more than a by-product of ordinary cognition. This negatively affects the status of religious belief. His understanding of reduction is when a phenomenon is explained by the laws and processes of a *lower-level science.* In this case, the *lower-level sciences* are cognitive science and neuroscience, while what gets reduced is religious belief. Van Slyke notes that the term 'reduction' is heavily discussed in philosophy of science but bypasses this discussion and goes on to defend an emergent view as an alternative. In Van Slyke's view emergence is closely aligned to top-down causation or top-down constraints. He writes: 'Causation is not fully explainable

through standard descriptions of causation but requires an account of inter-level causality where the whole is able to act as a constraint on its parts' (p. 19). The occurrence of top-down causation or constraints suffices for Van Slyke to reject the reductionist position and allows for an alternative theological worldview which does not consider religious belief to be reducible to ordinary cognition.

A large part of the book is dedicated to making the case that emergent cognition occurs. Van Slyke uses many examples from neuroscience which go against the standard reductionist view. One important feature of Van Slyke's reasoning is a defence of an embodied account of cognition where he argues that the environment plays an indispensable role in cognition. Furthermore, recent neuroscience suggests that neural networks have features which its basic constituents lack. He therefore claims that cognition is above all a top-down, not a bottom-up process. As a result, he focuses his attack on the first and third aspects of the standard model and affirms the importance of religious and cultural environments for religious cognition.

Van Slyke ends with a sketch of his alternative: a *multi-level perspective on the emergence of religious beliefs*. He does not deny the value of standard accounts from CSR, like Boyer's counterintuitive concepts or Justin Barrett's *Hyperactive Agency Detection Device,* but argues that they require a broader perspective. This perspective takes emergent features into account to allow an adequate view of religious cognition. He calls this view theological but does not get into detail about what makes it theological. Near the end, Van Slyke applies this strategy to evolutionary theories of religion. He attributes a great deal of importance to attachment as the relational dynamic between offspring and primary caregivers. According to Van Slyke, God might have served as an attachment figure and thus religion might have been beneficial for extending pro-social relationships to larger communities.

Although the diversity in CSR makes his use of the term 'standard model' problematic, Van Slyke has offered a viable alternative to the widespread reductionist view in CSR. His approach allows for a fruitful collaboration of CSR and theology – mainly because his emergent view does not rule out the truth of religious belief like the *standard model* seems to do. His argumentation is mostly based on scientific literature (mostly neuroscience) and is very well supplemented with examples. Van Slyke offers a decent scientific foundation for his alternative emergent view on religious cognition. However, where science takes up the bulk

of the book, philosophical (and theological) discussions are kept to a bare minimum. This is unfortunate because the notion of 'emergence' has been heavily debated by philosophers. Van Slyke does not get into detail, but his alternative perspective requires a version that goes beyond weak emergence, where the whole has features which the basic constituents lack, to a version of strong emergence where something completely new (in this case religion) arises from different, more basic constituents. This position is very controversial and the lack of lengthy argumentation on this matter compromises Van Slyke's alternative view. A related worry is that Van Slyke's line of reasoning remains speculative. The (neuro)scientific examples he cites were usually formulated for other purposes than questions about religious cognition and therefore it is uncertain whether they are applicable to this discussion. These points could, however, be remedied. A final, deeper, problem is that Van Slyke's *multi-level perspective* might also be interpreted in a reductionist fashion. His view of God as an attachment figure allows for the claim that people are religious because it was evolutionary beneficial and nothing more than that. This is not a reduction to the level of cognitive science or neuroscience but a reduction nonetheless – in this case to the evolutionary adaptive value of religion. Van Slyke probably did not have a new reductionist model in mind but it can be interpreted in this fashion.

James Van Slyke's book is an important contribution to the philosophical debate about the implications of CSR. He rightly points out a number of problems with *the standard model of CSR* and offers a viable alternative; yet, his alternative is open to a reductionist interpretation which he is attempting to avoid. His discussion of scientific arguments is especially impressive. Unfortunately, the book suffers from a number of philosophical shortcomings which could have been prevented if Van Slyke had chosen for a more elaborate discussion on notions like 'emergence' and 'reduction'.

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Paul M. Gould, *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects* (Bloomsbury Studies in Philosophy of Religion), Bloomsbury, 2014

In the introduction of *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, Paul Gould introduces an inconsistent triad that philosophers who endorse both the existence of abstract objects and theism will have to face (p. 2). The inconsistent triad goes as follows:

(1) Abstract objects exist. [Platonism]

(2) If abstract objects exist, then they are dependent on God.

(3) If abstract objects exist, then they are independent of God.

By God, Gould specifies that he has in mind 'a personal being who is worthy of worship (which is in line with perfect being theology)', and by abstract objects, he has in mind such terms and predicates as 'property', 'proposition', 'relation', 'set', 'possible world', 'number', and the like (p. 1). Gould thinks that by denying one of the options in the above triad, one will have to formulate a way to avoid certain undesirable consequences (p. 4). Thus, the rest of the book contains essays (and responses) expressing six different views, in regard to which tenet in the triad one should reject and how one can overcome the undesirable consequences of rejecting that particular tenet.

The first view that is discussed is Keith Yandell's God and propositions view. This view endorses that both God and mind-independent (including independent of God's mind) propositions exist (p. 21). Yandell's first concern is to demonstrate that there are no Scriptural reasons for thinking that this view is incompatible with the existence of the God of Christianity. He argues that Col 1:16-17, which express that God has created all things in heaven and on earth, does not rule out the existence of abstract objects, as the point of this passage and others like it is to demonstrate that 'thrones or power or ruler or authorities' do not pose a threat to God's sovereignty (p. 24). Taken with the fact that abstract objects are neither in heaven nor on earth, this passage has nothing to say about the existence of abstract objects (p. 24).

Yandell's main reason for why abstract objects cannot be tied to God in any way is that there is no way to know if God is a necessary being. The argument that Yandell focuses on that attempts to demonstrate that God

is a necessary being, is Plantinga's modal ontological argument, which like Plantinga, he concludes could rationally be accepted but fails to act as a proof that God is logically necessary (p. 29). Yandell thus, thinks he has made a plausible case for rejecting (2) in the triad. In response, both Welty and Craig mention that there are other reasons for thinking that God is a necessary being, and thus, even if one granted that the ontological argument didn't succeed as a proof for God's logical necessity, it wouldn't follow that God isn't a necessary being (pp. 39-41).

The next view is Gould's and Brian Davis' view of modified theistic activism. In their essay, the authors attempt to make plausible that conceptualism holds with respect to propositions, but that it doesn't hold as it pertains to properties and relations (p. 52). In regard to establishing the former, Gould and Davis first argue that propositions are truth bearing intentional objects as propositions are about things (p. 52). Gould and Davis briefly entertain a nominalist approach of having sentences or linguistic items fill the role of propositional truth bearing, but they reject such a strategy based on their reasoning that the parts of a sentence or linguistic items still aren't about anything (p. 56). Gould and Davis proceed to argue that it doesn't appear that such aboutness can be accounted for in Plato's heaven either, as the forms in Plato's heaven are impotent to account for the intentional nature of propositions (p. 56). Thus, propositions should be understood as divine thoughts and concepts.

Though Gould and Davis think that the best explanation for how propositions are grounded is in the mind of God, they reject that properties and relations could be grounded in this way as it would make every material object to be a collection of divine concepts (p. 59). Thus, for the authors, the best way to view properties and relations is through the understanding that propositions are divine conceptions and properties and relations exist in a strictly Platonic realm and exist there because God created them (p. 61). In rejecting (3), Gould and Davis argue that they can avoid the undesirable consequence of falling prey to the bootstrapping objection, (this is the objection that argues that God can't create properties unless He already has those properties of being able to create them), by arguing that God has certain properties that exist a se and inhere in the divine substance (p. 62). It is notable to report however; that Gould and Davis fall short in convincing all of the other authors that they have avoided falling prey to such boot strapping.

In the third view, theistic conceptual realism, Welty argues in a similar way (though in more detail) to Gould and Davis, that propositions should be considered as divine thoughts or ideas. In using an inference to the best explanation approach (IBE), Welty analyzes what theory best can account for the nature of propositions. He argues that a theory must capture the following six conditions: objectivity, necessity, intentionality, relevance, plenitude, and simplicity (pp. 84-87). The two main nominalistic theories Welty entertains are linguistic nominalism and set-theoretic nominalism. The former theory according to Welty argues that propositions are linguistic tokens of some sort (p. 89). Welty argues that this theory lacks the scope to explain the plenitude and necessity of propositions as 'there simply aren't enough human sentences to go around and human sentences exist just as contingently as human thoughts'. In regard to the latter nominalist theory, Welty explains that it attempts to supply 'sets' of concrete objects as candidates for propositions (p. 90). Welty argues that this isn't plausible for several reasons, concrete objects lacking intentionally or aboutness being one of the primary reasons for its implausibility (p. 90).

After establishing that nominalism lacks the scope to explain the needed facts surrounding the nature of propositions, Welty quickly explores why old fashioned Platonism also fails. He argues that traditional Platonic realism multiplies ontological kinds beyond explanatory necessity. This is because Welty's conceptual realism posits only thoughts that functionally fulfil the role of abstract objects, while a Platonist will have to postulate a different kind of entity altogether (p. 90). With this much argued for, Welty thinks he has shown why rejecting (3) is the most plausible solution to the above triad. As William Lane Craig points out however, the plausibility of his arguments rest on propositions existing at all, and one could avoid his argument by endorsing deflationary theory of truth (p. 101). Whether this is a good response to Welty, it will be up to the reader to decide.

Moving on to Craig's anti-Platonist position, in arguing for his anti-Platonist view, contra Yandell, Craig spends a good deal of time going through the biblical warrant for thinking that God both exists a se and is responsible for everything that exists. 1 Cor. 8:6, 1 Cor. 11.12, Jn 1.1-3, and the Nicene Creed make up his main biblical support (pp. 113-115). It should be noted that Craig more so than any of the other contributors focused on the biblical evidence.

The rest of Craig's chapter focuses on how rejecting (1) of the triad wouldn't entail any undesirable consequence. Craig argues that the indispensability argument is the chief challenger to nominalism and thus, Craig gives arguments for why he thinks this argument fails (p. 116). In responding to Craig's view, Welty argues that one could easily modify the argument to avoid a lot of Craig's criticism of the indispensability argument and Gould and Davis argue that there are other problems outside of the indispensability argument that would still give the anti-Platonist trouble (pp. 129-131).

The last two views are probably the most similar out of all of the views. Both Scott Shalkowski and Graham Oppy either endorse or are sympathetic to nominalism and deflationary theory (pp. 162, 174), and both argue that the truths about realism are irrelevant to the existence of God (pp. 144, 175). Though Oppy focuses more on how there isn't one view that makes theism more or less likely and Shalkowski spends a greater time arguing for why realism about abstract objects is false, there is little substantive difference between the two views. In fact, the biggest difference that comes out between the contributors is on if the universe is necessary (p. 189), though as one can imagine, this isn't too central to either contributor's argument.

Overall, it seems that the crux of the debate between the realists about abstract objects and the anti-realists is if endorsing a deflationary theory of truth is a plausible substitute for endorsing the existence of propositions. Welty, Gould, and Davis for example, make very compelling arguments for divine conceptualism that are based on the character of propositions; however, as Craig points out (p. 101), one could deny the existence of propositions altogether and avoid the consequence of their arguments. Of course, Welty, Gould, and Davis responded briefly (and their responses were given even briefer responses) to the anti-realists in the book who argued this way, but due to the format of the book, there was hardly any room to make a thorough response (or a counter response). This being so, I think a lot of readers who do not yet have an opinion on deflationary theory, will go away unsure of what position to prefer and those who already have an opinion, aren't likely to be challenged to rethink their current position. The brief responses (and even briefer counter responses) aren't thorough enough to make the winner of this debate obvious.

With this stated however, I think the book clearly gives an articulate and updated account of each position. Moreover, if this book is seen as

an introduction to this debate, I think it will help the reader understand the current questions that need to be asked, in addition to equipping the reader with the basic tools to answer them. In concluding, it would behoove anyone who wants a good introduction into this field to read this book.

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J. P. Moreland, Khaldoun A. Sweis, and Chad V. Meister (eds), *Debating Christian Theism,* Oxford University Press, 2013

Debating Christian Theism is a unique text with a creative format. The structure will make it an attractive volume for many purposes. In what follows I will describe and evaluate the format, before weighing in more specifically on a select subset of the overall contents.

This text divides into 20 debated issues under a general heading of Christian theism. Each of these 20 issues is treated by two scholars, one defending a traditional understanding of the issue, one demurring from said understanding. Thus, for instance, under the issue-heading 'Science and Christian Faith' Keith Ward defends the view that the title of the essay captures: 'Science is not at Odds with Christianity' while Julian Baggini demurs with 'Science is at Odds with Christianity'. Not all chapters fit as neatly into a *pro-* / *contra-* structure, but the general format of defend/ demure occurs throughout. Each chapter is relatively short and focused.

What is particularly helpful is the manner in which the editors have chosen contributors who are or were participants in the debates on these issues in the contemporary literature. According to the introduction, the contributors were not privy to their issue-interlocutor's work for this volume, nevertheless many of the articles interact with their issue-interlocutor's publications from other venues. This often results in something like a real dialogical debate and not just two unrelated opposing treatments of an issue.

What this dialogical format also entails, is that these articles are not 'state-of-the-art' summaries of the debate on an issue in the contemporary literature. Occasionally that happens in piecemeal form, but more often these chapters are new contributions to the literature or the updating of the author's previous contributions to the field. The first half of the

book treats arguments concerning God's existence: cosmological, teleological, ontological (a new modal version by E. J. Lowe, that I found very attractive), moral, from consciousness, and God and evil. These arguments are followed by treatments of specific Christian beliefs in areas as diverse as 'Miracles and Christian Theism', 'The Atonement', and 'Heaven and Hell'.

Having discussed the format of *Debating Christian Theism*, I will now weigh in more substantively on only two of the many worthwhile subsections. I am particularly interested in attempts by philosophers to engage with the traditional loci of systematic theology, and the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are at the heart of these loci.

Thomas Senor is charged with defending the position that the doctrine of the Trinity is coherent. He begins by defining the doctrine as a conjunction of these claims: 'There is one God' and 'The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons.' He then proceeds to delineate 'Latin' and 'Greek' methods for explicating this conjunct. Rather than choose one over another, Senor proposes to incorporate the best of both perspectives. The first step, à la Greek, is to see each person as tokens of the divine type. However, to avoid tri-theism, Senor describes the relationship between the persons as an exhaustively necessary relation. Additionally, à la Latin, Senor wishes to describe the divine nature itself as the only token of the divine type. To account for this, Senor employs the notion that 'The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps with the Son, perhaps not)'. The result is that the Son and the Spirit are ontologically dependent on the Father in a manner that the Father is not dependent on the Son or the Spirit. Senor asserts that this dependence relation does not diminish the equality of the persons with one another.

One worry that might be raised from traditional Trinitarianism focuses on Senor's description of three distinct wills in the Trinity. As he says, 'there are three willing faculties'. This is a worrisome move for a Christological reason, in that traditional Christology (at least Christologies submissive to the deliverances of the Sixth Ecumenical Council) has aligned wills with *natures* not *persons*. Thus, Christ, being one person with two natures, has two wills (technically known as *dyotheletism*, Constantinople III deeming *monotheletism* heretical). But if this alignment works for Christology, the consistent position would be to assign one will to the divine nature that is shared by all three persons of the Trinity (this, in fact, is the position Pope Agatho's

letter to the council asserts). This is not the route that Senor follows. A three-will explication of the Trinity seems internally coherent, but it may be a worrisome path for those holding to the theology commended by Constantinople III.

Following a defence of the coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity, one might expect certain things of the following chapter, entitled 'The Trinity is Incoherent' by Timothy Winter. One might expect an evaluation of the coherence of the doctrine as expressed by the early Councils or Creedal statements. One might expect an evaluation of any one of the numerous explications of the Trinity in the contemporary literature. One might expect some claim that 'threeness' and 'oneness' simply may not be coherently combined. However, Winter takes on none of these projects. Instead, Winter describes the Trinity failing 'on two internal Christian criteria and hence is, as a purportedly Christian belief, incoherent'. This move is puzzling. He seems to be saying that based on Christian criteria, belief in the Trinity is incoherent. I should think that most Christians throughout time and location would instead hold that the Trinity is the criterion by which the coherence of other purportedly Christian beliefs are judged. But instead Winter offers these 'two internal Christian criteria': A) the faith of Jesus and the apostolic generations and B) the assent to the doctrine by the faithful.

(A) makes some sense. But, rather than giving us good reason to suppose that Jesus did not hold to the divinity of himself, the Father, and the Spirit, Winter just gestures around how the notion of hard it would have been for a first-century resident of Palestine to believe anything other than monotheism 'in the Jewish sense'. Winter does not give any substantive reason for doubting Christ's divinity other than to say that there are other ways of interpreting the New Testament data about Christ without having to hold that he is divine. But Winter gives us no reason to think that his manner of reading the New Testament is to be preferred. Nor does he engage with the mountainous amount of argumentation for the divinity of Christ. Plus, Winter does not tell us who these 'apostolic generations' are who did not hold to Christ's divinity. Does he mean the Apostle Paul who refers to Christ as having the fullness of God dwelling in him? Does he mean the Apostolic Fathers who commend the worship of Christ as God? Does he mean the Nicene fathers who describe Christ as of one substance with the Father? Winter concludes his discussion of the divinity of Christ with the argument that the Islamic literature the 'Holy Hadiths' give a more plausible picture of Christ's self-understanding

as a prophet speaking *for* God, but not actually *being* God. It hardly seems an 'internal Christian criteria' to argue that the experience of a Muslim prophet better describes Christ's self-understanding than the apostolic generations who settled their minds on Christ identity centuries before Muhammad's birth.

On B, Winter opens and closes his chapter with the assertion that Christians today simply do not really believe in the Trinity, and in fact are embarrassed by the doctrine. To support this claim, however, he only cites anecdotal evidence from the Church of England. At best this is a sample size of 26 million out of the 80 million Anglicans worldwide; 26 million out of the over 2 billion Christians worldwide (to make things worse for this sample, the Church of England can only boast less than 2 million attending worship weekly). This seems weak evidence to support B, and even if it did support B, I do not see how B would constitute a charge of *incoherence* against the Trinity.

Continuing with the theme of the divinity of Christ, Katherin Rogers pens the Incarnation chapter and advocates for a traditional 'two-natures/ one-person' view of Christ. This allows her to continue her Anselmian explication of the Incarnation as *divine action*, as 'God doing something', which she has undertaken elsewhere. The analogy she uses is that of a state of affairs, called 'Nick Playing' (NP) which involves a boy, 'Nick', playing a first-person video game, his character being 'Virtual Nick'. Thus, the Incarnation is a state of affairs akin to NP. NP being composed of two parts is a picture of Christ composed of divine and human natures. Virtual Nick allows Nick to act in the virtual sphere, as Christ's human nature allows the Word to act in the human sphere. Her hope is that this kind of composition avoids some of the mereological issues that have plagued other Christological composition theories.

Coincidentally, as with Senor's treatment of the Trinity, I have worries that Rogers' analogy paints a rosier picture for monothelitism than the tradition typically allows. It is not entirely clear how Virtual Nick, even allowing latitude for the sake of the analogy, can be said to have a will in the manner that the Sixth Council wishes us to say that Christ had a human will. Of course, Rogers herself states that this is where the analogy breaks down because video game characters do not have free will; video game characters do not seem to have wills at all. But if an account of the Incarnation as divine action is to be pursued, it seems that more analysis of the causal chains inhering in this action needs to be pursued.

Michael Martin's chapter, 'The Incarnation Doctrine is Incoherent and Unlikely', picks up some of the arguments he has previously made in *The Case Against Christianity* against Thomas Morris' Christology from *The Logic of God Incarnate.* As such, Martin focuses on Morris' construal of Christ as having two minds. Martin makes roughly this argument: Minds correspond to persons. Either Christ had one mind and was one person, or he was two persons with two minds. If one takes the former, then one's view conflicts with Morris' account of Christ. If the later, then one's view conflicts with Christian orthodoxy. However, Martin fails to motivate the first premise, that the ratio of minds to persons is exactly one-to-one. It might be the case that our natural experience of persons and minds usually links these at a one-to-one ratio, but God Incarnate goes against our natural experience (Trinitarian considerations might also push against this).

Further, Rogers' NP scenario might be able to make sense of one person possessing two minds. Given the constrains of the video sphere in which Virtual Nick dwells, Virtual Nick is only able to have mental experiences inside that sphere. But, during NP, Nick is able to access both Virtual Nick's mental states and Nick's own. The mental states of Virtual Nick might not accrue to Nick, or only in some derivative sense as when Virtual Nick falls down a Warp Pipe, and Nick says, 'I'm falling down a pipe!' This is where Rogers' exposition of the *qua-* move comes in. *Qua*-Virtual Nick, Nick is aware of the fall, *qua*-Nick, he is not, but the state of affairs NP includes this action. Again, this might be outside of our natural experience, but seems to avoid the charge of incoherence.

These reflections are just a brief foray into the many fruitful selections in *Debating Christian Theism*. For those broadly interested in Christian philosophy, philosophical theology, and philosophy of religion, this volume really contains something for everyone. Many a professor will be able to assign sections of this text for a variety of courses on the upper division undergraduate and graduate level. Additionally this book will serve as a good reader for a general Christian philosophy of religion course and the advantage of this text over other readers is the presentation of two chapters per topic, thus the ability to engage the class in a clear dialogue.

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Michael Almeida, *The Metaphysics of Perfect Beings,* Routledge, 2008

Almeida's book covers a wide range of issues arising from the existence of a perfect being. The selection of topics Almeida examines are all likely to be of interest to analytic philosophers of religion with a technical bent, so the topics collectively form a cohesive whole. There are eight chapters in all, each covering a different topic. Chapter one starts with 'arguments from improvability' (in particular, Rowe's version), which Almeida argues is not sound. Chapter two discusses issues in choice theory: if a perfectly rational perfect being always has to actualise the best world there is an obvious problem if every world is such that there is some better world than it; Almeida argues that we should give up on the idea that perfect beings must always select the better option. Chapter three examines van Inwagen's argument that there is no problem of evil because there is no minimum level of evil that is sufficient for God's plan; conscripting in issues in vagueness (specifically supervaluationism) Almeida argues that van Inwagen doesn't rule out there being levels of evil that are *definitely* unnecessary for divine purposes (so there is no level of minimum evil that is definitely necessary, but nonetheless there are some levels of evil that are definitely *un*necessary). Chapter four examines Warren Quinn's 'puzzle of the self-torturer' (Almeida says it is 'much neglected' and I'm inclined to agree); Almeida provides, amongst other things, a close discussion of Arntzenius and McCarthy's reply, and responds to their worries. Chapter five examines the logic of imperfection (dealing with Anselmian concerns). Chapter six examines divine command theory (specifically, the version whereby the properties, but not the concepts, of being morally obliged and being commanded by God, are identical). Chapter seven and eight I discuss in more detail below. Certainly the breadth of topics considered is broad, and I'm sure any contemporary analytic philosopher will find much of interest in the discussion.

Regarding the book in general, two characterisations sum it up: unforgiving and dense; painstaking and detailed. Neither is a criticism. Throughout Almeida deploys the apparatus of logic and mathematics to best elucidate, discuss, and solve the various problems he puts under the microscope. Those uncomfortable with discussions of supervaluationism, different types of infinity, or routinely expressing portions of the

discussion as sequents of logic, will find themselves struggling with this book; hence, it is unforgiving and dense. However, for those more comfortable with such machinery, exactly those features mean Almeida provides a thorough, painstaking, and detailed examination of the issues at a level of precision that can easily be appreciated by those with an affection for such modes of expression. So whether this book will be readable by you will depend upon your level of comfort with technicalities. If you're unsure where you stand, then consider the following snippet:

There is no amount of evil k_n, ($k \, \square \, k_n \, \square \, 0$) in S such that for every increment i ($i > 0$) it is superdefinite that k_n is unnecessary for divine purposes and superdefinite that k_{n-1} is not necessary for divine purposes. (p. 73)

Where:

[…] it is *superdefinite* that k_n is unnecessary for divine purposes just in case the proposition is definite at every higher order of vagueness. If it is not superdefinite that k_n is unnecessary for divine purposes, then for some precisification at some higher order of vagueness, k_n is not unnecessary divine purposes. (p. 72)

If that daunts you, or you find it tricky to parse, this book is not for you; alternatively, if that level of precision suits your sensibilities, this book will please you no end and you'll benefit from, e.g., Almeida's technical discussions of comparing infinitely valuable worlds (pp. 155-58) or infinite options and choice theory (pp. 53-55) *inter alia*.

I'll end with a closer look at the final two chapters: Ted Sider's eschatological argument (chapter 7) and Almeida's combining of modal realism and God to resolve the problem of our being in a less than perfect world (chapter 8; Almeida also discusses hyperspace and multiverse theories used to the same end – he favours introducing modal realism above the latter two).

Ted Sider argues that if the options concerning our afterlives are discrete (e.g. heaven and hell) God has a problem for there will be two agents such that they differ only slightly when it comes to their moral natures, but one goes to heaven and one to hell. (Imagine, as Sider does, that their moral crimes solely depend upon the number of obscenities uttered: the man who utters n blasphemies is saved, the man who utters $n+1$ is damned.) This seems to rally against a straightforward principle of justice: that two morally similar people aren't treated radically differently.

Almeida argues that there can be cases where substantially similar moral agents are treated radically differently for they might differ with regards to whether they are redeemable or irredeemable. But we can redux the Sider-style argument and imagine a string of agents such that some are redeemable and others are irredeemable and each only differs from the last in a subtly different way. Almeida considers this and replies thus: being redeemable can be vague and God will save everyone who isn't *definitely* irredeemable – only the definitely irredeemable go to Hell. (Rinse and repeat for higher order vagueness: if someone is borderline definitely irredeemable they don't go to hell; if someone is borderline borderline definitely irredeemable they don't go to hell, etc.) However, what is it to be 'borderline redeemable'? For some X, understanding what it would be to be a borderline case of X can be problematic e.g. with existence. Whilst I easily understand what it is to be borderline bald or borderline fat, borderline existing is harder to understand. Similarly, I have a hard time understanding what it is to be borderline redeemable. We certainly shouldn't understand it as being someone who is *close* to be being irredeemable, or someone that we mere mortals might *think* is irredeemable, for the vagueness here is not of that sort; if it transpires, upon being taken to Heaven for eternity, that they are eventually redeemed then they – in being redeemed – were *definitely* not irredeemable all along! So instead we should be imagining that the borderline irredeemable go to Heaven and it is *never* clear whether they have been redeemed or failed to be redeemed. But now whilst God might not send anyone to Hell who shouldn't be there he does send to Heaven some who should not for now entrance to Heaven no longer requires definitely accepting God or definitely being redeemed. And that seems wrong. Take John 3:3 where it appears to be made clear that only those who are redeemed go to Heaven; given this theory we must give ground on that principle (for otherwise everyone in Heaven is redeemed and, contrary to the assumption, Heaven contains no borderline irredeemable people). So whilst one problem is solved, another – ensuring that only the redeemed go to Heaven – is introduced. Whilst not everyone may care that Heaven isn't entirely filled with, as it were, the 'right sort of people' (indeed, Almeida may not care for these scriptural worries) it seems a pressing problem. The rejoinder, of saying that being redeemable has a sharp cut off point, is denied by Almeida (as he endorses his 'Vague Depravity Thesis') – and rightly so! It is difficult to imagine a moral psychology wherein such a sharp cut off point would arise and, if there

were, it looks like a Sider-style opponent would be correct to argue that whatever minor psychological difference there is that makes one agent irredeemable and the other redeemable probably isn't the sort of feature that should lead to someone being punished for eternity.

Almeida's final chapter discusses using genuine modal realism (the thesis that possible worlds exist and are to be identified with spatiotemporally disconnected spacetimes) as a solution to the problem of there being a less-than-perfect world. Given genuine modal realism (GMR) there's no wonder that there exist people who find themselves in less than optimum circumstances for it is necessary that there are spacetimes containing such people. The main problem Almeida discusses is that the perfect being at that world must bring about that world and thereby bring about certain evils. He argues that the perfect being ends up being in the situation of a lifeguard who can save one of two drowning children: of each child it is true that she could make the drowning child's life better by saving them, but of the pair it is not true that they can both be saved. Similarly, then, Almeida thinks God is in the same situation: it is true of each individual that (unrestrictedly) exists, God could have made that individual's life better, but God cannot make *every* life better since, by logical necessity, there exist people who suffer horrendous evils. Just as the lifeguard leaves some to drown, God leaves some to horrendous evils. This is an interesting contribution to the material concerning combining genuine modal realism and theism.

However, whilst Almeida goes on to endorse modal realism, he is hesitant for two reasons: (i) the theory is ontologically extravagant (as it includes an infinite number of worlds on a par with the actual world); (ii) it cannot account for the possibility of there being disconnected spacetimes. But given the introduction of theism, such worries seem misplaced. Regarding (i), the standard line is that genuine modal realism is qualitatively ontological parsimonious, so Almeida must mean 'ontological extravagance' to be either that the theory is quantitatively extravagant or, in positing an infinite number of disconnected spacetimes of the given sort, simply absurd (a.k.a. the 'incredulous stare'). The former isn't really a problem if we think there's a commitment to possible worlds in the first place – be they abstract, or be they concrete, there will be an infinite number of them. The latter isn't really a problem because I take it the source of incredulity concerning GMR is that the explanation for why the spacetimes exist (i.e. that they're logically necessary) is so otiose or esoteric that it's not suitable to motivate making such a claim – only,

say, quantum physics (or some other physical theory) should make us think there are such spacetimes, not metaphysical armchair reasoning. But once we introduce God, this worry should fade away. In the same way that we might figure out (using armchair reasoning alone) that God would create three Divine Persons or free willed creatures to roam the Earth, if we believe God would have good reason to create an infinite number of spacetimes (e.g. because it makes for a parsimonious ontology) there should no longer be any incredulity as to what those worlds are doing there. Regarding (ii) we can tweak GMR: retain the ontology (so there is an infinite number of disconnected spacetimes) but alter the ideology, such that a disconnected spacetime needn't be a possible world and, instead, whatever object God cares to decree as being a possible world is a possible world. God generally decrees that any given spacetime is a possible world, but also decrees in some cases that the fusion of two spacetimes is a possible world. We have recovered the possibility of island universes. Indeed, a perfect being can now guarantee the gamut of possible worlds without bringing into existence a horrendous evil. Imagine God creates a world where someone apparently suffers unnecessarily, but is then rewarded. In the same way we can ask what is true at a certain region of space or at a particular disconnected spacetime, we can ask what is true at the earlier temporal portion of that world *considered in isolation*; considered in isolation, it's true at that portion that the person suffers unnecessarily (as we're ignoring the later portion where they are rewarded). If God further decrees that the earlier part of the world is a possible world (in addition to the whole) then it's possible that a person suffer a horrendous evil without God having to create a person who suffers it – that possibility is instead represented merely by the earlier temporal portion. In short: Almeida can, having introduced a perfect being into his ontology, monopolise on this fact to produce an even leaner theory.

All in all the book, will be eminently suitable – and interesting to – the technically adept reader.