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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

AGAPEIC THEISM: PERSONIFYING EVIDENCE AND MORAL STRUGGLE

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Abstract. The epistemology of monotheism offered by philosophers has given inadequate attention to the kind of foundational evidence to be expected of a personal God whose moral character is *agapeic*, or perfectly loving, toward all other agents. This article counters this deficiency with the basis of a theistic epistemology that accommodates the distinctive moral character of a God worthy of worship. It captures the widely neglected *agonic,* or struggle-oriented, character of a God who seeks, by way of personal witness and intentional action, to realize and manifest *agape* among humans who suffer from selfishness. In doing so, the article identifies the overlooked role of *personifying* evidence of God in human moral character formation. In agreement with some prominent New Testament themes, the new perspective offered ties the epistemology of monotheism to robust *agapeic* morality in a way that makes such epistemology ethically challenging for inquirers about God's existence. Accordingly, such theistic epistemology will no longer be a candidate for ethically neutral, spectator reflection.

INTRODUCTION

Notoriously, philosophers and theologians have tried to prove God's existence by various sorts of arguments, many of which are remarkably elaborate. The list includes cosmological, teleological, ontological, moral, and psychological arguments of different kinds, among others. None of these arguments has won the day with a consensus among competent observers; as a result, controversy proceeds apace among philosophers and theologians. This article takes a new approach by focusing on what would be *God's* approach to self-manifestation. Instead of focusing on our formulating arguments for God's existence, we shall focus on what kind of evidence, or witness, God would supply in order to reveal and

authorize God's personal reality, moral character, and relevant purposes to humans.

We shall see how God can witness to God's reality for us, even if we humans cannot witness to God on our own. This approach accommodates the compelling fact that God would need to take the initiative in supplying evidence of divine reality to humans. If God is inherently personal and loving toward persons, as some versions of Jewish-Christian monotheism suggest, we should expect direct evidence of divine reality to be more akin to an authorizing personal witness than to a logical proof. In being non-personal, a logical proof lacks a personal character and personal agency and therefore lacks love toward persons. Logical proofs, and arguments in general, can *affirm* divine personal love, but they cannot directly *manifest* it, because they do not themselves *have* personal love in the way that personal witnesses can and sometimes do. They are not a living personal agent in the way God is, if God exists. Direct evidence of God would include direct evidence of a living personal agent, because only a living personal agent can directly reveal a living personal agent. Philosophers and theologians have neglected this important consideration, but this article counters this neglect.

BEGINNING WITH THE TITLE "GOD"

Discussions about God's existence rarely pause long enough to clarify what kind of exalted being, particularly what kind of personal moral character, is under discussion. The result is either an unacceptably vague conception of God or a distorted conception of God that misrepresents what role the term "God" plays in traditional monotheism. According to a classic monotheist use, the term "God" is an honorific *title* that requires worthiness of worship in its title holder. In this use, the term "God" is not a proper name and therefore can fail to have a referent, or denotation.

Although a person can worship pretty much anything, including himself or herself, *worthiness* of worship sets a maximally high moral standard. It requires the moral perfection of the one worthy of worship. To be worthy of worship is to be worthy of full, unqualified commitment. If, however, one is morally deficient in any way, then one will not be worthy of such exceptionless commitment. One will then be worthy at most

of qualified commitment, given one's moral deficiency in some area. As a result, one will have to be free of moral deficiency, that is, be morally perfect, to be worthy of worship. A holder of the title "God," then, will be morally perfect.

Moral perfection is the rarest of valuable features in our morally troubled world. No mere human emerges as a viable candidate for moral perfection, and this seems to be one of the few truths about the world that reflective humans can agree on. Even if some humans set moral perfection as their life goal, and work hard to achieve it, no mere human can plausibly claim to have reached that goal in this earthly life. In seeking what is morally best for humans, however, God would seek moral perfection for them. If God sought something less than moral perfection for humans, this would invite the charge of God's being morally lax, in virtue of settling for something that falls short of what is morally ideal for humans. Such moral laxness would call into question God's being perfectly loving toward humans and therefore God's being worthy of worship.

Exactly how God would seek moral perfection for humans is hard, if not impossible, for cognitively limited humans to specify *a priori,* in the abstract. We may have to "look and see" in actual human experience and history to acquire the needed information. Human experience and history may surprise us on this matter. We can plausibly infer that mere humans fail and will fail to acquire moral perfection on their own, but God would have various alternatives to counter this widespread failure. We do well to look at human experience and history to see how, if at all, God seeks to counter human moral failure for the sake of eventual human moral perfection. Therefore, we should not automatically expect human inquiry about God to proceed solely *a priori,* just on the basis of reason and definition. The relevance of human experience and history merits careful attention here. The key question now is this: what kind of experience would be relevant to God in a manner that suitably indicates God's existence or presence or even God's absence?

In seeking what is morally best for humans, God would seek to communicate somehow with humans. The desired divine communication would aim to be morally challenging, and thus redemptive, in virtue of bringing humans not only information about God but also acquaintance with God's moral character. The latter acquaintance would enhance human motivation toward conformity with God's moral character, and

would prevent relevant ideas about God from being purely speculative. John Baillie explains:

> What is directly revealed to us . . . is not truths or doctrines about God but God himself. Our doctrines about God are always secondary to our direct finding of God in the realities of our experience, and are never wholly adequate to that finding or wholly exhaustive of its meaning. God does not [just] communicate with us: He does something far better—He communes with us. Not the communication of propositions but the communion of spirits is the last word about divine revelation (1929, pp. 114-15; cf. Baillie 1962, pp. 15-18).

Such communion would be *de re,* and not merely *de dicto,* in virtue of being directly agent-to-agent (or person-to person), and not just agent-to-proposition. It would involve the direct acquaintance of one personal agent with another, even if human beliefs accompany the acquaintance. Accordingly, God's witness of divine reality to humans need not be altogether propositional; it can include a non-verbal, non-propositional component.

If God's inherent moral character is one of unselfish love, or *agape,* toward others and is the personal power yielding such love among humans, then the salient basis is set for human acquaintance and communion with God. Accordingly, Baillie remarks: "The Christian's finding of God in Christ is but the fulfillment of faith's older finding of Him in all love and goodness, wherever these are revealed to our human eyes. God is love. Where love is, there God is" (1929, p. 119). This approach gives us a definite, realizable standard for human experience of God's moral character rather than of some alternative, such as a harmful counterfeit. Humans experience God's moral character whenever they experience *agape,* even if humans play a cooperative role, at least *de re,* in the provision of *agape* in many cases. Indeed, if we fail to find evidence of God's moral character in *agape*, we may fail to find it anywhere.

We find a clear connection between God and *agape* suggested in various parts of the New Testament. For instance, according to 1 John 4:7-8,16: " . . . love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love . . . . God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (RSV). The two striking claims that "God is love" and that "love is

of God" suggest a key role for *agape* in human acquaintance with God. The heart of *agape* is one's unselfishly willing what is good for someone, and such willing involves a distinctive kind of power: the power to love others unselfishly. If "love is of God," this power is not just a human product, even if humans play a direct incomplete role in some instances of its production. In that case, *agape* arises instead, at least in part, from the power of God, whose moral character is inherently and perfectly loving. The suggestion, then, is that if one wants to see what God is like in action, one should look to *agape* in action, even if humans are directly involved in some cases.

As suggested, a morally perfect God would seek what is morally best for humans, even what is morally perfect for them. This effort would include a divine redemptive call to humans to be conformed to God's moral character in willing cooperation with God's revealed purposes. The divine call would not be coercive, so long as God allows for human agency in response to God, and it could come in various ways. It could come through humans who relay the call, or it could come from God without human intermediaries. It also could come through circumstances that involve humans, such as failed human relationships, even when human intermediaries do not figure directly in the call itself. Accordingly, God would have various ways to extend a redemptive call to humans, and we cognitively limited humans should not consider ourselves to be in a position to comprehend fully all of the ways God can extend such a call. Even so, God would seek to call at least receptive humans to conformity with God's moral character, for their own good. This would exonerate God from a charge of moral laxness in relating to humans.

THEISM AS *AGAPEIC* AND *AGONIC*

Like divine redemption in general, God's redemptive call would be *agonic* in its intended effects, owing to a *struggle* to realize and manifest divine *agape* among all persons. In other words, it would be a call to struggle *against* whatever is anti-God (that is, whatever opposes God's moral character) and *for* whatever honors God. If divine *agape* is *agonic* in this manner, we should expect God and direct evidence of God to be likewise *agonic*. In particular, we should expect such evidence to aim to

have its recipients become similarly *agonic* in a struggle to realize and manifest divine *agape* among all persons. This would put evidence of God in a profoundly new light.

The apostle Paul characterizes God and divine redemption as *agonic* in a number of his letters. For instance, after referring to God as "the one who calls you" (Galatians 5:8; cf. 1:6), Paul remarks that "the desires of the [human] flesh are against the Spirit [of God], and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other" (Galatians 5:17, RSV; cf. Romans 7:22-25). He then identifies "works of the flesh," not with deeds of the body, but instead with immoral actions and attitudes in conflict with God's moral character: idolatry, jealousy, drunkenness, lewdness, fornication, and so on (Galatians 5:19-21).

In contrast, the traits of "the Spirit" are the distinctive features of God's worship-worthy moral character: "love (*agape*), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23, RSV). In Paul's portrait, God's redemptive call is a call to struggle *against* the immoral "works of the flesh" and *for* (our manifesting) the features of God's moral character. Indeed, Paul thinks of God's Spirit as offering to humans not only a personal witness to God as Father (Romans 8:15-16; cf. 2 Corinthians 2:22, 5:5), but also the divine power to "put to death" their immoral deeds antithetical to God's moral character (see Romans 8:13). Accordingly, God not only calls humans to struggle but also offers the power humans need to undertake the struggle. Paul likens his own redemptive struggle with the churches of Galatia to childbirth: ". . . I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19, NRSV). The struggle, according to Paul, is for humans willingly "to be conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Romans 8:29). We shall clarify how this struggle proceeds, in order to identify the distinctive kind of direct evidence we should expect of an *agonic* God.

Instead of a mere principle-oriented approach, Paul takes a *personifying* approach to the redemptive struggle by (a) identifying the person of Jesus, and not just moral principles, as the self-giving manifestation of God (see Philippians 2:4-11; cf. Colossians 1:15), and (b) endorsing the standard of a human person's "becoming like him [=Jesus]" in certain ways (see Philippians 3:10; cf. Romans 13:14). In accordance with the personifying standard that Jesus "emptied himself" for the sake of God (Philippians 2:7), Paul portrays his own redemptive struggle as follows:

> Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; [in order] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own . . . (Philippians 3:7-12, RSV).

Paul's redemptive struggle is both negative and positive: it is *against* all things that challenge God's supremacy, and it is *for* knowing God and his resurrection power, as exemplified in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Ultimately, then, the redemptive struggle is a struggle for humans to participate in God's life-giving resurrection power anchored in self-giving divine *agape*. (On the role of "mutuality" between Jesus and his followers in this connection, see Longenecker 2003.)

Paul thinks of God as offering morally powerful righteousness to humans (including a right relationship with God) as a perfectly free gift of divine "grace," without human merit or earning (see Romans 3:21-25, 4:4-5). Even so, the human *reception* of this powerful free gift, through human faith (or trust) in God, is centrally *agonic*, replete with human struggle, including the struggle to put God first over all other things. The latter point is widely neglected among interpreters of Jesus and Paul, and this hinders a needed understanding of faith, or trust, in God as crucially involving human struggle, beyond human thinking, believing, and reasoning.

Paul's *agonic* approach to divine redemption of humans is suggested by the following remark: "[God] has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well – since you are having the same struggle (*agōn*) that you saw I had… (Philippians 1:29-30, NRSV). The redemptive struggle of suffering emerges also in the Pauline letter to the Colossians: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and . . . I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (1:24, RSV; cf. 2:1). Even if Paul is not directly responsible for the letter to the Colossians (and the jury is still

out on this), an astute student of his teaching is, as suggested by its clear parallels with Paul's remarks in 2 Corinthians 1:5, 4:8-11.

Paul's acknowledgment of the key role of human struggle in receiving and sharing the power of divine redemption fits well with his otherwise puzzling injunction: ". . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13, RSV; cf. Romans 13:12, 2 Corinthians 6:7, 10:4). Paul's injunction is definitely *not* the following: work to earn, or to merit, your salvation from God. Instead, his key idea is that people are called to struggle, even in suffering, to receive and thereby to share the power of divine redemption freely on offer. We may understand the following remark attributed to Jesus in the same vein: "Struggle to enter through the narrow door [to God's kingdom]; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24; cf. Matthew 7:13-14). The struggle in question enhances the cooperative receptivity of those who seek to appropriate God's powerful free gift of a life of *agape* in accordance with God's moral character.

Let's use the word "temptation" for whatever invites one to be anti-God in some way, in virtue of opposing God's moral character, whether in attitude or in action. Ethelbert Stauffer observes:

> [Human] thinking that treads the road [of] faith [in God] has to fight a daily battle with temptation . . . . [A]gain and again the way is beset with puzzles and darkness…. [I]n temptation, [however], theology passes into prayer, that asks God himself for the answer to the enigma of our historical experiences (cf. Psalm 73:2, 15ff., 28). Only thought that prays can lead beyond the temptation and take us from one certainty to another" [cf. Job 27:1, 42:8] (1955, p. 175).

Stauffer adds an important component to an account that offers a personifying *agonic* approach to the divine redemption of humans. We may call this component "*kenotic* prayer."

The adjective "*kenotic*" stems from the Greek verb (*kenoō*) that underlies the idea, in Philippians 2:7, of Jesus *emptying* himself of his own preferences in humble obedience to his divine Father, even to the extent of death on the cross for others. (On this important idea, see Gorman 2001, pp. 253-59, 2009, pp. 9-39.) We may think of the redemptive struggle, including its accompanying suffering, as being intended by

God to prompt humans to engage in *kenotic* prayer to God, beyond mere thinking, believing, and reasoning. A perfectly loving God would want people to call on God, in *kenotic* prayer, for purposes of human redemption via cooperative fellowship with God. Such prayer would enhance one's receptivity to the new life offered by God, in virtue of one's emptying oneself of ambitions contrary to God's purposes. (For some relevant philosophical discussion, see Stump 1979.)

A salient example of *kenotic* prayer is found in Jesus in Gethsemane, just before his arrest and crucifixion. For good reason, the situation is traditionally called Jesus's "*agony* in the Garden," in the light of his painful struggle in the face of a torturous death. Some ancient versions of Luke's Gospel report that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground" (Luke 22:44, NRSV). His agonizing prayer is represented in Mark's Gospel as follows: "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36, NRSV; cf. Matthew 26:39, Luke 22:42). This prayer is *agonic* and *kenotic*: *agonic*, because Jesus struggles against his initial preference and for submission to God's will; and *kenotic*, because Jesus empties, or denies, his initial preference in order to obey God's call to self-giving obedience for the sake of others (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9). Accordingly, we can think of the *agonic* and *kenotic* features of redemption as serving God's purpose to enhance human obedience toward God. This obedience contributes to the realizing and manifesting of divine *agape* among humans, and thereby to the human personifying of God's moral character.

A central theme of Paul's redemptive message is that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19, RSV). Accordingly, we may think of God himself as struggling, even suffering, in redemption in order to identify with humans in need of divine redemption. (For discussion of divine suffering, see Moltmann 1981, chapter 2, Fretheim 1984, Fiddes 1988, and Wolterstorff 1988.) In this perspective, God is engaged in a struggle to undermine evil for the benefit of humans, without destroying human agency or protecting humans from all evil. God is, in short, *agonic* because *agapeic*.

Jesus thought of his controversial ministry as guided by a divine struggle against evil. For instance, he remarks that ". . . if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come

to you" (Luke 11:20, NRSV; cf. Matthew 12:28, Mark 3:27). Accordingly, Jesus attributes the power behind his *agape*-based *agonic* ministry to God. In the language of John's Gospel, ". . . the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing" (John 5:19, NRSV; cf. John 8:28). In this portrait, the Jewish-Christian God is *agonic* for the sake of human redemption aimed at the realization of divine *agape* among all persons. This divine struggle intends to be life-giving to all humans, who cannot supply the needed *agapeic* life on their own. We need to consider the relevant kind of *agape* more closely.

PERSONIFYING *AGAPEIC* EVIDENCE

We have characterized *agape* broadly as one's unselfishly willing what is good for someone, and we have identified *agape* as being at the heart of God's worship-worthy character. Divine love, however, is peculiar in its scope: it extends not only to friends of God, but also to resolute enemies of God. Such unselfish love is arguably a requirement of a morally perfect, worship-worthy character. Jesus acknowledges divine enemy-love and a corresponding requirement of human enemy-love, as follows: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (Matthew 5:44-45, NRSV). A parallel remark attributed to Jesus in Luke's Gospel is that "[God] is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35-36, NRSV). Such enemy love, including praying for one's enemies, is rarely endorsed by humans, even in the arena of longstanding religions. (For a possible move in this rare direction, see Proverbs 25:21-22; cf. Romans 12:20-21. For discussion, see Furnish 1972, chapter 1, Klassen 1984, chapter 4, Outka 1992, and Topel 2001, chapter 5.)

Paul straightforwardly acknowledges divine enemy-love as follows: "God proves his love (*agape*) for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. . . . [W]hile we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son . . ." (Romans 5:8,10, NRSV). It follows from Paul's remarks that God proves his redemptive love even for his enemies. Paul regards himself as a former enemy of God who was unworthily shown God's redemptive love, or grace (see Galatians 1:13, 15;

cf. 1 Corinthians 15:8-10). Such divine love prompts the following *kenotic* response from Paul: "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10, NRSV). God's unique power of *agape,* even toward enemies, is shown to be unique and enduring against the backdrop of human weaknesses of various sorts, particularly moral weaknesses. Accordingly, Paul values divine power over human power as the needed basis of human faith in God (see 1 Corinthians 2:3-5; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7-11, 1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Enemy love figures centrally in God's witness to God's reality, because it is salient *evidence* of God's unique moral character and abiding power. This evidence goes beyond propositions, arguments, and even experiences to distinctive personifying evidence. That is, it can reside in the *moral character of a person* in virtue of this character's being formed by divine power to reflect God's moral character of *agape,* even toward enemies. This consideration gives definite meaning to the present talk of *personifying* evidence in contrast with propositions, arguments, and experiences.

The relevant idea of personifying evidence is suggested in John's Gospel by the notion of a person's being "born of the Spirit" of God (John 3:6), and in Paul's letters by the assumption that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NRSV; cf. Galatians 6:15). Paul contrasts this new creation with "our old self . . . enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:6, NRSV), thus suggesting that it includes a new self, a new "inmost self" that will "delight in the law of God" (Romans 7:22, NRSV; cf. Romans 8:4). He thinks of this new creation as one's being spiritually (but not yet bodily) raised, or resurrected, to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4, RSV; cf. Colossians 2:12). Accordingly, he speaks of the Roman Christians as "those who have been brought from death to life" (Romans 6:13, NRSV). The new self in question corresponds to the divine promise of Ezekiel 36:26 to God's people: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you . . ." (NRSV; cf. 11:19, Jeremiah 31:33). The promise offers the divine gift of a new human center of motivation, a center that agrees with God's moral character of *agape* toward all others. (For relevant discussion, see Hubbard 2002.)

Paul thinks of the new self as the willing recipient of God's *agape* given through God's Spirit: "God's love has been poured into our hearts

through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5, NRSV). In addition, he thinks of divine *agape* in humans as the primary "fruit of the Spirit" of God, involving one's being "led by the Spirit" of God (Galatians 5:18,22; cf. Romans 8:1-5). Even more to the point, he regards divine *agape* as a ground for hope in God that precludes our being disappointed by such hope (Romans 5:5). We plausibly can treat this as a *cognitive* ground for human hope in God, and not just as a causal ground. That is, divine *agape* as an experienced transformative gift is salient evidence of God's presence in one's life, although this important consideration is overlooked by most philosophers and theologians. When such evidence is delivered directly by God's personal Spirit as representative of God's moral character, it takes the form of an *authorizing personal witness* to God's reality rather than a logical proof (see Romans 8:15-16, 2 Corinthians 2:22, 5:5; cf. Moser 2008, chapter 2).

According to John's Gospel, divine love in one's moral character is an indicator of one's being a genuine child of God and disciple of Jesus, who remarks as follows to his followers: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love (*agape*) for one another" (John 13:34-35; cf. 1 John 3:1,14,18-19). The *agapeic* evidence identified by John and Paul rests on the personally experienced power of personal divine *agape* and thus is person-oriented throughout. These considerations fit well with the following observation by F.X. Durrwell: ". . . redemption as a whole is a personal work. It is so in Christ who, in his death and resurrection, is himself salvation; it is so in the church which shares in salvation through fellowship with Christ in his death and resurrection" (1972, pp. 167-68). The salient evidence in such fellowship is more akin to an authorizing personal witness from God than to a logical proof or any other kind of argument.

In the wake of Jesus (Matthew 5:38-48, Luke 6:27-36), both John and Paul think of divine *agape* as extending to recipients beyond the followers of Jesus, to the whole world of persons, including enemies of God (cf. John 3:16, Romans 5:6-10, 12:14-21). We may distinguish, however, between God's *intended* human recipients of such love and the *willingly transformed* human bearers of divine love. God's intended human recipients can include self-avowed enemies of God, whereas the willingly

transformed human bearers are no longer enemies of God, because they have yielded, if imperfectly, to God's call to redemption.

Willing human bearers of divine *agape* manifest personifying evidence of God's reality, because they are personal witnesses to the transforming power of divine *agape* among humans (including themselves) and thus to the reality of God's moral character. Such personal witnesses, according to Paul, "are being changed into [God's] likeness from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18, RSV). As a result, Paul refers to the Corinthian Christians themselves as "a letter from Christ . . . written . . . with the Spirit of the living God . . . on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3, RSV). Such personifying evidence goes beyond any argument or logical proof in its power of personal communion, person-to-person. Being personal, it conveys God's personal moral character to a person in a way that no argument or logical proof (being nonpersonal) can. Even so, one can use an abductive, explanatory argument to challenge skeptics about divine reality, on the basis of the best available explanation of the human transformation in question (see Moser 2008, pp. 126-43, 2010, chapter 4; cf. Wiebe 2004, chapter 3). Such an argument, however, must not be confused with the basic experiential evidence for God's existence supplied by transformative *agape*. (For an account of basic, foundational evidence that avoids a confusion of such evidence with an argument but accommodates the important role of abduction, see Moser 1989.)

The divine witness in *agape* is a witness in action, in personified redemptive action, as Paul stresses in his understanding of the cross (see Romans 5:8; cf. 3:24-26). God could present merely claims and arguments to humans, but such an intellectualist strategy would omit something that is morally, motivationally, and personally important: person-to-person communion on the basis of God's moral character of *agape* even toward enemies. As a result, a perfectly loving God would not settle just for claims and arguments by way of revelation. God would promote the kind of personal witness to God's reality that resides in personifying evidence reflective of God's moral character. God would draw near to humans *in a personal manner* that goes beyond any claims, logical proofs, or arguments in general. The result, as suggested, would be an *authorizing divine witness*, from a cognitive authority, to divine reality for humans.

In the epistemologies of Paul and John, Jesus Christ is the paradigm of personifying evidence of God, given that he is "the likeness of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4, RSV; cf. Colossians 1:15) and the one, "in the bosom of the Father, [who] has made [God] known" (John 1:18, RSV). Accordingly, John's Gospel portrays Jesus as saying: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9, NRSV), and Paul speaks of "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6, NRSV). Jesus himself emerges therefore as personifying evidence of God, in virtue of being an authoritative and authorizing personal witness to God.

We should clarify what exactly God, as worthy of worship, would seek to reveal to humans. If the answer is, as suggested, "God's personal moral character," we can see why God would rely on an irreducibly personal witness for self-revelation, rather than on mere information or mere arguments. The best witness to a personal moral character is itself personal and hence goes beyond mere information and mere arguments. This simple but crucial lesson is widely neglected among philosophers, theologians, and other theorists. In bringing it to center stage, we can begin to make sense of the kind of direct, foundational evidence and self-manifestation to be expected of a God worthy of worship. We also can see why an authorizing self-witness from God is better suited as direct evidence in this case than a mere logical proof or any other kind of mere argument. (For the bearing of this lesson on the traditional theistic arguments, in connection with divine hiding, see Moser 2010, chapter 3; cf. Richardson 1966, chapter 6.)

Personified evidence from God's witness has distinctive features that cannot be fully captured by claims and arguments. In particular, claims and arguments cannot exhaust divine *agape* directly shown, or manifested, to a person by a personal witness who personifies *agape*. Accordingly, Paul speaks of "the manifestation of the truth" regarding divine redemption, where this manifestation includes the following: "commending *ourselves* to the conscience of every person before God" (2 Corinthians 4:2, italics added). His approach concerns person-based manifestation of evidence regarding God's redemptive intervention in Jesus. This manifestation is twofold according to Paul: "[We are] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death

for Jesus's sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:10-11, RSV; cf. 6:9). This sums up the existential core of "dying and rising with Christ."

The "life of Jesus" includes the resurrection power that Paul sought to know (see 2 Corinthians 4:14, Philippians 3:10; cf. Furnish 1984, pp. 283-84, Savage, 1996, pp. 177-78, and Byrnes 2003, pp. 61-71). This power is the same divine power of self-giving love that motivated Jesus to obey God even to the extreme of accepting death on a criminal's cross. As a result, Paul can say to the churches of Galatia that in his ministry "Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified" before their eyes (Galatians 3:1, RSV). A witness who manifests the death of Jesus also manifests the resurrection life of Jesus, if only in enduring suffering without relinquishing *agape* for others. More specifically, one's dying-and-rising with Jesus is the way to appropriate and to manifest divine *agonic agape*. It yields evidence, in a personal witness, of divine reality and presence, and it is the existential reality to which Christian faith and hope in God commit a person (cf. Byrnes 2003, pp. 121-22, 283-85).

CONCLUDING IMPEDIMENTS

We now can identify three human impediments to acknowledging and appropriating God's personal witness. The first impediment involves neglecting the fact that the personifying divine evidence in question has a diachronic character in human witnesses that involves development over time. Philosophers and theologians rarely look for evidence of God with such a diachronic character, and assume instead that evidence of God would be synchronic, available at a moment. In contrast, we may regard the aforementioned developmental feature in willing humans as spiritual maturation that includes one's becoming increasingly *true to* God, in communion with God.

A person's believing truths about God falls short of a person's becoming true to God in virtue of being conformed to God's moral character, in a struggle of dying and rising with Jesus. The latter conformation yields personifying evidence of God in a person over time. Human witnesses to God, then, owe their witnessing power (to God) to their becoming true to God over time and therefore, ultimately, to God's power. This is

no surprise, given that the basic empowering moral character for divine *agape* is *God's* character. Human witnesses to God are but cooperative beneficiaries of this divine power and evidence.

The second impediment is perhaps the most common: it is human unwillingness to undertake an *agonic* life toward *agape*-oriented character formation. Kierkegaard remarks bluntly: "you must die to your selfishness, . . . because it is only through your selfishness that the world has power over you . . . But naturally there is nothing a human being hangs on to so firmly—indeed with his whole self!—as to his selfishness!" (1851, p. 77). Human selfishness is, of course, antithetical to *agape* and therefore to a personified witness to the reality of divine *agape*. A refusal to die to selfishness is, in effect, a refusal to live an *agape*-oriented life and thus to witness personally to the reality of the divine source of *agape*.

Kierkegaard seriously distorts the truth at hand with this claim: "before the Spirit who gives life can come, you must first die to [selfishness]" (1851, p. 79; cf. p. 81). As suggested previously, the power of God's Spirit is offered to humans to "put to death" selfishness and other human traits contrary to God's moral character (see Romans 8:13). Accordingly, we might say that even human repentance is an empowered gift offered by God. A perfectly loving God, in other words, would offer to willing humans the power to "die to" selfishness as the way to realize cooperative life with God in *agape* toward others. Humans therefore would not be left, as Kierkegaard suggests, with their own meager power to purify themselves of selfishness before God's Spirit could supply God's life-giving power. Instead, God's life-giving power would be available to humans to set aside habitual selfishness for the sake of cooperative life with God. Kierkegaard mistakenly offers human self-purification as a precondition for, rather than a beneficiary of, the arrival of God's life-giving power. This is a recipe for frustration and excess severity, given human weakness. (For further discussion of Kierkegaard on God and *agape*, see Moser and McCreary 2010; cf. Walsh 2009, chapter 6.)

A third impediment is a close cousin to selfishness: human self-righteousness, the attitude that one is morally self-adequate, even before God. This is a kind of moral pride that readily takes the credit for the *agape* manifested in one's life, thereby omitting a crucial role for God in this connection. It endorses human moral self-achievement over either the need or the availability of the gift of divine grace. Accordingly, such

pride obscures the need for *kenosis* in a human life relative to God, and therefore clouds the personal witness of God to God's character of *agonic agape* toward humans. In particular, it resists the humble but struggling human reception of this witness in one's own moral character. Such reception is cast off for the sake of prideful human achievement in the moral domain. The *agonic* witness of divine grace, then, is at odds with human self-righteousness, morally and cognitively. (For relevant discussion, see Niebuhr 1964, chapters 4-5.)

In conclusion, we have identified *agapeic* theism as offering a widely neglected but distinctive approach to direct evidence of divine reality. Such theism characterizes this evidence as existentially significant, in virtue of its call for *agonic* human participation in, and thus personified witnessing to, the divine life of *agape* toward others. We now can see why and how the direct evidence of an *agapeic* and *agonic* God is morally significant in a manner worthy of more attention among philosophers and theologians. Religious epistemology, accordingly, can come to life in *agapeic* theism as *agonic*. It thus can move beyond mere reflection and discussion to the key role of human struggle for *agape* toward others. A worship-worthy God would foster such action-directed epistemology, for the vital good of all concerned.

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SOURCES OF DISSATISFACTION WITH ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION OF THE MEANING OF LIFE

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Abstract. In this paper, I seek to diagnose the sources of our dissatisfaction with answers to the question of the meaning of life. I contend that some of these have to do with the question (its polyvalence and persistent vagueness) and some have to do with life and meaningfulness themselves. By showing how dissatisfaction arises and the extent to which it is in-eliminable even by God, I hope to show that we should be satisfied with our dissatisfaction.

I.

'What is the meaning of life?' To ask this question seriously is to know that no answer capable of pithy formulation will be entirely satisfying. 'The meaning of life is to give and receive love.' 'The meaning of life is to gain in wisdom and knowledge.' 'The meaning of life is to find union with God.' 'The meaning of life is to escape the suffering inherent in the cycle of rebirth.' At the stage of seriously asking the question of the meaning of life, one will already have heard and rejected these and a multitude of alternative answers, rejected them at least as *definitive* of, as saying all that there is to be said about, life's meaning. If one picks through the scrap pile of answers one has thus generated, of most puzzlingly melancholic interest amongst them will be any which one found wanting in completeness whilst believing that there was nevertheless unsurpassable value in the modes of life that they licensed – for example, if one believes in God, the answer involving union with Him; if one believes in suffering inherent in a cycle of rebirth, the answer involving escape from this cycle.

In the case of a religious answer, if one is oneself of that particular religious persuasion, one naturally hesitates in having the thought 'There

must be more to it than that' when one reaches the object of ultimate religious reverence. If one believes in God, for example, one inclines to worry that the thought must finally be misplaced here, as there could be no 'that' more impressive – more ultimately satisfying of every valuable aspect of one's being – than union with God. But I speculate that one thinks the thought nonetheless, even here. And I speculate that the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, if one is of another religious persuasion. If one believes in the 'noble truth' that all existence is characterized by suffering and has committed oneself to the 'noble eightfold path', which one believes will lead one ultimately to escape from it, this too, I hazard, strikes one as, even if complete and sufficient as a guide to life, incomplete and insufficient as an answer to the question of the meaning of life. Of course, if one eventually finds oneself face-to-face with God, one will not, at that time (if time may still be spoken of in such a context), be thinking, 'There must be more to it than this'; and if one ultimately escapes existence altogether, one will not be able in such a non-state to think anything at all, so *a fortiori* one will not then be thinking 'There must be more to it than this'. But the fact that, in such states/non-states, such thoughts would be obliterated does not make any less well-grounded now the thought in question, for the thought is not that such things cannot happen or that their happening wouldn't then remove any dissatisfaction one might feel about one's life and indeed everything else, but rather that ending up at such points cannot be all that there is to making meaningful the lives that led up to them.

My purpose in this paper is to explain the persistence of this dissatisfaction with answers – even religious answers – to the question of the meaning of life. The first step in my explanation is the claim that there are several legitimate meanings of 'meaning', and indeed of 'life', and thus when one asks 'What is the meaning of life?', one asks an ambiguous question, or – perhaps better – one asks an assemblage of largely overlapping, but significantly different, questions at once. To list but a few of the concerns which find their home in the question:–

One is asking what, if any, consequences there are of an aspect or period of an individual's life, the individual's life as a whole, humanity's life, or life *per se*. One is asking what, if any, purposes are served (or exist whilst failing to be served) by life in one or more of these senses. One is

asking what significance, if any, in a greater (potentially non-purposive) scheme of things life in one or more of these senses has. 'Why are we here?' 'Why am *I* here?' One is asking what, if any, ideals are instantiated in an aspect or period of a life or life in one or more of the larger senses – 'What, if anything, does it 'stand for'?' One is asking what, within life in one of these senses, is desirable or valuable in itself, what – if anything – makes life worth living, worth going on with, for the individual or group living it. One is asking whether or not life in one or more of these senses contributes positively to various sorts of extrinsic value in the world or beyond. One is asking whether it is in some sense emotionally or spiritually satisfying, or perhaps the proper object of such an emotion/mood even if it is not yet had.

These are just some of the questions that find expression in 'What is the meaning of life?' Having merely briskly stated only some, my hypothesis of polyvalence is not justified in anything but the most impressionistic of ways. But I trust that each of the questions in the previous paragraph will have elicited in the reader a thought that might gain expression in 'Yes, that *is* in part what I was asking when I asked "What is the meaning of life?"' and thus have supported the hypothesis.

The hypothesis of polyvalence gives us a partial explanation of our dissatisfaction with the answers to 'the' question of the meaning of life. If there are indeed so many questions of the meaning of life, it is no wonder that no pithy formula can contain the answer to all of them. When one realizes the polyvalence of the question, one must then have some sympathy with the sages whose answers one has discarded as unsatisfying in coming to the point of this realization.

Consider the predicament in which a sage finds himself or herself when asked, 'What is the meaning of life?' Insofar as he or she is able to make determinate sense of the question and not retreat into Delphic aphorism by way of answer, he or she must disambiguate it in what strikes him or her as the most profound way and then answer it under that interpretation. Perhaps he or she then answers it correctly under that interpretation, but – be that as it may – as, depending on how it is disambiguated, 'the' question of the meaning of life is answered correctly with very different answers, so each particular answer proffered by a sage is likely to strike any individual hearer of it as at best only partial. And so

it is that even when one thinks of a sage as having singled out something of value in life with his or her answer (perhaps even having singled out something of unsurpassable value), one cannot help but think that whatever it is that he or she has described cannot be all that there is to making life meaningful – 'There must be more to it than that.' And so it is that this thought that one cannot help but have is right.

Polyvalence also explains another thought which I hazard occurs with great frequency in response to the many answers proffered to the question by sages past and present: 'There's something in that'. Perhaps almost as frequently as one feels oneself dissatisfied with a particular answer, one thinks of the unsatisfactory answer as nevertheless having some cogent truth contained within it. If there is a God and he is as those who believe in him characteristically suppose, the meaning of life is unlikely, one supposes, to have nothing whatsoever to do with finding union with him. If ultimate reality instead consists of suffering inherent in a cycle of rebirth, then the meaning of life is unlikely, one supposes, to have nothing whatsoever to do with escaping from this cycle. Whatever one's religious views or lack of them, gaining in knowledge and wisdom, giving and receiving love, and a host of other things which have been offered by sages as keys to the meaning of life are, one will almost certainly believe, valuable and, believing this, one will suppose that it is unlikely that they are entirely irrelevant to the question of life's meaning. No answer to the question of life's meaning that has been propounded by sages is wholly satisfactory, but few are wholly *un*satisfactory either. Again then, the hypothesis of polyvalence explains how this is so.

If the claim of polyvalence is correct, then the methodology that must suggest itself in investigating 'the' question of the meaning of life is as follows:-

We should disambiguate the various meanings of 'meaning' and 'life' as they figure in our minds as we ask the question of life's meaning. We should show how, under the various interpretations of 'the' question we are hence enabled to disaggregate, we are or are not in a position to judge of life that it has meaning or does not have meaning and perhaps the extent to which it has or does not have meaning. And, finally, in those senses of the question where we are in a position to make judgements of the meaningfulness of life, we should make those judgements, give the answers. But there will be problems implementing this procedure.

II.

As someone asking the question of the meaning of life, even asking it seriously and after much thought, it is unlikely one will have a secure and detailed prior grasp of the various different things one is asking. Were one to be given a list of possible interpretations of the question by the person to whom one was asking it and asked by him or her to specify some or all of the interpretations from that list as the meaning or meanings one already had in mind, one would not be able to compare the list one had just been given with a pre-existent list of one's own, and quickly tick off various meanings. Rather, a more synergistic process would take place between the list one had been given on the one hand and one's own, somewhat ill-formed, prior thoughts on the other. One would find oneself saying things like, 'You know, I hadn't really thought about it, but, now I see it there on your list, I think that meaning *a is* a part of what I was asking, or – perhaps better – a part of what I *now* wish to ask about when I put to you again the question of the meaning of life.' Look back at the list of questions which I briefly gave as illustrative of those that find expression in 'What is the meaning of life?' I hazard you will have this sort of reaction to at least some of them.

There are of course limits on the interpretations that the question of the meaning of life may carry, limits imposed by quite general considerations concerning the nature of language. As with all other questions, there are sorts of linguistic behaviour which someone might display in response to the question of the meaning of life that would be taken by all competent language-users as indicative, not of having a particular – and perhaps unorthodox – interpretation of the question, but rather as indicative of not understanding it at all. So, we need not make space at the table for all comers, indeed we should exclude some 'meanings'. The next question then is, how shall we decide who to exclude?

First, and least controversial as a criterion for exclusion, the interpretations of the question must be logically coherent before we consider them; there are many meanings to the question, but there are no meaningless meanings. That's the thing about meanings, they have to mean something; and that's the thing about logical incoherence, it fails even to mean something. We need not make space at the table then for those

'sages' who tell us that they are going talk about the meaning of life but speak only gibberish thereafter.

Whilst, as a criterion for exclusion, logical incoherence is uncontroversial, quite who this criterion excludes when applied properly is sometimes controversial. Thus matters are not quite as clear cut when it comes to applying this criterion in practice as one might initially have hoped given its clarity in principle. For example, Sartre contends that interpretations and answers to the question of the meaning of life which involve God involve logical incoherence; thus, he would maintain, they need not even be considered. However, other serious thinkers contend that it is *Sartre*'s answer to the question of the meaning of life which is incoherent and thus not needful of consideration. And we shall thus have to do some philosophical work to decide if either or both deserve a seat at the table in due course.

Secondly, and potentially more controversial as a criterion for exclusion, the interpretation of the question has to address at least an aspect of our concerns when we ask the un-disambiguated question, 'What is the meaning of life?' Of course, if the claim of polyvalence is right, any particular answer will address these concerns only partially. But interpretations must at least address some aspect of our concerns in raising the initial question if they are to be considered further as interpretations of and putative answers to *that* question rather than, at best, answers to other questions which are beside our concerns when we inquire into the meaning of life.

Even with these two criteria in play, setting some parameters on what will be acceptable as disambiguations of the question of the meaning of life, a worry may linger. The wisdom of sages seeking a place at the table is not left unchallenged; each has to be minimally coherent in the interpretation they give to the question and in their answer to it and the interpretation they offer has to address at least some aspect of the concerns of those of us who ask the 'raw' question. But this still leaves unchallenged the 'wisdom of the crowds', as it were, the wisdom of the rest of us who are asking the question. Might we not worry then that we've set the table up in the wrong place, that the *real* meaning of the question 'What is the meaning of life?' is, for all we know, something entirely different from what we, the vast majority of competent language-users, take it to be? Perhaps, unbeknownst to us in the crowd, the question 'What is the

meaning of life?' really does mean something to which the answer is or might be '42.' But such a worry makes no sense; such a thought gestures hopelessly towards no genuine possibility.

Someone who maintained that when people ask 'What is the meaning of life?' they are really asking – even if only in part – a question to which 42 might be the answer, would not have given the question of the meaning of life any legitimate interpretation. How can we be so sure? Because it is we, the crowd asking the question, who *create* the identity of the question with those concerns; they are our concerns and so we are authoritative over them and the question they form. Even in the case of a polyvalent question such as this – where there is no single hegemonic interpretation, but rather a family of legitimate interpretations – which of the potentially infinite number of interpretations counts as a legitimate member of the finite family is something which is determined by the reflective responses of the competent language-users posing the original question. Words must mean what their users characteristically take them to mean and thus the question of the meaning of life, even if ambiguous, cannot mean something which it is obvious to every competent language-user it does not mean, even partially. And one thing which it is obvious, comically obvious indeed, to us that the question 'What is the meaning of life?' does not mean, even partially, is any member of the set of questions to which '42' might be an answer. (We, the crowd, are sovereign over the identity of question, but of course we are not sovereign over the identity of the answer to it, or at least it would require another and more controversial argument to establish that we were. Legitimate interpretations of questions are legitimate just in virtue of being taken to be so by competent language-users. But correct answers to questions are not correct (or at least not usually correct) just in virtue of being taken to be correct by competent language-users.)

All of this, it may be admitted, has painted the picture in rather too stark a contrast of black and white. There will be some sages seeking a place at the table who we can clearly see are speaking to an aspect of our concerns ('It's to grow in wisdom and knowledge'; 'It's to find union with God'), and there will be some who we can clearly see are not ('It's 42'). But there will also be those for whom this issue is not determinate. Sometimes this indeterminacy will be epistemic, capable in principle of being removed by further interrogation of the person giving the answer.

But sometimes it will not. There will remain a certain amount of indeterminacy even after the most careful reflection and synergistic interaction with them, as a result of what we might call 'persistent vagueness' in our question. To some then we shall ultimately wish to say something along the lines of, 'Well, that's "sort-of" an aspect of what I was getting at when I asked the question of the meaning of life'. Some interpretations of the question, we might say, seize on that which is central to our concerns when we ask it; others, on what is more peripheral; and, at the outermost perimeters of the question, the borderlands of the concerns we express when we ask 'What is the meaning of life?' and thus the legitimacy of interpretations of it and the cogency of answers to it are not clearly marked. This is the second source of dissatisfaction with answers to the question of the meaning of life, persistent vagueness in the original question.

Whilst it undoubtedly complicates matters, in itself persistent vagueness is not unprecedented or even particularly troublesome. Persistent vagueness of a similar sort arises over many issues and, as with polyvalence, to be forewarned about it is usually sufficient to be adequately forearmed against it. Indeed seldom does it significantly impede progress even when one is not forewarned. Of course one may find oneself feeling dissatisfied with the somewhat vague results that are all that can – even in principle – be obtained in response to a vague question, but insofar as one realizes that this feature of the answer/answers is a function of persistent vagueness in one's original question, one will become satisfied with any dissatisfaction arising from this source; one will stop thinking, 'There must be more to it than that'. (This sort of satisfied dissatisfaction is analogous then to the comprehensible incomprehensibility that Kant claims is the best we can expect when investigating the relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal self.)

'So is *that* it?' one might now ask. 'If we disaggregated the various legitimate meanings of the question of the meaning of life, legitimate by reference to appearing, even if only on synergistic reflection, to speak to at least some aspect of our concerns when we raised the original question of life's meaning; if we appreciated the centrality of the concerns raised by these interpretations relative to our reflective understanding of our concerns when asking the original question (taking into account persistent vagueness); if we discovered in turn the answers to each of the questions into which the original was thus 'broken down' or discov-

ered why answers to these sub-questions were not available to us; if we did all that, would we *then* reach a completely satisfying (or 'satisfyingly dissatisfying', as we put it) answer to the question or rather then a list of answers to the list of questions – in any case, one which didn't leave us thinking, "There must be more to it than that"?'

<div align="center">III.</div>

Baggini approaches the question of the meaning of life in a similar fashion to that suggested heretofore and indicates that he would be favourably disposed to the thought that this would indeed be sufficient. He says this of his approach:–

> [It is] 'deflationary', in that it reduces the mythical, single and mysterious question of 'the meaning of life' to a series of smaller and utterly unmysterious questions about various meanings in life. In this way it shows the question of the meaning of life to be at the same time something less and something more than it is usually taken to be: less because it is not a grand mystery beyond the reach of most of us; and more because it is not one question but many.[1]

This is not the view of this paper. Whilst I concede that Baggini is right that the question of the meaning of life may be broken down into other questions, he is wrong in what he thinks flows from this. Many of these other questions are not in any significant way 'smaller' than the original question. Some at least are mysterious and seem destined to remain so for the foreseeable future. And there is sadly more work to be done than drawing up a chart with answers to all of them or blank spaces for the mysterious ones if we are to reach as satisfactory an answer to the question of the meaning of life as is possible. This is because polyvalence and persistent vagueness in the question are not the only sources of dissatisfaction with answers to 'it' and thus removing ambiguity and proffering various answers to the various questions into which 'it' is broken down to whatever degree of determinacy the persistent vagueness permits,

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[1] J. Baggini, *What's it All About? Philosophy and the Meaning of Life* (London: Granta, 2004), 3

or explaining in particular cases why such answers are unknowable to us, will not remove all such dissatisfaction. Having broken the question down into its component parts, we shall find ourselves with good reason to suppose that these parts need to be put back together again; with reason to think that they need to be put back together again in the right way; and with reason to think that judging the right way is not going to be an easy task. Let us skip ahead in our imagination to the end of the process of disambiguating the question and answering 'it' to locate the sources for dissatisfaction additional to the two on which we have focussed thus far.

Let us imagine then that we have in front of us a summary of our findings, laid out in the form of a chart. Down one side is a complete list of the different legitimate meanings that can be given to the question 'What is the meaning of life?' and, alongside each one, we have either a philosophically satisfying explanation of why we are not in a position to answer the question as so interpreted, one which explains why it must remain in this sense mysterious, or a philosophically satisfying argument for why a particular answer is the one we have best reason to believe is the correct answer to the question as so interpreted. Over at least some sections of this chart the issue of persistent vagueness will have made itself felt. It is difficult to know how this should be represented in our imagination. Nevertheless, let us imagine that the chart has been completed and now stands in front of us awaiting our inspection. What will we find as we look at it?

First, whilst in advance of actually having conducted the investigation that has led us to be able to draw up such a chart, we cannot be sure that each of the entries in it will not strike us as equally cogent to our undifferentiated concerns as expressed in our original question, 'What is the meaning of life?', we rightly suppose that they will not. As already mentioned, some of the interpretations of our question which we may, on reflection, have allowed through as legitimate we may have done so whilst nevertheless marking them down as less central to our concerns than others. We shall hence wish to 'rank' entries in the chart, at least roughly (persistent vagueness will prevent a completely determinate ordering). We might think of those higher up the chart as being the senses of the question which are determinately more central than those lower down.

Secondly, whilst in advance of actually conducting the investigation that has led us to such a chart we cannot of course be sure that these answers to the question will not be completely separate – causally, metaphysically, and conceptually – from one another, we rightly suspect that they will not be. And this issue generates more difficulties than the first. Even before conducting our investigation into the various meanings of 'the' question of the meaning of life, it is hard to believe that it is a mere accident of language that has resulted in all these meanings being carried by what is, on the surface, one question. And, if we were to conduct the investigation, we would see that this suspicion is well grounded.

As we unpacked these various meanings, we would notice various sorts of relationship between the different senses in which life (in its various senses) may or may not be meaningful. These relationships mean then that the original question cannot be broken down into other questions the answers to which are then left entirely loose and separate from one another, to be ordered in the chart merely by reference to their individual centrality to our original concerns when raising the question of life's meaning. As we looked down the chart, we would find relationships such as the following: an individual's life can only have meaning in sense p if it also has meaning in sense q; but it can only have meaning in sense q if humanity's life in general has meaning in senses q and r. And so on. These sorts of relationships then might, on reflection, lead us to wish to 'pull up' or indeed *de facto* 'push down' some things on such a chart. A new iteration of what we have called the 'synergistic' interaction between question and answer would need to be undertaken as a result of one finding oneself wanting to say things like, 'I would have said that meaning in sense p was not very central to my concerns, whereas meaning in sense q was really central, but now I realize that one's life having meaning in sense p is a necessary condition of its having meaning in sense q; I shall need to revisit that issue.' Indeed 'revisit' seems unlikely to be quite the right term; 'visit' seems likely to be more appropriate: there is likely to be even more persistent vagueness at this stage in the process of re-ordering the chart than there was at the first, as it is even less likely that one will have a clear prior idea of how important and thus immovable by synergistic interaction one regards the centrality or lack of centrality of the various meanings one now finds related to one another. (However, on the plus side, some of the vagueness that

was persistent at the earlier stage might be removed at this one. For one might find oneself saying something like, 'I would have said that meaning in sense *x* was only 'sort of' something I was asking about when I asked the question of life's meaning, but now I see that it is so closely related to meaning in sense *y*, which I'd always thought of as very central indeed, I see that it too really is a central part of my concerns; some of the indeterminacy I had thought of as persistent vagueness at an earlier stage in my investigation into life's meaning now disappears.') Whilst the extra level of vagueness in itself might leave one feeling dissatisfied anew with the results as they now found themselves re-ordered on the chart, again, as at the earlier level, reflection on the source of this (vagueness in one's original question) should lead one to feel satisfied with any such dissatisfaction so arising. However easily one reconciles oneself to this dissatisfaction, one would not be done with reasons for dissatisfaction even yet. Moving on then.

<div style="text-align:center">IV.</div>

Some of the relationships which investigation revealed would enable mutual support of differing kinds between differing sorts of meaningfulness or meaningfulness of the same sort when held by life at different levels of generality (a period or aspect of an individual's life, an individual's life as a whole, humanity's life, or biological life *per se*); these would draw together into clusters senses in which life in one or more of its senses could be meaningful. But some would not. Some would do the opposite; they would drive wedges between differing senses in which life in one or more of its senses could be meaningful. It is from this point – that some would do the opposite – that yet another spring of potential dissatisfaction bubbles up: as we redrew the chart, we would realize that there is no way for life in every sense of the term to be fully meaningful in every sense of the term and this is a qualitatively new source of dissatisfaction, in that it is dissatisfaction stemming from one's appreciation of a feature *of life*, not a feature of the question one is asking about it. To become satisfied with one's dissatisfaction with answers to the question of the meaning of life as they emerge from this source then would require a different move from any canvassed heretofore. Fortunately, such a move can be made.

But these are issues on which we need to spend a moment or two if we are ever to be satisfied with the dissatisfaction which stems from them.

In his lecture 'L'existentialisme est un humanism', Sartre hit upon a sense of meaningfulness in which, I suggest, life can only be fully meaningful in a Godless universe. Sartre overstates his case in that if there is a God, our positions mightn't yet be akin to that of paperknives (objects the function of which is entirely determined by factors exterior to them); they might be more akin to those of Executive Vice-Presidents than 'Junior Widget Affixers' and thus we still have at least some meaning in Sartre's sense of meaning – self-creative autonomy. But we cannot have *as much* meaning in Sartre's sense as we could have had were Atheism true. We won't be 'self-employed', as it were, free to style ourselves as President, Chairman of the Board, and anything else that might catch our fancy. At the most fundamental level – like it or not, *realize* it or not – we will be 'working' for someone else. This lack of ultimate self-creative autonomy is not something that theistic religions can fairly be accused of having hidden from us as an implication of their worldview. Following a law one believes to have been written by God on tablets of stone thousands of years before one's birth; following someone one believes to have been the perfection of that law, the incarnation of God; humbly submitting oneself to the commands of God as revealed to his last Prophet: none of these could strike one, even for a moment, as manners of living in which, as Sartre might have put it, one's existence is being supposed entirely to precede one's essence. Rather, each overtly supposes that a pattern has been laid down for us by another, God. This may not perhaps be a pattern for every detail of our lives. But it will be a pattern for at least significant areas of our lives, areas of our lives we may well find ourselves wishing we were more free over, indeed areas which, such religions are also unanimous in teaching, it is in our (at least post-lapsarian) *human nature* to wish ourselves more free over. For example, each of these religions has slightly different understandings of how marital relations are to be conducted. But these religions speak with one voice on the issue of adultery. It is impermissible; it has not been left up to us to construct for ourselves, should we so choose, an essence whereby we are adulterers, the religion only instructing us to 'live authentically' by whatever choice on this issue we may happen to make. This is, of course, not the case on Sartre's view. Should one so choose, one could go in for

some 'blue skies' thinking, indeed behaving, in this area as in all others; man being responsible only to himself for his life, he is free to create for himself the essence of an adulterer and live accordingly. Such freedom is denied to those who subscribe to one of the theistic religions and thus very natural human urges will, on occasion, lead such people to feel alienated from certain aspects of the way of life they believe themselves to be compelled to lead.

Let us leave Sartre for now and turn to consider a passage from Tolstoy's autobiographical 'Confessions', a passage where, in telling us of a searing moment of self-realization in his own life, he implicitly reveals a very different understanding of what would be required for life to be meaningful.

> I [had] lived for thirty or forty years: learning, developing, maturing in body and mind, and . . . having . . . reached the summit of life from which it all lay before me, I stood on that summit . . . seeing clearly that there is nothing in life, and that there has been and will be nothing. . . .Differently expressed, the question is . . . "Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?"[2]

It is futile to pretend that Tolstoy has not hit on a nerve with these observations. Yet futility has never been a bar to the pretensions of Philosophy. Flew tells us this:–

> Tolstoy was one of those inclined to hold, as if this were a necessary truth, that nothing can matter unless it goes on forever; or, at any rate, eventually leads to something else which does. But there really is nothing at all ineluctable, or even especially profound, about this particular value commitment.[3]

Flew is right that things can be meaningful in several perfectly legitimate senses (for example, fulfilling a purpose in some larger scheme of things) even if they do not last forever or do not lead to things which do (the larger scheme might not require such results), but Flew is wrong if he thinks, as he seems to think, that there is *no* sense of meaning at all

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[2] I have rather chopped up Tolstoy's text. The full version may be found in several translations free of charge online, by looking up 'L. Tolstoy, *A Confession*'.

[3] A. Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism* (London, Elek Books, 1976), 160-161

in which death – if it is the permanent cessation of existence – detracts from life's meaning. Consider this passage from Craig:-

> If each individual person passes out of existence when he dies, then what ultimate meaning can be given to his life? Does it really matter whether he ever existed at all? It might be said that his life was important because it influenced others or affected the course of history. But this only shows a relative significance to his life, not an ultimate significance. His life may be important relative to certain other events, but what is the ultimate significance of any of those events? If all the events are meaningless, then what can be the ultimate meaning of influencing any of them? Ultimately, it makes no difference.[4]

Craig nicely sidesteps Flew. Craig acknowledges that death as complete annihilation would not eliminate all meaning in the sense of bringing about significant consequence (Craig calls what would remain 'relative significance'), but points out that were *everything ultimately* to come to nothing, this would remove 'ultimate significance', would in that sense render all that had gone before it meaningless. Tolstoy, and – perhaps in a more nuanced way – Craig have then, I suggest, hit upon a sense in which individual humans' lives, if they are permanently terminated at death and their only effects are those which they have in this world, are meaningless. This is a sort of meaninglessness which can only be eliminated entirely if it is eliminated at the ultimate level. And it can only be eliminated at the ultimate level if a certain type of religious hypothesis is true. It could be eliminated there, for example, were there a God such as the one which Jews, Christians and Muslims worship, a God who preserves and magnifies into eternal life all that is most valuable in our lives as led this side of the grave.

So, if we live in a world where there is no God, then out individual lives are, at least potentially, more meaningful in the sense that Sartre discusses and not ultimately meaningful in the sense that Tolstoy and Craig have in sight. If we live in a world where there is a God, then our individual lives are ultimately meaningful in the sense that Tolstoy and Craig discuss and less meaningful in Sartre's sense. We may conclude then, *whatever our religious beliefs or lack of them*, that no single indi-

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[4] W. Craig, 'The Absurdity of Life Without God,' in e.g. E. Klemke (ed.), *The Meaning of Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 42.

vidual's life can, by dint of some of the relationships between different sorts of meaningfulness, be fully meaningful in *all* the senses which we may separate out from one another and reasonably care about. This inescapable feature of life may be unsatisfying to us, but in that – as we have now seen – it is a feature which not even an omnipotent being could remove, we should be satisfied with any dissatisfaction arising from it. Either God's there of metaphysical necessity or He's not there of metaphysical necessity. Thus, of logical necessity, our individual lives cannot be fully meaningful in every sense of the term.

<div style="text-align:center">V.</div>

A question now arises. If an individual's life may have more meaning in a particular sense, *x*, only at the expense of its having less meaning in another sense, *y*, is there – sometimes or always – a sense of meaningfulness, *z*, by which the other senses – *x* and *y* – may in principle be ranked and it be determined that, say, a life fully meaningful in manner *x* is, despite that, less 'deeply', as we may put it, meaningful than one only partially meaningful in manner *y*? For at least some values of *x* and *y*, we have reason to suppose that there *is* in fact such a deeper sense of meaningfulness; we have reason to believe that some lives, which are only partially meaningful in one sense, *are* more deeply meaningful than others, which in turn are fully meaningful in other, perfectly legitimate, but – our reflective intuitions tell us – shallower senses. We think that the charity worker who knowingly brings minimal but non-negligible good into the world before dying and being forgotten about leads a more deeply meaningful life than the infamous mass-murderer whose crimes are later made subject of much popular culture and give impetus to new legislation on gun-control, even though the killer's life had more meaning in some senses of meaning – significant causal consequence, for example – than the charity worker's life.

 Holding in mind this thought, let us return to consider the imaginary chart of the findings that we would reach at the end of an idealized investigation into 'the' question of life's meaning as conducted by the methodology suggested so far. It will be recalled that we are thinking

of the chart as having one column representing the various legitimate interpretations of 'the' question, the various questions into which the raw question 'What is the meaning of life?' may be broken down. And, beside this, another column, which contains, for each entry in the first, either an explanation of why the question as so interpreted is one we are not in a position to answer or an answer to the question as so interpreted. Up until now, we have thought of the chart as being roughly ordered by what, on some reflection, appears to us to be the centrality of these interpretations to our concerns when asking the original question of the meaning of life (roughly ordered, as there is some persistent vagueness in this ordering as a result of this sort of vagueness in our original question). Despite any vagueness, perhaps some people's charts would end up determinately ordered in different ways from others by this process. When we were considering merely the centrality of interpretations of the question to people's concerns, then, as in general each person is himself or herself the greatest authority on what concerns him or her, so we would appropriately have demurred from saying that at most one of these determinately different orderings was right. But, having moved on from centrality to our raw concerns to the issue of deepness, we now need to be more prescriptive; this is because the most central concern (or really overarching 'uber'-concern) that each of us seriously asking the question of the meaning of life has is plausibly the concern to discover the deepest sense of meaning, and, that being our most central or 'uber'-concern, to have our other concerns restructured if necessary in the light of this discovery.

We can see this most readily by imagining ourselves having discovered the deepest sense of meaning, and then looking back from this vantage point on the first steps of the journey that has led us to it. One might then say something like, 'I always thought that meaningfulness in sense x was really central to what I was asking about when I asked about the meaning of life, but as I am now able to see that it is quite a shallow sense of meaning – that sense y, for example is far deeper than x; I wish then to reverse my initial ordering.' One would *not* say, 'I realize now for the first time that one's life having meaning in sense x is its having meaning in a shallower sense of meaning than its having meaning in sense y, nevertheless it is really meaning in sense x that is what still interests

me most when I ask, "What is the meaning of life?"' So it is that by this stage in the process of investigation the ranking by reflective (but philosophically uninformed), centrality of an interpretation of the question to one's concerns when first asking the question will be displaced by the reflective (and philosophically informed) deepness of the interpretation and answer to the question, by what one now believes one has good reason to suppose *should* concern one in asking the question. Because there is, after all, an underlying and deeper sense of meaning, a sense which holds together at least some of the shallower senses of meaning which may be disambiguated, and because it is this sense which one would thus say is what one was really most centrally asking about all along when one asked the original question, 'What is the meaning of life?', centrality will be displaced by deepness as a principle of ranking in the final version of the chart of one's findings. But now a new problem arises. When it was just centrality to our reflective, but philosophically uninformed, concerns, we could in general merely defer to the reflective intuitions of competent language-users to resolve such issues insofar as persistent vagueness allowed them to be resolved. But now we are discussing deepness, we cannot do this; the answers to the various questions into which 'the' original question of life's meaning may be deflated are related in various ways and some of the ways in which they are related depend on various metaethical and metaphysical issues, so we cannot, until we have settled those issues, know quite how we should 're-inflate' the question of the meaning of life; certainly the reflective intuitions of competent language-users are not guide enough. The deepest question of the meaning of life is one the precise identity of which and one the answer to which waits on metaethics and metaphysics. That being so, pending the conclusion of substantive work in these areas, we have another reason to expect to continue to be dissatisfied with the answer(s) to the question(s) of the meaning of life; these answers will need to be left related to one another by links which are in some cases hypothetical (e.g. 'If Consequentialism is true, then y is a deeper sense of meaningfulness than x; if not, then….; 'If there's a God, then x is a deeper sense of meaningfulness than y; if not, then …'; and so on). Is this waiting on metaethics and metaphysics then the final reason for our dissatisfaction with answers to the question of life's meaning? It is not.

VI.

Let us suppose for a moment that all we have discussed hitherto has been accomplished; we see metaethics and metaphysics *sub specie aeternitatis* and re-order our findings accordingly; we – for example – decide to push up or pull down our list some senses of meaningfulness, ones which appeared to have a certain place in the list to us at an earlier stage but now, by virtue of a revealed tension, we believe can be seen to be determinately above or below their original position; we re-order now solely according to the principle of deepness, allowing our earlier judgements of centrality to be in some cases misguided, given that our primary purpose when asking the question of the meaning of life was to ask the question of the deepest meaning of life. As we return to look down the chart now, we may put an issue which now faces us as our noticing that meaningfulness in certain senses can only be 'bought' at the expense of meaningfulness in other senses and thus we may wish to think of 'trade offs' between differing types of meaningfulness. Some of these trades offs will have been determined in advance of any choices we may make; for example, the trade off between meaningfulness in Sartre's sense and meaningfulness in the Tolstoy/Craig sense will already have been fixed by whether or not there is a God (or something functionally equivalent in the relevant respects) and to what extent this God (or His equivalent), if He (it) exists, has fixed our essences, as Sartre would have put it, prior to our existences. But, unless the fact is that there's a God (or some such) who (which) has micro-managed us down to the level of paperknives (as no theists actually believe), other trade offs will be dependent on choices which we remain free to make.

Situations may arise then which raise in one's mind the practical question of how one would be best advised to trade off meaningfulness in one sense for meaningfulness in another if one were to wish to make one's life as deeply meaningful as possible overall. The chart we are now imagining ourselves in possession of will of course be ranked with the deeper senses of meaningfulness higher than the shallower ones, but it would be implausible to say that it was worth sacrificing any amount of a shallower sort of meaningfulness in order to achieve any increase in a deeper one, however slight. So, in addition to deepness, we shall wish to consider what we might call *overall* meaningfulness and consider how

best to construct this notion out of the materials to hand. One natural thought to have when considering how to represent this would be to wonder if it might be done mathematically, with some formula describing a function that appropriately weights the different sorts of meaningfulness, giving heavier weightings no doubt to the deeper sorts, and thus combines them into a quantity which we then do best (by the standards of making our lives as overall meaningful as possible) to maximize. But, on reflection, one will wish to resist this natural thought for the following reason.

Whilst, despite certain issues of incommensurability, some 'trade offs' between differing sorts of meaningfulness may indeed be understood more or less straightforwardly mathematically, some sorts of meaningfulness seem to require the eschewing of a strategy of maximization altogether. We may make this point more forcefully by utilizing some of the points that Williams has made in raising the 'integrity' objection to Utilitarianism.

Roughly, we may say that an individual's life has integrity in Williams's sense just if he or she is *un*willing constantly to subject his or her everyday commitments to a higher-order principle which instructs him or her to maximize something. A life led without integrity in this sense, would, it must be conceded, have an overriding and unifying worldview, and in that sense be very meaningful: an individual's life *is* sometimes said to have had great meaning just in virtue of its having had some dominant aesthetic, moral, ideological or religious goal, an overarching long-term project that – by acts of the will on the part of the individual concerned – selected and ordered the lower-order projects to which he or she committed himself or herself. So it is that we can speak of such individuals' lives as a whole as standing for something, exemplifying some unitary value. By way of examples: Gauguin's life stood for the aesthetic imperative; Lenin's for the communist revolution. Even if we look for our example to a Utilitarian on whom Williams's original point would be most pressing, we should concede that his or her life has more meaning through its unwavering commitment to Utilitarianism than the rather more 'morally-feckless' lives led by the rest of us. But two points may be made here. First, Williams would surely argue with plausibility that such a life would be one from which the person living it was inevitably alienated and would thus, at the same time as being meaningful in the

sense of having a unifying overarching project, fail to be meaningful to the person concerned in other senses. Secondly, this alienation would be all the more pressing an issue were there to be no ideology overarching one's life choices other than the determination to make these choices in the manner which led to one's life being maximally overall meaningful. There is a parallel to be drawn here with the Paradox of Hedonism; those who tried in each of their choices to maximize their lives' overall meaningfulness would end up leading less overall meaningful lives than at least some of those who directly aimed at something else. This being the case, it is at least possible (and I would contend plausible) that the notion of overall meaningfulness, even for one who has all epistemic barriers removed – seeing all relevant metaethics and metaphysics *sub specie aeternitatis* as we have put it – would not yield a determinate answer for at least some 'trade off' issues and this would be a source of dissatisfaction additional to those we have mentioned heretofore. But we have of course faced parallel issues of indeterminacy before in investigating the meaning of life, and we face similar issues every day, so again we should be satisfied with any dissatisfaction arising from this source (or at least no more dissatisfied with this than we are with everyday issues).

What is more troublesome is that there is another source of dissatisfaction with answers to the question of the meaning of life which stems from a genuinely regrettable feature of our condition, one which we have swept out of view for the last few sides so as to see other features more clearly: this side of the grave at least, we never *can* reach the position of viewing all the relevant aspects of reality *sub specie aeternitatis*.

One of the ways in which an individual's life can be more or less meaningless for him or her is the extent to which he or she is disabled by circumstances not of his or her own choosing from doing what seems to him or her reasonable given the beliefs that he or she has. Thus even if we suppose that there is in fact one correct ranking (even if it be partially indeterminate) of differing sorts of meaningfulness and we can discover it (as we cannot) and even if we suppose that two people (or the same person at two times) might agree on this ranking (as they may not), even then, between these two people (or one at two times), if they do not have access to the same facts about the world, there can arise tensions of this sort between different sorts of meaning and thus there be no way for life

considered as the lives of two or more individuals (or one at two or more times) to be fully meaningful.

By this stage, one is likely to be at least somewhat discouraged. Rather exhaustedly, one might ask, 'Is *that*, at last, it? If we disambiguated the question; if we got our metaethics, metaphysics, and all relevant facts straight (of course, this is impossible for creatures of our epistemic abilities – at least *ante-mortem* – and thus there will be problems of the sort generated by differing things making some lives meaningful in the sense of being subjectively reasonable for the persons living those lives from those which make it meaningful in the sense of being objectively reasonable); if we ranked our chart by reference to how, on philosophical investigation, deep these various senses of meaningfulness were revealed to us to be; if we looked at all the trade offs internal to issues of life's meaningfulness; and if we worked out, as determinately as the issues allowed, formulae with which to maximize meaningfulness for those internal trade offs where the notion of maximization was appropriate (whilst appreciating that maximization would not be the right notion to employ at the highest level, for 'integrity'-type reasons, when trying to achieve a life of what we may by then have called overall meaningfulness); if we appreciated the difficulties generated by combining individual lives (with their differing sorts of meaningfulness) into collectivities and across lifetimes; if we did all that, would we *then* at last find a completely satisfying answer to the question of the meaning of life?'

No. We would not be finished with reasons for dissatisfaction even then. But we would, finally, have found as satisfying an answer as the question of the meaning of life permitted, and thus the dissatisfaction which we would continue to feel would not now take as its proper object the answer which we had before us; it would refocus itself on the question.

<div align="center">VII.</div>

The final reason for dissatisfaction is that, once all the above work had been done (not that, as we have seen, it can be done – this side of the grave at least), we would realize that the question of the meaning of life is not as significant a question as we had hoped it to be. By the stage of

getting to this answer we would realize if we do not already realize that there are many things in life that we rightly value alongside and in some circumstances above its meaningfulness, even above its overall meaningfulness. We have already seen the issue of trade offs arising internal to considerations of meaningfulness (trading meaningfulness in one sense for meaningfulness in another), but this is a trade off of a qualitatively new kind. It may be better for us, not just if we trade off some meaningfulness in one sense in order to achieve greater meaningfulness in another, deeper, sense, for example, but if we do not lead all-things-considered the most overall meaningful lives that we can lead. A relatively overall meaningful life may well be worse for a person than a relatively overall meaningless one. (Plausibly Van Gogh's life was worse for him than that pictured by P. G. Wodehouse as being enjoyed by Bertie Wooster, but Van Gogh's life was more meaningful in every sense of the term than Wooster's.)

The question of the meaning of life is an important question, but it is not the only important question; it may be in some sense an ultimate question, but it is not the only ultimate question in the sense that the answer to it dictates the answers to all other questions of importance. The meaning of life is not to know the meaning of life and thus even someone who did know the meaning of life better than another might well end up leading a less meaningful life than that other. What is perhaps more surprising, but is also, I suggest, the case, is that a person who knew the meaning of life might end up rationally *choosing* to lead a less overall meaningful life than that other. This is because the truly wise try first and foremost not to lead meaningful lives, but to lead good ones. But to establish that and to talk about its attendant dissatisfactions would require another paper.[5]

THE PUZZLE OF PETITIONARY PRAYER

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Abstract. The fact that our asking God to do something can make a difference to what he does underwrites the point of petitionary prayer. Here, however, a puzzle arises: Either doing what we ask is the best God can do or it is not. If it is, then our asking won't make any difference to whether he does it. If it is not, then our asking won't make any difference to whether he does it. So, our asking won't make any difference to whether God does it. Our asking is therefore pointless. In this paper, we try to solve this puzzle without denying either that God must do the best he can or that petitioning God can make a difference to what he does.

> Father, we pray for your holy Catholic Church; *that we all may be one.*
> Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you; *that your Name may be glorified by all people.*
> We pray for all bishops, priests, and deacons; *that they may be faithful ministers of your Word and Sacraments.*
> We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world; *that there may be justice and peace on the earth.*
> Give us grace to do your will in all that we undertake; *that our works may find favor in your sight.*
> Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief or trouble; *that they may be delivered from their distress.*
> Give to the departed eternal rest; *let light perpetual shine upon them.*
> We praise you for your saints who have entered into joy; *may we also come to share in your heavenly kingdom.*
> Let us pray for our own needs and the needs of others.[1]

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[1] *The Book of Common Prayer*, The Prayers of the People, Form III

God, please take the tumor out of Michael's brain and make him all better.[2]

AAAHHHHHHH!!! @#$%!!! Help![3]

Sometimes when we pray we ask God to do something. Your friend has just been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor; the prognosis is bleak, so you ask God to heal him. You're alone in the backcountry, just north of Chikamin Ridge at Park Lake in the Central Cascades; it's 3:20am, and the bear you ran off twenty minutes ago is back in your camp, grunting and tearing at the ground. You clutch your knife, scream, and bang your pot; the bear charges. You implore God to intervene. It is reasonable for you to *want* God's help on such occasions; matters are desperate and you can't do anything about them. God can help you, of course; indeed, he wants to help you.

But why bother to *request* his help? It won't give him any information he doesn't already have; nor will it prod him to do what he knows he should do. He's perfectly aware of the gravity of the situation and, unlike most of us, he doesn't need prodding. Moreover, God will do the best he can do. Thus, if healing your friend and stopping the bear are the best he can do, he will do them whether you ask or not; and if they are not the best he can do, he will not do them whether you ask or not. So whether you ask or not won't make any difference to what he does.

This conclusion flies in the face of what most practicing theists assume. They assume that sometimes asking God to do something will make a difference to what he does and they are encouraged in this assumption by the example and admonition of religious authorities.[4] If it is false however, the practice of petitionary prayer appears pointless. After all, what's the point of petitioning God if it doesn't make any difference to what he does?

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[2] Peter Howard-Snyder, evening prayer, May 12, 2005.

[3] Dan Howard-Snyder, prayer at Park Lake, 3:20am, August 13, 2006.

[4] In the Christian tradition such notable commendations include: "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:2), "Ask, and it will be given to you: seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7), and "Pray for each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Cf. Colossians 4:3, 2 Corinthians 1:11, John 17:20-21.

I. THE ARGUMENT

We can generalize this puzzle, the puzzle of petitionary prayer, and express it in the form of an argument as follows:

The Argument
1. Either doing something is the best God can do or it is not.
2. If it is the best God can do, then your asking won't make any difference to whether he does it.
3. If it is not the best God can do, then your asking won't make any difference to whether he does it.
4. So, your asking won't make any difference to whether God does it.[5]

What should we make of The Argument?

Some people suggest that even if petitioning God won't make any difference to whether God does it, it still has a purpose since it can make a difference in *us*. Petitioning God can increase our awareness of our own needs and the needs of others and thus increase the likelihood of our acting to meet those needs; it can help us to reorient our focus, from evil to good, from despair to hope; it can prepare us to receive God's gifts with gratitude and it can promote recognition of their source.[6] As novelist George Meredith put it: "Who rises from prayer a better man, his prayer is answered".[7]

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[5] Two notes in one. (i) The Argument resembles one that appears in Stump 1979, 83-84; Basinger 1995, 475; Murray and Meyers 1994, 311-12; Basinger 2003, 257. (ii) The premises are true only if they are necessarily true. Hence, the conclusion is more aptly put "So, your asking *cannot* make a difference to what God does".

[6] John Calvin writes: "Prayer is not so much for his sake as for ours. . .it is very much for our interest to be constantly supplicating him: first, that our heart may be always inflamed with a serious and ardent desire of seeking, loving and serving him, . . . secondly, that no desire, no longing whatever, of which we are ashamed to make him the witness, may enter our minds . . . and lastly, that we may be prepared to receive all his benefits with true gratitude and thanksgiving, while our prayers remind us that they proceed from his hand." (1536; 1979, 147). See also Murray and Meyers 1994; Murray 2003a; Murray 2003b.

[7] Quoted in Flint 1998, 21.

We agree that petitioning God can make a difference in us. However, as we noted above, most practicing theists assume there is more to it than that and so it would be more charitable to solve the puzzle without denying their assumption. Moreover, even if petitioning God can make a difference in us, we cannot petition him while thinking that our words won't make any difference to whether he does what we ask. That's because, in general, our words do not constitute the speech act of petitioning if we think that our words won't make any difference to whether the petitioned does what we ask.[8] Therefore, no matter what words we use, *and even if they would typically be used to perform a speech act of petitioning*, they do not constitute an act of petitioning God if we think that they won't make any difference to what God does. It behooves us, therefore, not to accept the conclusion of The Argument if we wish to engage in the practice of petitionary prayer.

But how can we? Well, we might note that The Argument presupposes that God must do the best he can do. Some people suggest that this presupposition is false. Although we are not averse to this suggestion,[9] we will grant for the sake of argument that it is true.

In what follows, we aim to bring a crucial assumption of The Argument to light (section II). We will then briefly consider one basis for rejecting it (section III) and develop in more detail and defend a second basis for rejecting it (sections IV-VII).

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[8] One piece of evidence in favor of this is the standard conjunction test. Consider cases in which a speaker uses a sentence that would normally be used in a specified context to make a petition and conjoin it with the denial of the condition in question; if the conjunction leaves us in doubt about whether she made a petition with that sentence, then we have evidence to regard the condition as partially constitutive of the act of petitioning. Thus, for example, if you were to say to a family member, "I realize that what I'm about to say won't make any difference at all to what you do, but would you please pass the salt?," your words would not count as a petition but rather as an insult or a joke, or at best a mere expression of desire. Similarly, if a wife prayed to God, "I ask that you heal my husband, although I realize that what I say won't make a bit of difference to what you do," her words would not constitute a petition either.

[9] Howard-Snyder 1994.

II. BRINGING THE CRUCIAL ASSUMPTION TO LIGHT

Consider the following general point: *our bringing about a state of affairs in response to a petition can be better than the alternatives.*

This is a common feature of human life. For example, Michael Murray points out that there are times when our doing things for our children because they ask is better than not doing them at all or doing them absent a request.[10] Suppose a mother considers buying a book about spiders for her son, Peter, knowing that he would enjoy it. Suppose it is better that she buy one rather than not. Then she recalls that she has bought him many books in the past and considers whether her buying a book in response to his asking might be better than her buying a book unasked. If she brings Peter to the store and he finds a book for himself and asks for it, he will have more control over whether and what he reads—she won't simply be raining down books from on high. Moreover, he might feel more grateful if she buys a book because he asked. Similarly, if she waits for Peter's twin, William, to ask her to play a game of chess, he will have taken some initiative with respect to their growing relationship as well as his own development as a chess player—taking initiative has some value in addition to the value of simply playing the game together.

Here's another general point to consider: *our asking others to do something can change the moral status of their doing it, all by itself, independently of any other reason we have to do it.*

This too seems to be a common feature of human life. Suppose you have just as much reason to do something for another person as not. Then, if you don't do it, you won't be acting wrongly. But now suppose he asks you to do it. In that case, the moral terrain changes: you now have *more* reason to do it, in which case if you don't do it, you'll be acting wrongly. To illustrate the point, suppose you're working on a paper in your study. You look outside the window and notice your neighbor at the curb with a suitcase, peering down the street, anxiously glancing at his watch. It's obvious that he's expecting a ride and it's late. You consider whether you ought to offer a lift but decide that, in the circumstances, given your deadlines, schedule, and the like, you have just as much moral

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[10] Murray and Meyers 1994, 316.

reason to continue working as to give him a lift. You conclude that if you don't give him a ride, you won't be acting wrongly and so you continue working. Suppose you're right. Two minutes later, you hear the doorbell and answer it. Your distraught neighbor tells you that his ride is late; he asks you for a lift. Although you have learned nothing new—it was obvious that his ride was late and that he was distraught—his request nevertheless changes the moral terrain. It provides a reason for you to give him a ride, a reason that you didn't have before. In its absence you had just as much reason to continue working as to give him a lift but you now have more reason; therefore you act wrongly if you do not.

Both of these general points seem to apply, at least in principle, to divine-human relations; if they in fact do, then premises (2) and (3) are both false. Here's why.

Consider the first point. Suppose that God's bringing about a state of affairs in response to a petition can be better than the alternatives. Then it might be that, on some particular occasion, the act of bringing about a certain state of affairs is such that, if you do not ask him to do it, he will not do it, but if you ask him, he will since, if you ask him, doing it is the best he can do, but if you don't it isn't. In that case, doing something might be the best God can do *given that you ask him to do it*, and so your asking him would make a difference to whether he does it. Likewise, doing something might not be the best God can do *given that you do not ask him to do it*, but, if you asked him, it would be the best he could do and so asking him would make a difference.

Now consider the second general point. Suppose that asking God to do something can change the moral status of his doing it, all by itself, independently of any other reason he has to do it. Then it might be that, on some particular occasion, the act of bringing about a certain state of affairs is such that, if you do not ask, then God has as good a reason to do it as not, in which case he is permitted not to do it; but, if you ask, then he has more reason to do it than not, in which case he ought to do it and doing it is the best he can do. Therefore, doing something might be the best he can do, *given that you ask him to do it*, but not otherwise, in which case your asking would make a difference to whether he does it. Likewise, doing something might not be the best God can do *given that you do not ask him to do it*, but, if you were to ask, your request would

give him a reason he otherwise wouldn't have and so asking him would make a difference.[11]

The upshot is that if God's bringing about a state of affairs in response to a petition can be better than the alternatives or if asking God to do something can change the moral status of his doing it, all by itself and independently of any other reason he has to do it, then premises (2) and (3) of The Argument are both false. So premises (2) and (3) are both true only if a *Crucial Assumption* (CA) is true:

> CA. God's bringing about a state of affairs in response to a petition *cannot* be better than the alternatives, and asking God to do something *cannot* change the moral status of his doing it, all by itself, independently of any other reason he has to do it.

What should we make of CA?

III. HOW ASKING GOD TO DO SOMETHING CAN CHANGE THE MORAL STATUS OF HIS DOING IT

Geoffrey Cupit's account of how requests generate moral reasons suggests that, contrary to CA, asking God to do something *can* change the moral status of his doing it, all by itself, independently of any other reason he has to do it. Cupit argues that just as making a promise generates a moral reason to do what was promised, a reason above and beyond other reasons to do it, so do requests, the difference being that promises in and of themselves give the promiser a moral reason to do what was promised whereas requests in and of themselves give the requestee a moral reason to do what was requested. But how, exactly, do requests do that?

Cupit begins with the observation that people often already know what we need and our request simply draws their attention to it. On oth-

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[11] Alternatively with respect to the second general point: suppose God has *nearly* enough reason to do something as not. In that case, he will not do it since he has more reason not to do it than to do it. But if asking him to do it gives him a reason to do it independent of any reason he already has, and if that reason is *weighty enough*, it might tip the balance of reasons in favor of doing it over not doing it, in which case God ought to do it and it is the best he can do.

er occasions, people don't know what we need and our request provides needed information. "But," he says,

> it is not necessary for attention to be drawn, or information given, *by the making of a request*. It is enough to achieve this end simply to state that the wish exists. If we were to believe that requests do no more than refer to existing reasons we should be unable to see the point of a request, as against the mere expression of a wish.[12]

Since requests are not merely expressions of a wish, Cupit concludes that

> requests are attempts to affect the actions of others, and the attempt is made by providing a reason to act which the requestee would not otherwise have. Requests, by their nature, must be supposed to generate reasons for action.[13]

So, says Cupit, our requests give others an independent reason to act, a reason above and beyond any other reason they might have, since our words could not constitute the speech act of requesting as opposed, say, to the speech act of merely expressing desire, unless they provided such an independent reason.

But even if requests give independent reasons to act, what makes them *moral* reasons, reasons that generate defeasible obligations to do what was requested?

The mechanism Cupit suggests is basically this. When someone makes a request, she treats the requestee as caring or regardful; indeed, by making the request she expresses her trust that he will treat it as a reason to act. However, she runs the risk of being degraded, of being "made a fool of" for trusting him to be the sort of person who would treat her request as a reason to act when in fact he is not. She makes herself vulnerable to him; she puts herself at the mercy of his goodwill. Now: in general, we have a defeasible obligation not to degrade another human being, especially when she is vulnerable to us. Thus, upon hearing a request, the requestee has a defeasible obligation to regard the request, all by itself, as a reason to act.

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

Naturally enough, there are objections to Cupit's account. Since our focus lies elsewhere, we will leave an assessment of it for another occasion.[14]

IV. HOW GOD'S BRINGING ABOUT A STATE OF AFFAIRS IN RESPONSE TO A PETITION CAN BE BETTER THAN THE ALTERNATIVES

Consider what we might call *the institution* of petitionary prayer, things being set up by God in such a way that, on occasion, he will bring about a good state of affairs if and only if we ask him to. Suppose he decrees this institution. Then, on occasion, God will do something only if we ask. Of course, God could *make* us ask; alternatively, he might leave it up to us. Suppose the institution he decrees involves his leaving it up to us. Then, as a matter of logical necessity, God must on occasion leave it up to us to ask him to do something instead of doing it unasked. Now: God cannot do that unless he leaves it up to particular individuals to ask on particular occasions. He might not have any particular individuals or occasions in mind in his decree but, whether or not he does, particular individuals on particular occasions must ask; otherwise, God won't act. Consider such an occasion, one that involves, say, you. Then, on that occasion, God's bringing about a good state of affairs in response to your petition can be *better* than the alternatives precisely because bringing it about in response to your petition serves to help realize the institution of petitionary prayer.

But why suppose that the institution of petitionary prayer is valuable enough for God to decree it? The answer we favor is this: because, in general, it is a good thing for us to be responsible for our own welfare and the welfare of others and, as Richard Swinburne observes, the institution of petitionary prayer helps to serve that purpose.[15] In the same

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[14] For some of those objections and an attempt to restrict Cupit's account to requests within the boundaries of personal relationships, see Gellman 1997.

[15] Swinburne 1998, 115. Of course, petitions are no substitute for our feeding the hungry, clothing the destitute, visiting the sick, living simply so we can send half our income to World Vision, and the like, if we can. Petitioning God needn't be passing the buck.

vein, Isaac Choi says that the institution of petitionary prayer "gives us a practical opportunity to love others, especially in those situations when there is not much else we can do to readily help them".[16] In short: if God sets things up so that he brings about some good states of affairs if and only if it's up to us to ask and we ask, we exercise responsibility for our own welfare and that of others and the reach of our love is extended. That's what makes the institution of petitionary prayer valuable.[17]

Or so Swinburne and Choi say, and we concur. As might be expected, there are objections to consider. In what follows, we assess three of them.

V. DAVISON'S OBJECTION TO SWINBURNE'S SUGGESTION

Scott Davison objects to Swinburne's claim that the institution of petitionary prayer is a way for us to exercise responsibility. "[I]t is impossible," he says, "to reasonably believe that one's petitions are ever granted," direct revelation aside. In that case, he continues,

> it seems unlikely that one is responsible (in any substantial sense) for the results of God's granting them. This is because, in general, one's degree of responsibility for the obtaining of some state of affairs depends upon the degree to which one could foresee its obtaining given one's actions, the degree to which one intended that it obtain as a result of one's actions, and the degree to which one's actions contributed causally to its obtaining. So cases in which one person petitions another person to act freely in specific ways over time, especially when one does not know the outcome of such petitions, are cases in which one's responsibility for the obtaining of the state of affairs in question is dramatically diminished.[18]

At the most general level, Davison's argument is clear. Suppose one has no direct revelation that one's petition was granted by God. Then, even if the institution of petitionary prayer is in place,

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[16] Choi unpublished, 12.

[17] In what follows, we will drop the "it's up to us to ask" clause for the sake of simplicity and only use the "we ask" clause, but it should be understood that both clauses are in place.

[18] 2009, 296, lightly edited.

1. It is impossible for one to reasonably believe that one's petition was granted by God.
2. If it is impossible for one to reasonably believe that one's petition was granted by God, then one is not responsible (in any substantial sense) for the results of God's granting it.
3. So, one is not responsible (in any substantial sense) for the results of God's granting one's petition. (1,2)

What should we make of this argument? We make three points in response.

5.1. So what?

Suppose the conclusion is true. Responsibility comes in degrees, and one is, let's say, only *somewhat* or *minimally* responsible for the results of God's granting one's petition. That seems sensible, you might think. You ask God to heal your friend of her cancer. *You* sure don't have the power to do it on your own; you have no power over the laws of nature, the elementary particles, the genetics of cancer cells, and so on; indeed, you don't even have the power to maintain your own existence moment-to-moment. But God does. And you didn't set up the institution of petitionary prayer either. But God did. No surprise, then, that your responsibility for her being healed seems minimal. Suppose it is.

But how does any of this imply that the institution of petitionary prayer does not extend human responsibility? We don't see how. After all, even if you are only somewhat responsible for your friend's being healed, your free petition was necessary and sufficient for it given that the institution was in place. That's responsibility enough.[19] The truth is, however, that we see no reason to grant Davison's conclusion in the first place.

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[19] Perhaps Davison will reply: "If God really wants to extend responsibility for the world, there must be a better way." Indeed: that's exactly what he does say (2009, 302-303, note 26). But again: suppose he's right. For the sake of simplicity, suppose there are exactly two ways to extend human responsibility: the institution of petitionary prayer and the other, better way. So what? It certainly doesn't follow that God won't extend it through the institution of petitionary prayer. After all, extending it through both is an option. Indeed, it might even be that the better way includes the institution of petitionary prayer.

5.2. Is it impossible to reasonably believe that one's petition was granted by God?

Let's begin with premise (1) of the argument, the claim that it is impossible for one to reasonably believe that one's petition was granted by God, absent direct revelation. (Let's interpret the modality here charitably and let's not fuss about what theory of reasonable belief is in question.) Why suppose it's true? Davison writes:

> Given the complexity involved in saying that God does something because we ask, it seems impossible, apart from direct revelation, for any of us ever to reasonably believe that any particular petition has ever been granted because we asked. In order to see that this is so, suppose that every event is produced by God in some sense, as traditional theists have typically insisted. Even if this is the case, apart from direct revelation, there is no way to have enough access to God's reasons for bringing things about to be able to distinguish events brought about because we asked and events God brought about for other reasons after we happened to ask. Since we can't distinguish these things, the only reasonable thing for us to do is withhold judgment on the matter.[20]

What should we make of this line of thought?

On this score, the authors of the present paper disagree. So we offer both points of view, each in the first-person singular.

Author #1. A degree of intellectual humility is appropriate when it comes to believing God has granted a particular petition. In my experience, devout believers are far too quick to assume that some fortunate occurrence—a healing, an empty parking space, a chess trophy—was the result of God's granting their petition. At the same time, it seems a little extreme to say that one can never reasonably believe that God has granted one's request. Just as we sometimes reasonably believe that, on certain occasions, other people do things because we asked—despite the immense difficulty in saying *how* that can be—why can't we sometimes reasonably believe that, on certain occasions, God does something because we asked?

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[20] Davison 2009, 293, lightly edited. As for the "complexity" of which Davison initially speaks (perhaps he meant "difficulty"), we take it that he means to say that it remains perplexing how anyone, human or divine, can do things for reasons, especially when those things are done freely (as conceived by libertarians).

Let's get a real-life example before us. Misty visits the doctor for her severe, chronic back pain. After some tests, he informs her on the third visit that there's nothing to be done about it; her pain will almost certainly stay with her the rest of her life. He gives her a prescription for painkillers. She drives to the pharmacy. As she exits her car, the pain suddenly vanishes. Amazed, she walks around a bit in the parking lot. Uncertain whether to trust this change, she picks up her prescription, shops, and returns to her car. She calls her husband, Cavin, on her cell phone to tell him what happened. "What time did the pain go away?," he asks. She replies: "11:05. I had just finished listening to the NPR news headlines." "That was exactly the time our prayer group was praying for healing for you," he says.

In this situation, Misty and Cavin reasonably believe that God healed Misty because Cavin's group asked. Or so I say. Of course, they aren't absolutely certain but that's not necessary for reasonable belief. Whether their belief is reasonable depends on their background beliefs. Those who deny or who are in doubt about whether God has set the institution of petitionary prayer in place do not reasonably believe that God healed Misty because Cavin's group asked. But those who, like Misty and Cavin, believe that God has set it in place may well do so.

The situation is analogous to our beliefs about people granting particular requests. If you write to a philosopher and ask for a copy of her paper, and two weeks later you receive it (without an accompanying letter), you reasonably believe that she sent it to you because you asked. You reasonably believe this because of your background belief that people sometimes do things because they are asked. But if Misty and Cavin have the analogous background belief that God sometimes does things because he is asked, then they too can reasonably believe that God healed Misty because Cavin's group asked.[21]

Of course, coincidences happen. You write to the philosopher and ask for the paper but she never gets your letter; it occurs to a friend of hers, however, that you might be interested in it and so he suggests that she drop a copy in the mail to you. She does. It arrives two weeks after you posted your letter. But to insist that your belief that she sent the paper because you asked is reasonable *only if* you rule out coincidences like this

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[21] Cp. Murray 2003b, 263-64.

implies absurdly high conditions on reasonable belief about people do-
ing things because we asked. Likewise, even though we can't rule out the
possibility that Misty's pain disappeared at 11:05 for some purely natural
reason, it does not follow that Misty's and Cavin's belief that God healed
Misty because Cavin's group asked is not reasonable.[22]

So let's set aside purely natural coincidence and focus on alternative
explanations for the disappearance of Misty's pain at 11:05. Indeed, let's
suppose, as Davison does, that God healed Misty at 11:05. Even so, says
Davison, we should be in doubt about whether he did so because Cavin's
group asked. But why suppose Davison's right? Consider the three most
salient options:

(a) God healed Misty at 11:05 because Cavin's group asked then.
(b) God healed Misty at 11:05 because God had an independent rea-
     son to heal her then.
(c) God had an independent reason to heal Misty at some time or
     other and he randomly selected one.

If I understand Davison correctly, he would claim that (b) or (c) explains
the disappearance of Misty's pain at 11:05 at least as well as (a), and hence
that even if we believe God healed Misty at 11:05 we should be in doubt
about whether it was because Cavin's group asked. However, neither (b)
nor (c) explain why God healed Misty at 11:05 as well as (a). On (a), it's
very likely and understandable that the healing occurred at 11:05. On
(c), it isn't likely at all. On (b), it's likely that the healing occurred at 11:05
but it cries out for more details. What could God's reason be for acting
then if not the request of Cavin's group? Of course, we aren't in a posi-
tion to rule out such a reason. But what should we conclude from that? If
a window breaks upon being struck by a baseball, we are in no position
to rule out some alternative cause of its breaking at that time, e.g. a hid-
den weakness in the molecular structure that just happens to give way
then, but we reasonably blame the boy with the glove. Likewise, even
though Misty and Cavin are in no position to rule out God's having an
independent reason to heal Misty at 11:05, they reasonably believe he did
so because Cavin's group asked.

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[22] The professor case is from Murray and Meyers 1994, 321-22.

Author #2. I agree that a degree of intellectual humility is appropriate when it comes to believing that God has granted a particular petition, and I even agree that it is seems extreme to say that we can never reasonably believe that God has granted our request. Nevertheless, that is the position that the *appropriate* degree of intellectual humility leads to, absent direct revelation. Misty's case is a case in point. Four observations are relevant.

First, the degree of reasonableness of Misty's and Cavin's belief that God healed Misty because Cavin's group asked can be no greater than the degree of reasonableness enjoyed by their background beliefs, notably their belief that God exists and that he's in the business of granting petitions. To be sure, they have a high degree of confidence about these matters, but that doesn't add up to reasonable belief; moreover, if you examine the basis of their belief, I think you'll see that the degree of reasonability is at best quite low.

But let's put all that aside. Let's suppose that God exists, that he set the institution of petitionary prayer in place, and that their belief in these things is maximally reasonable. The issue, then, is whether there is enough evidence to think that Misty's case is one of those times when God does something because we asked—specifically whether there is enough evidence to think God healed Misty at 11:05 because Cavin's group asked then.

Second, we can't marginalize purely natural causes. They must be kept on the table. Like other ailments, chronic back pain sometimes disappears due to indiscernible natural causes. Nerves get unpinched, tight muscles suddenly relax, and so on. The role of stress and its relief with respect to chronic pain is generally poorly understood. A purely natural cause isn't nearly as unexpected as the coincidence you describe involving the professor sending the paper without receiving the request.

Third, we can imagine independent reasons *ad nauseum* for God to heal Misty at 11:05, reasons that for all we can tell God acted on apart from the request by Cavin's group. For example:

Independent reason #1. God healed Misty *at 11:05* because (a) 11:05 was after her 10:15 doctor's appointment and God wanted Misty's doctor to practice giving bad news to patients (something he's been trying to get better at) and God wanted Misty to virtuously respond to receiving it, and (b) during the

drive to the pharmacy Misty wrestled with her prognosis—she even pulled over on the shoulder to weep, in rage and sorrow—but, as she got out of the car at the pharmacy, she finally internally displayed the sort of trust, courage, and hope that God wanted from her. That's why he healed her. The time was 11:05.

There are many such stories involving independent reasons and we are in no position to rule them out. They are *all* on the table competing with the hypothesis that God healed Misty at 11:05 because Cavin's group asked.

Fourth, for twelve months, Cavin's group has met every week and each time they prayed for Misty. There are two points related to this fact.

(i) Approximately one out of every 168 hours of each week, Cavin's group asked God to heal Misty. If God had an independent reason to heal her during some one hour stretch or other, there's a 1/168 chance that he would do it during an hour in which the group was praying. So it's not nearly as statistically unlikely that God would heal her for an independent reason at a time when the group was praying, not nearly as unlikely as you suggest with the baseball analogy. The fact that the molecular structure of the window just happened to give way when the ball struck is massively unlikely, much, much more unlikely than Cavin's group praying when God acted on independent reason to heal Misty at 11:05, if he did. (I assume that your case would not be undermined if Cavin's group had prayed for Misty at 10:05. Surely God can do something because we asked even if it's an hour after we made the request.)

(ii) You say that God's having an independent reason to heal Misty at 11:05 "cries out for more details. What could God's reason be for acting then if not the request of Cavin's group?" I'm not sure what your point is here. We can cook up detailed independent reasons willy-nilly. However, contrary to what you suggest, God's healing Misty at 11:05 because that's when Cavin's group asked does "cry out for more details". Why did God do it *then* and not one of the fifty-one other times that Cavin's group prayed over the past year? And why did he do it *then* rather than one of the 364 times Misty asked in her daily prayers over the past year? And so on. You say it's understandable that God healed her at 11:05 given that God did so because Cavin's group asked then. Perhaps so, but without answers to these questions, it's not so clear that it is *more* understandable than any of the detailed independent reasons we can think of.

Without trying to connect the dots between these points, I submit that if we appreciate them properly, we will be in doubt about whether, on this particular occasion, God healed Misty at 11:05 because Cavin's group asked then. Whether some other case would illustrate how it might be reasonable to believe that God did something because we asked remains an open question. All we can do is proceed case by case.

(Here ends the authors' disagreement.)

5.3 Is inability to foresee sufficient for insubstantial responsibility?

We now turn to premise (2) of Davison's argument, the claim that *if* it is impossible for one to reasonably believe that one's petition was granted by God, then one is not substantially responsible for the results of God's granting it. Why suppose it's true? Because, says Davison, in general, one's degree of responsibility for the obtaining of some state of affairs depends upon the degree to which several conditions are satisfied, and if it is impossible for one to reasonably believe that one's petition was granted by God, then those conditions can only be satisfied to a degree which, at best, implies minimal responsibility for its obtaining. What are those conditions? There are three, says Davison:

(i) one could foresee the state of affairs obtaining given one's actions,
(ii) one intended that it obtain as a result of one's actions, and
(iii) one's actions contributed causally to its obtaining.

What should we make of this line of thought?

We grant, for the sake of argument, that it's impossible for one to reasonably believe that one's petition was granted by God. But we don't think that it follows that one is not substantially responsible for the obtaining of the state of affairs one prayed for.

Recall that we are supposing, for the sake of illustration, that the institution of petitionary prayer is in place and, thus, that your friend will be healed if and only if you ask. Now suppose you ask; as a result, God heals her and so she's healed. Consider condition (iii): to what degree has your action contributed causally to her being healed? It's difficult to know how to answer this question, but it seems that whatever degree it is, it won't be significantly less than the degree to which you contribute

causally in bringing about various mundane states of affairs. This is not surprising; after all, your freely asking is necessary and sufficient for her being healed, given that the institution of petitionary prayer is in place. To be sure, you didn't set the institution in place, but then we didn't set in place the standing conditions that allow us to contribute causally to the way the world is. Indeed, it seems we had no greater influence on those conditions than the institution in question, in which case it seems that the degree to which your asking contributes causally to your friend's being healed is no less than the degree to which a particular act of yours contributes causally to, say, the tennis ball's landing a winner or the sockeye and zucchini being grilled to perfection.

As for condition (ii), suppose you fully intend for your friend to be healed as a result of your asking. In that case, two of Davison's three conditions appear to be satisfied to a degree that would render your responsibility for your friend's healing fairly substantial, a degree that is at least nearly as great as that which would render your responsibility for bringing about various mundane states of affairs fairly substantial.

So Davison must be placing a lot of weight on condition (i).[23] That is, it appears that Davison thinks that if one cannot foresee that a state of affairs will obtain given one's actions, then one's degree of responsibility is insubstantial. Inability to foresee is sufficient for insubstantial responsibility. Let's look into the matter a bit more closely.

Suppose you rightly think that the institution of petitionary prayer is in place; furthermore, you can't foresee your friend being healed given your petition. Your faith is a faith without sight. As it turns out, unbeknownst to you, this is one of those occasions where God will bring about a good state of affairs if and only if you ask. In that case, either you ask and she's healed, or you don't and she's not. You ask. As a result, she's healed. Of course, you can't tell whether God healed her because you asked or for some other reason, or whether the chemo happened to work or what. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact and unbeknownst to you, in the circumstances, your asking was necessary and sufficient for her healing. If we understand Davison correctly, he thinks that, in this case, you are

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[23] Of course, there is the nasty question of how to weight these conditions, a question we expect will not admit of a well-known principled answer. But let that pass.

not substantially responsible for your friend's being healed. Why? Because you can't foresee your friend being healed given your request.

This doesn't seem right to us.

Consider another case. Suppose a nuclear facility is about to malfunction due to a leak; a town will be destroyed if it does. An engineer volunteers to seal the leak. Unfortunately, the only procedure for placing the seal has a notoriously unreliable track-record. He knows this and so he can't foresee that his placing the seal will result in the townspeople being saved. However, he fully intends for his action to have that result. Now, unbeknownst to him and as a matter of fact, if a seal is placed on that particular leak, the facility will not malfunction and the townspeople will be saved. Therefore, unbeknownst to him but as a matter of fact, in the circumstances, placing a seal is necessary and sufficient for the townspeople being saved. He freely places the seal; the town is saved. He is responsible for that result—in a substantial sense, not in a minimal, some-what-ish sense. Therefore, even if one cannot foresee that a state of affairs will obtain given one's actions, one's degree of responsibility for its obtaining might nevertheless be substantial.

Davison might object. For while the engineer risks his life in sealing the leak, those who pray do no such thing. Consequently, even if those who practice petitionary prayer can be responsible for the outcome, they are at best minimally responsible. It costs very little to merely ask for a favor.

In response, note that most theistic traditions hold that not all petitions are equally efficacious. The more sincere, the more ardent, the more detailed, the more persistent petitions are more likely to be granted, other things being equal. And God is more likely to grant the petitions of the faithful or virtuous than those of the unfaithful or vicious. Merely saying "Please heal my neighbor" may move God less if the petitioner does not wholeheartedly want the request to be granted or if she lacks faith that God will grant the request or if she lacks standing with God. Getting into the right frame of mind and getting into good standing with God may well be costly. In that case, our degree of responsibility for the good that comes about through God's granting our petitions might be quite substantial.

We conclude that Davison's objection does not give us good reason to reject Swinburne's suggestion.

VI. DAVISON'S OBJECTION TO CHOI'S SUGGESTION

Davison also rejects Choi's claim that if God decrees the institution of petitionary prayer in place, our prayers amount to acts of love, and the institution can be thought of as extending the reach of our love, especially to those who are distant from us. According to Choi, this is one way in which God allows us to make a difference in the world for the good. Davison has three worries about Choi's suggestion but the third worry, he says, is the most fundamental.[24] Here it is:

> Since God can freely decide not to answer any particular prayer, . . .it is not clear that we can describe answered prayers as acts of love performed by the petitioners. The offering of a petition might be an act of love performed by the petitioner, but the answering of the prayer would be an act of love performed by God, not by the petitioner. (If the offering of the petition is itself an act of love, then it is a good thing, but this will be true whether or not it is answered. . .) Choi's point is that God 'leaves room' for us to make a difference in the lives of others, but it would be the answering, not the petitioning, that would make a difference in the world, and the petition does not cause the answering so long as God is free. Hence God should get the credit for the answered prayer, not the petitioner, which undercuts Choi's point that God leaves room for *creatures* to make a difference in the world.[25]

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[24] First worry: Davison cites C.S. Lewis's claim that "often people pray for others when they should be helping them instead," and implies that Choi's suggestion should be restricted to "prayers for those whom we cannot help ourselves" (297). We don't see the need for any such restriction. There are lots of ways to help those we can directly affect who are in need and, if the institution of petitionary prayer is in place, perhaps it provides another way. Second worry: Davison presents a dilemma with respect to praying for those we can't directly affect: either there are others who can help them, or there are not. If there are, then they should, but if they don't, there's no point in asking God to change their minds; for "if God is willing to override my choices about whether or not to help in response to your prayers, then God is not taking seriously my choices about whether or not to improve the world" (297). If there are no others who can help, "Choi has given us no reason to think that God would not provide for them, whether or not anyone asks for this" (297). Neither horn of this dilemma seems especially sharp. As for the first, just because God overrides your choices on rare occasion doesn't mean that, in general, he doesn't take your choices seriously. To be sure, if he overrode all of them, this would follow. But Choi's suggestion doesn't even remotely suggest anything so pervasive. As for the second, see section 4 above.

[25] Davison 2009, 297-98.

What, exactly, is the argument here?

Here's a fair reconstruction of it. Suppose you ask God to heal your friend and suppose God is free with respect to doing so.

1. In general, if S is free with respect to act A, then, if T asks S to A, T's asking S to A does not cause S to A.
2. In general, if T's asking S to A does not cause S to A, then T is not responsible for the result of S's A-ing and T does not deserve any credit for it.
3. So, given our suppositions, you are not responsible for your friend's healing and you do not deserve any credit for it.

We suspect that at least one of the premises here is false.

Consider the following case. Susan is a very skilled surgeon who is much sought after and has a full schedule. A cancer patient asks her to perform a life-saving surgery. Susan points to her packed schedule and reluctantly refuses. Susan's husband, Tony, hears of the patient, takes pity on him, and asks Susan to perform the extra surgery instead of taking the vacation they had planned. (Tony also makes some sacrifice of his own time to help Susan make this possible.) Suppose Susan is free with respect to her decision. In that case, although she is influenced by Tony's plea, she is not compelled. She decides to do it. To be sure, Tony's plea is not causally sufficient for her action but, nevertheless, it raises the probability of her doing it significantly; moreover, if he had not asked her, she would not have done it. As such, Tony's plea is *a* cause even if not a necessitating cause. If causing is not necessitating, premise (1) of Davison's argument is false.

If causing is necessitating however, then, even if Tony's plea did not cause Susan's decision to do the surgery, Tony is partially responsible for the patient's success and deserves some credit for it. (If the standards for causation are that high, causation is not necessary for responsibility and credit.) After all, he made a difference. Susan had declined to do the surgery. Tony's plea made it much more likely that she would do it. In that case, since Tony sacrificed some of his own time in his effort to bring about this result, he is responsible and worthy of the patient's gratitude for the role that he played. If causing is necessitating, premise (2) of Davison's argument is false.

So whether or not causing is necessitating, Davison's argument has a false premise.

A final thought. Consider important historical figures we revere, such as Martin Luther King Jr. or Mahatma Gandhi. These men made a difference largely by influencing others to behave differently. The actions of the others were free, let's suppose; nevertheless, we still consider the result something that King and Gandhi are partially responsible for and we give them credit.

VII. THE PUZZLE OF *SERIOUS* PETITIONARY PRAYER

The final objection we will consider, an objection derived from David Basinger, can be put like this.[26]

I concede that there is no tension between the claim that God does the best he can and the claim that our asking can make a difference to what God does. Nevertheless, a problem remains. Consider the difference between what we might call "basic goods" and "discretionary goods." Basic goods are goods like life, freedom from severe pain, debilitating illness and oppression, adequate food, water, shelter, and clothing, an education and so on. Discretionary goods are the "little extras," such as a parking space, a toy, a sunny day, a kind commentator, an even kinder audience, and the like. I concede that God's provision of discretionary goods might well depend on whether we pray, and hence that, strictly speaking, The Argument you mention at the outset is unsound. But God's provision of *basic* goods cannot depend on whether we pray. Parents sometimes reasonably make their provision of various goods hang on whether their children ask for them. The justification for this practice is similar to the reasons you suggest justify God in letting some good states of affairs hang on whether we pray. Doing so gives the child an opportunity to extend her responsibility, to exhibit love for her friends and siblings, and to foster healthy psychological attitudes such as gratitude. But can we imagine any of these reasons justifying a parent's letting some *basic* goods hang on whether she asks for them? Can we imagine a good parent refraining from giving a child adequate nutrition or an education

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[26] 1995, 481-82; 2003, 259ff.

or warm clothing because she didn't ask for them? Of course not. That would be monstrous. But surely the same goes for God. Even if there is nothing amiss with his allowing discretionary goods to hang on our asking, he cannot—*morally* cannot—let basic goods do so.

But this flies in the face of what most practicing theists assume. They take it for granted that sometimes asking God to do something about basic goods will make a difference to what he does. They pray that the nineteen year old friend caught in an ambush in Afghanistan will not die from his chest wound; that the young woman in intensive care after attempting suicide will not die and will come to see reasons to live; that the tumor will melt away; that the bear will stop. When the going gets tough, when things of utmost importance are on the line, when survival is at stake, practicing theists tend to ask God for help. It would come as a disappointment to them, to say the very least, to learn that such petitions make no difference to what God does, although asking for a nice day for the church picnic might.

What we have here is what we might call the puzzle of *serious* petitionary prayer. As with the original puzzle, it too can be put into the form of an argument, as follows:

The Revised Argument
1. Either *providing a basic good* is the best God can do or it is not.
2. If it is, your asking won't make any difference to whether he does it.
3. If it is not, your asking won't make any difference to whether he does it.
4. So, your asking won't make any difference to whether God provides it.

Nothing you have said has any bearing on this argument at all.[27] (Here ends the Basinger-inspired objection.)

What should we make of the puzzle of serious petitionary prayer and The Revised Argument?

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[27] Thanks to Alec Baker for pressing this objection with us.

We agree that it would be monstrous of God to permit people to starve, die of exposure or gunshot wounds, and so on *just* for the sake of the institution of petitionary prayer or even primarily for its sake. While the institution is valuable, it isn't *that* valuable. But then we neither said nor implied that it was. We neither said nor implied that God sometimes brings about good states of affairs if and only if we freely ask him, *independent of any other reasons he might have for permitting the horrific evil and suffering our world contains*. Let us explain.

We have been addressing the puzzle of petitionary prayer. We take it that *that* puzzle is *not*, at bottom, just the problem of evil. If we are wrong on this score—if the puzzle of petitionary prayer is, at bottom, just the problem of evil—then it is an unnecessarily troublesome way to get around to raising it and we have nothing new to add to the enormous literature on that topic. However, if we are right—if the puzzle of petitionary prayer is *not*, at bottom, the problem of evil—then the puzzle of serious petitionary prayer expresses a *serious* misunderstanding.

To see why, note that the parental analogy—which supports the revised premise (2)—is compelling precisely because we think that, although it would be permissible and loving for parents to withhold a toy, a chess match, or a play date until asked, it would not be permissible or loving to withhold food, or water, or shelter. And we think this precisely because we assume that there is no reason that justifies them in withholding them. Absent that assumption, things look very, very different. For if we really did think that the parents have independent reasons that justify them in lovingly permitting their child to suffer horrifically, then, even if those reasons are inscrutable to us, we could not think they were barbaric for setting things up so that some basic goods were provided if and only if their child or someone else asked for them. Similarly, if we really think that God has independent reasons that justify him in lovingly permitting your friend's cancer, the bear to maul you, and the soldier to die of her chest wounds, then, even if his reasons are inscrutable to us, we cannot think he is monstrous for setting the institution of serious petitionary prayer in place. To suppose otherwise is to mistake the puzzle of petitionary prayer for the problem of evil. They are not the same problem, however.

CONCLUSION

We began with a puzzle, the puzzle of petitionary prayer. When we formulated it as an argument and scrutinized it, we discovered that it made a Crucial Assumption:

> CA. God's bringing about a state of affairs in response to a petition *cannot* be better than the alternatives, and asking God to do something *cannot* change the moral status of his doing it, all by itself, independently of any other reason he has to do it.

We submit that CA is false. First, we mentioned in passing Cupit's account of how requests generate obligations and suggested that if it is correct, then asking God to do something can change the moral status of his doing it. Second, we defended at length Swinburne's and Choi's account of how it might be that God's bringing about a state of affairs in response to a petition is sometimes better than the alternatives. Third, we presented a version of Basinger's puzzle of serious petitionary prayer and showed how, once it is distinguished from the problem of evil, it is no more compelling than the original. Unless there is some other objection of which we are unaware, we conclude that the puzzle of petitionary prayer has been solved.[28]

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EMERGENT INDIVIDUALS AND THE RESURRECTION

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Abstract. We present an original *emergent individuals* view of human persons, on which persons are substantial biological unities that exemplify metaphysically emergent mental states. We argue that this view allows for a coherent model of identity-preserving resurrection from the dead consistent with orthodox Christian doctrine, one that improves upon alternatives accounts recently proposed by a number of authors. Our model is a variant of the "falling elevator" model advanced by Dean Zimmerman that, unlike Zimmerman's, does not require a closest continuer account of personal identity. We end by raising some remaining theological concerns.

According to the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, human persons will exist after death; the very individual Augustine of Hippo, whose bones lie entombed in this earth, is either now enjoying a blessed afterlife or will do so at the time of the general resurrection. This doctrine certainly looks doubtful given the general materialist contention that human persons are (without remainder) biological organisms. At death, the organism deteriorates and is reduced over time (or in some cases rather quickly) to a heap of sub-organic matter. Some of this matter makes its way into the living processes of other organisms, including humans. But even if that were not so, and God were to re-assemble and give life to the decomposed bits that once constituted the living Augustine, it does not seem that Augustine himself would be revived. The requisite causal connection between the pre- and post-mortem states of Augustine is missing.

Peter van Inwagen (1978) has proposed one coherent scenario on which God whisks away Augustine's body just prior to death, healed or simply out of harm's way, as the case may be, to the afterlife. Simultaneously, he replaces it with a perfect simulacrum, a process that would be perfectly undetectable by human beings and so consistent with everything we immediately apprehend in experience. Alas, this scenario

can easily seem a fantastic deception. While it suffices to show the possibility of the bare idea of bodily survival of death, we should hope for something better.

Dean Zimmerman (1999) has proposed an alternative strategy, "the falling-elevator model," on which Descartes' no-deceiver axiom is preserved. Immediately prior to death, Augustine's body fissions into two bodies, one of which remains as his corpse and the other of which jumps through space and time to the afterlife—just as in cartoon physics a person might survive in a falling elevator by jumping out at the last minute. But, Zimmerman argues, the cost of the falling-elevator model is acceptance of a closest continuer theory of identity. On that view, whether Augustine continues to exist over an interval of time depends on facts extrinsic to him throughout the interval. If there are *two* or more organisms, each connected in the right sort of causal way with Augustine just prior to his death, Augustine does not persist; if there is exactly one, he does. On Zimmerman's model, Augustine satisfies the closest continuer constraint across the point of his passage from this life. The corpse left behind after the fission is, after all, a mere corpse, so at that point there is but one plausible candidate for being Augustine: the living organism in the afterlife. Given that it satisfies plausible intrinsic conditions on being Augustine, the theory says that it *is* Augustine.

The problem is that we agree with Zimmerman that any closest continuer account of identity is implausible. Whether I survive shouldn't depend, constitutively, on whether a process wholly outside of me takes place, a process simply involving the persistence of another entity altogether. As John Perry says through a fictional character, death by competition is surely "a strange death if ever there was one" (1978, p. 35).

Now, we happen to be unsympathetic to the materialist thesis that token conscious mental states are identical to complex physical states of organisms, presumably complex states of the nervous system. Conscious mental states, while differing greatly among themselves, seem one and all to be fundamentally different, intrinsically, from any complex pattern of neuron firings, which are themselves hierarchically nested physical structures of enormous complexity. Mental states exhibit relatively basic or unstructured qualitative and intentional features that separate them sharply from anything recognizably material. Nevertheless, we are sympathetic to a second materialist thesis that a human person is a material

being, a specific kind of biological organism, even if one that exhibits ontologically emergent features unseen in other wholly unconscious material systems.[1]

Finally, we are also committed to the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Are we stuck with the unpalatable choice of accepting either van Inwagen's body snatcher proposal or Zimmerman's falling-elevator model and, with it, a closest continuer theory of identity? No—or so we shall argue. First, we present Zimmerman's model, together with his argument that a view of human beings as biological organisms is committed to the closest continuer theory. Second, we present our preferred, *emergent individuals* view of human persons. Third, we provide an alternative falling-elevator model to Zimmerman's, one that is based on the emergent individuals view of human persons and that is committed to neither the body snatcher proposal nor the closest continuer theory of identity. Fourth, we briefly contrast this model of the resurrection with two alternatives. We end by raising some remaining, theological concerns.

I. JUMPING ANIMALS AND CLOSEST CONTINUERS

Consider, first, the persistence of a simple—that is, partless—object. What is it for such an object to persist from moment to moment? Plausibly, while the endurance of a basic individual is not analyzable, it has immanent causal constraints (Zimmerman, 1997a). If x endures from t1 to t2, the intrinsic state of x at t1 must have been among the causal factors giving rise to x's being the way it is at t2. Otherwise, we would absurdly allow the possibility that its state at time t2 was wholly determined by extrinsic factors over the interval, which is consistent with mere (annihilation together with) duplication. It would be nice to be more precise than the hand-waving "among the causal factors," but we shall not pursue that here. We shall say that when x and y meet these causal constraints—whatever precise account of them turns out to be correct—x is "immanent-causally connected" to y.

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[1] See O'Connor and Jacobs (2003).

Notice, however, that these immanent causal constraints are not the whole story about the persistence of simples. For it seems possible for a simple, x, at t1 to be immanent-causally connected to *two* simples, y and z, at a later time, t2. In addition to the immanent causal connections, there is a further, basic fact of identity. Either y or z (or neither) is identical to x, but this identity does not admit analysis in terms of immanent causal connections. Whether a simple persists or not is a metaphysically bedrock fact. When it comes to simple objects, then, immanent causal connections are necessary but not sufficient for persistence. (The same should be said whether the simple in question is material, an atom, or immaterial, a soul.)

But now consider composite organisms *as conceived by van Inwagen*. On that view, the lives of organisms are highly organized, self-maintaining events of enormous complexity, involving different swarms of molecules at different times. (We note that van Inwagen (1990, p. 90) states that he is strongly inclined to reject 'holism' regarding living beings, including human beings, and we take his less-than-perspicuous remarks on this matter to commit him to rejecting any kind of emergence in a metaphysical sense. More on the significance of this denial shortly.) The collective persistence of the simple parts of an organism at any time is neither necessary nor sufficient for the persistence of the organism itself at later times. It is not sufficient since the organic unity can be dissolved consistent with the simples persisting outside the life of the organism. Just as clearly, the persistence of any individual particle is not necessary, since organisms can (indeed, *must*) lose parts. What's more, it looks as though an organism can undergo an entire change-over in parts from one moment to the next and still persist, so long as there are appropriate immanent-causal connections throughout the change. If, as some interpretations of current physics apparently imply, physical simples do not persist for any appreciable length of time, we would not automatically conclude that organisms do not persist.[2] As a result, the persistence of organisms (at least on this van Inwagen-style view of them) is *entirely* determined by immanent causal connections.

It is this feature of van Inwagen's account—the necessity *and sufficiency* of immanent causal connections for persistence of the organism that

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[2] See Zimmerman (1997a) for a brief discussion.

is the person—that both plausibly leads to the closest continuer theory of identity and allows for the falling elevator model of the resurrection. Suppose that an organism, x, at time t1 is immanently-causally connected to two bodies, y at t1+n and z at t1+m, where the first time may be identical to or later than the second time. (When x is connected to y and z in this way, let us say that x has undergone "immanent causal fission.") If both y and z are living organisms, then x is identical to neither. After all, the immanent causal connections between x and y are the same as those between x and z, but x cannot be identical to both y and z. If, on the other hand, y is a living organism and z is a heap of matter, then x is identical to y, since they are immanent-causally connected *and* there is no equally-suited competitor to y for being x. Hence, the van Inwagen-style account is plausibly led to affirm the correctness of the closest continuer theory of identity.[3] Whether x is identical to y depends on matters external to x and y, in particular, on the presence or absence of competitors.

Yet, an attraction of this account is that it allows us to account for the resurrection of the dead. To do so, we need only suppose that, perhaps with the aid of God, Augustine's body undergoes immanent causal fission just before his death, say, at t1. The dead matter constituting what some (not van Inwagen) will call his "corpse" at t1+m is the way it is because of the way his body is at t1, since it is immanent-causally connected to his body at t1. But the organism in the afterlife (t1+n) is the way it is because of Augustine's body at t1 as well, since it is also immanent-causally connected to his body at t1. But the living organism is a better candidate for being identical to his body at t1 than is a mere corpse. Hence, Augustine exists in the afterlife. He is resurrected in virtue of jumping across space and time.

II. EMERGENT INDIVIDUALS

Van Inwagen's account is unacceptable to us because it entails a dubious account of identity over time. It is also unacceptable because of the im-

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[3] Van Inwagen himself denies this conclusion. Rather than enter into the details of van Inwagen's views concerning organism identity that bear on this matter, we simply refer the reader to Zimmerman (1999, 198-201), who has convincingly shown that van Inwagen must take an implausible stance with respect to certain kinds of possible fission cases.

poverished account of our biological unity, itself flowing from his anti-holist commitments. As we see it, fixing the latter defect suffices to fix the former.

To see the way forward, let us think further about the nature and identity of a mereologically simple object, say, Eddie the electron. On our favored ontology, one invoking immanent universals (Armstrong 1997), Eddie has no parts but nevertheless has several features—spin, charge, mass, and so on—as non-mereological constituents. We believe that the arguments to follow in defense of an account of resurrection could be made with equal plausibility, given appropriate adjustments, within an ontology of tropes that dispenses with universals. For expository simplicity, we will not develop the alternative picture.[4] As universals, these features exist wholly in both Eddie and the other 10^{80} or so electrons in our universe. If this much is true, there must be more to Eddie than a mere cluster of universals, since he is a particular thing, and no cluster of universals can yield full determinate particularity, sufficient to distinguish perfect duplicates. Though we cannot argue the matter here, it is plausible that this something extra can only be what we shall call Eddie's *particularity* (what Armstrong calls Eddie's *thin particular*): a primitive, non-qualitative, particular component of him that is necessarily unique to him. Eddie, then, is constituted at any time by a cluster of universals plus such a particularity, bound in a *sui generis*, non-mereological structure.[5] Crucially, when we consider the identity of Eddie over time, we look to the persistence of his particularity and whichever universals this may entail.

Discussions of the nature of particulars within universals-based ontologies have a long history.[6] Some authors, especially authors in recent times who hold universals to be transcendent of rather than immanent to objects, appeal to what Robert Adams calls "thisnesses," which he con-

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[4] See O'Connor and Jacobs 2003.

[5] Armstrong calls such thin-particular+universals structures 'states of affairs,' an event-like category. We do not follow him in this respect. Our difference on this point stems from a difference concerning the nature of persistence over time; Armstrong is a perdurantist, whereas we are three-dimensionalist endurantists.

[6] For more recent discussion, see Black (1954), Adams (1979), O'Leary-Hawthorne (1995), Zimmerman (1997b), Armstrong (1997), and O'Leary-Hawthorne and Cover (1998).

ceives to be a non-qualitative, nonshareable *property* of being identical to the individual whose property it is. Therefore, we wish to forestall confusion by emphasizing that particularity, as we conceive it, is in no sense a peculiar sort of property. It is, rather, a peculiar sort of particular: an entity that is incomplete in itself—its 'role' is to particularize a complete object—and that in every case (plausibly) essentially instantiates certain properties and contingently instantiates others. (Granted, such entities can seem mighty peculiar indeed. But every account of objects and their properties has its peculiarities, and we judge this one to be a bit *less* peculiar, all things considered, than its rivals, and that is all that one can ask of a metaphysical theory.)

Let us now consider the general nature of *composite* objects. Many ordinary composite objects are such that the following condition holds:

> (R) All the object's features are entirely constituted by instantiations of more basic features in and among its parts.

At least, it is commonly thought that this view has been made very plausible by advances in physics and chemistry, though there are dissenting voices.[7] Suppose this common view is correct. In that case, loose and popular discourse notwithstanding, we should not suppose that such composites have persisting particularities, distinct from the sum of the particularities of each of their parts. We should posit a distinctive particularity only in those composites that exhibit an objective, substantial unity, where this is indicated precisely by the failure of (R).

We here assume that in thinking organisms such as ourselves, ontologically emergent properties do confer on us a substantial unity as thinking biological substances, *requiring* one to treat human persons as genuine wholes in any adequate characterization of the dynamics of the world. Consider that emergent properties, as primitive features, will make a non-redundant or fundamental difference to the way the world unfolds. A minimally adequate characterization of the world's basic dynamics must refer to all causally-relevant features and their bearers whose causal efficacy is basic—that is, whose efficacy is not in some sense 'inherited' from the features of more fundamental constituting entities.

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[7] See, e.g., Laughlin (2005) and Hendry (2006).

This causal/functional *unity* does not itself constitute a human person's having a particularity as an enduring thing, but it plausibly implies it. Surely our particularity is primitive, rather than deriving from the primitive particularities of our parts, as our parts are constantly changing. As organized yet constitutionally changing entities exhibiting stably persisting holistic features, we ourselves have distinctive particularities of our own. Even so, as organisms we are mereologically *composite* systems, wholly composed ultimately by simples. Putting these two facts together, then, we are composite systems that have distinctive particularities and some distinctive features. The emergent things we are are none other than living organisms, even if we have an ontological status not had by composite things, or perhaps even living things, in general.[8]

A delicate question remains: what exactly is the relationship between me, my mereological parts (microphysical simples), and my non-mereological parts (my particularity and my emergent properties)? An anti-emergentist account of organisms, such as van Inwagen's, maintains simply that (i) I am necessarily mereologically composed by many simples; (ii) mereological essentialism is false so that no particular simple or set of simples is essential to me; and (iii) composition is restricted so that, to compose me, the simples must be bound up in a life. So long as the very same protracted homeodynamic event that is a particular life persists, I persist. On our emergentist account of composition, by contrast, there is a composite living and thinking object just in case the above mereological conditions of the anti-emergentist holds *and* the simples are so arranged as to cause and sustain unrealized holistic properties that are bound together with a system-level particularity that does not reduce to the sum of the particularities of the simples. However, it may not suffice to simply affirm the conjunction of these two conditions, one mereological and the other non-mereological. For consider an emergentist version of substance dualism on which I am a mind-body composite that is the mereological sum of a collection of physical simples (none of which I have essentially) and a simple mental substance (which I have essentially) that is non-mereologically composed of a particularity and a collection of mental properties. The view we propose denies that there *is* any such non-mental substance that is dual to the body. The question

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[8] See O'Connor and Jacobs (2003).

is, why are we entitled to make such a denial, given the existence of an irreducible particularity that instantiates a range of unrealized, person-level properties?

We see two strategies for clearly distinguishing an emergentist substance dualism from our monistic emergent individuals account. The first is to propose that a person's particularity is non-reductively composed of the particularities of a person's parts. As the parts are ever-changing, so would be the composing particularities that constitute the composite's particularity from moment to moment. This proposal has the virtue of making transparent the claim that the emergent individual is indeed a composite: she is mereologically composed of simples, and her particularity is composed of the particularities of her parts. However, we judge the posited non-reductive composition of a particularity to be of doubtful intelligibility. It would stand in relation to its composing particularities in roughly the manner that a functional property is said to stand in relation to its realizing properties on familiar accounts (token identical, but type non-identical). It also seems to share in its problems: one has to squint hard to see two wholly overlapping items at any given time, and one of them (the one posited by philosophical theory) doesn't seem on reflection to do any real explanatory work.

In any case, we prefer a second strategy for preventing a collapse of the emergent individuals account into a form of substance dualism. A person's particularity and emergent properties don't non-mereologically compose a substance distinct from the body because they don't function together as a separate entity, not even as a separate entity that is intimately causally coupled to the body. They have no purely internal dynamics; they don't constitute a nature that is complete, capable of an integrated description independently of the physical-structural states that sustain them. Instead, the structural-physical and emergent mental states of the brain jointly determine subsequent mental as well as relevant physical states of the whole system in a continuous manner. There is but one unity here, not two. We are inclined to suppose that this is somehow reflected in the distinctive nature of a composed person's particularity: unlike the particularity of Eddie the electron, my particularity is precisely something which constitutes me as a particular *system*, a substantial and composed unity.

III. JUMPING EMERGENT INDIVIDUALS

How might someone who accepts the emergent individual account of human persons think of the resurrection? If one ignored our previous paragraph, one might be tempted to propose a simple solution: while the living Augustine was an emergent, composite substance, his having constituting simples is not *essential* to him. He has a particularity wholly distinct from those of his simples, and a rich array of emergent features, some of which are no doubt essential to his nature. All that God need do is miraculously preserve his particularity and emergent features, taking over the job of directly sustaining them from the simples whose unified functioning is about to cease. After all, God has been *indirectly* sustaining the emergent features in virtue of his directly sustaining moment-to-moment the fundamental fabric of the universe, Augustine's constituting simples included.

This simple solution is unsatisfactory. Granted, Augustine's being *this* individual is a fact distinct from *these* composing parts' being what they are, as these are parts of Augustine for only a short period of time, while he endures. But if Augustine is nonetheless this *system* throughout such changes (rather than a distinct substance), his individuality must be somehow intimately bound up with there being some (organized) particles or other which sustain it. Otherwise, the view collapses into substance dualism. It makes no sense to say that *this* thing is first a composite, then a simple, then again a composite at the resurrection. How could God bring it about that Augustine's emergent state later becomes the state *of* a new body?

One might suppose, alternatively, that the immanent-causal constraint on identity over time applies only to features at the emergent level. We could then allow that at the moment of Augustine's death, God could generate a particle-for-particle replacement body, and set things up in such a way that this new body's *emergent level state* is determined in part by the emergent level state of Augustine just before death (and allow that it is *not* so determined by the intrinsic state of his then-constituting simples, which were on the verge of dissolution, leading to the cessation of their higher level functions).

But such a view posits too weak a connection between Augustine and his underlying matter. It is a kind of substance dualism in all but name,

as it seems that *this system* cannot lack all immanent causal links with its constituents. For this reason, Augustine should be thought of as essentially a composite, none of whose composing matter at a given time is essential to him. But further, it is not enough that there be at every instant an emergent, Augustine-like state associated with an underlying Augustine-like body. For God could annihilate Augustine entirely and simultaneously create an exact duplicate of him in the same location, yet this would not be Augustine himself. There must be immanent causal connections at both the underlying and the emergent levels.

But, now you ask, how can this be? If we agree, contrary to the body-snatcher scheme, that the dead body in the grave is not just a replica of something that once was a living organism, but is instead the remains of such an organism, then that once-living organism is causally connected to *the dead body*, and not to any glorified individual far away from *terra firma*. Here, Zimmerman makes an ingenious suggestion: we need suppose only that just before Augustine's demise, God miraculously confers causal powers on the bodily constituents, such that in addition to being immanent-causally responsible for the dying state of the body remaining on earth, they *also* bear such a connection to the newly generated one. The earthly body, while constituted by the matter that a moment ago had constituted Augustine, is not Augustine, for it lacks the unity-conferring emergent features essential to him. The heavenly body retains those features, and so in virtue of its intrinsic state's having the requisite immanent-causal connections to Augustine's earlier state, it is Augustine himself.

We're not so sanguine about the miraculous-addition-of-causal-powers bit, suspecting that it can be bought only by one soft on causation. But no mind: we need only suppose that the features of the constituents of Augustine's body—and as these are no different in kind from the constituents of any material thing, of all material things—and the emergent-level aspects of Augustine jointly have a hitherto entirely latent tendency to jointly cause the composing simples to fission in the requisite context, which is providentially connected solely to situations of imminent demise. (Perhaps God miraculously brings to bear some requisite additional force-like factor that acts as a co-cause with the relevant disposition.) If you find this wildly implausible, even given theism, you ought to carefully examine the source of your incredulity. Which emergent features,

if any, are latent in the fundamental constituents of our universe cannot reasonably be assigned any particular *a priori* probability. They are discovered empirically, having to be accepted, in the phrase of the early 20th century emergentist, Samuel Alexander, with "the natural piety of the investigator." Given that the posited consequence is *ex hypothesi* not observable to us in this life, who can say?

We said that there are immanent causal relations between the particles of Augustine's body pre-mortem and the particles of both the subsequently dead body and the resurrected body. But which of the latter two collections of particles, if either, is *identical* to the former collection? Within our framework, nothing vital hangs on this question. Identity of particles is not necessary, at any rate, for the persistence of Augustine, the emergent individual. And there is reason to want to preserve the identity of particles in the case of the dead body: if moment to moment, the identity of most of the particles of the pre-mortem Augustine is preserved, it is uncomfortably close to the body-snatcher scenario to suppose that things are radically otherwise at the moment of death. Furthermore, one might doubt that it *could* go the other way (particle-identity, for the most part, in the resurrection body). While we have allowed that particles might have an *additional* propensity, in special circumstances, to effectively spawn duplicates of themselves in a disconnected space, it is harder to concede that the tendency might be *inter alia* to negate their normal tendency to persist in spatiotemporally continuous circumstances and to produce mere duplicates there instead. One wants to think of emergent propensities as only *adding* to the non-emergent propensities that are at work in the sub-emergent individuals.

Does the resulting view of the resurrection carry with it a commitment to the closest continuer theory? After all, if it is possible for our constituting matter to fission under circumstances propitious for bodily resurrection, it should likewise be possible under different circumstances, including one in which *both* products of the fission are living human beings. Or, for that matter, three-way fissioning should be possible, and worse monstrosities still.

We grant the premise, but deny that it forces one to adopt the closest continuer theory. For on our view, immanent causal connections, while necessary, are not sufficient for the persistence of the emergent individual. In this regard, the persistence of emergent individuals is rather like

the persistence of a simple object. Persistence is a further, basic fact. If there were a fissioning of my body into two duplicates, then one of the resulting emergent individuals may well be me: it will depend on where the distinctive particularity is preserved, if it is preserved at all. It may be impossible to establish empirically the identity, but that is a far cry from saying there is no fact of the matter. The situation parallels precisely the analogue of person-level fission on the substance dualist account that Zimmerman himself favors. Zimmerman has us imagine that our brains' hemispheres were a bit more symmetric, so that they were perfect mirrors of each other. (Our actual brains are not like this, but they do include a lot of functional overlap. Just suppose they differed so as to allow perfect functional overlap.) Of course, I could survive the destruction of one of my actual hemispheres, so surely I could survive the destruction of one of these more symmetrical hemispheres. Further imagine a possible future scenario in which brain transplants are possible, so that you could take one of these hemispheres and put it into someone else's head. Now, Zimmerman's scenario: Take both of my hemispheres out of my body and put each into a separate body. Which one continues my life? Empirically, they are equally well-suited candidates. But on the soul view, Zimmerman claims, ". . . I went wherever my soul went—either with the one half-brain or the other or neither, as the case may be" (1999, p. 198). In other words, one hemisphere, at least, will generate a distinct mental substance, while another may continue to sub-serve the previously existing soul, or perhaps also give rise to a new one. These possibilities will be empirically indistinguishable, while being plainly distinct metaphysically. Just so, we say, on our emergentist account: where the entire organism that I am fissions into two living organisms, I may be the one on the left, the one on the right, or neither. There is a fact of the matter, even if it seems hard to say what determines which fact it is. We agree that the suggestion that there is *no* factor that determines which way one's particularity goes induces intellectual vertigo, but this is not what we are suggesting. We are denying only that there must be some independently identifiable factor that does the determining. Given a situation of perfect symmetry from an empirical/observable point of view, the determining factor could only be a built-in 'bias' (left, right, or neither) to the latent disposition towards fissioning. Unlike God, we learn of the nature of fundamental dispositions through their effects, and since the

effects would be indiscernible to us, we could not distinguish the cases absent divine revelation. But to think that this epistemic indiscernibility constitutes a challenge to the intelligibility of what is proposed owes either to a residual trace of positivist anti-metaphysics or, more likely, to one's not having taken fully seriously the suggestion that my particularity is metaphysically basic.

We maintain, then, that it is possible to see, in the abstract, schematic manner characteristic of metaphysical theories, how it could be that God 'preserves us body and soul' through death without resorting to deception. It is no deception that things occur elsewhere and elsewhen as a result of things occurring right before our eyes, provided that events we *do* seem to see right before us are as they appear (in a rough and ready manner, befitting the limitations of our sensory organs).

IV. A COMPARISON WITH TWO OTHER ACCOUNTS

We want to briefly compare our view of human persons and how they might survive death with two other views that are superficially similar to it. Lynne Rudder Baker defends what she calls the "Constitution View" of human persons. On this view, human persons are not identical to their bodies, or to a part of their bodies, or to unions of their bodies with nonphysical souls. Constitution, then, is not identity. Human persons are necessarily embodied, but it is not necessary that they have the body they in fact have. They are a partly psychological kind. To be *human* is to be constituted by a human body. To be a *person* is to have a 'first-person perspective': "One can think about oneself as oneself and think about one's thoughts as one's own." For this to be the case, it is not enough for one to be conscious. Nonhuman primates are *conscious* and have *points of view*, but, she maintains, "they cannot conceive of themselves as the subjects of such thoughts. They cannot *conceive of* themselves from the first person" (2007, p. 334).

Here's how we are to think of constitution, on Baker's view:

> [T]he general idea of constitution is this: when various things are in various circumstances, new things—new kinds of things, with new causal powers—come into existence. Every concrete object is of (what I call) a primary kind.

> A thing has its primary-kind property essentially. So, kind membership (or species membership) is not contingent. The relation of constitution unites things of different primary kinds, and hence things with different essential properties. E.g., a human organism is essentially a member of the human species; a person essentially has a first-person perspective. A human person is a person constituted by a human organism. (2007, p. 337)

She goes on to suggest that "constitution is everywhere: Pieces of paper constitute dollar bills; strands of DNA constitute genes; pieces of cloth constitute flags; pieces of bronze constitute statues" (2007, p. 337). These mundane examples rooted in human conventions make clear that Baker is not thinking of the coming to be of new causal powers in our sense. Constitution is not ontological emergence. She does, to be sure, insist that the coming to be of new materially-constituted kinds is a metaphysical fact, but this contention can't be embraced by someone who takes causation to be a real and basic relation. There would be entirely too much overdetermination of effects if every socially-based kind (such as currency or works of art) results in a co-located object with new causal powers—the piece of paper and the dollar bill, the lump of clay and the statue. Furthermore, it's not at all clear what the constitution relation *is*, according to its proponents. In a single location, we are told, there are two body-shaped objects that wholly overlap, such that many of their fundamental properties are 'shared', so that when they get on the scale together and it registers 160 pounds, that is the weight of each, rather than the weight of them only collectively. We confess to thinking this to be plainly impossible—there *is no* relation that would underwrite this strange claim.

Well, these are reasons enough for us, incurable neo-Aristotelian metaphysicians that we are, not to like the constitution account. But perhaps you're unconvinced. Would adopting this picture allow for an elegant scenario of resurrection? Given Baker's view, what is needed is for Augustine's particular first-person perspective to survive death. According to her, there is no immanent-causal *constraint* whatsoever on this being true. (There is such a constraint on the persistence of Augustine's *body*, but on Baker's view, Augustine is not identical to a body, he is merely constituted by one.) Well, then, in virtue of what will it be the case that Augustine's first-person perspective comes to be realized in a glori-

fied body? Here's what she says: "All that is needed is God's free decree that brings about one contingent state of affairs rather than another. If God decrees that the person with body 1 have [Augustine's] first-person perspective, then [Augustine] is the person with body 1 . . . . Hence, there is no threat from the Duplication Problem" (2007, p. 346).

We find this idea that our persistence is determined by a fact (sameness of first-person perspective) whose identity condition is wholly based in divine *decree* deeply mysterious. Identity is surely not a wholly extrinsic affair. One wonders what would prevent God from decreeing that glorified body B has Augustine's first-person perspective, despite its sharing none of his earthly psychology.

Baker seems driven to this peculiar way of accounting for survival of death by the perceived unpalatability of the alternatives. Of the alternatives that she criticizes, what she calls 'Animalism' seems closest to our own account. Her chief metaphysical objection to animalism is that it cannot allow for gradual replacement of biological with non-organic parts consistent with persistence of the person. However, this is not clearly true of our own account. She *is* making what we take to be a fairly large assumption here. Experience teaches that the simples that compose us and all other material things have latent dispositions such that, when *organically* arranged in the right sorts of ways—in the first instance, into cells, then into more complex structures such as functioning nervous systems—they collectively cause and sustain emergent mental phenomena. It *may* be that those latent dispositions are sufficiently robust that when matter is arranged in functionally equivalent ways from the level of molecular biology on up—with non-organic components that are differently constituted from but functionally equivalent to ordinary cells—we'd get the same emergent phenomena. Maybe. And if so, our view can cheerfully accept it. We do not *define* human nature such that we necessarily are organically composed, even if we necessarily *start* that way. However, we also don't let thought experiments replace actual experiments when it comes to discerning the causal powers of physical things. My arm is not implicated in sustaining my consciousness, and so is not vital to my persistence as a system whose unifying features are broadly psychological. I do not need to worry that replacing it with a bionic equivalent may be an existential threat. When it comes to large-scale replacement of neurons in my cerebral cortex with non-organic counterparts, on the other

hand—well, let's just say that we wouldn't want to be among the very first people to try *that* technology, even if they offered it for free!

Finally, we note that Baker's *theological* argument against Animalism also doesn't carry over to our view. She writes: "In contrast to animalism, the constitution view does not take being a person to be just a contingent and temporary property of beings that are fundamentally nonpersonal (organisms). On animalism, being a person has no ontological significance at all" (2007, pp. 346-7). And she goes on to note in contrast the centrality of personhood to the Christian conception of human beings. However, our emergentist view, unlike the non-emergentist Animalism defended by van Inwagen and others, can equally affirm with Baker that distinctively personal attributes, or at least the potentiality for such, are essential to human beings. Of course, we are not unique among earthly denizens in being organic unities in virtue of a general capacity for conscious experience. But our *way* of being conscious beings is distinctive, in some respects, within the animal kingdom. And so it seems just as open to us as to a constitution theorist or a mind-body dualist to elaborate an account of the essential properties of human beings adequate to the thesis that we are divine icons, image-bearers, and all that this dramatic declaration in the book of Genesis entails.

Famously, there is another, older view of persons in the general vicinity of our own, also constructed in a way so as to account for the possibility of resurrection: Aquinas's. Just as famously, however, interpreting Aquinas on this topic is a vexed matter. Two key elements of Aquinas's view are clear: (1) the soul is the form of the body, so that the human person during his earthly life consists in a form-matter unity; (2) the soul exists without informing any body from the moment of death until the time of the resurrection, from which point onward the person will exist as a form-matter unity once again. The most vexed issue concerns the identity of the soul in the interim state. Is that disembodied soul identical to the person who died and who will one day be raised again?

Taking inspiration from Aquinas's repeated claim that the soul is not identical to the person, and that, strictly speaking, the departed saints do not pray for us, but their souls do, Christina van Dyke (2007) constructs a Thomistic view of the resurrection similar in certain respects to the one we offer: at death, the person ceases to exist and at the resurrection the

person exists once again.[9] Eleonore Stump (2006) claims that this can't be Aquinas's view, as there are theological reasons, some of which we'll briefly mention below, for thinking that the person's existence cannot be gappy. According to Stump, Aquinas thought that while the person is not identical with the soul—and indeed is, before death, constituted by body and soul—the person is nevertheless constituted by the soul alone after death. On either reading of Aquinas, then, the soul has an uninterrupted existence and thereby enables immanent causal connections to hold between the pre-mortem and post-resurrection stages of the person's life without spanning a temporal gap. A fundamental difficulty facing both interpretations is to motivate the claim that it is possible for a mere 'form' of something to persist absent any underlying stuff that it is the form *of*. This claim seems no less objectionable than would be a claim, rooted in our own account, that my particularity will persist in the absence of any organism that it particularizes. And while Stump's interpretation is textually well-motivated, insofar as Aquinas's claims about the nature and experiences of disembodied souls are scarcely intelligible on the assumption that they are not then souls of the departed (or any other) persons, it has the added burden of the troublesome metaphysics of constitution. What are these persons, now constituted by (but not identical to) souls conjoined to bodies, then constituted by souls alone, and then again by both? Stump suggests that it is no more problematic than an analogous 'animalist' scenario where a person's body is whittled down to her brain, which is kept alive by artificial means. In such a case, she says, the animalist should say that the person is first constituted by her body, then by her brain alone. But there is a better avenue available to the animalist than to indulge in constitutionist double vision. She may instead say that the person once was an intact organism and then *became* a brain. Saying this will require the animalist to deny that there was, strictly speaking, a brain before the whittling process was completed.[10] But brains are less integral to the animalist's scheme than souls are to Aquinas's.

For these reasons, we do not see reasons for preferring either Baker's or Aquinas's alternative pictures to the one proposed here.

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[9] See also Toner (2009).
[10] See Peter van Inwagen (1981).

V. REMAINING THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

There are, however, some remaining theological concerns with gappy existence. Here we note just two: First, according to the Doctrine of the Harrowing of Hell, Christ descended into Hades after his death but before his resurrection to free the souls of those who had gone before him. The doctrine seems to imply that there is continued existence after death and before the general resurrection, since the souls of the departed are there to be freed. Second, the practice of petitioning departed saints to pray for us seems to require, if we take it seriously, that the saints exist now and, undoubtedly with the aid of God, hear our prayers and petition God on our behalf.

There are, no doubt, many moves that could be made here, various re-interpretations, deflationary readings or philosophical acrobatics to be performed. But none of those are necessary to undertake here. For note that our account of the resurrection, while explicitly developed in the context of the assumption that our existence is gappy, is nevertheless consistent with the continued, bodily existence of every person after death.[11] Fairly obviously, it is consistent with immediate resurrection upon death. But it is also consistent with some intermediate, 'incomplete' bodily existence, just sufficient for the persistence of the emergent individual until the time of the resurrection. The assumption of gappy existence can be seen as an attempt to work out how the resurrection of the human person is possible even if some (atypical) form of materialism is true and our existence is gappy. That is a sort of worst-case scenario. It would be significant if it could be shown that the resurrection is possible even in that scenario, and we think it is.[12]

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UNRESTRICTED QUANTIFICATION AND NATURAL THEOLOGY: IS "THE WORLD" ON THE *INDEX*?

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Abstract. The first section of this paper introduces talk about absolutely everything – the world as a totality – as an integral element in the project of natural theology, as it has been presented by Fergus Kerr and Denys Turner respectively. The following section presents talk about the world as a totality of facts as a theme in philosophical logic and outlines a problem it has given rise to there. After confronting the solution originally suggested by Bertrand Russell and defended by David Armstrong, the paper points to key elements of the solution presented by Wittgenstein in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. I show how Wittgenstein's answer to the question of unrestricted quantification draws on his notion of showing and the inexpressible. Against this background, the concluding section draws attention to an important difference in ambition between Kerr's and Turner's description of the prospects for natural theology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout his authorship, Wittgenstein would use expressions from religion and practices of magic to describe issues in philosophy of logic and language. One of the earliest examples of this tendency is found in a notebook entry made in October 1914:

> The expression "not further analysable" too is one of those which together with "function", "thing" etc. are on the Index; but how does what we try to express by means of it get *shewn?* (Of course it cannot be said either of a thing or of a complex that it is not further analysable). (Wittgenstein 1979: 9)

Wittgenstein's reference to the Roman Catholic list of prohibited books, *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, is supposed to suggest a range of statements

that attempt to say what is shown by well formed propositions. Given Wittgenstein's view that what is shown cannot be said, such statements are deemed to be nonsensical and illegitimate. The expressions that Wittgenstein puts on the *Index* in the notebook are precursors of the formal concepts of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*TLP*). Formal concepts play a central role in the theoretical apparatus of the *TLP*, in so far as the work seeks to throw light on the nature of representation and logic. The *TLP* concludes by pronouncing its own lack of sense, and though there is significant disagreement among Tractarian commentators regarding the point and precise character of this judgment, Wittgenstein's use of formal concepts makes for clear, particular cases of the kind of statements that are ultimately deemed nonsensical.

Wittgenstein's characteristic mixture of themes from religion and logic has provided grounds for a myriad of religiously informed interpretations of his early work. Such readings rely on a huge amount of second guessing and interpreting in order to arrive at the substance of, and intention behind, Wittgenstein's claims.[1] While this paper has set out by referring the reader to another case of Wittgenstein's usage of religious terminology in connection with otherwise quite unrelated topics, it will seek to establish a firm connection between the logical themes in the *TLP* and a range of theistic arguments. It will do this by drawing together the topic of the very opening of the *TLP*, oddly overlooked in philosophy of religion, with a style of argument that continues to be pursued in theology and philosophy of religion. The topic is that of unrestricted quantification and claims containing unrestricted quantification are found in theology and philosophy of religion when one uses the singular term "the world" to describe an all inclusive totality.

Both the list of formal concepts in Wittgenstein's notebooks, quoted above, as well as the one presented in *TLP* 4.1272, contain an "etc.",

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[1] The fusing of themes can be gathered from the titles of works dedicated to early Wittgenstein and religion such as *Logic and Sin in the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Shields 1993) and *Wittgenstein and Judaism: A Triumph of Concealment* (Chatterjee 2004). They draw on either themes from Wittgenstein's philosophical logic (for instance, the notion of showing) or what appears as scattered remarks of his. Shields, accordingly, admits that his own explication of religious themes in early Witgenstein is somewhat probing and speculative, and he elaborates it in terms of affinities between logical and religious phenomena (cf. Shields 1993: 34).

indicating that they are incomplete. After an introduction of discussions of natural theology that involve use of "the world", I firstly wish to make the case that this piece of language displays features similar to other formal concepts and it therefore is a candidate for inclusion on the list. The key contention will be that what we try to speak about with the apparent singular term "the world" is in fact something that is shown by language use. Secondly, I wish to point to the relevance of what I present as the Tractarian assessment of the use of "the world" for discussions of the potential of natural theology.

2. "THE WORLD" IN THEOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

Wittgenstein's *TLP* shares with metaphysics[2] and theology the attempt to speak about the world as a whole, which is currently discussed under the labels of unrestricted quantification or absolute generality. It is mainly in connection with numbers that unrestricted quantification continues to be discussed.[3] Talk about absolutely everything will feature in a theological doctrine of creation, but most importantly for our present purposes, it plays a key role in the premises of a range of theistic arguments.

Below are two such uses of unrestricted quantification, taken from Fergus Kerr's and Denys Turner's respective treatment of the viability and character of natural theology. Kerr, in his attempt at softening up what some perceive to be the overly ambitious character of natural theology, as outlined by The First Vatican Council of 1870, comments:

> Read in context, the claim for the possibility of knowing God with certainty from the world, by the natural light of reason, is not as ambitious as Roman Catholic apologists have often hoped and Barthian theologians always feared. As far as the fears of the latter are concerned, the idea that anyone might be coerced into faith by metaphysical arguments, or be expected to found faith in Christ on rationalist apologetics, is excluded. Perhaps surpris-

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[2] A highly relevant conception of metaphysics would be Bradley's, according to whom metaphysics is "the effort to comprehend the universe, not simply piecemeal or by fragment, but somehow as a whole" (Bradley 1897: 1).

[3] From Cartwright (1994) to the collection, Rayo and Uzquiano (2006). These discussions are typically of unrestricted quantification over things *of a kind*, typically sets or numbers. What we are considering presently is supposed to be over all kinds.

ingly, no examples are offered of what sort of reasoning from the world to knowledge of God would be appropriate. The emphasis is entirely on the claim that reasoning of some kind from the existence of the world to the existence of God is possible, without appealing to faith – in opposition to the view, that is to say, that knowledge of God's existence is either solely the result of faith or dependent on subjective experience. (Kerr 2002: 36)

The alternatives with which Kerr concludes may not strike us as sufficiently exhaustive, but all I wish to emphasize presently is the apparently straightforward use that Kerr makes of "the world" when he states the apparently quite innocent premise that the world exists.

Another recent example is Denys Turner's extremely general account of the conditions, and possible shape, of a proof of God's existence. His work is rather positive regarding the capacity of reason in coming to knowledge of God on the basis of premises that do not somehow presuppose that God exists. As well as the requirement of meeting what he calls secular conditions for inferential validity, Turner suggests:

. . . such a proof [of God's existence] will need to demonstrate that there is something which answers to the description "God", the minimum for which description being, as we shall shortly see, that something answers to "Creator of all things out of nothing". (Turner 2004: 76)

And this must then be shown to be "extensionally equivalent to the God of faith" (ibid.).

These are two examples of the singular term "the world", or equivalent expressions, being used in connection with theistic arguments. I shall conclude the paper by emphasizing an important difference between Turner's and Kerr's standpoints. For now, we notice that these two thinkers join many others in taking the existence of the world as a relatively unproblematic given, on the basis of which we ought to be able to somehow establish the existence of God.

3. THE WORLD AS A TOTALITY OF FACTS

The existence of the world has frequently been challenged in the history of philosophy, and more recently, van Fraassen raised the issue:

The question we confront, the one we have to face, is not whether some philosopher's theory has this or that virtue or implication. It is not the question of what is tenable, consistent, plausible, coherent, metaphysically or epistemologically satisfying. It is a question about the statement "The world exists" and is simply this question: "*is it true*?" (van Fraassen, 1995, p. 141)

When wishing to settle a question of existence, we start by enquiring about the nature of what we are interested in, and immediately notice that the Tractarian conception of the world as a totality of facts differs in some ways from what is most frequently meant by "the world". First of all, there are legitimate uses of "world" that are not relevant to the logical themes that we will be discussing. In some religious contexts, "the world" has moral connotations, suggesting a place where dark forces are at work.[4] The word is also used to describe the Earth, regions of it (as in "the Western world") or a set of personal experiences (as in "the artist is in a world of his own"). The sense that is relevant to the issues we will raise is more frequently captured by the notion of the universe. The *Oxford English Dictionary,* offers the following definition of "universe": "2. a. The whole of created or existing things regarded collectively." While the use of "thing" is prevalent when the *OED* outlines the meaning of both "world" and "universe", the notion of a fact is completely absent. This dominant usage of "object" or "thing" is mirrored by the formulations of Kerr and Turner above, and also in the way that van Fraassen goes on to frame the question and his answer.[5] This focus on the concept of

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[4] Cf. Ephesians 6:12.

[5] Reluctant to accept what appears to be the ontological commitment of cosmology (*i.e.* the existence of the world), van Fraassen goes on to defend a variety of what Williamson (2003, section V) calls generality relativism: According to van Fraassen, philosophically significant use of "the world" is *always* construed as a schematic expression, which, when complemented by a relevant count noun, points to a restricted domain of quantification. As I am not concerned with discussion of unrestricted quantification over a domain of objects, I shall have to leave the reader with a quick objection to van Fraassen. Van Fraassen says that when we use "world" it is equivalent to "interpret[ing] quantifiers, [and] specify[ing] a domain of discourse" (1995: 152), a domain that in virtue of his understanding of "world" is always restricted. We can reasonably take van Fraassen to be committed to the following in virtue of simple inferences "there are some things that are not quantified over in occurrence *x* of 'world'". Such a sentence, however, must be taken to have quantified over all the things that were not relevant to the count noun that completed the supposedly schematic "world". Lewis' even quicker rejoinder to attempts

a thing would seem to make for a contrast with the Tractarian conception of the world as a totality of facts, and we shall set out by commenting on the Tractarian understanding of the world. By what follows I do not presume to be able to win anyone over to becoming "a friend of facts". More modestly, the purpose is to position the Tractarian emphasis on facts in the landscape of approaches to ontology.

Motivating and carefully explaining standpoints was never an overarching concern when Wittgenstein wrote the *TLP*. To get an idea of what he had in mind in thinking of the world as a totality of facts, we may look at some of his informal comments on the *TLP* upon his return to philosophy in the early 30's:

> "The world is everything that is the case". This is intended to recall and correct the statement "The world is everything that there is"; the world does not consist of a catalogue of things and facts about them (like the catalogue of a show). For 1.1, "The world is the totality of facts and not of things". What the world is is given by description and not by a list of objects. So words have no sense except in propositions, and the proposition is the unit of language. (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 119)

This is a transcript of a conversation, and although the explanation off its own bat might only seem like a very slight pedagogical improvement on Wittgenstein's behalf, we can glean some of the implications and motivations of Wittgenstein's appeal to facts in the *TLP*. Firstly, as a cursory reading of the *TLP* will reveal, the existence of objects is not being denied. Both early Wittgenstein, and others such as Bertrand Russell and David Armstrong[6] who emphasize facts in their meta-ontology,

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at stating that it is impossible to quantify over all objects is this: "Maybe the [relativist] replies that some mystical sensor stops us from quantifying over absolutely everything. Lo, he violates his own stricture in the very act of proclaiming it." (Lewis 1991: p. 68)

[6] Armstrong says regarding states of affairs: "The phrase 'state of affairs' will be used in the same way that Wittgenstein in the Tractatus used the term 'fact'" (Armstrong 1997: 19). It seems to me that Armstrong fails in using "fact" in the same way as Wittgenstein in so far as he takes states of affairs to be possibilia and a fact to be a state of affairs that obtains. Meanwhile, we can for present purposes take Armstrong's and the Tractarian conceptions of a fact as equivalent in the following minimal way: "The cup is on the table" represents a state of affairs. If the cup is in fact on the table, the state of affairs obtains, and "the cup is on the table" represents a fact. Of course, Tractarian objects are very different from ordinary, complex objects like tables and chairs.

will maintain that there are objects (also called "things", "entities" or "particulars"). It is just that the existence of objects is not exhaustive when offering an account of the world. Secondly and more importantly, in addition to not being exhaustive, Wittgenstein will maintain that the concept of an object is not a primary explanatory notion in an account of language and world. This contention has its source in the linguistic thesis that Wittgenstein goes on to mention in his elaboration: the context principle. The claim that words have meaning only in the context of a proposition Wittgenstein got from Frege, and Wittgenstein would appeal to versions of the principle throughout his authorship. In his early thinking, the Fregean influence would result in Wittgenstein's taking the concept of an object to be derived from that of states of affairs.[7] In *lieu* of a fuller discussion and defense of the context principle, I shall simply draw attention to some relevant aspects of the principle in early Wittgenstein.

Firstly, the principle ascribes primacy to an account of the workings of language when offering an account of the world. Secondly, there is an insistence that language makes contact with the world at the level of units of language that can be true or false. Single words do not have this feature, while expressions with the complexity of a proposition do. In case the proposition is true, the worldly correlate is a fact. When I said that objects are not exhaustive of what there is, this might suggest that facts are conceived as additional items on a list of what the world consists of, but Wittgenstein maintained ". . . that there are no such things as facts" (Wittgenstein 1979: 123). Such a claim is not meant to deny that some propositions are true and represent facts, but is a characteristically cryptic way of saying that facts and objects are essentially different, logico-syntactically determined ontological categories. Facts cannot be named and should not be considered as complex things that are to be added to a list of what there is. Rather, there are facts, knowledge of which allows us to gather what objects there are.

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[7] For an account of Wittgenstein's appeal to the context principle throughout his authorship, see Reck's "Frege's Influence in Wittgenstein: Reversing Metaphysics via the Context Principle" (1997). Sullivan (2001) offers an exposition of the way the principle influenced the *TLP*. In Hansen 2010, I mount a defense of the principle as a guide to ontological investigations and I point to differences between the use to which Frege and early Wittgenstein put the principle.

Finally, while Wittgenstein distinguished objects from facts by means of formal concepts, and thus subscribed to a version of typed ontology, he also maintained that there can be no *theory* of the types: "The question about the existence of a formal concept is senseless. . .The logical forms are anumerical" (Wittgenstein 1922: 4.1274, 4.128). These claim follow Wittgenstein's introduction of the distinction between formal and proper concepts. Proper concepts are integral to questions of existence, and the example Wittgenstein offers of a proper concept is a count noun. For example, he maintains that ". . .one cannot, *e.g.* say 'There are objects' as one says 'There are books'". (Wittgenstein 1922: 4.1272) While we can count books by means of the noun "book" and say that there are at least two ("there are books"), the formal concepts are only count nouns by appearance. In effect, this meant that Wittgenstein turned against the idea that we have a genuine count noun, by means of which we can count the ontological categories (such as "object" and "fact"), or the logical categories from which these notions derived.

Count nouns feature centrally in questions of existence, and the idea that we shall pursue below is that on reflection, "world", like other formal concepts, is only *apparently* a count noun. Thus, we will ultimately agree with van Fraassen that "world" is deeply problematic as a count noun. However, as our agreement has very different sources, we will set out by noting that *pace* van Fraassen, "world" certainly *appears* to function as both a count noun and singular term. "World" as a count noun serves to individuate a range of states of affairs that completely make up a way things might be. "The world" – *i.e.* the singular term – denotes that way the world actually is, the totality of facts. Below, our concerns will be purely logical, and not concerned about the question of e.g. mutual interaction of elements of a system.[8] Should there be a range of causally isolated multiverses, we will let the totality of these be designated by "the world".

Assuming that facts matter to an account of the meaning of "the world", we begin our discussion of the logical problems with "the world" on a historical note: In the context of a "natural theology clinch" with Frederick Copleston, Bertrand Russell quipped that "I should say that

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[8] This is the Newtonian inspired conception of a world that Lewis operates with. To him, to be a world is to be to be the maximal number of spatiotemporally related objects, or something analogous to it (cf. Lewis 1986: p. 75f).

the universe is just there, and that's all."[9] Meanwhile, Copleston was putting to use the notion of the world in his argument for the existence of God. Russell seemed keen to question Copleston's appeal to the existence of the world – an attitude that made for a contrast with his own surefooted use of "the world" in the 1910's when he was engaged in logic and metaphysics. As he is likely to have been aware, his concluding expression of generality, "that's all", constituted a fundamental problem for his own earlier attempts at doing metaphysics.

During this earlier period, Russell shared with Wittgenstein the project of logical atomism, and the opening paragraphs of the *TLP* allude to a problem for the explication of logical atomism. The problem arises from the analysis of the term "the world": "The world is the totality of facts, not of things. The world is determined by the facts, and by these being *all* the facts." (Wittgenstein 1922: 1.1, 1.11). That is, when offering an analysis of "the world", it will have the logical form, "Fa & Fb & Fc & Gb. . .", where the atomic propositions represent facts from all kinds of subject matters. To ensure that this list of facts is indeed an analysis of "the world" – of everything distinct from God, the existence of whom Kerr and Fergus wish to reserve the possibility of arguing for – we need to be told that these are all the facts there are. If we had left just one fact out, we would have fallen short of our ambition to give expression to what we wanted. And it is with the expression of generality, "all", that the logical trap lies. The trap is spelled out more elaborately further down the paragraphs of the *TLP*, now in terms of elementary propositions, out of which the *TLP* has it that all language is truth functionally constructed:

> The propositions are everything which follows from the totality of all elementary propositions (of course also from the fact that it is the *totality of them all.*) (Wittgenstein 1922: 4.52)

With such formulations, Wittgenstein's point becomes clearer: the general fact adds to the list of facts there are: the way Wittgenstein here presents the analysis makes no distinction between the facts. As Russell (1986b) maintained and David Armstrong (1997) agrees, we are in need of a general fact in order to offer the analysis. This fact will somehow stand

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[9] From a transcription of the famed 1948 BBC programme. See Russell (1986a).

above the rest, ensuring that they indeed are exhaustive of the world in its totality. Without it, we have no totality, only a long conjunction of facts that might or might not make for a complete inventory of the world.

Being purely concerned with logical form, we can for present purposes remain agnostic about the character of Tractarian objects and elementary facts, and whether they will suggest anything like what we ordinarily call subject matters and their facts. Thus, we do not have in mind an actual description of what facts there more exactly are, and can for present purposes stick with Wittgenstein's casual suggestion of "the totality of true propositions being natural science" (Wittgenstein 1922: 4.11), while remaining ignorant of the content of those propositions. What matters is that those engaged in natural theology in the manner envisaged by Kerr and Turner will have to take the general fact seriously, as it is on the basis of the totality that they wish to argue for the existence of God.

4. ARMSTRONG'S TOTALITY FACT

What are we to make of this last totality-fact, expressed by the concluding statement of generality, "these are *all* the facts"? It seems clear that the expression is of a radically different character than all the other true propositions that make up the description of the world. Let us assume that we have *some* idea of first-level, atomic propositions making contact with the world in virtue of considerations to do with correspondence. In this respect, the general proposition is different: it appears not to be about the world, but about a collection already offered to which nothing "worldly" is added by what the proposition represents. Nevertheless, one cannot from any list of facts in itself conclude that these are all the facts there are: the last fact is needed as long as one wishes to pursue the kind of natural theology or metaphysics that relies on talk about the world. Considerations regarding the nature of the totality fact, *i.e.* its apparent difference from first level facts, quickly become troublesome if you subscribe to some kind of atomism, with the understanding that a description of the atoms is exhaustive and nothing "nonatomic" – *i.e.* general – is needed for an account of the world. Of course, this in different ways includes the projects that Russell and Wittgenstein were pursuing, though there was disagreement between the two over the nature of the

atoms. After an outline of the reasoning above, Russell's version of logical atomism (1986b) readily allows the necessary existence of general facts into his account of the world. This move, however, makes the account of the world rather non-atomistic and could not consistently be held by a logical *atomist*, if that term is to have any purchase.

There are at least two strategies regarding the need for the totality fact: one may, like Russell, actually postulate the existence of a generality fact or one may opt for reliance on the Tractarian notion of showing. Armstrong has no atomist commitments, and he therefore does not face the same obstacles in postulating the existence of what he calls a kind of higher-order state of affairs: the totality state of affairs. In addition to what many perceive to be a certain oddness of the totality fact, an oddness we will return to in the following section, the main problem is that postulating the totality fact to offer an analysis of "the world" merely creates another totality that now makes up the world. Even when we allow the higher order totality state of affairs and bracket the questions we may have regarding the nature of the second order fact, it seems we never get what we are after: If we say that the world consists of a number of first-order facts along with a totality fact, that still falls short of what we wanted – we still need to be told that the analysis just offered, now including the second order totality fact, includes all the facts there are. If we don't say that, we have not offered an adequate logical analysis of "the world." If we then add the fact that the first-order facts and the second order totality fact are all the facts there are, then this has generated a third-order fact and so on *ad infinitum*. The concept of the world appears to fall foul of the vicious circle principle, according to which

> "[w]hatever involves *all* of a collection must not be one of the collection"; or conversely: "If, provided a certain collection had a total, it would have members only definable in terms of that total, then the said collection has no total." [...] By saying that a set has "no total" we mean, primarily that no significant statement can be made about "all its members." (Whitehead & Russell 1927: 37)

It is not clear whether Armstrong's solution to this quandary is the same in the two treatments he offers of the problem in Armstrong (1989) and Armstrong (1997). In the latter, Armstrong makes the suggestion that while the first totality fact does make for a richer world – *i.e.* a world with

one more fact – that is not the case with the facts that are generated as we try to give expression to the further totalities. As he formulates it, while the first totality fact does not supervene on the first order facts, the third order fact does (in fact) supervene on second order facts. In effect, his suggestion is that the last proposition in the following conjunction:

Fa & Fb & Fc & Gd . . . and these are all the facts there are. And these are all the facts there are.

does not in the same way add to what we are told about the world: "The regress becomes unthreatening at the point that supervenience occurs." (Armstrong 1997: 198).

According to Armstrong, when *A* supervenes on *B*, *A* does not make the world an ontologically richer place, as it is entailed by *B*. There clearly is no entailment of the first totality fact from the first order facts: You can never infer from a list of the form "Fa & Fb & Fc" that these are all the things that are *F* or that these are all the facts there are. Hence, according to Armstrong's criterion of adding to the world, the last proposition tells us something more about the world. Armstrong then maintains that this is not the case with the yet higher level facts. They are there, but "ontologically harmless."

A quick objection to Armstrong's stance is that he is simply monster barring. He is being unfair to facts along lines that are designed solely to solve the problem at hand. More elaborately, Armstrong runs into type-theoretic problems of exactly the kind that Wittgenstein attempted to overcome in the *TLP*. Armstrong elsewhere puzzles over the need for concepts like "being a state of affairs", as well as states of affairs corresponding to "There is 'a degree of supervenience'" (Armstrong 1989: 95) and seems to allow them. Likewise, Armstrong will need facts that correspond to the true sentences that assure us that the third- and yet higher order facts do not add to the world in its totality. Armstrong cannot allow these facts to be of first or second level, as they would make the world richer for each fact in the infinite regress. But he does need the facts about the higher order facts to feature somehow in his description of the world as a totality for it to be complete, and it is by no means obvious of what level such facts would be. In short, there are strong reasons for suggesting that talk about the world as a totality of

facts – though apparently innocuous – gets one involved in reference to an illegitimate totality, and Armstrong does little to convince us that we shouldn't dismiss the totality that makes up the world as an illegitimate one. According to the vicious circle principle, this would mean that the singular term "the world" falls apart in our hands.

5. WITTGENSTEIN'S STRATEGY: "THE WORLD" AS A MATTER OF SHOWING

Russell's answer to such worries relied on versions of type theory. Wittgenstein's *TLP* was highly critical of such solutions, mainly as it came at the cost of the generality of logic.[10] Wittgenstein's *TLP* is amongst other things an exercise in countering the reasons, explored above, for taking "the world" to be an illegitimate totality. A full account of Wittgenstein's evasion of the trap he sets up in the opening paragraphs is intricate and technical. In short, it consists in operating with an "ontologically flat" conception of the world, where all the representation takes place at the level of absolutely specific propositions that have names stand in for objects in state of affairs. From elementary propositions, all meaningful language is built up by means of an infinitary version of the Sheffer stroke, the N-operator.

Besides considerations regarding the nature of logic – the main concern of the *TLP* – there are other related considerations that speak against going down the route Armstrong takes. It is seems odd on epistemological grounds that an entirely new kind of fact is introduced, when one considers the close relation between particular and general facts. For instance, we could make little sense of simply consulting the general fact in trying to find out if all Germans are logicians: it seems a "detour" via the particular facts about Hans, Fritz and all the other Germans is necessary, and identical reasoning will apply to the totality fact. More importantly, if the world is constituted by facts, totality facts and atomic facts alike, a pressing question becomes this: How do two worlds differing only in second order generality facts, while having all the same first-order facts, differ at all? I think we would want to say that

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[10] See e.g. the excellent discussion in Sullivan (2000).

the second order fact does not add to the world. John Heil has formulated the intuition well: "I contend that the need for a totality or 'that's all' fact is an artifact resulting from a tendency to conflate representations of ways the world is and ways the world is [...] Suppose God had neglected to decree 'that's all'; suppose God had merely stopped creating [...] Would anything have been left out of the world?" (Heil 2003: 70). Heil answers his rhetorical question with the claim that the totality fact involves no addition to being.

This much ought to reverberate with our understanding of generality and ontology as it is bears on our understanding of "the world". However, while Heil's rhetorical question does good service in explicating what is likely to be a widely shared view, he does little to address the reasoning that leads us to want to say that we need to postulate a totality fact: the equally clear understanding of generality and totality that informs us that a mere conjunction of atomic facts will not provide an adequate analysis of "the world". It is unfortunate that Heil labels the line of thinking that conflates features of the representation of the world with features of the world, "the picture theory". Wittgenstein's picture theory was an integral part of the attempt to overcome the need for postulating general facts.[11] The overall drift of the theory was that there was no generality in the world, but that language makes connection with the world at a level of absolute specificity, and that the generality contained in all other language is constructed by means of logical constants that do not represent anything in the world: "My fundamental thought is that the logical constants do not represent. That the *logic* of the facts cannot be represented." (Wittgenstein 1922: 4.0312). Wittgenstein here uses "*vertreten*" for "represent" which he reserves for what we might call the ontologically committing level where names stand in for objects.

We may for present purposes leave out the technical innovations in philosophical logic that were involved in the construction of language from absolutely specific propositions. Rather, we shall make a drastic shortcut, also suggested by Armstrong, to the doctrine of showing as it used in connection with the totality. That this notion is relevant to the attempt at speaking about the world in its totality can be gathered from Wittgenstein's presentation of the need for a totality fact above:

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[11] In fairness, it should be mentioned that Heil leaves open the question of the relation between his whipping boy, the picture theory and Wittgenstein's picture theory.

> Suppose that I am given *all* elementary propositions: then I can simply ask what propositions I can construct out of them. And there I have *all* propositions, and *that* fixes their limits. (Wittgenstein 1961: 4.51).[12]

When knowing that elementary propositions are characterized by their absolute specificity (*i.e.* lack of generality) and that all the building that takes place is done by means of a powerful, but purely sentential operator, the N-operator, we can make out what Wittgenstein's suggestion comes to.[13] Wittgenstein is suggesting that the limitation is achieved by a feature *of* the symbolism, rather than being an expression *in* the symbolism: There simply are no more propositions than the atomic ones and what is constructed from them. Interestingly, we may turn to Armstrong for the same suggestion spelled out in a clearer fashion. He suggests that we

> . . . begin the discussion with quite small and simple worlds, where different positions . . . emerge with greater clarity. Consider, then, a world containing just two simple individuals, *a* and *b,* with the first having just the one simple property F and the second having just the one simple property G. For the factualist, the world is like this:

> (1) F*a* & G*b*

> The conjuncts are states of affairs. . . We do, I believe, and will later argue, require a higher-order state of affairs: that these are the *totality* of lower-order states of affairs. But that is not of present importance, and we can let it be shown, as opposed to being said, by the absence of any further symbols for states of affairs in formula (1). (Armstrong, 1997: 107)

Rather than making the existence of the world as a totality something that we can make the subject of fact stating language – *i.e.* something that can be said – the suggestion being made by Wittgenstein and Armstrong, but only seriously pursued by Wittgenstein, is that the existence of this

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[12] I here rely on the translation by Pears and McGuinness for what I take to be, in this case, its greater clarity.

[13] Remarkably, a part of the Tractarian solution to the problems we are surveying is the reduction of first order predicate logic to a version of propositional logic. Wittgenstein thus does away with expressions of generality as we are used to employing them. See e.g. Wehmeier (2004) for an exposition.

totality is something that will have to be shown by the symbolism.[14] As Armstrong puts it, in the absence of generality facts, we may let the existence of the world be something that is shown, rather than spoken about in sentences that represent states of affairs. This showing takes place by the absence of any further facts than those mentioned in the description of a given world. Given complete knowledge of the make-up of the simple world, when we describe it like this:

Fa & *Gb*

we do not need to add to our representation of the world that these are all the facts there are. Like the Tractarian symbolism, our correspondingly simple language probably wouldn't contain the generality operators to do that anyway. The totality is simply shown by the absence of any further representations. We *see* that that is all.

Of course, the idea of this sort of miniature world is not something we can immediately rely on when seeking a solution to our problem, unless we had specified something equivalent to the elementary propositions in the *TLP*. Our world is far more complex than the simple world conjured up and described above, and its contents, the facts, remain to a great extent unknown to us. We have no sideways perspective on language and world available to us in the way that we do with Armstrong's simple world. No system of representation we possess is adequate to have the totality of facts be shown by the symbolism in this manner. In the *TLP*, the totality is shown in a different way: its existence – but not its actual specification – is a matter of following and accepting what I take to be the overall argument of the *TLP* to the effect that there must be such a totality, given the existence of true or false propositions about the world.

Regardless of these differences, making the world more complex than the simple one created and represented by Armstrong does not alter its basic ontological and logical features: no generality fact enters the world at any point of increased complexity. Only, our expressive powers

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[14] Wittgenstein makes the same suggestion to Russell in his notebooks (Wittgenstein 1979: 131), but here regarding Russell's class of all objects, the cardinal number of which Wittgenstein takes to be shown by there being a number of names that stand in for objects.

gradually get outstripped by the world as it increases in complexity, and we begin to rely on expressions of generality to try and express what we can immediately see in the representations of the far simpler worlds, whose constituents are all known to us. We have, after all, created it.

Having confronted Armstrong's postulate of a generality fact, the suggestion remains that we should add "the world" to the list of concepts whose instantiation is shown by language, but which cannot form part of anything that is represented in language. Enigmatically expressed in the way that Wittgenstein at times would resort to, we have not said that the totality is not there, we just run into problems when speaking of it. I am aware of having expressed myself problematically in exactly the same way that Wittgenstein does, when he in the *TLP* frequently tries to speak about that which is shown. For instance, he frequently applies the formal concepts *fact* and *object*, but also says that doing just that is nonsense: their instantiation is shown by well functioning language, and what is shown cannot be said.[15]

In the case of the formal concept "thing", the proper expression is the variable: "Wherever the word 'object' ('thing', 'entity', etc.) is rightly used, it is expressed in logical symbolism by the variable name." (Wittgenstein 1922: 4.1272).[16] In suggesting that "the world" has the same features as other formal concepts, we are not suggesting that its proper expression is a variable. In our case, the suggestion is that we have an instantiation of "the world" in the case where we can see that there are no more propositions. Such a totality was never reached in the *TLP*, but its

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[15] The relevant passages are: "That which expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by language. […] What *can* be shown *cannot* be said." (Wittgenstein 1922: 4.121, 4.1212).

[16] It may strike the reader as incredible that Wittgenstein would maintain that we can't *say* that there is an object, while we e.g. can say there is a tree. Accordingly, comparing the present viewpoint regarding "the world" with the formal concept "object" will lend little credence to the viewpoint that "the world" has similar features as formal concepts. Wittgenstein maintains: "Thus a proposition '*fa*' shows that in its sense the object *a* occurs, two propositions '*fa*' and '*ga*' that they are both about the same object." (Wittgenstein 1922: 4.1211). We see here a case of the apparent self-refutation alluded to above – in so far as Wittgenstein uses "object" not as he otherwise insists it must be used and further, tries to say what is shown. Van Inwagen (2002) confronts the Tractarian viewpoint regarding "object", and presently, I can only refer the reader to Hansen (forthcoming), where I defend the Tractarian viewpoint against van Inwagen's criticism as well as that of others.

postulation should rather be seen as a demand of strands of thought on language and representation in the work. The Tractarian setting aside, neither is it the case that *we* are in reach of such a description.

It is instances of trying to say what is shown that led Wittgenstein to his famous concluding judgment on the work itself: that it lacked sense. Apparent self-refutations are an occupational hazard when trying to explicate Wittgenstein's early thinking, and there will be more below, as I shall keep talking about *that* which is shown – the existence of the world. Nevertheless, the question of unrestricted quantification that Wittgenstein raised at the outset of the *TLP* remains with us, and having confronted Armstrong's solution to the question of unrestricted quantification, we have more reason to pursue the technical details of the Tractarian approach. While we have made a shortcut to the notion of showing, the reliance on this notion ought to gain credence as more details of the Tractarian solution are offered.

6. ASSESSING KERR'S AND TURNER'S ACCOUNTS OF THE POTENTIAL OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

Let us take stock. Initiated by an introduction of formulations in connection with natural theology, we have in fact surveyed what Zermelo in his treatment of set theory called "two polar opposite tendencies of the thinking mind, the idea of creative *advance* and that of collection and *completion*. . . ". (Zermelo 1930: 1233). In our case, the creative progress consisted in the forming of yet new totalities, which seemed to make use of the singular term "the world" fall apart in our hands. This it did in so far as use of "the world" is an expression of our capability to embrace totality, a capability that is exercised in set theory ("all sets") as well as in metaphysics ("all the facts" or "the world"). While convictions may differ when it comes to totalities in set theory, I believe we are strongly inclined to think that in the case of metaphysics, our linguistic expressions of all-embracing completeness are indeed mirrored by a fixed, determinable reality: the world. In other words, we are inclined to believe that Armstrong's simple world is an accurate model of *the* world in the respect of being ultimately fixed and determinable.[17]

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[17] Sullivan completes his treatment of elements of the Tractarian answer to the ques-

Having made a shortcut to the notion of showing in the treatment of the world as a totality, we have not tried to reconstruct the Tractarian arguments to the effect that there is such a totality. Rather, we have said that like other formal concepts of the *TLP*, the existence of the world will be a matter of what is shown by an adequate symbolism. The existence of the totality will not be assertable by propositions, but will be a feature of a yet-to-be reached description of the world.

Let us return now to our two characterizations of the potential of natural theology and see how the Tractarian position affects them. Turner insisted that a proof of God's existence, in whatever shape, should meet what he called secular conditions for inferential validity, and he took it to be reliant on reference to the world in its totality. If "the world" is only by appearance an unproblematic singular term that can feature in true or false sentences (such as "the world exists"), then its setting in an argument is similarly compromised: If the apparent singular term "the world" does not at all contribute to sentences like ordinary singular terms do, it will, like other formal concepts, not feature in a true sentence, whose truth can be carried to the conclusion in an argument. Such are after all – secular or not – supposed to be truth-preserving. In short, the prospects for the theistic argument that Turner envisages are poor.

While the problematic term may result in statements of nonsense, in so far as what it tries to say is what is shown by an adequate symbolism, a still dominant strand of Tractarian interpretation[18] insists that speaking this kind of "philosophical nonsense" may nevertheless have cognitive potential. In the *TLP*, Wittgenstein's compares knowledge of the formal features of language and world with knowledge of facial features: We

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tion of the totality of facts by raising the question whether there is a totality of facts. The question is answered with a guarded "maybe". (Sullivan 2000: 191). Our intuitions that the expression "the world" refers to a fixed, determinable reality may have various sources. One obvious suggestion is the biblical creation narrative. As Tractarian commentators have suggested, its influence can be seen to reach even to the *TLP*, which shares with the creation narrative its seven stages. Another possible source, treated by John Dewey, would be what he calls the Greek metaphysics of contemplation, which would shape scientists' understanding of science for posterity (See e.g. Hickman (1989) for an overview).

[18] Dominant, that is, in the face of "The new Wittgensteinians", exemplified most clearly by Diamond (1991), whose contention is that there is but one kind of nonsense: *mere* nonsense, such as "frabble wabble".

have a very intimate knowledge of faces, but our language for expressing this knowledge is severely impoverished. While thus impoverished, in the case of faces my language can be developed to properly express what I experience. This is not so with those features that, in the *TLP*, are shown. Here the inexpressibility is principled – what is shown cannot be said, but what is shown is shown by means of quite ordinary use of language with which we are all very familiar.

Such an emphasis on the cognitive potential of the logically problematic terms sits well with Kerr's far more guarded expression in his comment on *Vatican I*: Here the emphasis is on the possibility of "reasoning of some kind" from the existence of the world to the existence of God. Such reasoning might not be in the style of propositions whose truth and interrelated structure provide sound arguments. It could nevertheless consist of reasoning and expressions that are able to convey knowledge of an important kind. The fact that someone possesses inexpressible knowledge does not mean that we cannot say something about that knowledge. What we cannot do is describe it as knowledge-that: It is only *that* which we can't say that we can't say. This leaves us with significant maneuvering space for making theological sense of the doctrine of showing and of what appears to be limitations on the expressive powers of our language.

Works that found their way to the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* would often return to being in good standing and carefully read and taught by Roman Catholic scholars. Likewise, though we have seen reasons to put "the world" on a rather different *index*, one should be hopeful that attempts at talking about the world in its totality, and what I have suggested to be the related doctrine of showing, will find use in constructive and fruitful interaction between "Barthians" and Roman Catholic theologians, who traditionally have been inclined to hold strongly opposed views on the potential of natural theology.[19]

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RECONNECTING THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND ENGAGED RELIGIOUS REASONING

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Abstract. It is no surprise that the philosophy of religion, the many disciplines counted within the study of religion and theology, and religion-specific studies, all have their own methods and interests, and often proceed necessarily as conversations among small groups of experts. But the intellectual cogency and credibility of such studies also entails a problematization of the boundaries that divide them. While disciplinary distinctions are necessary and valuable, a freer flow of ideas and questions across boundaries is to the benefit of all concerned. In particular, the philosophy of religion proceeds more fruitfully if, among its several dimensions, it is also intentionally comparative and interreligious, vulnerable to the questions raised by insiders to traditions, and open to the implications of ideas for religious practice.

I have never counted myself among those expert in the philosophy of religion, instead locating myself among those theologians who seek to understand their faith by detailed and rigorous study of the ideas and arguments presented in a religious tradition other than their own. Yet the comparative work I am interested in repeatedly places before me the philosophical and religious arguments of pre-modern Hindu intellectuals who often enough do not neatly separate philosophical and theological reasoning. And so I do turn occasionally to the state of the question regarding the philosophy of religion as a philosophical and religious discipline, with homes in both academe and amidst religious communities.

It was therefore with great interest that I recently read William Wood's essay, "On the New Analytic Theology, or: The Road Less Traveled."[1] In it

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[1] *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (December 2009), Vol. 77, No. 4, pp. 941–960.

he reviews several notable new volumes in the field of analytic philosophy of religion and related theological disciplines.[2] Wood also estimates the state of the fields wherein philosophy, theology, and the study of religion intersect; early on, he characterizes in this way the current standoff among philosophers, theologians, and scholars of religion:

> Most scholars working in the religious studies academy have little use for analytic philosophy. They tend to treat it with suspicion when they consider it at all, which is rarely. For their part, most analytic philosophers of religion return the favor by ignoring contemporary theology and continental philosophy of religion, to say nothing of the other subdisciplines of religious studies. Many practitioners of religious studies believe that analytic philosophy of religion is merely a stalking horse for oppressive and antiquated forms of traditional Christianity. Conversely, analytic philosophers of religion often treat practitioners of religious studies as silly, unserious, uninterested in truth, and unwilling if not unable to appreciate that the rational case for traditional Christianity is actually quite strong. (942)

Lack of communication depends on justificatory caricatures, and on narrow professional boundaries that encourage and reify the exclusion of other disciplines. But Wood also sees the irony in the fact that constructive religious reflection flourishes quite apart from ordinary, seemingly wayward theological reflection:

> From a certain point of view, the entire situation is bizarre. On the one hand, what can only be called constructive theology, and of a very traditional sort, is currently flourishing in philosophy departments, in near total isolation from the actual academic discipline of theology. On the other hand, the actual academic discipline of theology remains fractured and embattled, under attack from all sides, unsure of its place not only in the academy, but in churches and divinity schools as well. (942-3)

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[2] Including: *A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology*, edited by Oliver D. Crisp. New York: Continuum, 2009; *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, edited by Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009; *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009; Oxf*ord Readings in Philosophical Theology, Vol. 1: Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement*, and Vol. 2: *Providence, Scripture, and Resurrection*, both edited by Michael C. Rea. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Near the end of the essay, Wood reminds us that we cannot take for granted as if settled any particular narrative regarding how reasoning stands in relationship to the goals of academic scholarship and religious reflection:

> [S]cholars who advocate a sharp distinction between theology and the study of religion find themselves defending, if not quite disengaged reason, at least the scientific status of all genuine academic work in religious studies. That is, whether they accept or reject various claims about postmodernity, opponents of postmodern theology continue to criticize it for failing to live up to the proper canons of rational inquiry in the academy. But down the hall from the department of religion, we find another discipline, philosophy, with sterling academic credentials and its own methodological norms, norms that do seem to legitimate exactly the practice that our own opponents of theology will not countenance—namely, the practice of making and assessing truth claims about God. (958)

Religion departments may be undercutting the credibility of religious beliefs, as if for the sake of autonomous judgments on religion, while the rigorous analysis of religious claims in philosophy departments may conversely make available persuasive defenses of religious beliefs.

Wood's estimate of the situation is of course open to discussion and further nuance, but overall it rings true. More work needs to be done to remedy the stubbornly enduring and unproductive separation between philosophical discourse and intellectual reflection within religious traditions and among practitioners, that we might get clearer about the relationship between reasoning about religious topics and the engaged religious reasoning practiced within the bounds of a faith perspective.

From the vantage point of comparative theology,[3] I suggest that we need also to break down the artificial boundary between reasoning about and from religious perspectives in the (Christian) West, and the similar forms of reasoning quite evident in other religious traditions. We still act as if geographical borders and specific histories excuse us from including in our conversations potential interlocutors in other traditions. The relation between the philosophy of religion and theology, between

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[3] See Francis X. Clooney, SJ, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

such intellectual disciplines and religious practice as motivating and contextualizing thinking, and between Western Christian intellectual practices and those found elsewhere in the world, are more effectively tackled when addressed together.

To offer a modest contribution to the larger ongoing conversation, as the core of this essay I reflect on yet another recent publication, Parimal Patil's *Against a Hindu God: Buddhist Philosophers of Religion in India*, and from there trace a path of widening religious reflection. In this 2009 monograph, Patil aims first of all to get straight the Buddhist philosopher Ratnakirti's critique of Hindu logicians' arguments in favor of the existence of a creator god. Against the background of a general exposition of the epistemological framework of the argument about a world-maker — taken to be divine, i.e. God (Chapter 2), Patil explores Ratnakirti's understanding of *relation* and *pervasion* (Chapter 3), key elements in the arguments on both the Buddhist and Hindu sides. He then considers the relevant Buddhist epistemology, particularly the logically and rhetorically important concept of "exclusion" (Chapter 4), and finally the structure of Ratnakirti's Buddhist worldview as a whole, as implicit in the arguments (Chapter 5).

This is not an easy book, nor could it be. Even a reader already somewhat familiar with Indian dialectics must be ready for a heavy dose of technical detail and refined terminology. Although Patil strives for clarity, the arguments, rigorous and concisely delineated, remain daunting; but the technicalities serve clarity in argument and regarding the goals of argument, which otherwise lose cogency.[4]

Although the book deals primarily with "the philosophical content of an interreligious debate between Buddhist and Hindu intellectuals in premodern India," as argued by Ratnakirti, Patil is also interested in "moving beyond the usually historical and philological task of restating, in English, complex arguments formulated in Sanskrit." (4) The demonstration that there is a broader intellectual accessibility such as commands our attention across cultural and religious boundaries is in fact key to Patil's overall project. He wants to build bridges, so as to

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[4] For example, the book is replete with coded abbreviations, e.g., C1, performance conditions; C2, instrument conditions/triple conditions; C3 argument conditions – and these as nuanced by a series of "H" distinctions: H1a, "unestablished in the site of inference", H1b, "opposed," that is, a "direct defeater," and all the way to H5, "too late."

enable interested and willing philosophers, particularly in the Western academy, to engage more substantively in reflection on the arguments posed by Ratnakirti and his interlocutors. Patil offers substantive analyses of such arguments in a conceptual framework that recognizes both indigenous Indian, and Western, modes of religious/philosophical argumentation. In this way, Patil is emphasizing the value of "thinking (in) Sanskrit," even for readers who do not know the Sanskrit language and have not thoroughly mastered the technical terminology of Indian logic. Any of us, he suggests, can learn enough so as to begin to have in place ways of thinking about religious and philosophical issues that are indebted to India and not merely Western traditions applied to Hindu and Buddhist arguments.

To ground this mix of detail and epistemological reconsideration, *Against a Hindu God* models a transdisciplinary learning that draws on three sources — South Asian studies, philosophy, and study of religion. By means of this learning, Patil hopes to rethink the boundaries among these disciplines for the sake of a "new kind of philosophy of religions." (6) Much of it has to do with a willingness to read, with care and patience. Patil scolds scholars of South Asian studies for infatuation with "the social, cultural, and political 'outsides' of texts." Given the avid turn to contextual issues, it may seem as if texts are interesting primarily because of what can be wrested from them regarding context, insights into social, political and power concerns that, while relevant to interpretation, are simply not what the texts say and are about. He traces this attitude to "the tyranny of social and cultural history, and a closely related distrust of philosophy." (6) Endemic too is a predilection for academic theories generated outside of India and then merely applied to Indian texts, as if such texts are meant to provide data by which to test Western theories about Hindus, Buddhists and their arguments. As Patil rightly reports, specific arguments from the Indian context, such as Ratnakirti and the Hindu logicians trade back and forth, do more than tell us something about social conditions and power constructions in premodern South Asia. They get us to think often more rigorously and certainly differently, about issues of wide import and subject to debate in the West. For example: can it be shown that God exists?

Patil robustly argues that the Indian debates, when taken seriously on internal grounds – in terms of what the texts say – are philosophically

interesting, and for that reason, remain pertinent centuries later. Indeed, they form "an intellectually available source from which we can learn today" regarding "the nature of rationality, the metaphysics of epistemology, and the relevance of philosophy to the practice of religion." (4)

Stepping back from the details, Patil highlights four benefits of the approach he is defending. First, "focused attention on the philosophical content and significance of Ratnakirti's arguments will remind historians of religion of the importance of intellectual contexts to the study of religion." And, I might clarify, not only the social contexts of texts matter, but also internal contexts, ideas. Second, philosophers of religion will be enabled to see the relevance of these Indian materials to their field, and to move beyond an overly Christian-based set of "Christian texts and textual traditions." (13) Third, the book will enable diligent and open-minded philosophers to begin to philosophize using Sanskrit materials often abandoned as accessible only to the specialist. Fourth, all of this will make evident that what is learned in South Asian studies, including philosophy, is of relevance to a much wider audience than those interested in India and South Asia. Ratnakirti and his interlocutors are philosophers, and of interest to the wider philosophical audience. (13-14)[5]

If all this adds up to an ambitious agenda, Patil is also interested in a still deeper and more robust defense of this philosophical argumentation as religiously informative. At the end of the volume he makes the interesting move of uncovering the pedagogical and religious dimensions of the Buddhist argumentation he has been studying. According to Jnanasrimitra

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[5] Along the way, Patil also insists on a fresh approach to the comparative dimension of comparative philosophy. The project of studying Ratnakirti with these sensitivities and expectations is comparative because it brings together "two or more components that are generally taken to be different" – from different entities or "patients," or "different features of a single, multivalent component, or both." (22) Whenever an entity is studied in this expansive way, the study becomes a comparative one. It allows for "narrow" comparisons (dealing with historically related entities) and "broad" comparisons (which bring hitherto unrelated elements into a single reflection). The model also allows for a very rich variety of exempla, since many different kinds of entities can be compared, including processes. (23) While this notion of comparison seems too broad – and liable to the uninteresting generalization that all learning is comparative – it neatly escapes any standard "Western-other" dichotomy, and so makes it at least seem noncontroversial that the preoccupations of the West regarding its own uniqueness are no longer interesting.

(Ratnakirti's teacher), advancement in proper argumentation is as it were the ascent of a ladder of ideas and insights, rising toward superior, fuller viewpoints; "the way that one learns to move up from rung to rung of this ladder is by discovering conceptual problems inherent in how we speak about awareness and its objects." (350) Philosophy by this account "is of pedagogical significance, since it is through philosophical analysis and argumentation that a teacher like Jnanasrimitra is able to help his 'students' move up from rung to rung of a philosophical stepladder. . . [P] hilosophy is supposed to change people's minds by turning them away from their false or partially true views and toward those that are more correct." (350)

Buddhist argument with the Hindu logicians thus offers valuable training in philosophy, but not only for the sake of establishing correct philosophical views; rather, in accord with Buddhist insight, the end result is also the defense of the correctness of the selflessness-momentariness thesis, by which "Ratnakirti further identifies selflessness and the thesis that all existing things are momentary as the unique teachings of the Buddha, and thus . . . that they alone are the proper objects for meditation." (331) This identification is defended on the grounds of a proper epistemology and set of arguments about the self, a world-maker, etc. And all this is in turn propaedeutic to right practice, since "meditating upon selflessness-momentariness can lead to omniscience — that is, the direct awareness of dharma itself." (355) But this means that the technical Buddhist philosophical arguments are also relevant to our understanding of "Buddhism" as a religion, of which the selflessness-momentariness thesis is the essential, distinguishing feature. Even as Ratnakirti is uncompromising in the rigor of his philosophical arguments, the overall structure of his discourse "is determined by both philosophical and soteriological concerns that are informed by Ratnakirti's understanding of the Buddhist path." (362) Or, to put it another way: Buddhist religious beliefs are relevant to a proper understanding and assessment of Buddhist philosophy. Soteriology and epistemology inevitably imply one another, each incomplete until the other is taken into account.

When vigorous arguments change minds, the way is opened to better and more efficacious religious practice. This opening is a goal implicit in the stated arguments, and it marks the direction in which the arguments

move for the sake of conclusions that are not only logical but also religious. So the philosophical and religious cohere:

> [P]hilosophical activity, as a form of religious practice, improves one's epistemic position with respect to a soteriological goal, by both removing one's false views and fixing the right views in one's mind through very detailed and deliberate philosophical analysis. Built into this work is the expectation that upon entering this new epistemic position, one will display the necessary epistemic rationality and accept Ratnakirti's conclusions. On Ratnakirti's model, religious reasoning is a "hybrid virtue" that requires that one be sensitive to both instrumental and epistemic reasons. (362)

This hybridity requires that we get right the intellectual context, the complexity of the words, concepts, and models of reasoning, such as will disclose the coherence of reasoning and word, faith and practice.

Yet if this more generously imagined religious philosophy of religion is to make sense, it must also be possible to go a step farther and still more forthrightly make room for judgments on truth. Patil does not go far in this direction; we notice that in listing four benefits of his approach, he does not add a fifth benefit that would be highly significant – that the study of these arguments sheds light on whether a God (a maker god, the Hindu God, or some other) can be said to exist. While Patil is articulate in describing what Buddhist intellectuals take seriously for philosophical and religious purposes, he does not say whether all of it adds up to more light shed on the question of God. But the logic of *Against a Hindu God* pushes us toward taking very seriously the question whether God does exist, and motivates us to say more about who that God might be.

So do Buddhist arguments against the notion of a world-making divinity make it less reasonable to believe today that God exists? Are the Hindu logicians right in making the case for the divinity whom believers address as Visnu, Siva, or by another name? And if there are good reasons for the existence of Visnu, does this count for or against the existence of the Christian God? While a large number of questions surely intrude here, my point is that the overall direction of the philosophy of religion is toward taking seriously direct questions about God, even toward answering them affirmatively.

The second chapter of my *Hindu God, Christian God*[6], "Arguing the Existence of God: From the World to Its Maker," is the closest I come in my own writing to a reasonably full treatment of a philosophical argument about God's existence.[7] I wrote this book in order to show how the great theological issues that have occupied the Christian West have serious and apt counterparts in traditional Hindu theology,[8] and consequently that there is no good reason for theologians serious about such issues to restrict their attention to Western and Christian sources.

In this second chapter, I deal with the existence of God as a key topic in the philosophy of religion, addressing a version of the same debate over the existence of God that Patil treats more thoroughly in his book. Like Patil, though much more briefly, I draw on Buddhist and Hindu arguments, and I also draw some parallels to the Christian tradition of the philosophy of religion, represented in this chapter by the work of Richard Swinburne. From personal motives (as a practicing Catholic) yet also for good *reasons*, in the chapter I entertain the view that it is more rather than less probable that there is a God who exists and, in divine perfection and with perfectly good intent, creates the world. This view remains plausible even if, the Buddhist critique aside, we also find in both the Hindu and Christian traditions that there have been important thinkers, devout theists included, who did not believe that an adequate case for the existence of God could be made and satisfactorily defended. In this project, I took arguments about God's existence to form a necessary starting point – conceptually, if not temporally – for whatever else one might wish to say about God deeper within the specific confines of individual traditions.

Yet, although I had originally imagined that my book would have been concerned solely with the issues arising in the debates about God's existence, even in chapter two I gave space to Hindu scriptural

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[6] *Hindu God, Christian God* (Oxford University Press, 2001) – to which Patil wrote a concluding response.

[7] See also "The Existence of God, Reason, and Revelation in Two Classical Hindu Theologies," *Faith and Philosophy* 16/4 (2000) 523-543.

[8] The four main chapters of *Hindu God, Christian God* (Oxford University Press, 2001): c. 2, on the existence of God, beginning with Richard Swinburne, then moving to Hindu materials; c. 3, on God's proper identity, beginning with Hans Urs von Balthasar; c. 4, on whether God can become embodied, beginning with Karl Rahner; c. 5, on whether revelation tells us definitively who God is, beginning with Karl Barth.

theologians (in the Mimamsa and Vedanta traditions) who do not believe that the demonstration of God's existence can ever work perfectly, while in its imperfect form it may cause doubts that are harmful. To an extent, I share that skepticism; something more than logic and appeals to natural instances of cause and effect are required if we are to think cogently about God.

But does concern for the question of God, as a real question with real implications, require faith? We ought not to slip too casually from the land of philosophy into a world of believers. Not that this would necessarily be a bad thing, even for rigorous philosophers. While the contemporary academy has for a long time had an ambition toward an objectivity that keeps its distance from faith, its practicing communities and its authorities, the reasons for this distance no longer add up to an absolute separation. If Patil is right, then the turn to religious engagement, including faith and practice, is occurring at the heart of rigorous arguments about religion, particularly when substantive classical materials are taken seriously. The split that Wood has highlighted now seems all the more problematic, since good philosophical arguments ("from the outside") and good religious arguments ("inside") all the more obviously imply one another.

In *Hindu God, Christian God* I was therefore also interested in additional difficult issues that arise when more specific, positive features of religious belief become topics of intellectual relevance. In the third chapter, for example, I turned to the issue of God's proper, specific name – Siva or Narayana or the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, for example – and the very conditions under which God can be convincingly recognized by one right name. While inevitably religious, the issue is also philosophically challenging, as the philosophical arguments, already difficult enough, are further complicated by decisions about whether and how reason and experience favor one specific understanding of God and one religious practice over another.

Such arguments, Hindu or Christian, entail claims about truths that have universal import, even while remaining in other ways tradition-specific. In Chapter 3 I was therefore dealing with *arguments* posed by Hindu and Christian thinkers who insist that there are reasons for the specificity of divine identity announced in their faith traditions. In examining Hindu arguments about whether Visnu or Siva is the supreme

deity properly named, I suggested that these arguments stand parallel to Hans Urs von Balthasar's arguments in favor of Jesus Christ as the sole completely full and true manifestation of God properly known. In either the Hindu context or the Christian, proponents of naming God in "just this way" know very well that reason alone will not suffice for a compelling case determinative of who God is. Yet they still made arguments, and saw that without risking this extended and more vulnerable argumentation, the mere claim that God exists would remain empty.

In the fourth and fifth chapters of *Hindu God, Christian God*, I dealt with still more narrow specifications, taking up arguments that this God can become incarnate (c. 4), and that God can be reliably and specially revealed in specific scriptural texts (c. 5). Each chapter by plan demands more of readers, insofar as it involves still narrower commitments to specific ways of arguing that entail still more rigorous religious and philosophical tenets. Thus, the idea of incarnation will not be accepted by Muslim or Saiva theists, and the idea that sacred texts (oral, written) afford reliable encounter with and information about God will put off other believers, and not just those who adhere to one scripture while excluding all others.

This increasingly narrowed set of interests of course raises the bar for participants, even as it leaves less comfortable space for philosophers whose sentiments, personal or professional, run against treating the particularities of specific faith traditions as of compelling intellectual relevance. This process of edging deeper into religious particularities and scriptural exegesis makes it unlikely that philosophically neutral arguments will be decisive; it also narrows the conversation to the smaller group of religious intellectuals willing to take seriously factors other than reason. In turn, attention to scripture also makes it relevant to reflect on a still wider range of learning practices that afford to religious truths a more demanding cogency. Even if Patil is right in arguing that the *truth* of arguments is not merely community-specific, the way to get at the larger cogency and universal meaning arises through attention to "local" detail, to those specifics on which religious traditions in the end do not yield. Yet if this line of reasoning has some force to it, the obligation goes both ways. Logical arguments about God open up properly religious topics; religious arguments are weaker if reasoned argumentation is

left to skeptics and opponents, while believers rush too quickly to safer religious resources that have little or no force with outsiders.

Once we open the door to tradition-specific religious arguments, we can ask whether there is anything to be gained by stating that this philosophical and religious reflection is itself a mode of religious activity. I believe that there are advantages, provided we do not overdo the correlation or insist that every individual thinker must be explicitly religious. It is better to move forward cautiously; Patil's case for the relevance of arguments about God and related matters will be strengthened if we become willing to speak of certain forms at least of the philosophy of religion as religious practices that are most naturally rooted in traditions of practice, even as forms of theological or religious reasoning.

A viable starting point for this further consideration is the well known "way of spiritual exercises" proposed by Pierre Hadot. Although Patil refers to Hadot only once, in passing and with a certain hesitation (p. 362), he does helpfully refer us to Matthew Kapstein's *Reason's Traces*,[9] wherein Kapstein, himself a distinguished scholar of Buddhism, points to close parallels between Hadot's understanding of philosophy and that of Buddhist intellectuals who care about religion *and* argument both. Kapstein argues that "Buddhist philosophy" is in some ways more precisely "Buddhology," "the hermeneutics of buddhahood and of the message propounded by the Buddha." (19) This Buddhology proceeds with a care for revealed teachings that does not sit well with conceptions of philosophy as autonomous; indeed, it is plausible to argue that "Buddhist philosophy has never claimed for itself the perfect autonomy of reason that is often supposed to be a hallmark of the Western traditions of rational inquiry derived ultimately from the Greeks." (19) Kapstein, like Patil, shows how the study of Buddhist thought might now be undertaken "not only for interreligious reflection on arguments and practices elaborated in the past, but in considering also our unactualized prospects . . . in critical reflection on its ideals of the good in relation to our contemporary predicaments." (20) I infer that Kapstein supports the model proposed by Hadot: Buddhist (or Hindu or Christian)

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[9] Specifically, the Introduction, pp. 3-26, in *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought* (Wisdom Publications, 2002).

philosophizing is a spiritual exercise that foregoes the ideal of total autonomy. But if so, understanding adequately the Buddhist arguments, or Western and Christian arguments with which they are paired, requires that one must be prepared to reconceptualize one's intellectual practice as a spiritual inquiry. And this means that we need to pay attention to our practices even as we attend to theirs, and speak with some candor about what our predicaments are. This richer philosophy of religion becomes in a way actually confessional, a discourse rooted in tradition and even normally understood as arising from and for communities of faith, alongside a similarly intended group of academic colleagues and interlocutors.[10]

To some readers, when I reconceive the philosophy of religion as a spiritual practice with confessional characteristics, I will seem to have traveled too far from what real philosophers of religion think the discipline to be. But I do so because in this way I find myself on surer ground, where I can think better, thinking religiously. Indeed, I have recently[11] tried out this still more deeply engaged thinking, by taking up the topic of "loving surrender to God" as argued and presented in two classics of spiritual theology, the *Treatise on the Love of God* by Francis de Sales and the *Essence of the Three Mysteries* by Vedanta Desika. Both de Sales and Desika, classical theologians, think through carefully the potential and limits of reasoning in spiritual matters, while arguing for continuity between clear-sighted reasoning about self and world on the one hand, and the necessarily interior journey that begins but does not end in reason's hard questions. I found their work attractive because I was interested in pushing still farther the matter of how religious intellectuals write so as to draw their readers into religious activities, such as surrender to God, that stand at the heart of their traditions. Reason and argument have their role, but employing them properly — chastened, literate, aware of their resting point — raises the prospect of actual religious practice. Patil made this point with respect to Ratnakirti's project; my contribution is to argue that I really do intend also an existential event, that a reader might be persuaded actually to surrender to God.

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[10] On my understanding of "confessional" as a characteristic of comparative theological discourse, see *Hindu God, Christian God*, c. 1.

[11] *Beyond Compare: St. Francis de Sales and Sri Vedanta Desika on Loving Surrender to God* (Georgetown University Press, 2008).

For now, the relationship among the philosophy of religion, theology, and engaged religious reasoning remains uncomfortable and vexed, but more intimate and intense conversations that violate disciplinary boundaries promise to be so fruitful that no one involved should neglect the opportunity to take the other modes of reasoning seriously. As Patil shows us in splendid detail, the densest and most exact of arguments is still made clearer by catching its religious finality; deeper and engaged religious reflection is never relieved of the need for exact, even detached reasoning; as Kapstein's reflection on Hadot tells us, Buddhist (and other) forms of arguments can rightly be recognized as spiritual exercises. All of this needs to be formalized, of course, but Wood states the balance well in the last paragraph of his essay:

> It would be a good thing if more scholars of religion—and especially theologians—read analytic philosophy. Moreover, theologians who want more scholars of religion to read theology ought to agree. So also scholars of religion who want more theologians to read Marxist and Freudian critiques, or wrestle with non-Christian religions, or with social scientific approaches to religion. And for the same reasons, too—there are good arguments there, arguments worth taking seriously, even if one ultimately rejects them. We profit intellectually when we engage with the interdisciplinary other. This is a truism of the religious studies academy, itself inherently interdisciplinary. So too with the analytic other. (959)

Wood should agree that the "ought" runs the other way too. By the obligation of their own commitments to reason, practitioners of analytic philosophy need to take seriously positive, tradition-based theology, including the serious but difficult thinking that occurs in other terms in other religious traditions. None of the disciplines at stake is sufficient without taking the others into account.

I close by reemphasizing that all of this is interreligious. In all such study, reflection proceeds by way of complex learning with respect to multiple dimensions; even more broadly, religious and cultural boundaries are less than absolute because they do not make sense, are not productive, and are in fact crossed repeatedly. In turn, there will be no reason to privilege exclusively any single tradition's manner of reasoning or scriptures or tradition of great teachers.

We are not just talking about good academic work, nor about a sensitized inclusion of Asian and southern hemisphere thinkers in our philosophical projects. Our disciplines will be intellectually compelling insofar as false boundaries are not imposed. Insofar as truth is at stake, the very content of our disciplines will unsettle conventional divisions between philosophical and religious modes of reflection.

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RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: A PHILOSOPHICAL DEFENSE OF RELIGIOUS INCLUSIVISM

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Abstract. Faced by the challenge of religious plurality, most philosophers of religion view pluralism and exclusivism as the most accepted and fully developed positions. The third alternative, the model of inclusivism, held especially within the catholic tradition, has not received adequate attention in the debates in philosophy of religion, perhaps as it is based solely on theological grounds. In this essay I offer a philosophical defense of the position of religious inclusivism and give reasons why this position represents the most appropriate position in the face of conflicting religious truth claims.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious plurality today presents a significant challenge. There exist a plurality of religious traditions, each with different teachings and practices, and each is further differentiated internally into various movements and interpretations.[1] To the extent that these traditions are grounded in particular truth claims and call for the dissemination of their own teaching and way of life, many powerful theological, philosophical and political challenges are created. By 'challenge' I mean the cognitive calling into question of the truth of a certain belief or attitude generated by other doctrines or practices. There are at least four ways beliefs can be challenged: One position can negate another (marking a contradictory relationship between propositions), dissent from it (contrary relationship), diverge from it (divergent relationship) or, despite its otherness,

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[1] Cf. David Basinger, Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment, Aldershot 2002, 2f.; Hendrik M. Vroom, A Spectrum of Worldviews. An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion in a Pluralistic World, Amsterdam 2006, 254.

correspond to it (convergent relationship). Concerning the plurality of religious beliefs, I would like to distinguish three spheres in which such challenges are felt:

(1) *The intra-religious sphere*: In the face of the plurality of religions, a given religious community is prompted to clarify the uniqueness of its own religious beliefs, and explore whether and to what extent the awareness of the religious views of others might lead it to define more precisely or revise its own teachings.[2]

(2) *The inter-religious sphere*: This is the sphere of debate that concerns models that define the relationship between rival religious truth claims, but also the consequences of the intra-religious questioning of these truth claims.

(3) *The extra-religious sphere*: This is the sphere where the relationship between plural religious beliefs and other beliefs or convictions is defined within the liberal framework of the secular state. It is also the sphere for debating the conditions under which religious citizens might make public use of reason.

In this essay I focus solely on the second aspect: the inter-religious challenge of religious plurality. From the perspective of theology and philosophy of religion, there are three well-known models of the relationship between the plurality of divergent religious beliefs: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. These theories arise mostly on the basis of epistemological considerations. Exclusivism and inclusivism are related models, insofar as both claim the superiority of a particular religion; they differ roughly in that the other religion is in its core tenets[3] untrue for the exclusivist, but only partially untrue for the inclusivist. At its core, the term 'pluralism' incorporates at least the following assumptions: (i) the plurality of competing religious truth claims is a fact, and must be accepted,[4] (ii) there is no generally acknowledged religious metaposition

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[2] Cf. Harold Coward, Religious Pluralism and the Future of Religions, in: Thomas Dean (ed.), Religious Pluralism and Truth, New York 1995, 45-63, 45f.

[3] Core tenets of a religion are doctrines and teachings to which assent is religiously required of all believers.

[4] As William C. Smith puts it: "Plurality, the existence of diversity, is a fact; pluralism,

from which to judge rival truth claims,[5] and (iii) religious truth claims are at best mythologically, not literally, true with regard to the nature of ultimate reality.[6] The three models also describe the relevant attitudes of different religions toward each other: either a relationship of superiority or one of equality between the different truth claims of the religions.[7] In virtue of the fact that numerous intricate varieties can be distinguished within the three models, these concepts can be further differentiated – though I am not going to do so – and a religious position can contain elements of different models.[8]

Faced by the challenge of religious diversity, most philosophers of religion take the view that pluralism and exclusivism are, according to Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker, "the most fully developed positions".[9] Or, as David Basinger claims, there are only "two basic responses to the reality of religious diversity: religious exclusivism and religious pluralism".[10] In this context inclusivism "faces a less certain future"[11] or even, according to John Hick, constitutes a "somewhat astonishing doctrine".[12] I would

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the acceptance of diversity, is an imperative." See William C. Smith, Religious Diversity, New York 1976, xviii.

[5] A version of exclusivism can also be inferred from (ii): see William P. Alston, Perceiving God. The Epistemology of Religious Experience, New York 1993, 274.

[6] Cf. Roger Trigg, Rationality and Religion: Does Faith need Reason?, Oxford 1998, 53. On facets of religious pluralism see: Keith Yandell, Some Varieties of Religious Pluralism, in: James Kellenberger (ed.), Inter-Religious Models and Criteria, New York 1993, 187-211, here 187-194.

[7] Does Comparative Theology constitute, as claimed, a separate model? See James L. Fredericks, Faith among Faiths. Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions, New York 1999, 9. I do not endorse this view. I think that Comparative Theology does not present a fourth model, but at best a hermeneutically sensitive variant of inclusivism or exclusivism. Here is not the place to give reasons for my claim.

[8] For a detailed description of these models see Gavin D'Costa, Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religion, Oxford 2009, 3-33.

[9] Kevin Meeker/Philip L. Quinn, Introduction, in: idem (eds.), The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity, New York 2000, 1-37, 27.

[10] David Basinger, Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment, 4.

[11] Ibid., 27. Another reason for the unpopularity of inclusivism might be, as Jonathan L. Kvanvig states, that inclusivism is "the most difficult position to clarify in this scheme". See Jonathan L. Kvanvig, Religious Pluralism and the Buridan's Ass Paradox, European Journal for Philosophy of Religion 1 (2009), 1-26, 3.

[12] John Hick, Religious Pluralism and Salvation, in: Faith and Philosophy 5 (1988), 365-377, 376.

like to call these views into question. As Quinn and Meeker have emphasised, although many religious persons hold the inclusivist view, "no one has yet undertaken to provide the same *detailed* defense of inclusivism that is evident in Hick's defense of pluralism or Alston's defense of exclusivism."[13] In this essay, I develop a response to this deficiency and formulate some philosophical arguments towards a defense of inclusivism. Perhaps, because Christians have defended it solely on the basis of theological grounds, inclusivism has not received adequate attention in the debates in philosophy of religion.[14] The inclusivist position seems to me to be the most realistic and tenable response to the challenge of mediating divergent religious truth claims in the intra- and inter-religious spheres without either relativising all of them to mere mythological statements or deeming only the claims of one religion to be true and the rest to be false. Here is not the place to refer to the extensive debates about pluralism and exclusivism or to give detailed reasons why pluralism and exclusivism are not, in my view, "the most fully developed positions" for coping with conflicting religious truth claims.

I am going to call the position that holds that there is a compatibility among competing religious truth claims *epistemic* inclusivism, because it pertains primarily to epistemological considerations about religious truth claims and not to theological considerations about the way of salvation. In the first section I analyse the idea of inclusivism within the catholic tradition. In the second section I sketch a philosophical view of inclusivism and give reasons for thinking that it constitutes the most viable position in response to the challenge of divergent religious truth claims. The third section presents a brief conclusion.

II. THE IDEA OF INCLUSIVISM

If neither pluralism nor exclusivism are appropriate responses to the problem of religious diversity, what reasons would there then be to

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[13] Kevin Meeker/Philip L. Quinn, Introduction, in: idem (eds.), The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity, New York 2000, 1-37, 27.

[14] See for instance Karl Rahner's famous concept of the "anonymous Christian": Karl Rahner, Christiantity and the Non-Religions, in: Theological Investigations, vol. 5, London 1966, 115-134.

support a position of epistemic inclusivism? I would like to defend the following position: The inclusivist position opens up the only conceptual possibility for a believer upholding the exclusivity of her own truth claims (against pluralism), without declaring the divergent belief, or the central truth claims of that belief, to be false (against exclusivism). Inclusivism and exclusivism share the view that the doctrines of the home religion are true and the truth claims of other religions incompatible with them are false. But inclusivism differs from (at least a traditional and more restrictive) exclusivism on the question, "whether it is possible for an alien religion to include any true claim among its doctrines and teachings."[15] According to inclusivism, the exclusivity of a truth claim of the home religion excludes incompatible alien truth claims, though not a possible inclusion of the truth of the home religion in the alien belief system. The inclusivist can accept the fact of religious diversity and manage that fact conceptually without having to deny the superiority of her own standpoint. This kind of inclusivism should not be understood, as David Basinger claims,[16] as a derivative "soft exclusivism", but as a model in its own right that remains distinct from exclusivism and pluralism. Correct terminology is important here. Any position that acknowledges, theologically, the salvific force, or, philosophically, the inclusivity of at least one of its own basic truth claims within the tenets of a different religion, should be considered as an inclusivism and not as an inclusive or "soft exclusivism".

Yet how can one think that the other religious belief is possibly only *partially* true? Is such a view, and therefore the inclusivist position as a whole, at all tenable, bearing in mind the principle of bivalence contained in classical logic – according to which any proposition is either true or false, but not true and false at the same time, and therefore not 'partially' true? The inclusivist standpoint maintained by the Catholic Church for instance is based firstly on Biblical witness, and then on theological reflection concerning the radius and centre of the divine salvific will. Regarding the truth claims of other religions, the Second Vatican Council states with regard to other religions:

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[15] Paul J. Griffiths, Problems of Religious Diversity, Oxford 2001, 57.
[16] David Basinger, Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment, 5.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.[17]

This notion revolves primarily around St. Justin's Christian interpretation of the Stoic idea of the *logos spermatikos*.[18] Theologically, this idea states that there are or may be 'grains' of truth in other religions; a "ray of that Truth" (*radius illius veritatis*) that Christians recognise in Christ shines through them.[19] This passage implies a distinction between *alethic* inclusivism and *relativistic* inclusivism. Both versions hold that (a) there exists an absolute truth or set of true assertions about God. Only the latter holds that (b) no religion is able to ascertain fully the absolute truth or the complete set of true assertions about God and (c) every religion can at best ascertain partially the absolute truth or the true assertions about God. 'Inclusivism' in the Catholic sense refers to an alethic, that is truth-inductive inclusivism, which defends the position that one particular religion is able to ascertain, as the passage says, "the fullness" of God's truth in Jesus Christ.

But this might turn out to be more complicated than it seems at first glance; in light of the fact that within the Catholic tradition the concept of truth – without relativising the truth claim of the Church's own teach-

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[17] "Ecclesia catholica nihil eorum, quae in his religionibus vera et sancta sunt, reicit. Sincera cum observantia considerat illos modos agendi et vivendi, illa praecepta et doctrinas, quae, quamvis ab iis quae ipsa tenet et proponit in multis discrepent, haud raro referunt tamen *radium illius Veritatis*, quae illuminat omnes homines. Annuntiat vero et annuntiare tenetur indesinenter Christum, qui est 'via et veritas et vita' (*Io* 14,6), in quo homines plenitudinem vitae religiosae inveniunt, in quo Deus omnia Sibi reconciliavit" (emphasis added), in: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2. See also the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church *Ad gentes*, no. 11.

[18] Concerning this model from a theology of religious pluralism perspective, see: Jacques Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, New York 1997, 53-60.

[19] Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.

ing – is construed historically, insofar as "every truth attained is but a step towards that fullness of truth which will appear with the final Revelation of God."[20] This distinction between a 'truth attained' (*veritas capta*) and the 'fullness' of truth (*veritas ultima*) would entail, unintentionally, not alethic but a version of relativistic inclusivism. This distinction can be expressed within the metaphor found in *Nostra Aetate,* the document of the Second Vatican Council cited above. So, read in light of this distinction, we see that Christians, too, do not yet see all the rays of the Truth that is the event of Christ, but, in contrast to non-Christians, they do now see at least those rays that reveal it to be the event of *Christ*. This metaphorical view might explain why the Catholic tradition adheres to an alethic inclusivism. However, in the sentence of the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* about the distinction between the *veritas capta* and the *veritas ultima* it remains problematic, how under these conditions key tenets of Christian faith can be conceived of as being fundamentally final and irrevocable. This problem indicates that the talk of the *logos spermatikos* remains more of a metaphor, which does not take us very far in analyzing the basic problem of an inclusivist position.

The first question to be addressed is the meaning of inclusivity or inclusion in the term 'inclusivism'. Based on the passage quoted from *Nostra Aetate*, inclusivity denotes the notion that a particular set of truth claims or at least one truth claim of a religion *P* (here Christianity in the Catholic tradition) is contained, or included, in a different religion *S*. 'Inclusion' is tantamount to 'containment'. So literally, 'inclusion' means that a truth claim or a set of truth claims of *P* is contained in *S*. The relation of inclusion is stated by a particular religion that assesses the occurrence of its own truth claims within the set of truth claims of different religions. It requires an outright interreligious commitment on the part of the inclusivist to analyse carefully the truth claims of different religions before stating any form of inclusivity.

How can the notion of inclusion be stated more precisely? Since set theory construes 'inclusion' as a particular relationship of containment between two sets of elements, it might be helpful to clarify the idea of

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[20] "… conscia sit omnem veritatem captam unam dumtaxat stationem esse plenam ad illam veritatem quae ultima in Dei revelatione ostendetur", in: John Paul II., Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, nos. 2-3.

inclusivism in light of this insight from set theory. A set A includes a set B ($A \supseteq B$), if B is a subset of A and is contained in A. If there exists at least one element of A which is not contained in B, then A is also a proper superset of B, or, equivalently, B is a proper subset of A. This relation is antisymmetric, because if $A \supseteq B$ with $A \neq B$, then $B \supseteq A$ is false. Assume, as an example, a relationship of inclusion between a religion S with its truth claims $S_1, S_2, S_3 \dots S_n$ and a religion P with its truth claims $P_1, P_2, P_3 \dots P_n$. If P is a proper subset of S, all the truth claims of P must be contained in S (so that $S_1 = P_1$, $S_2 = P_2$, and so forth) and there exists in S at least one truth claim S_{n+1}, which is not contained in P.

However, it is clear that the model of inclusion of set theory thus articulated is not applicable to the issue of religious inclusivism. Even if the latter entails an antisymmetric relation between two religions (with a set of truth claims or only one truth claim of P as a subset of the truth claims of S), P could not be considered as a proper subset of S insofar as not *all* truth claims of P are contained in S. In this regard, the idea of inclusivism refers more to the intersection of two different sets, which contains all elements – *i.e.* truth claims – of P that also belong to S. But on the other hand, the concept of intersection does not express an antisymmetric relation as it is implied in the notion of inclusivism.

Consider an example. Religion P entails the three central and basic propositions {a, b, c}. Religion S entails {b, c, d}, religion T {c, d, e} and religion U {d, e, f}. Here, P's truth claims b and c are included in S, and its claim c in T. No truth claim of P is included in U – but it would be possible for an adherent of P to suppose that, for the time being, no truth claim of P has yet been identified as contained in U. Even with this simple example, we can draw three conclusions for the position of inclusivism: there might be (1) one religion all of whose (or whose core) truth claims are true, (2) different degrees of inclusivity with regard to the number of truth claims of P that are contained within different religions, (3) a hierarchy of religions from the perspective of P according to the number of the truth claims of P that they contain. It should be mentioned that this interpretation is simplified in that it focuses solely on the number of occurring truth claims. It is also possible – though I am not going to do so – to emphasise the meaning of truth claims within different religions and infer from that particular hierarchies.

My explication of the core ideas of epistemic inclusivism shows us that there are epistemic advantages of inclusivism in comparison to exclusivism and pluralism.[21] With regard to exclusivism, the position of inclusivism is better differentiated in terms of the relation between one's own religion and other religions. The traditional exclusivist analyses solely, under the principle of self-contradiction, the compatibility of the central truth claims of a different religion with his own core truth claims. In the case of incompatibility between these two sets of claims, the exclusivist tends to deny the truth and salvific force of the whole other religion – otherwise he would hold a form of inclusivism (as I have defined it). Inclusivism allows one to assert the absolute truth of one's own religion while affirming that salvation is also possible for non-Christians. With regard to pluralism, the idea of inclusivity sketched allows a religious person first to refer to her self-understanding and maintain the (non-mythological) truth of her single religion, and second to define a hierarchy of religions different from her true religion that are not completely false, but, on a sliding scale, partially true.

III. AN EPISTEMIC FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVISM

Despite these advantages, this model of inclusivism still needs a more solid philosophical underpinning. How is it possible for the inclusivist to hold, on the one side, the exclusivity of truth claims of her own religion which excludes incompatible alien religious claims, and, on the other side, an inclusion of a truth claim or a set of truth claims of her religion in the alien belief? As was shown, the inclusivist maintains that only her religion R is true and that there is a hierarchy of religions which are, on a sliding scale, either partially true (depending on the number and the meaning of contained true claims of R) or even false (because no truth claims of R are contained). I would like to delineate only two aspects as an epistemic framework for the model of inclusivism:

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[21] Recall that I am referring to a traditional and more restrictive form of exclusivism. A 'traditional exclusivist' holds that only her own religion is true if there are no core claims of an alien religion which are compatible with the core claims of Christianity (for example, the claim that salvation is only available through faith in Christ).

(1) It is possible that different religions refer to the same God in different ways. This can be illustrated with a simple example: At t_1 observer *A* sees from a distance that a tower looks round, whereas to observer *B*, who is even further away, the tower appears rectangular.[22] At t_2, the persons get closer and both see that the tower is, in fact, round. Hence, at t_1 two contrary beliefs are held, but – as is revealed at t_2 – the two observers have been successfully referring to the same object. This clearly emerges as we consider the conditions of perception of the truth claim. At t_1 observer *B* was able to give sound reasons for his belief, while from *A*'s perspective it is clear that *B* is not mistaken in referring to the same object, but is mistaken in his description thereof. From his perspective, *A* has sound reasons to assume both that he is correct at t_1 and that *B* is referring to the same object (for instance because *B* is pointing at it). At this point it is helpful to distinguish three types of reference based on John Searle's theory of reference in *Speech Acts*:

(a) fully consummated reference, which identifies the object unequivocally,
(b) successful reference, which though not complete is successful,
(c) unconsummated and failed reference, which fails to lead to an identification of the object.[23]

Compared to both Quine's general skepticism with regard to the success of the act of reference (even within the system of one's own language), and the causal theories of reference developed by Kripke and the early Putnam, Searle's descriptive theory of reference has the advantage of conceptualizing the identification of the object of reference as a performative act, which with the aid of descriptors or markers can lead to unequivocal identification. Thus, according to Searle, successful reference is *potentially* fully consummated reference.[24]

It is precisely this transition that is at the stake in the example given above. The situation at t_1 is a case of successful reference: The tower is

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[22] The example originates from Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, chap. XIII, Cambridge (Mass.) ²2000, 69 (I am grateful to Erik Baldwin for this hint).

[23] John Searle, Speech Acts, 82; Searle does not explicate separately the third form of reference.

[24] Ibid., 82.

successfully identified as the object of reference by both *A* and *B*, though only *B* refers to it in an incomplete mode. Epistemic inclusivism might rephrase the performative act of reference as follows: From the internal perspective of a religion *E*, reference to God within the religion *F* can be conceived of as a case of successful, though not complete, reference.[25] It points in the right direction, allowing identification and thus distinction between God and idol, yet, from the internal perspective of *E*, still remains provisional compared to *E*'s own more precise reference.[26] Consider, as an example in the field of religion, the following belief:

(B)   The one God is not triune.

Both the Christian inclusivist and exclusivist share the view that (B) is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and, thus, agree that it is false. But, in contrast to the exclusivist, the inclusivist still can acknowledge that there is an 'element' of the Christian faith included in (B). Obviously, (B) contains the monotheistic belief that there is one God. So, in terms of reference, the inclusivist may argue that (B) is a case of a successful reference to the object of the Christian belief, in which case (B) is able to identify the Christian God but remains incomplete given that (B) does not acknowledge God's triune existence. The exclusivist cannot grant there is an element of truth in (B). See, for instance, the following definition:

> *Exclusivism* maintains that the central claims of Christianity are true, and that where the claims of Christianity conflict with those of other religions the latter are to be rejected as false. Christian exclusivists also characteristically hold that God has revealed himself definitively in the Bible and that Jesus Christ is the unique incarnation of God, the only Lord and Savior.

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[25] Of course this is not to say, as John Hick's pluralist theology of religions might, that all religions refer successfully, though necessarily imperfectly, to a transcendent reality.

[26] Can religion *E* still revise its strong and central beliefs? From *E*'s internal perspective, its own truth claim is, at root, the certainty that no such revision will take place, either at t_3 or at t_n. However, the foundational certainty that this involves relates only to the successful identification of the object of reference 'God', not to the scope of the set of propositions that can be predicated by it. This becomes clearer when we consider aspect (b).

Salvation is not to be found in the structures of other religious traditions.[27] Exclusivists and inclusivists share the view that claims which are incompatible with their own religious claims are false. But the inclusivist is not therefore automatically forced to reject the other religion. With regard to the incompatible claim of the other religion the inclusivist is able to examine carefully whether it is based on an unconsummated and failed reference (and is therefore false) or on a successful though incomplete reference (and is therefore at least partially true). Thus, accepting incomplete reference to the same object permits the inclusivist to accept that 'false statements' about that object may be partially true. This view is available only to the inclusivist but not to the exclusivist – otherwise the latter would hold some sort of 'covert inclusivism'. This idea of an incomplete though successful reference does not only apply to particular truth claims but also to religions as theories.

(2) Understood as theories, religions are under-determined and, with respect to the scope of the set of propositions that they uphold, not necessarily complete. For instance, if we understand the belief system of a religion as theory T_1 with the truth claims $S_1, S_2, S_3 \ldots S_n$, then from an internal perspective it is not ruled out that T_1 might, in light of 'progress towards the fullness of truth' develop into T_2 with the truth claims $S_1, S_2, S_3 \ldots S_n, S_{n+1}$ (broadening of the set of propositions) or $S_{1^*}, S_{2^*}, S_{3^*} \ldots S_{n^*}$ (unfolding or revision of certain propositions or attitudes). Within the Catholic Church, numerous examples of this can be found in the history of dogma. Examples of broadening include for instance the Mariological dogmas of the 19th and 20th centuries. Examples of revision include attitudes towards the freedom of religion. And examples of unfolding include the understanding of revelation. This insight entails recognition of a certain form of doctrinal contingency: From the internal perspective of a given religious community, its own teaching is true at t_1, while it is not excluded that this truth may be capable of being expressed more comprehensively and precisely at t_2. If a religious tradition disputes such

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[27] Harold A. Netland, Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth, Vancouver 1997, 9. See also ibid., 112: "Christian exclusivism . . . contends that where the central claims of Christian faith are incompatible with those of other religious traditions the latter are to be rejected as false. Thus, for example, it has traditionally been said that the Muslim and the orthodox Christian cannot both be correct in their respective beliefs about the identity of Jesus of Nazareth."

underdeterminedness and thus the possibility of extending or deepening of its core beliefs, then it can only be described as radically exclusivist.

With regard to the notion of inclusivity, the two aspects allow for the possibility that a particular religious truth claim as well as a religious belief can be considered as being "approximately true".[28] On the basis of this interpretation, it is possible to reconstruct an inclusivist position philosophically, while still upholding the ultimate truth of a certain *veritas capta*, yet without excluding the possibility that the *veritas ultima* might be more comprehensive and profound.

IV. CONCLUSION

Inclusivism is not, as John Hick claims, a "somewhat astonishing doctrine". Against Hick's pluralism, the inclusivist holds that religions are referring successfully to God. Hick maintains that substantial properties (such as 'omnipotence' or 'being a person') cannot be ascribed to the divine reality[29] and that religious truth claims are, at best, mythologically but not literally true.[30] We now see how it is that, for Hick's pluralism, religions are unable to refer *successfully* to the divine reality. Because of the transcategoriality of the divine reality, reference to what religions call 'God' or 'Allah' or whatever is unable, according to Hick's theory, to identify the divine reality in itself. So when Hick, for example, points out unequivocally that "the ultimate reality, the Real, cannot be described as a personal God", it follows that within Hick's pluralism the Christian attempt to refer to God as a person remains unsuccessful as it fails to identify God as he is in himself.[31]

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[28] Cf. Laurence BonJour, Reply to Solomon, in: Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 50 (1990), 779-782, 779f. See also: Lorenz B. Puntel, The Rationality of Theistic Belief and the Concept of Truth, in: Godehard Brüntrup/Ronald K. Tacelli (eds.), The Rationality of Theism, Dordrecht 1999, 39-59, here 53, who speaks of a relative "truth status": "Only at the end of the day, that is, when *all* factors (data, aspects, alternatives, and the like) have been taken into account and examined, will it be possible to establish 'the truth', that is, the fully determinate status of the sentences stated and the propositions articulated."

[29] See John Hick, An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent, New Haven/London 2004, 239.

[30] Ibid., xix-xxii, 348.

[31] For an attempt to clarify Hick's theory with regard to reference see Peter Byrne,

Against exclusivism, and without relinquishing the exclusivity that is logically inherent in her truth claims, the inclusivist can (i) accept a plurality of heterogeneous attitudes and thus co-exist at least with a minimal pluralism, (ii) on the basis of her own doctrinal contingency even learn from this other position and supplement or deepen her own teaching, and (iii) when faced with another *religious* belief or conviction, ascribe to that other position an inclusivity of truth claims of the home religion. That is, she can consistently concede that members of other religions make successful although incomplete references to God. Thus, a form of moderate exclusivism should not be called 'inclusivism' if it identifies the inclusivity of, at least, one of its own truth claims within the tenets of a different religion.

As we know, divergent truth claims of religions harbor a particular potential for both ethical and political conflict. They do so on the one hand when combined with a radically exclusivist attitude, and when they involve both strong and exemplary beliefs, thus creating a clash of world views upon which identities are constructed. They do so, on the other hand, when the members of the religious communities concerned lack sufficient intellectual and social competence to manage these conflicts both cognitively and politically, and to call into question an unjustified coherence of strong religious and political beliefs. The inclusivist model is empirically and epistemically the most viable position to adopt in response to the challenge of the plurality of religious truth claims. In my opinion, the challenge of the plurality of religious views consists first and foremost in the problem of whether the members of a religious community are willing to acknowledge their particularity *de facto*, without therefore having to relinquish the truth claim of their own religion. In this respect the concept of epistemic inclusivism offers major advantages.[32]

Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion, London 1995, 31-55, 191-203.

LIGHT OUT OF PLENITUDE: TOWARDS
AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF MYSTICAL INCLUSIVISM

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Abstract. The question to what extent the putative mystical experiences reported in the variety of religious traditions contribute to the conflict of religious truth claims, appears to be one of the hardest problems of the epistemology of religion, identified in the course of the ongoing debate about the philosophical consequences of religious diversity. A number of leading participants in this debate, including the late W.P. Alston, took a strongly exclusivist stance on it, while being aware that in the light of the long coexistence of seemingly irreconcilable great mystical traditions, mystical exclusivism lacks philosophical justification. In this paper I argue that from the point of view of a theist, inclusivism with respect to the issue whether adherents of different religious traditions can have veridical experience of God (or Ultimate Reality) now, is more plausible than the Alstonian exclusivism. I suggest that mystical inclusivism of the kind I imply in this paper may contribute to the development of cross-cultural philosophy of religion, as well as to the theoretical framework for inter-religious dialogue, because (1) it allows for the possibility of veridical experience of God in a variety of religious traditions, but (2) it avoids the radical revisionist postulates of Hickian pluralism and (3) it leaves open the question whether the creed of any specific tradition is a better approximation to the truth about God than the creeds of other traditions.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the term 'mystical experience of God' designates an experience in which the subject takes herself to have a direct non-sensory perception of God (or of God's presence or God's activity). However, more than being about putative mystical *experiences* of God, this study is focused on *beliefs* about God formed on the basis of alleged mystical experiences of God. More precisely, I will be concerned with the *mystical doxastic practice*

(hereafter 'MDP'), conceived in the manner proposed by William P. Alston (1991), *i.e.* as the cognitive practice of forming beliefs about God on the basis of alleged mystical experiences of God. The beliefs formed in this way will be called 'mystical beliefs' (later 'M-beliefs') about God. I would like the term 'mystical belief' to be understood on analogy with the term 'sense perceptual belief'. As we can call 'sense perceptual belief' a belief that we take to be epistemically warranted in virtue of being properly grounded in some sense perceptual experience, so by 'M-belief' I mean a belief that is supposed to derive its epistemic warrant from the fact of being properly grounded in a (non-sensory) perceptual experience of God.

Among the contemporary philosophers of religion who have addressed the issue of the epistemic status of M-beliefs (*e.g.* Alston 1991; Swinburne 1991; Yandell 1993; Wainwright 1981; Pike 1992; Gellman 1997 and 2001; Franks Davis 1989), there is a widespread agreement that the fact of religious diversity, especially the variety of ways different religious traditions (later 'RTs') describe God, constitutes powerful challenge to the apologists of mysticism. In this paper I want to examine a number of key claims made by the late William P. Alston in his *Perceiving God*, which is justly considered a classic in the field of epistemology of religion, and I will suggest that the exclusivist stance exemplified by Alston does not meet the above challenge, and an inclusivist approach is called for as a more viable option.

I describe the position which I defend in this paper as 'inclusivist', in order to contrast it with the view I will label 'exclusivism'. By exclusivism I mean a view that, either God does not come into experiential contact with adherents of alien RTs (and therefore the beliefs about God taken by representatives of alien RTs to be M-beliefs are never such, because they are not grounded in genuine mystical experiences of God), or, even if God is being experienced in alien RTs, the practice of forming beliefs on the basis of such experiences is, in these RTs, for some reason generally unreliable, *i.e.* it does not yield mostly true beliefs about God.

Inclusivism, as conceived in this study, (1) allows for the possibility of MDP being reliable when exercised in a variety of RTs, but (2) does not imply denying the possibility that the account of God provided by one RT, or a group of doctrinally related RTs (*e.g.* broadly theistic RTs), is a better approximation to the truth about God than the accounts of God found in other RTs. Stress on (1) allows for distinguishing such inclusivism from exclusivism. Stress on (2) allows for distinguishing inclusivism from those pluralistic positions, defended *e.g.* by John Hick (1989) which imply that

all beliefs about God held in various RTs, including beliefs taken by each respective RT to be either based on, or verified by mystical experiences of God, are equally true (in some sense) and epistemically on a par.

I will argue that an inclusivist account of MDP, as outlined here, is a better explanatory account of the reports of mystical experiences of God (later 'mystical reports') coming from a variety of RTs, than an exclusivst account.[1] The main advantage of inclusivism should manifests itself in the fact that, unlike exclusivism, it allows for an adequate response to a number of concerns, crucial to any satisfactory (from the point of view of a theist) epistemological assessment of mysticism. Among them are: (a) saving the reliability of MDP in the face of the Conflicting Truth Claims Challenge (later 'CTCC'); (b) providing a hypothesis that would explain both similarities *and* differences in the mystical reports coming from various RTs, without discarding too much of the available data; (c) taking into account metaphysical and epistemological complexities involved in the idea of 'experiencing God'; (d) objecting to the revisionist approach to mystical experience proposed by the anti-realists, which apparently dismisses some

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[1] One needs to notice that given the understanding of MDP as a practice of forming beliefs on the basis of mystical experience *of God*, a positive answer to the question whether MDP as exercised in the context of both theistic and non-theistic RTs can be generally reliable, does imply that some mystics from non-theistic RTs can be justified in holding some M-beliefs *about God*. As the question is asked and answered *by a theist*, for MDP to be reliable in the context of non-theistic RTs, it must be the case that it is the God which a theist believes in, that is both the object of the non-theist's mystical experience and the object of a non-theist's M-beliefs. The *meaning* of the terms that some Eastern mystics may use to name the object of their mystical experiences may be too different from the meaning a Western theist ascribes to 'God', to allow for a Western theist's identification of the object of an Eastern mystic's experience as the God of Western theism. However, it will suffice to assume that the terms used by the theist and the non-theist to name the object of the non-theist's experience have the *same reference*. Such assumption can be made without imposing anything which would be unacceptable for Western or Eastern RTs, because, while using the term 'God', we can substitute for the conception of God, which is not common to all RTs, the conception of an Ultimate Reality as the ultimate source or ground of all else, which is common to Eastern and Western RTs. Such a contention is supported *e.g.* by the way F. X. Clooney & H. Nicholson characterize the mainstream Hindu conception of Ultimate Reality: "Ultimate Reality might be described as follows: that which cannot be surpassed; that from which all realities, persons, and things come, that on which they depend . . . In the theistic traditions that most distinctively characterize Hindu thinking, this Ultimate Reality is personal, can be invoked by one or more proper names, and can choose to become accessible in perceptible form" (Clooney & Nicholson 2001, 95-96).

of the most fundamental claims made by mystics themselves about the nature of their experiences of God.

To show that it is possible to accept an inclusivist account of MDP, without undermining the efforts of various theistic philosophers to secure the epistemic reliability of MDP as such, is an essential part of the present project. Hence, the arguments provided by the acclaimed authors who are sympathetic to the idea that some people have had veridical mystical experiences of God, will constitute the background of my own argument, which is meant to supplement rather than to challenge their overall approach. This will be especially true with regard to Alston's defence of the reliability of MDP. Revising the Alstonian account of MDP, I will suggest that construing MDP as a single doxastic practice, reliable across a variety of RTs, allows for a more satisfactory response to CTCC.

My response to the critic of mysticism will be centered on the suggestion that although overall accounts of God found in different RTs may be and often are incompatible, M-beliefs about God as the object of mystical experiences do not have to come into direct conflict (the beliefs that do conflict are not M-beliefs).

My argument will proceed as follows. Firstly, I will reject W.P. Alston's exclusivist account of MDP. I will suggest that the reasons he provides for taking there to be many conflicting MDPs rather than one universal MDP ('universal' in this context meaning 'common to all RTs') are insufficient. Then I will show that individuating plurality of MDPs does not allow for a satisfactory response to CTCC, while by allowing of there being just one universal MDP it is possible to conceive an inclusivist account of MDP. Finally, I will make a suggestion how, granting an inclusivist account of MDP, the presence of apparently incompatible beliefs about God implied in some mystical reports coming from various RTs may be explained without denying the general reliability of MDP as exercised in the variety of RTs. I will conclude that CTCC does not endanger the reliability of MDP as accounted for in an inclusivist manner.

A CRITIQUE OF ALSTON'S CONSTRUAL
OF MYSTICAL DOXASTIC PRACTICE

In his *Perceiving God*, William P. Alston arrives at an account of mystical doxastic practice which has clearly exclusivist consequences, as far as religious diversity is concerned. Crucial in this respect are Alston's contentions that we cannot individuate a single universal MDP reliable across various mystical traditions, but that each RT has its own distinct MDP which is incompatible with the analogical practices of other RTs (the claim I reject), *and* that there can only be one epistemically reliable mystical doxastic practice (the claim I support).

Alston's motivation for being an exclusivist is that MDP as exercised in at least some alien RTs seems to yield beliefs about God that are mostly false (*i.e.* heterodox from the point of view of the exclusivist under consideration). An exclusivist may think that allowing for MDP being generally reliable in alien RTs would amount to giving credibility to an account of God that the exclusivist takes to be false (*e.g.* an account of God as non-personal).

Alston's understanding of mystical experience of God as 'a perception of God', while providing ground for a strong argument in favour of the veridicality of at least some mystical experiences, invites a formulation of CTCC that makes it the most powerful challenge to the reliability of MDP. The critic of mysticism can say that even if there is no way to *prove* that MDP as such cannot be reliable, and even if beliefs about God (usually grounded *also* in scriptural revelation, philosophical reflection, reports of miracles, and religious authority) held in each individual RT appear to be in full harmony with deliverances of MDP as exercised *within this particular* RT, still the very existence of a plurality of RTs, each with its own belief system about God (which supposedly includes M-beliefs) that appears incompatible with the belief systems of other RTs, calls into question the reliability of MDP as exercised in *each* competing RT.

I suggest that this line of criticism can be rejected, and it can be done in a more effective way than that proposed by Alston. Thus the first point to be made is that Alston's attempt at securing the reliability of MDP in the face of CTCC (and that is his central concern) is simply unsuccessful. Its failure depends largely on the way Alston *individuates*[2] MDP.

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[2] Due to stylistic considerations I will speak about 'individuation' and 'individuating' mystical doxastic practice(s), aware that it would perhaps be more precise to speak of 'deciding about there being' one or many MDPs.

Alston's *Perceiving God* is an extensive defence of what he calls the 'mystical perceptual practice', by which he means, the practice of forming beliefs about the Ultimate on the basis of putative direct experiential awareness thereof (*PG*, 103, 258). This initial formulation is specified by a proposal to understand this practice as one among other 'doxastic practices', like sense perception, memory, deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, rational intuition, or the forming of beliefs on the basis of the testimony of others. By a doxastic practice Alston means "the exercise of a system or constellation of belief-forming habits or mechanisms, each realizing a function that yields beliefs with a certain kind of content from inputs of a certain type" (*PG*, 155). This involves "a family of ways of going from grounds – doxastic and experiential, and perhaps others – to a belief with a certain content" (*PG*, 100, 153).

Alston's main thesis is that "a person can become justified in holding certain kinds of beliefs about God by virtue of perceiving God as being or doing so-and-so" (*PG*, 1). In a different place Alston formulates this thesis as follows: "The experience (or, as I prefer to say, the 'perception') of God provides *prima facie* epistemic justification for beliefs about what God is doing or how God is 'situated' vis-a-vis one at the moment')".

On Alston's account, in the last analysis, a person is justified in holding certain M-beliefs (as I call them) about God if MDP is reliable, *i.e.* it can be relied on to yield mostly true beliefs. Thus to support his main thesis Alston needs to show that MDP is epistemically reliable. It is my contention that by failing to respond adequately to the challenge posed by religious diversity, Alston makes his defense of the epistemic reliability of MDP not entirely convincing. It is only by revising this that he would be able to make an effective argument in favour of the evidential value of mystical experience.

Before discussing the issue of what we should accept as the basis for individuation of doxastic practices, Alston firmly asserts:

> A doxastic practice has only 'conceptual' reality. It proves convenient for one or another theoretical purpose to group particular mechanisms into larger aggregations, but a 'practice' is not something with an objective reality that constrains us to do the grouping in a certain way. [. . .] I am assuming that any plausible mode of individuation will group mechanisms into a single practice only if there are marked similarities in inputs and functions, but that still leaves us considerable latitude (*PG*, 165).

In other words, Alston admits that inputs and input-output functions (and he could add outputs too, as he does on other occasions) *are* grounds for the

individuation of practices, however he finds them insufficient. In what sense could they be insufficient? The relevant paragraphs of *Perceiving God* suggest that Alston is unhappy with the degree of arbitrariness in individuating doxastic practices that this approach allows for. For example, he considers the range of inputs of sense perceptual doxastic practice (later SPDP) and concludes that it is not easy to see why we should individuate SPDP as one doxastic practice, rather than as a separate visual-perceptual practice, along with an auditory-perceptual practice, and so on; each sensory modality would seem to provide sufficient ground for determining yet another separate doxastic practice. This example is meant to support Alston's thesis that "there is no one uniquely right way to group mechanisms into practices" (*PG*, 165). But then, if Alston is right in claiming that we are not decisively constrained by any objective reality in individuating doxastic practices in just one way, but are free to group belief forming mechanisms into practices in the way that is "convenient for one or another theoretical purpose" (*PG*, 165), why should we worry about a certain 'latitude' that individuating of doxastic practice primarily on the basis of inputs and outputs supposedly leaves us with? If we can point to an important theoretical purpose for which a certain way of individuating doxastic practices will be convenient (*e.g.* our purpose of showing that it is plausible to individuate just one MDP), do we need any further justification of our choice to do so? And besides, once Alston admits that individuating doxastic practices in a particular way is always to some extent arbitrary, he has to provide strong reasons to justify his insistence on individuating MDPs in the way he thinks is appropriate (namely along the borderlines of the World religions).

More importantly, it is not obvious that Alston is right in claiming that we are *not* constrained by any objective reality in individuating doxastic practices in just one way. Does Alston's above example, supposedly showing the possibility of individuating a number of perceptual doxastic practices, really show that in attending to the inputs of belief forming mechanisms we don't find decisive constraints on the individuation of doxastic practices? One could argue to the contrary, that this example shows that by attending to inputs alone, we find natural (*i.e.* non-arbitrary) groupings of belief forming mechanisms into practices with somewhat vague borders in such a way that some doxastic practices have other doxastic practices as natural parts. Perhaps Alston gives too much weight to the apparent vagueness of the borders between doxastic practices. We need to notice that this vagueness may be seen as a result of our imperfect knowledge of the workings of belief forming mechanisms, rather than as characterizing their objective

reality. Perhaps if we knew perfectly well all the input-output functions of all doxastic practices, we might be able to see that on this ground we can individuate each doxastic practice quite precisely without latitude or vagueness. Thus our present inability (due to our limited knowledge) to point to the one and only right way of individuating doxastic practices, does not exclude the possibility that we may be able to individuate them in the way that is arguably closest to the natural way of individuating them, *i.e.* the way that is least arbitrary.

After concluding that individuation of doxastic practices on the ground of similarities in inputs, outputs, and in the function that connects inputs and outputs, would not be satisfactory, Alston seeks additional reasons for grouping certain belief forming mechanisms in one doxastic practice. One such reason is that practices as typically individuated are usually highly homogeneous with respect to epistemic reliability (*PG*, 166-167). When we compare deductive reasoning, memory or formation of beliefs on the basis of the testimony of others, they clearly appear to have very different levels of homogeneity with respect to epistemic reliability. No doubt, this homogeneity can be seen as confirming that certain ways of individuating doxastic practices are more natural than others. However, probably against Alston's wishes, homogeneity with respect to epistemic reliability can be seen as a factor which supports the claim that we should individuate a *single* universal MDP rather than a plurality of MDPs, as Alston prefers. After all, it is hard to see any compelling reasons for thinking that Christian MDP betrays any difference in homogeneity with respect to epistemic reliability when compared with Jewish MDP or Muslim MDP. I would suggest that MDP taken as one universal doxastic practice appears to be highly homogenous in this respect, and such homogeneity should be expected given that irrespectively of RT, it seems to deal with the same subject matter (*i.e.* Ultimate Reality as an object of experience), and has similar input, output, and input-output functions (as Alston agrees). Thus homogeneity with respect to epistemic reliability does not appear to be a good basis for an argument in favour of Alston's way of individuating a plurality of MDPs, rather than just one universal MDP.

Finally, Alston points to the 'overrider system' of a doxastic practice as a possible ground for its individuation. It is primarily on this ground that Alston's individuates a plurality of MDPs (and this move, I will suggest, is responsible for Alston's failure to respond to CTCC, and puts him, in the last analysis, in the exclusivist camp.)

For Alston, the concept of *prima facie* justification can be applied only when we have an overrider system. He conceives an overrider system

as a regulating mechanism which allows for deciding whether a *prima facie* justified belief ought to be accepted, all things considered. It is primarily a belief system about the specific subject matter, against which a particular *prima facie* justified belief can be checked (*PG*, 167, 262). As MDP and SPDP (sense perceptual doxastic practice) deal with distinctive subject matters, their overrider systems are likely to constitute two markedly different sets of beliefs. The overrider system for SPDP will be made up largely of beliefs about facts concerning the perceivable physical and social environment, while the overrider system for MDP will need to be made up of beliefs about facts concerning God and God's relations to the Universe. Possessing different overrider systems makes doxastic practices autonomous, because the outputs of one doxastic practice are tested against the background of the overrider system specific to this particular practice, and not any other. For this reason (and because he thinks that other grounds are not sufficient), Alston suggests that the difference in the overrider systems should be considered the chief basis for individuating different doxastic practices.

On this basis Alston argues for the impossibility of there being a single MDP with a single overrider system. He does not deny that there are often important commonalities in the ways mystics in different RTs describe their religious experiences, which could suggest that inputs and outputs of MDP as exercised in various RTs are often similar. Still, Alston asserts that it is not clear that in the inter-religious context these commonalities are significant enough to justify individuating only one universal MDP on this ground (*PG*, 185-186). More importantly, comparing MDP with SPDP, Alston points out that though they both have a number of common features that are typical of a doxastic practice (notably, its social establishment and transmission, as well as its ability to be mutually involved with other recognized practices in belief production), there are at least two important differences between them that make it impossible to conceive MDP as a single practice, in the way SPDP is a single practice. These are, lack of a single conceptual scheme and lack of a single overrider system in MDP conceived as a single doxastic practice.

This is one of Alston's central claims about MDP, which I wish to challenge (along with his claim that inputs and outputs cannot provide sufficient basis for individuating MDP). What are Alston's reasons for thinking that there can be no one conceptual scheme in MDP conceived as a single doxastic practice? Alston argues that even if we grant that in the case of SPDP we cannot exclude the possibility that perhaps in some uncivilized cultures (as

some anthropologists suggest) people conceptualize sensory input in ways somewhat different from us (*e.g.* perceiving inanimate nature as animated), this would be nothing in comparison with the diversity of conceptual schemes found in various religions. Alston writes:

> The ways in which theists, Hinayana Buddhists, Mahayana Buddhists, and Hindus of one or another stripe think of the objects of their worship (and of what they take to be Ultimate Reality) differ enormously. [. . .] There are also differences in the ways God is conceived in the different theistic religions, but they seem like family squabbles compared to the differences between all of them and the non-theistic religions. Thus if the use of a uniform conceptual scheme, with only minor deviations, is required for a single doxastic practice, we will have to deny that there is any single MP. We will have to distinguish as many MPs as there are different conceptual schemes for grasping Ultimate Reality (*PG*, 189).

Alston adds to this the following comment:

> I must ask the reader's indulgence for the extremely crude nature of my appeals to the comparative study of religions. I am concerned only to make the point that there is diversity in certain respects, and therefore I need not go into the careful distinction of, *e.g.* different forms of Hinduism that would be required for a different purpose.

On the same page, putting Hinduism and Buddhism on a par, Alston asserts:

> If Christianity has the right line on Ultimate Reality, the others are wrong. In that case, either Hinduism and Buddhism have no real subject matter [what beliefs are about] at all, or they have the same subject matter as Christianity, but it is incorrectly characterized.

These views of Alston's invite criticism. Above all, Alston plays down perhaps too easily the importance of attending to details when it comes to conceptions of Ultimate Reality to be found in Eastern religions. The abundant literature on Hindu monotheism[3] should have prevented him from putting Hinduism and Buddhism on a par and from making such a sharp contrast

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[3] Regarding Hindu monotheism see *e.g.*, Clooney 1996 (ch. 2-3); Clooney 2001 (ch. 3); Sharma 1990 (ch. 1); Sharma 1995 (ch. 1).

between Western and Eastern religions in general. Alston's contention that the differences in the way God is conceived in the Western religions seem like family squabbles, when compared with the differences between Western and Eastern religions, is controversial, taking into account that not only does the Hindu Dvaita Vedanta of Madhava embrace a clearly theistic conception of God, but the Visistadvaita Vedanta of Ramanuja also allows for a theistic interpretation.[4] This is even more obvious when one considers Sikhism.[5] A Muslim may consider the Christian conception of God (as Trinity) further removed from his own, than the conception of God embraced by a Hindu Madhva or a Sikh. R.Z. Zaehner (1957, p. 205), an authority (even though not uncontroversial) on Hindu mysticism, wrote: "Hinduism has its theists as well as its monists; and the Bhagavad-Gita as well as Ramanuja stand nearer to St. John of the Cross than they do to Sankara." So perhaps the conceptions of God to be found in various World religions are not always as significantly different as Alston seems to think.

To this objection Alston could respond that this does not matter too much, as after all his argument against the possibility of individuating a single MDP is negative in nature: so long as there is no *one* 'conceptual scheme for grasping Ultimate Reality' common to mystics from *all* RTs, there can be no single MDP. But on what ground does Alston really base his claim that mystics from various RTs do not use one conceptual scheme to grasp Ultimate Reality in mystical experience? Apparently on the ground that at least some strands of some Eastern RTs' *conceptions* of Ultimate Reality can be found that are impossible to reconcile with the Christian or Jewish conception of God. I would suggest that from the fact that different conceptions of Ultimate Reality are to be found in various RTs it does not follow that mystics from these traditions use different conceptual schemes for grasping Ultimate Reality, especially *when having a mystical experience*.

Firstly, different subjects *can* have (broadly) the same conceptual scheme in relation to the same subject matter and make different claims within the same conceptual scheme. This may be especially true in the case of MDP, due to the highly specific subject matter, *i.e.* Ultimate Reality. Mystics from various MDPs can make different and sometimes conflicting truth claims about the (common) object of their mystical experiences for reasons that are not necessarily associated with the concep-

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[4] This claim finds support in Srinivasachari 1946, 579-600; Zaehner 1969 (ch. 4); Bradby 2003, 61-5.

[5] Cf. Cole & Sambhi 1993, 25-40.

tual scheme employed. In fact, the popularity of CTCC shows that many critics of mysticism presuppose that mystics use relevant concepts in a sufficiently similar way, otherwise there simply would be no possibility of contradiction (like in the case of rugby and soccer where different conceptual schemes are being used and as a result statements about a 'goal' or 'tackle' made within these different schemes cannot conflict). Thus we can make sense of the situation, taken by Alston as a serious possibility, that Hinduism has in fact the same 'subject matter' as Christianity but in one of them (or both) it is 'incorrectly characterized', without assuming that different conceptual schemes are involved. Perhaps simply in some religions false claims are being made about God within the same conceptual scheme (or in all of them). And perhaps the relationship between the conception of God to be found in a particular RT and the conceptual scheme for grasping God *in mystical experience* employed by a mystic from that RT is such, that mystics belonging to different RTs (and so having different conceptions of God) employ nevertheless (broadly) the same conceptual scheme when they grasp God *in mystical experience* (as opposed to grasping God when just thinking about God).

That a mystic's grasp of God in mystical experience is not always *completely* dependent on the conception of God to be found in that mystic's RT follows from the mystical reports in which the mystics suggest that what they have grasped in their mystical experiences goes beyond what the conception of Ultimate Reality held in the mainstream of their own RT would make them expect to experience.[6] This sometimes leads them to making, on the basis of their experiences, claims about God that are taken to be heterodox in their own RT. This would not be expected if what is grasped in mystical experience was always fully shaped by the conception of the object that those who engage in MDP have, as S.T. Katz (1978) and other 'constructivists' would like us to believe.

Secondly, the apparent difference in the characterization of God may be a result of problems with translation (broadly understood). Given Quinean

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[6] Meister Eckhart and Jan van Ruysbroeck are good examples of Christian mystics of this kind. Worth taking into account in this context are also comments of Japanese Buddhist mystics about Christian mysticism, as well as exchanges between Christian and Buddhist mystics (cf. Suzuki 1957; Moammaers & Van Bragt 1995). They make no suggestions that mystics from different RTs conceptualize the object of their mystical experiences in accordance with the conception of Ultimate Reality to be found in their respective RTs. The picture that emerges from this exchange is rather that in some cases mystics from different RTs have similar experiences which they conceptualize in a similar way, while in other cases they simply have clearly different experiences.

difficulties about synonymy, there may be theoretical problems in deciding whether in a particular instance one is faced with radical incomparability or not, but nevertheless usually the presumption is that the difficulty is in translation, and not in the use of significantly different conceptual schemes.

Thirdly, one might argue that because of the highly specific subject matter, it may be actually difficult to spell out precisely what a conceptual scheme employed in mystical perception consists of. Mystical writers regularly complain that all concepts that a mystic can have *prior* to mystical experience or which a mystic can form as a result of mystical experience, are somehow insufficient for an adequate grasp of the object of mystical experience. Now, considering that Alston's main point is that we have to "distinguish as many mystical practices as there are different conceptual schemes for grasping Ultimate Reality", he would need to spell out precisely what these different conceptual schemes consist of, in order to show that the alleged differences are indeed significant enough to prevent individuating a single MDP. And it is not easy to see how Alston could accomplish that.

To sum up, Alston does not provide sufficient reasons to justify his claim that we cannot individuate a single MDP, because of the alleged plurality of conceptual schemes for grasping God in mystical experience.

As if aware of this difficulty, Alston shifts his attention from conceptual schemes to overrider systems, asserting:

> Differences in overrider systems are more crucial. The overrider system determines how we go from *prima facie* to unqualified justification; as such it has a crucial bearing on what outputs are ultimately approved. Hence we cannot count practices with quite different overrider systems as different branches of one practice (*PG*, 189).

Thus ultimately Alston suggests that we should individuate as many MDPs as there are overrider systems (rather than conceptual schemes).

So long as he was focusing on conceptual schemes for grasping God, one might have expected that Alston would allow for there being a single theistic MDP. However, at the end he decides to individuate MDPs along the lines of major World religions, on the ground that the overall doctrine of a religion constitutes one unified overrider system of MDP for that particular religion. As a result we get among others a 'Christian Mystical Practice' (for the sake of terminological consistency I will call it 'Christian MDP', unless quoting Alston). Alston defines Christian MDP as "the practice of forming perceptual beliefs about God that is standard in . . . mainline Christianity" (*PG*, 193).

Since Alston ultimately considers not inputs, outputs or conceptual schemes, but overrider systems to be crucial for individuating MDPs, the more important issue becomes the question which beliefs are to be included in the overrider system.

I take it for granted that Alston is right in claiming that one doxastic practice should have one overrider system. This claim is ultimately grounded in a plausible intuition that is fundamental to the doxastic practice approach to epistemology, namely that one doxastic practice (when functioning properly) should have one set of outputs given one set of inputs. However, there are reasons to think that we should not expect that in the case of every doxastic practice it will be equally easy to specify which beliefs belong to its overrider system. There may be significant differences in this respect between doxastic practices. As to achieve consensus in matters concerning the nature of mystical perception and the nature of the object of mystical perception will be much more difficult in the case of MDP than it is in the case of SPDP, one can expect that it will also be more difficult to specify which beliefs belong to the overrider system of MDP. And this characteristic of MDP can be called in to support the thesis that we have no sufficient reasons to deny that it is possible to individuate one universal MDP with one overrider system (although with vague borders).

Considering that Alston's point is that we have to individuate many MDPs because mystics from different RTs in assesing their M-beliefs use significantly different overrider systems, he has to show the sets of beliefs which in particular cases play the role of overriders in order to support his claim that these sets are too different to make the idea of there being only one overrider system (of a single MDP) viable. Alston does not provide reasons for thinking that this can be done.

For the reason I am about to spell out, unlike Alston, I consider similarities of inputs and outputs of MDP as constituting sufficient ground for individuating one universal MDP. As already mentioned, Alston is aware that it is tempting to consider the differences in inputs of two doxastic practices as the primary candidate for being a ground for their individuation. However, speaking about SPDP and MDP he asserts:

No doubt, they have qualitatively different experiential inputs; but that is equally true of different sensory modalities. The experiential input for MP does not, so far as we know, stem from the stimulation of physical sense receptors, but since we understand so little about the input of MP, that is a rather shaky basis for differentiation (*PG*, 167).

Such an argument against making the difference of inputs the primary basis for distinguishing between SPDP and MDP is not entirely compelling. Firstly, why should we worry about our inability to reject a hypothesis that mystical experience may, after all, stem from the stimulation of physical sense receptors? Given that we have good reasons to believe that the object of mystical experiences is sufficiently different from the objects of sense perceptual experiences, even if after all mystical experiences turn out to be the causal effects of God on mystics' senses, they would still be so different from ordinary sense perceptual experiences that it would justify individuating 'mystical sense perceptual doxastic practice' as distinct from SPDP.

Moreover, one needs to notice that while it is clear what constitutes outputs of a doxastic practice (namely beliefs about the relevant subject matter formed by the relevant belief forming mechanisms), it is possible to specify what constitutes inputs of a doxastic practice in more than one way. From the fragment just quoted one can gather that Alston takes the 'experiential input' of SPDP to be qualified as such by the fact that it does stem from the stimulation of physical receptors. But let us assume for the sake of argument that Berkeley is right and material objects do not exist. Would this make the whole talk of SPDP as a reliable doxastic practice meaningless? Not necessarily. I suggest that we identify inputs of SPDP as *experiences* of a certain sort, namely experiences that their subjects take to be sensory experiences of what the subjects take to be physical objects. Of course, there is a story of brain-processes behind these experiences/inputs, as there is behind beliefs/outputs, but this is equally true in the case of every doxastic practice, including MDP, and we are unlikely to be able to differentiate inputs of different doxastic practices by attending to this level of the reality of doxastic practices. Hence we can identify experiential inputs of MDP as experiences that their subjects take to be non-sensory experiences of what the subjects take to be God (or Ultimate Reality). For such identification of inputs that would allow for individuating MDP on the ground of similarities in inputs, it is not necessary to establish whether the causal chain that leads to mystical experience leaves the physical world at the point of causing a physical brain-input or at the point of causing input on sense-organs (which for all we know is not the case).

Thus, in opposition to Alston, I propose that the differences in inputs and outputs can provide sufficient ground for individuating MDP as a single mystical perceptual doxastic practice *by distinguishing it from SPDP*. Differences in their (*i.e.* the MDPs' and SPDPs') respective overrider systems, as well as the homogeneity of each practice with respect to epistemic reliability

(different in the case of MDP and SPDP) only confirm the plausibility of differentiating between those two practices as natural (*i.e.* non-arbitrary).

AN EXCLUSIVIST ACCOUNT OF MYSTICAL DOXASTIC PRACTICE AND THE CONFLICTING TRUTH CLAIMS CHALLANGE

By individuating the plurality of MDPs, Alston provoked a particularly strong version of CTCC. Once he decided to distinguish between mystical practices along the lines of major religions and dug up a gulf between them by individuating them primarily on the ground of the overrider systems, which according to him include the overall doctrines of respective religions, there was no other way left to show that Christian MDP is reliable than by coming out victorious from the conflict between competing MDPs.

In these circumstances Alston could either attempt to prove that Christian MDP is reliable and other practices are not, or to argue for the weaker claim that though there is no way to settle the issue which practice has better credentials to reliability, he can show that it is rational to continue to engage in Christian MDP. Alston chose to admit that there are no sufficient reasons independent of one RT which could settle the conflict, but he was confident in being able to defend the weaker claim in the face of religious diversity. The main reason Alston thinks there are no sufficient RT-independent arguments available to show which MDP has stronger claims to reliability, is that he does not believe that Natural Theology can settle the issues concerning the nature of God.[7]

One of the consequences of Alston's settling for a weaker claim is that while initially he appeared to defend Christian MDP on RT-independent grounds, and was aiming at epistemic reliability or justification of Christian MDP, when faced with the fact of religious diversity he becomes less clear as to what sort of rationality (practical or epistemic) he wishes to establish. There is no doubt that he settles for directing his argument only to defending those who are already engaged in Christian MDP. The main claim he now attempts to support is that it is rational *for them* to continue to do so. And this self-imitation seems unavoidable, for, in his own words, the problem

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[7] Not surprisingly the main positive suggestion that Alston's critics came up with is exactly that without bringing metaphysical argumentation into the picture he will not be able to secure a serious epistemic justification of the reliability of Christian MDP. (See Wainwright 2000; Willard 2001; Quinn 2000; Schellenberg 2000).

Alston faces is the following:

> Since each form of MP is, to a considerable extent, incompatible with all the others, not more than one such form can be (sufficiently) reliable as a way of forming beliefs about the Ultimate. For if one is reliable, then most of the beliefs that issue from it are true; and hence, because of the incompatibility, a large proportion of the beliefs issuing from each of the other must be false; and so none of those others is a reliable practice. Now why should I suppose that Christian MDP is the one that is reliable (if any are)? (*PG*, 268-269).

So it appears that Alston is aware that once he has generated conflict between different MDPs, he can either argue successfully that his RT got it right and other RTs got it wrong, or allow for some other RT or none to be declared a winner. At times (*e.g. PG*, 274-275) Alston may sound as if is he wishes to establish epistemic parity between mystics engaging in different MDPs, but on a closer look this merely amounts to an expression of the status quo, namely that there is no RT-independent way of settling the dispute. Alston clearly ends up in a position close to that occupied by Alvin Plantinga (1994), claiming that (1) there are no sufficient overriders of the *prima facie* justification for the M-beliefs of someone engaging in Christian MDP, but (2) neither are there sufficient arguments to show that a Christian mystic is in an epistemically more favourable position when compared with a non-Christian mystic. It is in this context that Alston (like Plantinga) comes to the conclusion that it is sufficient to argue that (3) it is rational to continue to engage in a particular MDP.

Claims (1)-(3) do not in themselves imply that Alston is an exclusivist with respect to the reliability of MDP. They do, however, support the claim that exclusivism is implicit in Alston's project, when we combine them with some other of his assertions. In the passage from *PG* I have just quoted Alston makes the claim (4) that "no more than one such form [of MDP] can be (sufficiently) reliable as a way of forming beliefs about the Ultimate". As claim (1) entails that Christian MDP is reliable, from claims (1) and (4) it follows that MDPs different than Christian MDP are not reliable. In this context, by stating (2) Alston admits only that there is no way to rationally convince everybody who is not yet engaged in Christian MDP that it is the only reliable MDP, but it does not imply that Alston is unsure whether other MDPs are reliable or not.

Alston's most promising argument in his defense of the reliability of Christian MDP in the face of religious diversity is the one based on the (sup-

posed) disanalogy between a conflict that occurs within the same doxastic practice and inter-practice conflict. Alston suggests that it is only because in the case of the former there is a common ground between competitors, that it is possible to charge one of the competitors with the lack of something positive that his rival has got. So one can be defeated only if there is a possibility of clash, as it were. But, according to Alston, in the case of mystics from different RTs there is no such common ground, as they engage in different MDPs. Consequently, the lack of positive arguments able to establish the superiority of Christian MDP does not have negative epistemic consequences (*PG*, 271-272).

Even when we grant that this argument works, it seems that what Alston can (at most) establish in this way is that it is rational for a person who is already engaged in Christian MDP to continue to do so (*i.e.* Alston can at most establish the *prima facie* warrant of a Christian mystic believing certain things on the basis of her putative mystical experiences of God). It is not easy to see why a person who is an outsider to Christian MDP should take a Christian mystic to be more justified or rational in continuing to engage in her MDP, than is a mystic from some other competing MDP (of course, we bracket possible arguments that Natural Theology might perhaps supply in this respect, for Alston does so). But Alston claims that his argumentation for the reliability of CMP (*i.e.* Christian MDP) would "provide anyone, participant in CMP or not, with sufficient reasons for taking CMP to be rationally engaged in" (*PG*, 283).

This assertion may be read in two different ways. On the weaker interpretation, Alston can mean only that he can supply an outsider to Christian MDP with reasons to believe that the participant in Christian MDP may rationally engage in Christian MDP. Such a claim would not imply that an outsider to Christian MDP has been supplied with reasons to believe that Christian MDP is reliable, as it could be compatible with the same outsider having reasons to believe that mystics engaging in other MDPs are similarly justified, and with this outsider believing at the same time that Christian MDP is after all unreliable. (Similarly, I can have very good reasons for thinking that S is perfectly rational in his being an atheist, while at the same time justifiably believing that S's atheistic beliefs are after all false.)

But the statement of Alston's just quoted might have been intended by him to express his conviction that even granting the impossibility of settling the dispute between different MDP's, there are ways of justifying the outputs of Christian MDP for the outsider to Christian MDP. This stronger interpre-

tation appears to be supported by Alston's lengthy discussion (*PG*, 279-282) of how an outsider to MDP can be justified in believing that p (where p is an M-belief) in virtue of basing this belief on testimony of a mystic whose belief that p is based on her own mystical experience. Although this suggestion does not imply that an outsider to MDP would not have been equally justified in believing that ~p, basing this belief on the *testimony* of a mystic from a competing MDP, considering that this discussion occurs in the context of Alston's defence of the reliability of Christian MDP, one might read Alston as suggesting that he can provide an outsider to Christian MDP with reasons for believing that Christian MDP is reliable. But if we grant that there is no other way of settling the dispute between competing MDPs, it is hard to see how an appeal to testimony could be of any help in establishing the reliability of Christian MDP. Why should an outsider to Christian MDP credit a Christian mystic with a greater trust than a Muslim mystic? If the outsider is a Christian, he may have additional reasons to put a greater trust in a Christian mystic. But in such a case the outsider's justification in believing what some Christian mystic testifies about would be a function of the reasons he has for believing that the claims made by the mystic are true, rather than a function of the reasons he has for believing that these claims are warranted in virtue of being outputs of Christian MDP. So pointing to the possibility of an outsider's acquiring justification in virtue of believing in the testimony of a mystic does not look like a promising way of establishing the reliability of Christian MDP (or indeed any other MDP, once one assumes that there are many conflicting MDP's).

Equally unpromising is another of Alston's arguments for the reliability of Christian MDP, in which he asks us to imagine that SPDP is diversified in such a way that we have some people who engage in an 'Aristotelian practice of seeing', a 'Cartesian practice of seeing', etc. Here again we have a situation in which there is no way of settling the dispute, each doxastic practice enjoys considerable self-support, and as this practice is necessary to function in a real life environment, Alston concludes that we would need to grant that practitioners in each practice would be justified in continuing to engage in their practice. The suggestion here is that different MDPs are like different 'practices of seeing', hence by parity of reasoning, it is rational for a practitioner of CP to continue her engagement in the practice.

Alston's argument from analogy is not convincing either. True, Alston's thought experiment with a plurality of SPDPs does show that the very fact of the plurality of MDPs would not in itself disqualify all MDPs as reliable doxastic practices. When we grant that there are many competing MDPs,

and it will appear that all competing MDPs seem to have something about them that makes engaging in them practically rational (as engaging in them brings with it certain spiritual rewards that confirm their value), it is still thinkable that only one of them is a generally reliable source of beliefs about God, while all other MDPs are not. However, the issue at stake is whether there are sufficient reasons to accept that this is indeed the case.

Alston does not seem to provide convincing reasons of this sort. Alston's argument from analogy implies or entails a number of claims which seem to lead to an undesirable conclusion. If (1) for a practitioner of each particular MDP, it is possible to establish the *prima facie* warrant of her continuing to engage in her MDP, and (2) there are no sufficient arguments to show that one particular MDP is superior with respect to epistemic reliability, then (3) the outputs of all competing MDPs are *prima facie* warranted for those who engage in them. If we grant in addition that (4) a transfer of warrant to an outsider is in the context of MDP at all possible (on the ground of testimony), then (5) in the case of each MDP reasons would be available for an outsider to take its outputs to be a reliable source of beliefs about God (as there are no reasons to doubt that in each MDP there are trustworthy practitioners of MDP). However, as Alston individuated and characterized different MDPs in such a way that they are in direct conflict (for only one of them can be reliable), reasons for assenting to the outputs of one MDP are at the same time reasons against assenting to the outputs of other MDPs. And so the outsider's warrant deriving from testimony is mutually cancelled, thus at best giving reasons for suspending judgment.

Hence it seems that Alston can establish only a *prima facie* warrant of an individual subject in relation to a particular mystical experience. But this is unlikely to suffice for establishing the epistemic reliability of Christian MDP, as in many cases this warrant will be called into question by M-beliefs held by mystics engaged is some other competing MDP, and therefore it is unlikely that Alston will be able to suppose that as Christian MDP produces *ultima facie* warranted belief in each individual case, then we can say that it generally produces *ultima facie* warranted beliefs.

On the other hand, even if Alston's arguments would be able to establish the rationality of the practitioner's continuing to be engaged in Christian MDP, they would be useless for our project which aims at showing how one might allow for the reliability of MDP as exercised in alien RTs without undermining the effort of securing the reliability of MDP as exercised in one's home RT. They would be useless because Alston's individuation of MDPs does not allow for more than one MDP being reliable.

AN INCLUSIVIST ACCOUNT OF MYSTICAL DOXASTIC PRACTICE AND THE CONFLICTING TRUTH CLAIMS CHALLANGE

It should be clear by now that the reason for my giving, in this essay, so much attention to the issue of individuation of a single universal MDP rather than many conflicting MDPs, is that individuating a plurality of MDPs plays into the hands of the critics of the veridicality of mystical experience.

The critics of mysticism (*e.g.* Gale 1994, Martin 1990) often make the point that as mystical reports coming from the variety of RTs apparently imply that different mystics hold conflicting beliefs about God, it follows that many of these beliefs must be false, and since we are unable to provide an argument which, if any, mystic is right, it makes a mockery of the idea of MDP being a reliable belief-forming practice. In response I wish to argue that even if we grant that mystics from various RTs often hold conflicting beliefs about God, it will not follow from this that MDP is not a reliable doxastic practice. There are two ways to support this claim. Firstly, one can argue that the beliefs about God that are conflicting are not M-beliefs, therefore this conflict does not have any bearing on the reliability of MDP. Secondly, one can argue that some apparently conflicting beliefs are indeed M-beliefs, but the alleged conflict between them is only apparent. Now I will develop these two lines of arguments, appealing to the characteristics of the inclusivist account of MDP I propose.

To show how these arguments could work I need to return to the idea of there being just one overrider system shared by mystics from various RTs. I argued above that Alston fails to show why there cannot be only one over-rider system of this sort (which would indeed entail that there cannot be a single MDP). Now I would like to suggest that what Alston actually says about the overrider system of Christian MDP gives a clue as to how the overrider system of a single MDP could work.

When comparing MDP with SPDP, Alston notices that while in the case of SPDP we are not confronted with any significant diversity of conceptual schemes, the background beliefs of which the overrider system of SPDP is made up are less uniform. This lack of uniformity, according to Alston, is however 'peripheral' and 'for practical purposes' we may think about there being "a single worldwide overrider system for SPDP" (*PG*, 192). When it comes to attending to the background beliefs that make the overrider system of Alston's Christian MDP, he manages to accommodate all the differences involved in the intra-Christian inter-confessional disputes. In what I consider to be the crucial move in his argument, Alston asserts that although *any*

doctrinal difference can affect the overriding function of a doxastic practice, ". . . this point should not be overblown. Many differences are rarely called upon in this capacity. Hence groups that differ on certain doctrines may in fact use the same criteria for testing putative divine perceptions" (*PG*, 193-194).

Now, Alston's talk about the 'lack of uniformity' of an overrider system means simply that some subjects who engage in the relevant doxastic practice believe that P is a part of its overrider system, while some others think that ~P is an overrider in this system. However, strictly speaking P and ~P cannot both at the same time belong to the overrider system because then neither P nor ~P could play the role of an overrider. Alston's comments clearly imply that different subjects *can* (be it rarely) bring with themselves into the overrider system of a reliable doxastic practice some beliefs they consider to be overriders in this system, although some other practitioners of this doxastic practice disagree. So how is such an overrider system, which is not fully uniform (as every overrider system of a mystical doxastic practice however conceived is likely to be), supposed to work?

I suggest that we can conceive an overrider system as a set of background beliefs with vague borders, such that some of these beliefs belong to the *core* of this system, in virtue of their overriding function *regularly and universally*), while some other beliefs are 'peripheral' (in the sense that they are called upon in this capacity only by some subjects who think these beliefs are true and use them as overriders – even though not always consciously). On such a picture, only the core beliefs would strictly speaking play the role of overriders, because a *significant* lack of consensus as to whether some beliefs should play such a role makes them unable to prevent any *prima facie* warranted beliefs from becoming *ultima facie* warranted.

Moreover, one can justify the inclusion into an overrider system of a limited number of beliefs which lack universal acceptance as overriders, if there are serious reasons for thinking that they tell the true story about the subject matter of the relevant doxastic practice and therefore *do in fact* belong to its overrider system, although due to our limited knowledge (which gives rise to the disagreement in question) we cannot (as yet) be sure of that. Such 'peripheral overriders' are really only conditionally included into an overrider system.

In the context of Christian MDP (as conceived by Alston) allowing for there being one pan-Christian overrider system would imply that some Christian mystic can form an M-belief, with respect to which there will be no consensus as to whether it is *ultima facie* warranted, because there will be

no consensus between Christian mystics whether particular beliefs which can override this particular M-belief belong in fact to the overrider system. However, since the presumption is that it is likely to be a relatively rare occurrence, because M-beliefs are rarely about very specific doctrinal nuances on which Christians may differ, Alston is justified in stressing the importance of the *common core* and allowing for their being a single Christian MDP (rather than the Pentecostal MDP, the Catholic MDP, the Protestant MDP, the Reformed MDP, the Dutch Reformed MDP, etc.).

Granting the plausibility of the core overriders/peripheral overriders distinction, it is now *not* clear that we are compelled to differentiate between Christian MDP, Jewish MDP, Muslim MDP, etc., rather than to take there to be a single universal MDP, with one overrider system consisting of the common core overriders shared by mystics from various RTs and peripheral overriders whose overriding status is a matter of debate that is unlikely to be resolved on this side of the Great Divide. A possible argument that the lack of uniformity would perhaps be too great to allow for this, is simply difficult to support. Given that Alston defined MDP in a way that restricts the range of experiences which may constitute inputs of MDP to direct non-sensory focal perceptions of God, the conclusion could be supported by the rich data of mystical reports coming from various RTs that the vast majority of M-beliefs formed on the basis of such experiences are of such kind that they do not call for confrontation with peripheral overriders.

The picture that emerges from the study of mystical reports coming from various traditions does not support what might be a popular intuition that the mystical experiences of Christian mystics are mainly about Christ as God, that most of the mystical experiences of Muslim mystics confirm that Muhammad received the revelation of the Qu'ran from Allah, while Hindu mystics have mainly visions of Krishna or some other *avatar*.[8] If that would be the case, it might indeed call into question the idea of there being one overrider system shared by mystics from various RTs, because then what I called 'peripheral overriders' would be more prominent than the common core overriders,

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[8] It is important to bear in mind that the idea that God may be perceived through different intermediaries (*sefirot*) is also known in Kabbalah mysticism. These intermediaries are not understood as distinct from God but are phenomenally different from each other, so that experiential encounter with God in different *sefirot* is sometimes compared to seeing water poured into different coloured bottles. The suggestion here is that as one does not ascribe the characteristics of the bottle to the water itself, so a mystic does not ascribe the phenomenal characteristics of different intermediaries to God (cf. Idel 1988; Idel 1999).

and in such a case we would have to conclude that different mystics use significantly different sets of overriders, except that they overlap a bit. The truth of the matter seems to be, however, that in most of the Sufi mystical reports there is hardly any mention of Muhammad. The mystics of the Kabbalah rarely experience God communicating to them that the people of Israel are the Chosen People. Such classic Christian mystics as Jan van Ruysbroeck or the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* do not report mainly mystical encounters with Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity, etc. The writings of Sufi mystics are typically of such kind that should one extract from them what pertains to putative mystical experiences, one could mistakenly attribute them to some medieval Christian or Jewish mystic.[9] Also the typical mystical experience reported by a Christian mystic does not appear to be an experience of Christ but rather of God characterized in such general terms as to make Him indistinguishable from the object of the mystical experiences reported by Jews or Muslims.

As so far the discussion was rather abstract and general in character, not grounded enough in the examples of mystical experiences coming from the variety of RTs, in order to show that an inclusivist account of MDP may look viable when confronted with the mystical literature, it will be good to present at least some examples of mystical experiences, as reported by the mystics themselves, which can play the role of inputs of MDP conceived in an inclusivist manner.

The reports that follow are taken from a variety of RTs and refer to paradigmatic experiences that satisfy the requirements of my stipulated definition of mystical experience of God. All the reports presented here have the family resemblance which one would expect from experiences that can constitute inputs of the same doxastic practice. It may be noticed that most of the experiences reported or alluded to in the section that follows are of such kind that if some of their elements which are of secondary importance were to be bracketed, it would be difficult to say to which RT the mystic belongs. By providing such examples I want to suggest that there are plenty of mystical reports coming from various RTs that do not pose any difficulty for there being a single universal MDP. This will constitute a point of departure for my discussion of such cases when there are apparent incompatibilities between beliefs about God that are supposed to be outputs of one

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[9] The story of Yehuda Halevi, a medieval Jewish mystic who immersed himself in the Sufi mystical tradition, shows that in some cases it is possible to use specific mystical concepts and terminology developed in an alien tradition, to express one's own mystical experience, while remaining committed to the overall doctrine of one's own RT.

and the same reliable MDP. I will show that these incompatibilities may be explained in such a way that it does not diminish the value of the reports that now follow, and which support the viability of an inclusivist account of MDP.

(Report I) I had no delight whatever in the Torah I studied or the prayers I recited. [. . .] Many harsh and demonic forces (*kelippot*) rose against me to dissuade me from studying the Torah. [. . .] But once I had overcome these blandishments, suddenly, in the midst of the day, [. . .] a great light fell upon me, [. . .] a marvelous light, the *Shekhinah* [the Divine Presence] resting there. This was the first time in my life that I had some little taste of His light, may He be blessed. It was authentic without error or confusion, a wondrous delight and a most pleasant illumination beyond all comprehension (Rabbi Isaac Eizik of Komarno, after Jacobs 1976, 240-241).

(Report II) All at once [. . .] I felt the presence of God – I tell of the thing just as I was conscious of it – as if his goodness and his power were penetrating me altogether. [. . .] Then, slowly, the ecstasy left my heart; that is, I felt that God had withdrawn the communion which he had granted. [. . .] I think it well to add that in this ecstasy of mine God had neither form, color, odor, nor taste; moreover, that the feeling of his presence was accompanied by no determinate localization. [. . .] But the more I seek words to express this intimate intercourse, the more I feel the impossibility of describing the thing by any of our usual images. At bottom the expression most apt to render what I felt is this: God was present, though invisible; he fell under no one of my senses, yet my consciousness perceived him (Anonymous report, after James 1982, 68).

(Report III) By love He [Brahman] comes to recognize my greatness, who I really am, and enters into me at once by knowing me as I really am. [. . .] Go to him alone for refuge with all your being, by his grace you will attain the highest peace and his eternal resting place (*Bhagavad Gita*, 18.55, 62).

(Report IV)   Not by sight is It grasped, not even by speech,
                Not by any other sense-organs, austerity, or work.
                By the peace of knowledge, one's nature purified –
                In that way, however, by meditating, one does behold
                Him who is without parts
                (*Mandukya Upanishad*, III, i, 8, after Radhakrishnan & Moore
                1957, 552).

(Report V) At times God comes into the soul without being called; and He instills into her fire, love, and sometimes sweetness. [. . .] But she does not yet know, or see, that He dwells in her; she perceives His grace, in which she delights. And again God comes to the soul, and speaks to her words full of

sweetness, in which she has much joy, and she feels Him. [. . .] And beyond this the soul receives the gift of seeing God. God says to her, 'Behold Me!' and the soul sees Him dwelling within her. She sees Him more clearly than one man sees another. For the eyes of the soul behold a plenitude of which I cannot speak: a plenitude which is not bodily but spiritual, of which I can say nothing (Blessed Angela of Foligno, after Underhill 1995, 282).

(Report VI) The way of the *zaddikim* [. . .] is well known. [. . .] as they experience the fragrance and sweetness of God, [. . .] it would take but little for them to become annihilated out of existence in their great longing to become attached to God's divinity [. . .]. [. . .] they proceed until they come to that high place where comprehension is impossible, except in the way one smells something fragrant, and even this only in a negative way, since that which is there cannot be grasped by thought at all. When they comprehend this, so great is their longing to attach themselves to His divinity, blessed be He, that they have no desire to return to the lowly world of the body (Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Epstein of Krakow, after Jacobs 1976, 221-222).

(Report VII) The mystic who has seen the Vision of the Unity, sees at first the light of Real Existence: even more, as he sees, by his gnosis, the pure light, in everything he sees, he sees God first. A condition for good reflection is solitude, for in that state a flash of the Divine Light brings us help. [. . .] To that one whose spirit lives in contemplation of the Vision of God, the whole world is the book of God Most High (Mahmud Shabistari, a Muslim mystic, after Smith 1972, 112).

(Report VIII) Now it fares in like manner with the soul who is in rest and quiet before God: for she sucks in a manner insensibly the delights of His presence, without any discourse. . . [. . .] She sees her spouse present with so sweet a view that reasoning would be to her unprofitable and superfluous [. . .]. Nor does the soul in this repose stand in need of the memory, for she has her lover present. Nor has she need of the imagination, for why should we represent in an exterior or interior image Him whose presence we are possessed of? (St Francis of Sales, after Poulain 1950, 75-76).

(Report IX) The saint [. . .] is submerged in the ocean by unity, by passing away from himself. [. . .] He leaves behind him his own feelings and actions as he passes into the life with God (Al-Junayd, a Muslim mystic, after Stace 1961, 115).

(Report X) That which the Servitor saw had no form neither any manner of being; yet he had of it a joy such as he might have known in the seeing of the shapes and substances of all joyful things. [. . .] And the Friar could do naught but contemplate this Shining Brightness; and he altogether forgot himself and all other things. [. . .] Then he said, 'If that which I see and feel be not the Kingdom of Heaven, I know not what it can be [. . .]' (Blessed Henry Suso, after Underhill 1955, 187).

(Report XI) When a state of perfect motionlessness and unawareness is obtained, all the signs of life will depart and also every trace of limitation will vanish. Not a single

idea will disturb your consciousness when lo! all of a sudden you will come to realize a light abounding in full gladness. It is like coming across a light in thick darkness; it is like receiving treasure in poverty. [. . .] Your very existence has been freed from all limitations: you have become open, light and transparent [. . .]. Here is manifested the unsophisticated self which is the original face of your being (Yuan-wu, a Buddhist Zen master, after Mommaers & Van Bragt 1995, 185).

(Report XII) In very truth the soul, immersed in God and absorbed into Him, swims, as it were, to and fro in the Godhead, and abounds with unspeakable joy which even overflows plenteously into the body (Venerable Blosius, after Pike 1992, 8).

(Report XIII) This is a supernatural state, and however hard we try, we cannot reach it for ourselves. [. . .] The soul, in a way which has nothing to do with the outward senses, realizes that it is now very close to its God, and that, if it were but a little closer, it would become one with Him through union. This is not because it sees Him either with its bodily or with its spiritual eyes. [. . .] It [the soul] cannot understand how it knows Him, yet it sees that it is in the Kingdom [. . .] (St Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, ch. 26).

(Report XIV) In this exalted state she [the soul] has lost her proper self and is flowing full-flood into the unity of the divine nature. But what, you may ask, is the fate of this lost soul? Does she find herself or not? [. . .] though she sinks all in the oneness of divinity she never touches bottom. God has left her one little point from which to get back to herself [. . .] and know herself as creature (Meister Eckhart, after Stace 1961, 114).

(Report XV) Those who have passed into the unitive life have attained unto a Being transcending all that can be apprehended by sight or insight, for they find Him to transcend in His sanctity all that we have described heretofore. But these can be separated into classes, for some of them, all that can be perceived is consumed away, blotted out, annihilated, but the soul remains contemplating that Supreme Beauty and Holiness and contemplating itself in the beauty which it has acquired by attaining to the Divine Presence, and for such a one, things seen are blotted out, but not the seeing souls. But some pass beyond this and they are the Elect of the Elect, who are consumed by the glory of His exalted Countenance, and the greatness of the Divine Majesty overwhelms them and they are annihilated and they themselves are no more. They no longer contemplate themselves, and there remains only the One, the Real, and the meaning of His Word: 'All things perish save His Countenance' is known by experience (Al-Ghazali, a Muslim mystic, after Smith 1972, 71).

(Report XVI) Yet [in the mystic union] the creature does not become God, for the union takes place in God [. . .] and therefore the creature in its inward contemplation feels a distinction and otherness between itself and God. [. . .] There [in this union] all is full and overflowing, for the spirit feels itself to be one truth and one richness and

one unity with God. Yet even here there is an essential tending forward, and therein is an essential distinction between the being of the soul and the Being of God [. . .] (Blessed Jan van Ruysbroeck, after Pike 1992, 29).

All these mystical reports, typical of the mystical traditions to which the respective mystics belong, seem to point to experiences which in my opinion do not pose any problem for an inclusivist account of MDP, *i.e.* MDP conceived as a single universal MDP, reliable when exercised across the variety of RTs.

This is so, because as can be gathered from the above mystical reports, mystical experiences have rarely such a determinate conceptual content as to involve very specific and elaborate doctrines of particular religions. For this reason, the beliefs that constitute the core of the overall doctrine of one RT and differ from the core beliefs of some other RT* don't have to be included in the core of the overrider system of MDP common to both RT and RT*. By suggesting that Christian beliefs about the Incarnation or the Trinity can be conceived as 'peripheral overriders' within a single universal MDP, I do not mean to suggest that they are peripheral to Christian faith but only that in the context of MDP they are (as a matter of fact) rarely called upon in their capacity as overriders. One must not forget that MDP is just one of the doxastic practices involved in forming beliefs about God, and practices of forming beliefs about God by appeal to sacred scriptures, testimony or deductive reasoning may have overrider systems with significantly different core beliefs than MDP. In each case the overrider system needs to include all beliefs that may be called upon in their overriding capacity, but not all beliefs about the subject matter. And this implies that Alston's proposal to include in the overrider system of MDP all beliefs that make up the doctrine of particular religion(s) is an unnecessary step which makes it difficult to see how could there be only one MDP. To sum it up, to possible doubts about one MDP being able to accommodate M-beliefs formed by mystics from various RTs, one may respond by using the words Alston uses to justify the individuation of a single Christian MDP, when he says that "groups that differ on certain doctrines may in fact use the same criteria for testing putative divine perceptions" (*PG*, 193-194).

This point shows that MDP may be conceived as generally independent of particular RTs, both in the forming M-beliefs and in their assessment against the background of the overrider system. The possibility of MDP being generally RT-neutral is highlighted by the fact that there are reports of mystical experiences of God that occur outside the context of

any particular RT. Taking into account the mystical reports presented above, it is hard to see compelling reasons for thinking that to have such experiences of God as pointed to in these reports, or to asses the *prima facie* warrant of M-beliefs formed on the basis of these experiences, a mystic would need to appeal to background beliefs which would be an expression of Christian rather than Muslim or Hindu faith (especially once one allows the names: 'Brahman', 'Allah', 'the Real' or 'God' to be co-referential and one is aware that certain ways of describing mystical experience are tradition-bound metaphors, not pertaining to the experience itself).

That a mystic may identify the object of her mystical experience as the 'God of Jesus Christ' or 'Yahweh who delivered His People from the slavery in Egypt' does not necessarily have any bearing on the viability of an inclusivist account of MDP. Speaking more generally, the mystical reports often show that mystics from various RTs have mystical experiences of God on the basis of which they form M-beliefs that do *not* involve concepts or doctrines that are distinctively connected with just one RT (*e.g.* beliefs attributing to the object of their mystical experiences goodness, power, lovingness, being active or just being present). These examples make one think that it would be undesirable to individuate MDP in a way that would not make sense of this common ground apparently shared by mystics from various RTs.

But what about the assessment of M-beliefs that *are* clearly RT-specific? After all, it is a matter of fact that various mystical traditions (not to be confused with MDPs), like *e.g.* the Roman Catholic mystical tradition or the Kabbalist mystical tradition, have their own rules for discerning whether a mystical experience is veridical, notably rules for disqualifying some alleged mystical experiences. Are these not 'local' overrider systems within these traditions?

As I already suggested, the beliefs that make up such 'local' overrider systems could be thought about as being peripheral overriders of the overall overrider system of a single universal MDP. This would imply that within such a system some M-beliefs which are RT-specific cannot at all be shown to be *ultima facie* warranted. But this would not be a problem specific to MDP. As long as all the debates concerning the nature of the extra-mental world and the nature of sense perception are not resolved (*i.e.* as long as we are not able to say in every case whether a certain belief is or is not a part of the overrider system of SPDP), people can form sense perceptual beliefs which cannot be shown to be *ultima facie* warranted, because according to some their warrant will be canceled, while some others may disagree (and be able to provide solid reasons for that). This,

however, does not call into question the general reliability of SPDP or MDP, or the viability of SPDP or MDP being a single doxastic practice, because a doxastic practice is generally reliable when it yields mostly *true* beliefs, and not necessarily beliefs which are always *ultima facie* warranted. Inability to show that a belief is *ultima facie* warranted is not a sufficient reason for thinking this belief to be false.

To allow into the overrider system certain beliefs which can be called upon in their function as overriders when a mystic has a specifically Christian mystical experience (*e.g.* an experience of the presence of 'Christ in his Divinity') does not amount to allowing into the overrider system beliefs that are like P and ~P. I have defined these RT-specific overriders as peripheral overriders, saying that they are only conditionally allowed into the system, on the ground that although (at least as yet) there is no universal consensus as to whether they are in fact overriders, there are good reasons (shared by a significant number of practitioners of MDP) for thinking they may in fact be overriders. However, as they are not universally shared by practitioners of MDP, they are not overriders *sensu stricto*, *i.e.* it is not the case that a Christian mystic is compelled to appeal to the peripheral overriders recognized as such by a Hindu mystic.

Exploring the above analogy further, I can finally make use of the two main lines of argument against CTCC, suggesting that some beliefs about God that are expressed in the context of mystical reports are not M-beliefs at all, and as such should not be assessed against the background of the overrider system of MDP. To elucidate this suggestion, it will be helpful to clarify the distinction between there being one universal MDP but a plurality of mystical traditions. By 'mystical tradition' I mean a somewhat vaguely specified set of beliefs (not necessarily M-beliefs!) about the object and nature of mystical experience, about the ways of cultivating mystical consciousness, etc., held by mystics committed to a particular RT. What is specific about mystical traditions so understood is that in forming these beliefs they usually draw on the resources of the sacred scriptures of their religion, or on writings of some prominent historical mystic from their mystical school, or on the resources of philosophical reflection typical for this school, etc. What is important here is that many of these beliefs may not be M-beliefs at all, and as such are not warranted in virtue of being outputs of MDP (and when they are unwarranted, it is not MDP which takes the blame). Taking this into account and remembering the distinctions I have already made in different places in this study, we need to stress that sets of beliefs that make up (1) the overall account of God that

is held within the RT*, (2) the account of God held in some mystical tradition*, (3) the account of God formed on the basis of mystical experiences* of God – may be different sets of beliefs. Now, let us assume that a mystic S* is linked to RT*, mystical tradition* and is the very mystic that had mystical experiences*. And let's assume further that we have another mystic S** who is linked to RT**, mystical tradition** and had mystical experiences**. Now, let's assume that the mystical reports of S* and S** imply that they hold conflicting beliefs about God. I suggest that it is possible that in such a case the M-beliefs held by S* and S** do *not* conflict, but instead are warranted beliefs, being outcomes of a reliable doxastic practice, namely MDP.

Now, in one of the crucial steps of the defence of the main claim of this paper, I suggest that it is the critic of mysticism who carries the burden of proof here. The burden is to show that the conflicting truth claims about God as the common object of all mystical experiences *are M-beliefs*. Given that I have shown that they may well not be, the failure of the critic of mysticism to show this would result in dissolving CTCC. The situation here is clearly analogous to what we face in the case of the so called problem of evil, where it is considered sufficient for the apologist of theism to show that beliefs about God being omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good are not *necessarily* logically incompatible with beliefs about there being evil in the world. And it seems that the task of the critic is in both cases hopeless.

Thus an apologist of mysticism can hold that there is no conflict between M-beliefs held by S* and S**, because it is possible that some beliefs that are implied in mystical reports provided by S* and S** are not M-beliefs but instead are beliefs read-in by the mystic(s) *post factum* drawing on the set of beliefs about God they hold on the basis of something else than mystical experience. Of course, it may not be possible for an outsider to assess whether some particular beliefs implied in a mystical report are or are not M-beliefs, but the data of mystical reports coming from various RTs suggest that the overall doctrines of Ultimate Reality, like *e.g.* those proposed by the two greatest Hindu philosophers, Shankara and Ramanuja, cannot be directly confirmed or negated by mystical experiences. In opposition to Ramanuja, Shankara claims that Brahman and Atman (*i.e.* God and the mystic, to simplify it a bit) are one. Ramanuja argues convincingly that it is not possible to base such a belief on one's experience (*i.e.* such a belief cannot be a perceptual belief), because so long as one is experiencing something, one is aware of the subject-object distinction and so unable to transcend this distinction to confirm experientially that one is not distinct from the object of this

experience. Similarly, it is hard to see how a classical Western theistic account of God could be based on one's experience. After all, one can perceive God as very good or very powerful, but how could one perceive God in such a way as to form perceptual beliefs that God is perfectly good or omnipotent? These beliefs are clearly outputs of doxastic practices other than MDP. One way in which one could form an M-belief that God is omnipotent or that the mystic is not distinct from God whom she perceives is by experiencing God as communicating such a belief. This may be possible, but the study of reports of mystical experiences (covered by our stipulated definition) does not confirm that such beliefs are often formed. And were they formed, their warrant would have to be checked against the background of peripheral beliefs, and in this case the conflict would be resolved by suggesting that once peripheral overriders conflict, either P or ~P is false (though we are unable as yet to settle the matter).

To sum it up, beliefs about God expressed in the context of mystical reports may in fact be formed by more than one doxastic practice, and if outputs of two different doxastic practices are conflicting it cannot be said that both are to blame. In fact, Shankara and Ramanuja can both have veridical experiences of God and form true M-beliefs about God, while one of them can hold false beliefs about God which are outputs of *e.g.* deductive reasoning. Assessing the warrant of these latter beliefs has nothing to do with MDP and its reliability.

Having said that, it seems that more often than not, when we are faced with the apparent conflict of beliefs about God implied in mystical reports and we are challenged by the critic arguing along the lines of CTCC, the adequate response is not to point to the fact that the conflicting beliefs are not M-beliefs, but to say that they are indeed M-beliefs but are not really in conflict. Here are a few hints how this second sort of response to CTCC could look.

Let's consider the issue of some mystics having experiences of God as being person-like, while some other mystics report experiencing God as non-personal. The simplest response to this is to point to the possibility of different mystics experiencing different sets of characteristics of the common object of their experience. Here it is very helpful to note that the present inclusivist account of MDP is being defended from the point of view of a theist. Hence, a theist can suggest that it is not necessarily the case that a Buddhist mystic holds false beliefs about God (or does not experience God at all). It is conceivable that (for whatever reason) God 'allows' him to ex-

perience some of His characteristics, but not some others which a Muslim mystic does experience. And *vice versa*.

So perhaps it is not the case, as a typical exclusivist about the reliability of MDP would suggest, that the belief producing mechanism involved in MDP is malfunctioning in the case of a Hindu mystic or a Sufi mystic, and as a result they end up having false M-beliefs about God (and so one can conclude that they never really have any genuine mystical experiences, or at least most of their experiences are illusory). Perhaps it is simply the case that different mystics perceive different sets of characteristics of God because God Himself, for some reason, *manifests to them* different sets of characteristics out of the Divine Plenitude.

What sort of reasons could God have to 'behave' in this way? For the purposes of my argument it will suffice to show that such reasons are thinkable. Perhaps God positively wills that there be a diversity of ways to the full knowledge of Him in the *eschaton*, and the diversity of M-characterizations of God is needed to generate diversity of ways to God.[10] Or perhaps (in addition) God, respecting human freedom, manifests Himself to a mystic only in a way specified by the mystic's preconceptions of what might be experienced, and/or his degree of openness to the truth about the subject matter and his readiness to be led by what is experienced in an unknown direction, and/or his strength and the authenticity of his desire to discover the truth, and/or the purity of his intentions, etc.?

Irrespective of the actual reasons why different mystics perceive different sets of characteristics of God, it may nevertheless be true that they all have mostly true M-beliefs. It is only that they are revealing only part of the whole truth about God (or Ultimate Reality), or more precisely, they are revealing only certain truths about God. Thus to describe the differences between M-characterizations of God in different RTs one could say that it is not the case that one M-characterization X is a better approximation to the truth about God than M-characterization Y, because Y consists of mostly false M-beliefs, but rather because X consist of *more* true M-beliefs than Y. But theoretically they may both consist of mostly true M-beliefs, being outputs of one universal mystical doxastic practice reliable when exercized across various religious traditions.[11]

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[10] A similar line of thought has been developed *e.g.* by S.M. Heim (1995 & 2001).

[11] I am grateful to Brian Leftow and Gerard J. Hughes for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY AND INDIAN VERSIONS OF THEODICY

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Abstract. Comparative philosophical studies can seek to fit some Eastern patterns of thought into the general philosophical framework, or, on the contrary, to improve understanding of Western ones through the view "from abroad". I try to hit both marks by means of establishing, firstly, the parallels between Indian versions of theodicy and the Hellenic and Christian ones, then by defining to which of five types of Western theodicy the Advaita-Vedānta and Nyāya versions belong and, thirdly, by considering the meaning of the fact that some varieties of Western theodicy, like the explanation of evil by free will and Divine dispensation aiming at the improvement of man, have Indian counterparts while others lack them. Some considerations concerning the remainders of primordial monotheisms ("an argument from theodicy") under the thick layers of other religious world-outlooks are also offered to the reader at the end of the article.

I.

Quite recently, while participating in the First Asian Philosophy Congress in New Delhi (March 6-9, 2010 Jawaharlal Nehru University) and attending at the section on "Philosophy of Science", I was, at the end of some hot discussion, asked by the chair, what would be, in my opinion, the best advice to those who deal with comparative philosophy, a discipline which has always been in favour in India[1]. My answer was

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[1] One should not forget that the very term "comparative philosophy" was introduced into English by the Indian historian of Indian sciences Brajindra Nath Seal in 1899, while comparisons between traditional Indian darśanas and Western philosophers in general (e.g., works of comparison between Buddhism or Vedanta and Kant, Whitehead, Bradley, Hegel, now also Husserl and Heidegger etc.) or between Western and Indian mysticism

that, as is the case with all other sorts of rational activity, one embarking on comparative studies in philosophy, has also, first of all, in order to succeed, to determine for himself/herself *what* his/her endeavors should be *for*, because comparativistics for the sake of comparativistics (something that takes place often) lacks sense. In my opinion, the reasonable goals of comparative philosophy can fall into only two main types.

Comparative studies in philosophy may firstly be justified if one has in mind to use them as an instrument for the description and/or understanding of the concepts and doctrines of concrete texts from the Eastern philosophical tradition *X* (which are "less transparent" for one) by means of the application to these latter of concepts and doctrines from Western traditions (that are "more transparent" for one). E.g., one aims at a better understanding of the famous and at the same time considerably enigmatic dualism of the ancient school of Sāňkhya-Yoga and acquires an idea of its specific features by comparing it with other versions of the same ontological pattern, like the mind-body dualism of Plato, Descartes or Kai Neilsen (saying nothing of Indian varieties of dualism in the shape of Jaina philosophy or the Vedāntic school of Madhva), or else by shifting the boundaries between "the objective" and "the subjective" spheres of being with Heinrich Rickert, or by means of the distinction between êtres en soi and pour soi presented by Jean Paul Sartre[2]. As a result of an investigation both of its similarities and dissimilarities with regard to other versions of dualism, the peculiarities of the Sāňkhya-Yoga conception of the interrelations between "spirit" and "matter" turn out to be more understandable for one than they were before. But one can move also in the opposite direction, that is one can investigate one's "native" philosophical concepts or doctrines against the

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and spiritual practices (e.g. between Rāmānuja or Vijňānabhikṣu and St. Bonaventure etc.), both real and far-fetched, have always been in vogue in India. See, in particular: *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies. Vol. I. Bibliography*, ed. Karl H. Potter (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995 – Third Revised Edition). Western-Indian parallels were also one of the main subjects at the First Asian Philosophy Congress (March, 2010) I referred to.

    [2] All the parallels mentioned (with the exception of the one regarding Rickert) were discussed in: Gerald Larson, *Classical Sāňkhya. An Interpretation of its History and Meaning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969), 229-238; *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies. Vol. IV.: Sāňkhya A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Gerald J. Larson and Ram Sh. Bhattacharya (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1987), 74-77.

background of their "foreign" counterparts, in order to widen the horizon of the former (as it is profitable sometimes to go abroad in order to better understand one's homeland), to fit them into an intercultural framework, to amplify their peculiarities and to make an estimate of them. While the comparativistic investigations in the direction "from West to East" have been justified from the beginnings of oriental studies, those "from East to West" needed to wait until the studies of Oriental philosophical traditions had reached a mature stage comparable in some degree with those of Western philosophy, as is the case in our time. Certainly, since our instruments for understanding non-Western traditions and their texts are also of the Western type, we have to revolve in a kind of the hermeneutic circle. But bearing in mind that "the boundaries of my world are those of my language", we have no choice but to proceed in this way, and this condition is not the worst one possible, insofar as scholars also of non-Western origin who wish to be understood in today's world accept it. My dealing with the topic of theology in connection with philosophy, as designated in the heading of this article, will be in the context of *both* of these types of comparative studies.

<div align="center">II.</div>

But the heading itself, I believe, could justify these studies. It is not too common in the Anglo-American tradition to distinguish different fields within the discipline of "theology in connection with philosophy"[3]. Nevertheless, there is good sense in doing so, and it would be reasonable to outline from the first even the simplest difference between "genus" and "species". The genus I'd designate, for reasons of convenience, *rational theology*[4]. One of its species, from the Middle Ages entitled *natural theology*, can be, in my opinion, a component, in the strict sense, only of the Christian tradition. The reason is that Christianity emphasizes

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[3] Prof. Richard Swinburne confirmed in our correspondence that there are no generally recognized precise definitions of such fields.

[4] The term *theologia rationalis*, as the opposition to *theologia revelata*, was popular in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cf. Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (B 659-660, according to the standard mode of reference to the second edition of the text).

more than any other tradition the gap between those religious truths which can be apprehended by human beings who, in Aquinas' terms, are led by the natural light of reason (ducti naturalis lumine rationis) and those attainable only through the light of Revelation[5]. But the term *philosophical theology* could be suitable for designating all traditions (Christianity included) where the existence of God, his attributes and actions in the world have been made a subject of philosophical reflection. E.g., it'd be ridiculous to call the Stoics or Epicurus "natural theologians", because they had no idea of Revelation (and, if they had, they would doubtlessly have rejected it), but they contributed much to the elaboration of philosophical arguments for the existence of a divine world and therefore delved into philosophical theology. Therefore philosophical theology may be designated as rational theology in the intercultural context, and its study could be very helpful for theistic-minded persons of different traditions today, as it was, e.g., in the Middle Ages, when exchange of opinions (not without polemics) did much for the theology in connection with philosophy of all the three monotheistic religions. That the reference point should be *classical* Western theism has nothing to do with any Eurocentrism, at least no more than the need for a gauge in any measuring, weighing etc. of material things implies a bias.

These purely theoretical assumptions receive some corroboration from practice. For example, I can refer to the newest and authoritative *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* edited by Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford University Press, 2009) where after four sections dealing with the main topics of rational theology the fifth one called "Non-Christian Philosophical Theology" includes material on the Jewish, Muslim and Confucian traditions. It is surely an unquestionable

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[5] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, lib.1, c.3, cf. already Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* I.18 etc. The view that natural theology should deal only with arguments for the existence of God and analysis of Divine attributes (eternity, infinity, immutability, unity etc.), along with modes of their knowledge by natural reason, while the Christian dogmas are to be discussed in *cursus theologici*, was one of the cornerstones of the so-called second Scholastics who systematized the former. One may be referred to a text of such superb authority as *Disputationes metaphysicae* (chapter XXX) by Francisco Suarez (1597) as well as to the textbooks of his followers. See: Francisco Suárez, Opera omnia. Vol. 25-26 (Paris: Louis Vivés, 1856-1857), also Guiseppe S.J. Polizzi, *Disputationes in universam philosophiam* (Palermo, 1675-1676), disp. LIX-LX or Silvestro S.J. Mauro, *Quaestionum philosophicarum* (Roma, 1670), lib.V, quaest. 2.39-44.

shortcoming that the editors didn't try to explicate their reasons for including under this rubric Confucianism, in which theistic elements were in the strict sense absent, and excluding Greek and Indian philosophers, among whom the former laid the foundations of almost all the types of arguments for the existence of God in Christianity, Islam and Judaism (enumerated in accordance with the comparative antiquity of "philosophy in connection with theology" in the three traditions)[6] while the latter worked out different versions of the argument from design as well as such attributes as unity, eternity, omniscience etc., saying nothing about other things. Nevertheless, the very inclusion of non-Christian traditions in the volume under discussion is very appropriate for it widens the purview of different dimensions of philosophical theism, while the omissions under discussion stimulate more careful work in this direction.

The history of the term 'philosophical theology' itself, in the strict sense, dates from Thomas Aquinas' *Exposition super librum Boethii De trinitate* (commentary to Boethius' treatise on the Holy Trinity – 1257-8) where "the divine science" is divided into theologia sacrae scripturae and *theologia philosophica*; in the latter God is to be known by means of natural reason. But a separate discipline of knowledge under this title is not older than the two-volume book by Frederic Robert Tennant *Philosophical Theology* (1928-1930)[7]. In either case philosophical theology is by definition a bipartite area of knowledge. As a field of philosophy it corresponds to a self-sufficient investigation of metaphysical realities to which God with his attributes and actions pertains as a special and crucial subject. As a kind of theology it aims at the acquisition of certain spiritual goals, the polemical assertion of faith against militant unbelief being one of the most important means towards this.

What corresponds to philosophical theology in the Indian tradition and constitutes the topic of this investigation was called *īśvaravāda*

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[6] It is well-known that the argument from design goes back to Plato and the Stoics, the cosmological argument to Plato and Aristotle, the argument from the fact that religion is widespread in all of mankind to Plato and Epicurus, that from religious experience to the Stoics who also reasoned that the most perfect being has to exist because of "the ladder of perfections" in the world, an argument wherein a prototype of Anselm's ontological argument is recognizable.

[7] See: Frederic Robert Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*. Vol. 1-2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928-1930).

("the teaching that Īśvara, or the Lord, exists"). Both metaphysical and polemical components were interrelated also in this case, but the polemical bias here was still weightier than in the West, because from the early Middle Ages up to the Enlightenment Western theism didn't face real opponents while in India theistic attitudes of thought met very strong opposition from the very beginning. Indian philosophical theists had to defend many outposts against stubborn enemies, or followers of *nirīśvaravāda* ("the teaching that Īśvara, or the Lord, does not exist") who tried to assert the incompatibility between the power of the Lord and human responsibility, between an incorporeal God and the material world, between Divine aims in the world and Divine self-sufficient being.

The problem of evil has always been the sharpest point of controversy in both West and East, because the real (though not insurmountable) difficulties in reconciling the idea of Divine goodness, omniscience and omnipotence with the abundance of suffering and evil in the world (for which God has to have responsibility) have always been the trump card of all antitheists including those of India. But before embarking on Indian attempts to overcome "the argument from evil" let us obtain a bird's-eye view of the main historical versions of Western theodicy.

III.

The main historical versions are well-known and with a view to comparison one may confine oneself to their general classification in the context of anti-theistic arguments (their spectrum being related to atheistic ones as the whole to the part) arising from the problem of evil to which they have responded.

Western antitheistic arguments may be divided into (1) "dogmatic" endeavors merely to disprove the existence or activity of God in the world on the ground of the abundance of evil and (2) "sceptical" doubts concerning the cogency of the main rational ways of reconciling His existence with this abundance. I would designate (1) as a *naturalistic* position and (2) as a *critical* one. To (1) belong the following: those characters from Plato's *Laws* (book 10) for whom the fact that the impious live to a venerable age, enjoy honors and transfer them to their

offspring were proofs of the inactivity of the gods in the world; Epicurus, to whom is ascribed the famous slogan that if the divine being is willing to prevent evil, but not able, then it is impotent, if is able but not willing, then malevolent, but if is both able and willing, then whence comes evil?; Voltaire, for whom the Lisbon earthquake that took many lives was a good argument against God's responsibility for the world (in accordance with his general deistic views); John L. Mackie, who insisted that a theist has to believe both that God exists and that evil exists but cannot do so consequently, and many others. While the majority of naturalists emphasize the unworthy tolerance of evil on the part of a being whom theists consider to be God, some of them (1a) also accuse Him of consciously assisting evil. An example is given by Anthony Flew who charges Him with not having conferred on men powers to carry out only righteous choices and actions in order to avoid at least a large amount of evil. Among the most notorious representatives of (2) one may mention the following: Pierre Bayle who rejected the very possibility of reconciling faith with reason in relation to the existence of evil in the world created by God; David Hume who, on the one hand, approved of Epicurus (see above) and wondered how God's infinite power and wisdom might be compatible with the sufferings of men, animals and the whole of nature (where no one is lucky), but, on the other hand, rejected only the theistic image of a personal God as anthropomorphic but not the idea of God as such and underscored its incomprehensibility; William Rowe, who rejects the idea of understandable goods behind gratuitous sufferings and deaths (like the death of a fawn in a forest fire[8]) and offers to regard the problem from the perspective of "friendly atheism". I consciously juxtapose here ancient, modern and contemporary philosophers because it is in the nature of philosophy (and this distinguishes it from the sciences) to reproduce the same decisions on the same perennial issues during centuries and even millenniums, with only the techniques of discussion differing.

The same is true also for the main patterns of theodicy which are not too numerous and also present certain perennial archetypes. While the anti-theistic positions could, I believe, be generalized, in contemporary

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[8] Such tender sensitivity for the sufferings of animals, not of men, is very typical of the age when *the love of many shall wax cold* (Matthew 24: 13). Here and below references to the King James Bible are made.

terms, as affirming *incompatibilism* in regard to the interrelation between the Divine attributes and the fact of evil in the world, the theistic ones correspond to *compatibilism* in the same context. Four of them have a long pedigree (three among them have followers today), while the fifth one (as a well-reasoned position) is very new.

Pattern (1) may be designated as the attempt to defend the compatibility between the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibeneficent God and the abundance of evil, by the virtual elimination of the latter as something which is, in the final analysis, a result of our misunderstanding of the world and, consequently, a non-essence having only a semblance of being. Among the most notorious champions of this view (here, as also in the following cases, their sorting will be very selective) were the following: the Stoics who interpreted evil as a product of the deficiency of our knowledge; Plotinus, who regarded evil as either a product of matter which is almost the same as non-being, or only a diminution of good (cf. *Enneades* I.8 and III.2.5); Origen, for whom evil was something nonexistent, because everything existent must be created by God and God could not create what contradicted his own nature (*Commentary to Gospel according to John* II,13,93); St. Basil the Great and other Cappadocians for whom evil was nothing in its essence and something in between an "ontological parasite" and a pure appearance; Pseudo-Dionysius, who emphasized, by means of his famous method of negations, that evil is outside any way, goal, nature, causes, beginnings, ends, limits, forms and even the existence of anything (*De divinis nomonibus* IV. 20-23); Johannes Scotus Eriugena who was sure that God doesn't know evil which, therefore, doesn't exist; Aquinas, who elaborated this privative conception of evil as something which is neither existent nor nonexistent in accordance with Boethius' conception that the notions of good and being are mutually convertible (*Summa Theologiae* II,2, qu.18, a.132); and lastly Leibnitz, who also adopted the privative conception of evil and approved such aphorisms as malum causam habet, non efficientem, sed deficientem (*Essais de Theodicée* I.20). One may be sure that the opposition to Manichean dualism (where cosmic evil enjoyed almost the same rights as good) and the indirect reception of Neoplatonic ontology (cf. the interpretation of matter as being more the privation than the possession of something and as a kind of middle

between existence and nonexistence) were important resources for the elaboration of this sort of theodicy on the side of Christian theologians.

According to pattern (2) evil is not something ontologically defective, but, on the contrary, a necessary element of the world system and its universal harmony and order. Here Plotinus is to be remembered, inasmuch as, according to his reasoning, since only God can occupy the highest step on the ladder of being and all the others also have to be occupied, including the "ground-floor", evil is inevitable, while those who would like it to be eliminated are similar to those ignorant critics who rebuke an artist for not using one color, a producer for including also negative characters into his play and citizens for establishing the service of an executioner (*Enneades* III.2.12.9; III.2.17.83); St.Augustine, who reproduced the analogy of the executioner, adding to it that of the cithara (different strings produce different sounds and not only high but also low ones) and formulated the famous principle that God by means of His omnipotence can make good out of any evil and, therefore, the lack of many evils would have led to the absence of numerous goods (*De ordine* II.4.12); Aquinas, for whom the perfection of the universe entails inequality of things and, hence, that in order that all niches of the good should be occupied there should also be things deviating from the good; Bonaventura (*Commentaria in libros IV Sententiarum* I.1.d.44, a.1, qu. 4) and Ulrich von Strassburg (*Summa de bono* II.3.4), for whom, correspondingly, a white picture can be perfect only with the addition of black, and the punishment of sinners facilitates the beauty of Divine justice and rulership in the world. But, certainly, Leibnitz is here the chief character as a mouthpiece of the view that while the reason for evil may be regarded as necessary, its origin is an accident, while the harmony of things implements its transition from possibility to reality because of its appropriateness in this "best of all worlds" (*Causa Dei*, §68-69). Among his contemporary followers Nelson Pike and Roderick Chisholm are to be selected, because of their opinion that evil is a necessary element of the world's harmony and order.

Pattern (3) is in line with the treatment of the origin of evil in a free and false will. Here the following may be mentioned: Plotinus again with his view that evil is a result of the free choice of the outward life instead of contemplation of the spiritual world; Proclus whose opinion was that the egoistic self-isolation of finite souls from the cosmic whole

and each other was the cause of their inner discord leading to their ruin; Origen (cf. *Contra Celsus* III.69; IV.12, 20, 21, 64 and *De principiis* II.6.4-6), for whom men become evil because of bad upbringing, free self-corruption and vicious environment, even to such a degree that vice becomes a component of their nature, and moral evil becomes the cause even of physical disasters in nature (though some of them are produced by demons); Tertullian, who formulated very clearly the view that the cause of evil is not God but only the abuse of freedom, which in itself is the greatest gift of God to man, while Divine interference into free choice would have been contradictory to God's own good will and stated that one has to distinguish between evil as sin that depends wholly on man and evil as punishment that comes from Divine justice aiming at the restoration of sinners (*Adversus Marcionem* II.6, 15-16); St. Basil the Great and St. Augustine with their clear view that it was humans and not God who made the perverted choices, and that the nature of evil depends on what humans constitute (so sinfulness is not a substance but perverted will which rejects "the inner man" and involves "getting firmly established in the outward world")[9], this view being followed by Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena; Aquinas, for whom also it was clear that God was the creator of only such evil as is involved in punishment but by no means of that which is involved in guilt; Leibnitz who stated that had God deprived man of the very possibility of misusing his free will, it would have been something still worse than sin itself. Today, Alvin Plantinga vindicates free will theodicy and renovates it in terms of possible worlds and "transworld depravity", while Eleonore Stump undertakes a more traditional defence of this type of theodicy based on the traditional difference between moral and physical evil (dating back, as we know, to Terullian). But, one way or another, the free will theodicy is shared by all well-known theists for whom the dogma of the Fall is of any significance.

Pattern (4) is called the soul-making defence, in other words, the account of evil as Divine dispensation aiming at the improvement of man. Here the following may be mentioned: Plotinus, again, who considered

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[9] St. Basil's opinions might be selected from Patrologia Graeca 31, 332-333,344,348, while the locus classicus of St.Augustine's opinion is *Confessionum libri tredicum* (The Confessions) VII.12.18.

evil as a means to help humans in increasing vigilance, waking sound reason, withstanding obstacles and realizing how beneficent virtue is in comparison with the disasters which befall wrongdoers (*Enneades* III.2.5.15); Tertullian again (*Adversus Marcionem* II.16) and Origen (cf. *Contra Celsus* VI.56 and *Philokalia* 27, 7) who were sure that Divine punishments were similar to bitter drugs used by doctors on recovering patients and that every suffering was intended not against those who suffered but for their good; again Pseudo-Dionysius who insisted that Providence used evil for the profit of humans, be it individual or social. Among today's champions of this version of theodicy John Hick and Richard Swinburne are the most distinguished. The former defends what he calls St. Irenaeus' theodicy[10] and insists that in order to make right choices humans have to be provided, besides free will, also with some environment that could help them to develop their characters, firstly by relieving the suffering of others, and for that suffering itself should take place. Swinburne's view is that in order that some good beliefs of man implanted into him by God should not only be acknowledged by him, but also "learned", man has to be placed in certain conditions leading him to practical moral training and the latter is unfeasible without certain evils (both moral and physical) which could secure outweighing goods.

What I consider to be the newest pattern (5) is less definite than those discussed above. It may be called a defense from the limits of human knowledge or as a contextual theodicy. For example, when answering to Rowe's account of "gratuitous sufferings" Peter van Inwagen appeals, on the one hand, to free will, and, on the other, to the possibility that God has His own accounts of the magnitude, duration and distribution of evils which are simply inaccessible for human minds (in opposition to epistemologically optimistic versions of theodicy) but are not lacking. Michael Murray's conception of God's hiddenness is also in some sense in this vein. Close to this reasoning is Marilyn Adams' "theistic agnosticism" according to which we can have no idea why some "horrors" (whose "volume" outweighs what we could regard as "superior goods") are dispensed and may only hope that some strategies of understanding

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[10] Unfortunately, Hick doesn't provide, according to my knowledge, his readers with references to St. Irenaeus' text, considering that his "general considerations" should be quite sufficient for them.

could be helpful here, but they should be different from "the traditional theodicies". Robert Adams' conception of "individual theodicies" by which every one may propose Providence in one's own personal life without submitting it under some or other kind of "general theodicy" is also of the type under discussion.

However crude and selective the portrayed "map" of Western theodicies is, it justifies some generalizations. *First*, all the patterns of theodicy, with the exception of (1) which has become part of the heritage of philosophical theology, have followers today, while (5) is an immediate result of contemporary discussions. *Second*, with the exception of a few names, the same thinkers of the highest authority in the subject (Plotinus, Tertullian, Origen, St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena, Thomas Aquinas, Leibnitz) didn't confine themselves within a single strategy of theodicy, but felt the need to combine several patterns, presenting a kind of a "cumulative case", and the same is true also with contemporary theistic philosophers. The reason is very transparent: the explanation of the abundance of evil in the theistic context (I mean the context of the main Divine attributes) is anything but easy philosophical entertainment, and evil itself is by no means a "one-dimensional" reality, hence, in this context, different approaches to its understanding seem justifiable. Indeed, some of them may be regarded as mutually complimentary, as, e.g. (3) and (4). *Third,* like everything in philosophy (let's not forget that philosophical theology at least partly belongs to philosophy), the strategies of explaining evil against the background of a theistic world-outlook may also be differentiated as more and less persuasive. Pattern (1) is not persuasive because it contradicts the general and, moreover, everyday human experience which leaves no doubt in any soul that evil is very real and by no means "a mere semblance of being". It is true that when we sin against anybody we may have an illusion that he (she) makes a mistake in identifying our action as evil, but when someone sins against ourselves we have not the least doubt that evil is done. In addition, in spite of all justification in regarding evil as "non-being" in the context of the controversy against Manicheism (and its branches) Christian authors (even those of great authority) obviously did contradict both Scripture (cf. Ephesians 2:2, 6:12), where the forces of evil are depicted as a most vital and active reality with which a battle to the death is recommended

as the necessary condition of salvation[11], and the whole ascetic tradition. Pattern (2) is in contradiction with logic, because any 'evil' which is a necessary component of the cosmic perfection and harmony would not be an evil, but an obvious good, and it is surprising that such an outstanding philosopher as Leibnitz didn't notice this. Again, this view is unnatural for the Christian world-outlook (while this is not the case with Neoplatonism which didn't have the concept of sin[12]): the difference between good and evil is by no means the same as that between different colors and tunes, and it is surprising again that such great theologians as St. Augustine and Bonaventure didn't understand this. Patterns (3) and (4) are much more persuasive, for almost everyone who has a conscience can feel in the depths of his "inner man"[13] that there is or has been a connection between his (her) choice of evil and some suffering in his (her) life. On the other hand, one cannot be sure that one's suffering may be fruitful for one's spiritual improvement. Nevertheless, sufferings differ. I can realize, e.g., that some physical (or even mental) injury, or poverty, or injustice etc. may be of some (or even much) profit for me, but it is surely a mystery for me what greater good may follow for a newborn baby perishing in a crushed aircraft, or for his parents washed away by a tsunami, or for pious parishioners who perish right in a church because of an earthquake, or for victims of terrorist attacks in an underground railway. In this regard pattern (5) has an advantage because it leaves more space for humility in reasoning (and this is a crucial Christian virtue) than other versions do, and this is in a better accordance with a genuine theistic world-view which entails that the reasons of the Creator are not always comprehensible for the minds of even the most reasonable creatures because of the ontological gap between Him and them[14].

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[11] The same war is recommended against sin which has become almost the second nature of man (cf. Romans 7: 15-17 and Hebrews 12:4), and what we have to battle against cannot be regarded as a "semi-being".

[12] Though the Platonists knew the words *amartia* and *amartêma,* the question with them is not about "sins" in the real sense but about "mistakes", or disrepair of the soul.

[13] See: 2 Corinthians 4:16, Ephesians 3:16, cf. 1 Peter 3:4.

[14] Cf.: Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13: 4-5).

IV.

The scheme depicted provides coordinates for the accommodation also of non-Western counterparts of theodicy, which is in line with the main tasks of philosophical theology as a cross-cultural reality (see above). Here the anthology, edited by Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murray (Blackwell, 1999), might be referred to. In the section "Doesn't all the evil in the world show that there is no God?" two passages from, correspondingly, Muslim and Jewish texts are included, along with contemporary Western texts on theodicy, which do really correspond to two of the abovementioned patterns, though the editors themselves didn't aim at classification. The first one, taken from one of the most authoritative Muslim theologians and philosophers Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), is an attempt to explain the existence of evil in "the best of all possible worlds". In line with Plotinus, St. Augustine, Ulrich von Strassburg and Bonaventure, he justifies evil as a necessary component of the world, "for were it not for night, the value of day would be unknown. Were it not for illness, the healthy would not enjoy health. Were it not for hell, the blessed in paradise would not know the extent of their blessedness", and, as Al-Ghazali emphasizes, "every lack in the next world in relation to one individual is a boon in relation to someone"[15]. Beasts have been created in order that the dignity of man might be manifest and favors for the inhabitants of paradise are increased by increasing the punishments for the inhabitants of hell[16]. Doubtless, we have here pattern (2) of theodicy in its clearest form, and the objections against it remain valid. The main objection is that an 'evil' which is both necessary and beneficial for the world is not evil, but good. But insistence on the instrumentality of the punishment of sinners with regard to the glory of the saints is also tantamount to the acknowledgement that God, being desirous of the second, should be interested also in the first, and is, consequently, at least an indirect cause of moral sin. By contrast, a passage from the distinguished Jewish theologian Saadya Gaon (882/92 – 942) leaves no doubt that his version of theodicy is very close to pattern (3). While questioned how it is possible that there should exist in God's world anything which does not find His approval, he unhesitatingly

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[15] This seems to suppose that the Master of boons is "restricted" in His means.

[16] *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions,* ed. Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murray (Blackwell publishers Inc., 1999), 190-191.

refers to human free will, stressing that God abhors human disobedience for our own sakes because it has a harmful effect on us. Though Saadya Gaon does not state directly that for God our free will is so valuable that He prefers its misuse leading to evil in the world and the suffering of human beings to depriving His creation of it, his arguments for the existence of free will express this idea[17].

But why should we confine ourselves with anthologies? The newest translation of Ibn Rushd's (1126-1198) trilogy constituting what is called *Exposition of Religious Arguments* leaves no doubt that his conception of "evil for the sake of good" can also be placed into the context of the same patterns. According to the "most subtle" Muslim philosopher, "since leading astray is evil, and since there is no creator beside God, it was necessary to attribute that to Him, just as the creation of evil is too. However, this must not be understood in an absolute sense because He is the Creator of the good for its own sake and the Creator of the evil for the sake of the good; I mean for the sake of the good that is conjoined to it. On this view, God's creation of the evil could be just". Ibn Rushd gives the example of fire which is necessary for the subsistence of many things and despite the fact that it might accidentally destroy some existing things, its existence on the whole is much better than its non-existence, and thus it is good[18]. Without doubt this explanation of evil belongs mostly to pattern (2), though some "tunes" of pattern (4) are also heard in it.

The same scheme of fitting Eastern versions of theodicy into the main patterns discussed above will work also in the Indian case. But one important difference is to be mentioned from the start. Medieval Muslim and Jewish elaborations of the topic are based on discussions of the earlier Mutakalims (viz. "theologians'), *i.e.* Mu'tazilites who from the eighth century A.D. tackled, among other issues, whether God has power over the evil deeds and injustices of His reasonable creatures. They also discussed whether God has power over the human choice of actions itself. These controversies were serious and sometimes even heated, but they were located in the "inner circle" of theistically-minded participants. In India, in contrast, the problem of evil had been launched by militant

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[17] Ibid., 193-194.

[18] *Faith and Reason in Islam*: *Averroes' Exposition of Religious Arguments*. Averroes. Transl. with footnotes, indices and bibliography by Ibrahim Y.Najjar with an introduction by Majid Fakhry (Oxford: One World, 2007), 118-119.

anti-theists for whom the very idea of God was hateful. Enemies of a God who tolerates evil and suffering in the world that has something to do with Him, were more powerful and active in India than even in the West and, one more important thing, were active right from the earliest stages of theistic philosophizing. This justifies a separate digression concerning the anti-theistic stress on the incompatibility between the Divine attributes and the abundance of evil in the world.

V.

It was not later than in the Pali *Jātakas* that the argument from evil was implemented by the Buddhists, their main emphasis being on the incompatibility between belief in Brahma as the lord (*issaro*) of the world and the unhappiness and unrighteousness found in the latter (VI.208)[19]. In the Madhyamika text *Dvadashamukha* ("Twelve Gates"), preserved in a Chinese translation (circa the fourth century A.D.), the Buddhist replies to a theistically-minded opponent that had these creatures been Īśvara's children, he would have taken care to use enjoyment to eliminate suffering, and this is unobservable in any way, even with regard to those who revere him. In his auto-commentary to his famous *Abhidharmakosha* Vasubandhu (of the same period) brings up the question what could be the real aim of Īśvara (assuming he exists) in organizing the universe. If it were for the fulfillment of his own desires and needs, he cannot be its "Lord" (*i.e.* Īśvara), but if he is just fond of creating human beings subject to sufferings in hells, etc., then "my humble respects to such an Īśvara!" (II.63-64). The same sarcastic question is posed in the extensive critical commentary on Sanghabhadra's *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (conventionally called "Nyāyānusara", dating to the late fourth century A.D.), where the Buddhist asks what kind of God he is who has created a world full of sufferings. In the authoritative Madhyamaka text *Madhyamakaṛidaya-kārikā* with the *Tarkajvala* commentary (both currently attributed to Bhavya, sixth century A.D.) Īśvara is also described (in view of the current state of affairs in the world) as being cruel and unfair. The conclusion drawn from the above is that it is not Īśvara but only karma that can be

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[19] Reference is to the edition of the standard edition of Jātakas in the Pali Text Society series (the latin number indicates a volume, the Arabic one a page).

held responsible for the creation of the universe.

But we have testimonies of the acute interest on the part of anti-theists in the problem of evil also in the texts of philosophical theists themselves. For example, Jayanta Bhaṭṭa (most likely the ninth century A.D.), in his great elaboration of the Nyāya system, the very voluminous compendium *Nyāyamañjarī,* in the section dealing with Īśvara, lists all the main arguments designed to refute the existence of God which were used up to his time. The first one sounds epistemological: God is not perceived and, therefore, also cannot be inferred. The question under discussion is involved in the traditional provocation from the side of Indian anti-theists (Buddhists mostly) who asked about whether God has any reason for acting in the world or not. If He has, then He is not self-sufficient and, therefore, not the Lord. If He has not, He then behaves as an insane person. Or maybe He participates in the creations of the world out of compassion? Then, and here the anti-theist triumphs over his opponent, why did He create so much sorrow? And he quotes the verse which runs as follows: "Surely, the heart of the creator of the world was washed by the ambrosia of compassion, for how otherwise could he create it as abounding in suffering and cruelty?!". To the objection of the generalized theist that a world consisting only of pleasures would not be very long-lived, the antitheist retorts that there is nothing unfeasible for the highest Īśvara. And to the theist's objection that Īśvara could take into account those good and bad deeds whose residues are located in the numerous souls, his answer sounds again triumphant: "Let then just these deeds be creators of the world – why do we need Īśvara?!". But Indian philosophical theists had also some arguments, and some of them were not too easy to refute.

VI.

There was more then one version of *īśvaravāda* itself from the ontological point of view. What I prefer to call its "weak" form is the theistic teaching of the classical Yoga, where Īśvara is understood as only the omniscient teacher of mankind willing to lead it to right knowledge and lessen the weight of suffering in rebirths, and serving, at the same time, for ascetics as an object of meditation. I designate this version of Indian

philosophical theism as a weak one because Īśvara is not attributed here any role in the creations and dissolutions of the world, in other words, is bereft of any cosmic functions. The next version could be called "the middle form" of theism, because Īśvara is charged here with cosmic functions and responsibility for sustaining and organizing the empirical world, but this world itself being of a very indefinite ontological status[20], these functions are also regarded as real only at the level of the empirical truth (*vyavahārika*) but not of the ultimate one (*pāramārthika*). This is the version of philosophical theism presented by Advaita-Vedānta. The "strong version" of Indian theism I see in the doctrine of Nyāya and later Vaiśeṣika where all the aforementioned cosmic functions of Īśvara and his responsibility for the world are regarded as real, in correspondence with the full reality of the universe itself. It is of importance that even the "strong variety" of Indian theism is a weak one if compared with the classical theism of the monotheistic religions, since God in the Indian view can only arrange and rearrange eternal atoms of matter and not create them in the real sense and serves only as a coordinating manager of the law of karma which is also without beginning and of a completely autonomic nature. Bearing in mind these restrictions, let us look at attempts at theodicy which emerged from the second and third versions of Indian theism.

What could be called the theodicy of Śaṅkara, the founder of Advaita-Vedanta (from the seventh to eighth century A.D.), may be divided between two passages of his commentary on the *Brahma-sutras* (*i.e.* the *Brahmasutrabhashya*) II. 1. 34-36 and II. 3. 41-42, where he, in the fashion of the classical commentators, repudiates virtual opponents who, nevertheless, express the views of real ones. In the first of these sections the opponent is a militant anti-theist (in the fashion of the Buddhists, Sāṅkhyas and maybe even the materialist Cārvākas) who states that Īśvara creates some beings (e.g., gods) as too happy, others as too miserable (e.g., animals) and the third ones as "mediums" (e.g., human beings), and, therefore, should feel affinity for some creatures and hostility for others, which is contrary to his descriptions in the Vedic scriptures. That is why he, having created a world full of suffering, owing to his prejudice

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[20] As a product of World Illusion it is not ultimately unreal in the same sense as purely illusory objects and dreams, but by no means properly real as only Brahman is.

and cruelty, has nothing divine in him. In his reply Ŝaṅkara suggests a very graphic similarity. (Let us not forget that for ancient and medieval Indian philosophers to give a good illustration was the same as to prove any thesis). Īśvara creates living beings by taking into account their virtuous (*dharma)* and vicious (*adharma*) qualities and this relieves him of the opponent's incriminations. Grown plants are also unequal owing to the dissimilarity of their seeds (the potencies of future actions), and rain as the general cause of their ripening (Īśvara) bears responsibility only for the growing of what was ingrained in them but not for its quality. The opponent objects that the balances of dharma and adharma in souls can form only after the beginning of living creatures' bodily existence, whereas the creation of the world attributed to Īśvara precedes it and therefore he cannot be guided by these balances (consequently, the incrimination of Īśvara in prejudice and cruelty remains valid). Ŝaṅkara's reply is that *saṅsāra* itself is beginningless and therefore a series of these balances and bodies is similar to a series of seeds and shoots (a shoot is caused by a preceding seed, the latter by a preceding shoot and so on). To the opponent's question on what grounds one may state that *saṅsāra* is beginningless, the answer is that if it had a beginning and had arisen from nothing, it would prove to be causeless and could come into being again even in the one who has attained salvation from *saṅsāra* (but this is nonsense). The second of Ŝaṅkara's opponents bears features of a Mīmāṅsaka. In his view the soul's activity should not depend on Īśvara, for being activated itself by the by the basic and deep affects of consciousness it can have its own experience in activity and therefore no place is left for Īśvara. Besides, in our worldly practice we do not believe that any activity, e.g. ploughing, depends on him. Moreover, Īśvara, in urging souls to the activity that brings about mainly suffering and directing this activity towards unequal results, should be blamed for cruelty and unfairness. Ŝaṅkara refers to his former examples of seeds and rain. The soul acts on its own even though Īśvara directs its actions. If souls acted only in dependence on Īśvara, the Vedic commandments to perform certain actions and to avoid others would be senseless (and an absurdity). Īśvara would have acted for everything else and therefore the performance of even mundane actions by people would have become

meaningless, but that is not right[21]. So the basic idea of Śaṅkara's theodicy is the acknowledgement of souls' responsibility for all their actions and, correspondingly, the effects of the latter.

The Nayayikas' answers to objections against the existence of Īśvara deriving from the problem of evil were much less eloquent. Jayanta Bhatta, already well known to us, opines that Īśvara could work the creations and destructions of the world out of compassion, while the opponents' objections are incorrect. Saṅsāra having no beginning, the souls being "pierced" by the effects of their good and bad deeds, and the gates of liberation (*mokṣa*) being insurmountable for them because of the bonds of dharma and adharma, how are they not deserving of compassion?! In addition, in view of these very circumstances Īśvara should provide Hell and other "penitentiaries" (let us not forget that the antitheists referred to these as proofs of his cruelty) for those whose karma is bad to correct their ways. As for the periodic destructions of the worlds (the cycles of *pralaya*), they are also used by Īśvara to give the selves periodic rests from their labors out of his benevolence[22]. Another great authority, Vācaspati Miśra (the ninth or tenth century A.D.), who wrote in all of the Brahmanic philosophical traditions (except that of Vaiśeṣika), in his sub-commentary on the *Nyāya-sūtras* under the title of *Nyāya-vārttika-tātparyaṭīkā* (IV.I.21), also answers to the question "If Īśvara is merciful, why does He make people suffer?!" that although Īśvara is full of mercy, He has no power to change the natural law (*i.e.* "the necessity", *niyati*) that from bad actions bad effects should follow[23].

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[21] The whole of Śaṅkara's dispute with the *nirīśvaravādin* on the topic of evil is reproduced from: Brahmasûtraśâṅkarabhāṣyam ratnaprabhā-bhāmatī-nyāyanirṇaya-ṭīkātrayasametam, ed. M.S. Bakre and R.S. Dhupakar (Bombay, 1934), 618-623, 746-750.

[22] For the whole of Jayanta's polemics against the *nirīśvaravādin,* including the problem of evil see: *Nyāyamañjarī of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa*, ed. Mahāmahopadhyāya Gaṅgadhāra Śāstrī Tailaṅga. Pt.1. Benares, 1895 (The Vizianagram Sanskrit Series, 10), 190-204.

[23] *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies. Vol. II. The Tradition of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika up to Gaṅgeśa*, ed. Karl. H. Potter (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), 481.

VII.

Now, is the proper time for us to give answers to the following two questions: 1) Can the Indian attempts to deliver Īśvara from imputations of cruelty, injustice and, at least, the lack of mercy be rated among the five main patterns of Western theodicy discussed above, or do they constitute a new one? And 2) of what significance for classical theism are the parallels with Indian theodicies which pertain to non-classical versions of philosophical theism?

An answer to 1) may be quite clear: Ŝaṅkara's and Vācaspati Miśra's attempts at theodicy doubtlessly pertain to pattern (3), that is, the argument from free will, while that of Jayanta Bhatta *also* pertains to pattern (4), that is, the soul-making defense. Ŝaṅkara's very graphic comparison of God with rain, and of the dispositions of souls with seeds, delivers the former from any responsibility for miseries which befall the latter as the results of their bad choices, and the same is true with Vācaspati Miśra's explanations of God's non-participation in worldly evil. Jayanta Bhatta's treatment of sufferings in hells etc. as a kind of purgatory has a striking similarity with Tertullian's view that Divine punishments are similar to bitter drugs used by doctors for the recovery of patients and that every suffering is intended not against those who suffer but for their good (and such are, in substance, also the views of the earlier Hick[24] and the current Swinburne). The Indian belief in reincarnation makes it understandable that life in the Indian perspective doesn't confine itself within the span of one birth and one death but is prolonged in further rebirths, so hells and other "penitentiaries" are understood as means of moral education by which God improves beings endowed with reason. While both patterns have as champions religious philosophers of different commitments, the Indian positions are doubtlessly closer to a Platonic than to a Christian mode of thinking. Neither the doctrine of creation (the Hindu philosopher insists that *saṅsāra* is beginningless) nor of sin (man only accumulates *dharma* or *adharma* without transgressing the will of the Highest Person) have any correspondences in Indian conceptions.

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[24] For the current Hick, who established a new religion with "The Real *an sich*" as its ontological focus, which is theoretically equidistant from both personal and impersonal symbols but practically much closer to the latter (being in reality one of them), the problem of theodicy cannot be of any relevance.

In connection with question 2) this means that Indian answers to the challenges deriving from the problem of evil, like those of Islamic and Jewish thinkers (see above) don't expand our Western horizon. This is of much importance, because Indian *īśvaravāda* is the only tradition of philosophical theism which has no Hellenic roots (in distinction from Islamic and Jewish *kalam*). And it confirms the view that the main types of Western theodicy remain equally relevant in the intercultural context. So we are justified in considering the patterns of theodicy (3), (4) and (5) as the best ones (see above). In other words, there is no tradition of philosophical theism which would give better explanations of evil in the God-created world than as in some sense conditioned by human sins, in another sense as used by "Divine education" and in a third sense as tolerated because of Divine reasons which are very far from being understandable by created minds. This is already a result of no small importance.

But Indian counterparts of theodicy are valuable for us also in other regards. To begin with, they indirectly show the relevance of those patterns of classical theodicy, viz., (3) and (4), which are more viable than some others. It is of significance, for example, that the Indian mind with all its attention to illusory objects (which have been in some sense the focus of Indian epistemology[25]), doesn't regard evil as one of them. Then it is of much significance that having no answer to the question about the origin of evil in the world (for the dogma of a beginningless saṅsāra is only a kind of regressus ad infinitum, while the teaching of the Fall, firstly on the part of incorporeal spirits and then of man, gives such an answer however mysterious it is[26]) some Indian philosophical theists, Jayanta Bhaṭṭa being one of them, felt that there was something corrupt in the universe whereby it would have been unnatural, had it been only happy. Intuitions of such a kind, having some other parallels (e.g., profound

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[25] Let's only mention that the topic of illusory objects of perception (when, e.g., one mistakes a rope for a snake or a shell for a piece of silver) made up the whole subject of *mithyājñāna* ("false knowledge") and such mental constructions as the horns of a hare, a celestial flower or the son of a barren woman played a very important role in Indian philosophical argumentation.

[26] It was not too sensible for Western "theology in connection with philosophy" to have tried many times (beginning maybe with Tertullian's De patientia, 5) to discover the secret of why Lucifer fell (in spite of having the best inborn spiritual nature) by inventing purely rational reasons, because the subject itself is inaccessible to reason.

"feeling of dependence" even if suppressed by the universally recognized doctrines of *karma* and *saṅsāra*[27]), suggest the idea that some theistic archetypes stubbornly sprouting against the thickness of alien layers belong to the initial and genuine elements in the structure of the world-outlook of even those religions which deviated from monotheism very early while those alien layers (in spite of all their dominance) are indeed alien. If one realizes that the problem of theodicy itself may be of real significance only for the monotheistic world-outlook (where a Personal Creator of the world could have personal responsibility for it), one will not be very far from the idea that the "initial light" of the basic monotheism shone everywhere. And it was sufficiently "strong" (see above), especially if compared with contemporary theological postmodernism (where the religious light has died out completely), e.g., process-theology, whose champions, in opposition to Indian *īśvaravādins*, preferred to get rid of real attributes of God instead of explaining evil and suffering in the theistic context[28].

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[27] An example is given by Uddyotakara, the author of the *Nyāyavārttika* (a sub-commentary to the *Nyāyasûtras*) who in response to the sarcastic question of the opponent, *i.e.* whether God creates the world out of something or out of nothing, says that firstly a man makes an axe out of wood and iron and then with the help of the axe makes lumber, and just so God makes *dharma* and *adharma* in the beginning and with their help makes the bodies of man (IV.1.21). Making "*dharma* and *adharma* in the beginning", as the instruments for the making of the material world, is almost the same as creating the latter out of nothing.

[28] Though the motive of providing "relief" for the human mind in its attempt to understand evil by "denying" some Divine attributes, omnipotence being one of them, has not, according to my knowledge, been explicitly acknowledged by process-theologians, it is clear that it was also in their purview in their general project of adapting religion to contemporary mankind. Among the avowed enemies of the very problem of theodicy are the representatives of so called feminist theology (Grace Janzen and others).

GOD, EVIL, AND EVOLUTION

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Abstract. Most evil is compatible with the existence of God if He has an aim that He can achieve only by using an unguided process of evolution and if He cannot be condemned for trying to achieve His aim. It is argued that there is an aim that could reasonably be attributed to God and that God cannot achieve it without using evolution. There are independent grounds for thinking an evolutionary response is necessary if God is to be defended at all. Issues that require further investigation are pointed out and desirable features of the evolutionary response indicated.

INTRODUCTION

If God is a moral agent and if it is therefore appropriate to judge Him in light of moral standards of right and wrong, and good and bad, then any adequate response to the evidential problem of evil must involve the theory of evolution by variation and natural selection. Evolution enables us to show that, in most cases, neither natural nor moral evil gives us reason to doubt the existence of God *qua* moral agent, provided that He could have a purpose that requires Him to use a process of evolution that He does not control and in which He does not intervene, and provided that the value of achieving the goal outweighs the disvalue of the suffering and death that evolution by variation and natural selection inevitably involves. The only possible evils that cannot be explained in this way are those in cases in which God does not intervene miraculously to prevent them after He has achieved His aim – and the existence and number of such cases depends on His aim. Moreover, evolution is necessary to explain some evils in a way that exonerates God *qua* moral agent, which means that if there is no evolutionary response, there can be no complete response.

In arguing for the foregoing claims, the first step is to distinguish this project from the free-will and the soul-making responses. The second is to suggest an aim such that God would need to use an unguided evolutionary process in order to achieve it. The aim suggested will be the development of persons who are capable of freely desiring, and of freely committing themselves to, a relationship with God. The third is to show that the occurrence of an unguided evolutionary process explains most natural and moral evil. The fourth is to argue that it is impossible to exonerate God *qua* moral agent without relying on evolution. Since the purpose of this paper is just to show that evolution must play a role in any adequate response to the evidential problem of evil and not to provide an actual defence or theodicy, there will be no attempt to go further. Once the argument is complete, I will briefly discuss the possibility that evolutionary ethics puts a question mark against the greater good approach, the consequent implications for our understanding of the nature of God, and a couple of ways of dealing with any residual evils. I will follow with some brief evaluative remarks.

A NEW APPROACH

One philosopher neatly summarizes the two prevailing approaches as follows: "According to the 'free-will defence', evil and suffering are necessary consequences of free-will. Proponents of the 'soul-making argument' . . . argue that a universe which is imperfect will nurture a whole range of virtues in a way impossible either in a perfect world, or in a totally evil one."[1] Soul-making also involves freedom. "[It] is the process by which . . . agents freely and autonomously come to develop and perfect certain valuable traits of moral character and to know and to love God."[2]

The position here is distinguishable from the free will response in that evil is not primarily the consequence of the possession of free will by individuals but a concomitant of the only process that can bring into existence organisms that are capable of freely committing themselves to God, and freely desiring to do so. The argument is not that "if God grants

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[1] Peter Harrison, "Theodicy and Animal Pain," *Philosophy* 64 (1989), pp. 79-92: 79.
[2] G. Stanley Kane, "The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6 (1975), pp. 1-22: 1.

us significant freedom, he cannot control how it will be used."[3] On the view here, if there are objective and independent moral standards, there will be evil in some possible worlds in which no free agents ever develop. Moreover, for all that is said here, free agents need not be responsible for any evil, although they certainly can be responsible for some. The position here is also distinguishable from the soul-making argument in that it need not be the case that the function of freedom is to enable a process of soul-making, or that the desirability of soul-making justifies the existence of most evils. It is possible to hold that God wants there to be beings capable of acting freely without intending that there be any soul-making at all. In sum, the position here neither presupposes nor entails either the free-will or the soul-making theodicy; it is independent of them.

Naturally, the aim attributed to God in this paper is speculative: there is no way to demonstrate that it is His aim. However, it is also speculative that God particularly wants to create beings with free will and speculative that God's aim is soul-building. Indeed, any response to the evidential argument from evil must be speculative. Strictly speaking, the most that can be shown is that the evil that we observe does not count against the existence of God because He could have a good reason to permit it.

When it comes to good reasons for permitting evil, the evolutionary response is far more powerful than some of its extant competitors. For instance, Swinburne's contention that natural evils are somehow educational is implausible.[4] Swinburne talks of other animals "learning" from the fate of a fawn: "It is good for the fawn caught in the thicket in the forest fire that his suffering provides knowledge for the deer and other animals who see it to avoid the fire and deter their other offspring from being caught in it."[5] The trouble is that some deer starve to death in places like Canada every winter but other creatures appear to have learned nothing about avoiding hunger as a result. In contrast, as we will see shortly, the evolutionary response has no difficulty with such cases. If

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[3] David Basinger and Randall Basinger, "The Problem with the Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994), pp. 89-97: 91.

[4] See the works of Richard Swinburne, starting with his "Natural Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 15 (1978), pp. 295-301.

[5] Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 103.

God has an aim that can only be achieved through an unguided process of evolution and if He cannot be condemned for trying to achieve it, then starving deer will not undermine the response at all. Neither will any of the other cases of injury, disease, death, and extinction that we know to have occurred in the course of evolution. Since it cannot be argued that evolution could take place in a world that is radically different from the actual one in relevant respects and since evolution occurs as a result of differences in viability and fertility, it appears to be literally impossible for the advocate of the evidential argument from evil to discover counter-examples that can be used to undermine the evolutionary response. The power of the evolutionary response is a good reason to explore it.

WHY THE ABILITY TO ACT FREELY MUST BE A PRODUCT OF EVOLUTION

As for God's purpose, let us suppose that God wants there to be persons who are capable of *freely desiring* to enter into a relationship with Him and of *freely committing* themselves to the relationship. I shall refer to such persons as "relationship-capable persons." When it comes to how relationship-capable persons could possibly come into existence, there are four cases to consider. First, there is the case where God manufactures them, where manufacturing them means either creating them fully formed by fiat, or by establishing initial conditions and deterministic laws of nature in a world that will inevitably bring them into existence. Second, there is the case where God establishes the initial conditions and laws of nature in an indeterministic universe and then uses artificial selection to develop relationship-capable persons. Third, there is the case where evolution does not occur and individuals sometimes chance to desire to enter into a relationship with God. And, finally, there is the case where God establishes the initial conditions and laws of nature in an indeterministic universe and leaves it alone in the hope that relationship-capable persons will eventually evolve. Relationship-capable individuals can come into existence only in the last set of circumstances. The possibility that God might nurture individuals as a parent nurtures children is not an additional option because the capacity for free action is not an acquired characteristic.

As for the first possibility, God cannot manufacture relationship-capable persons. The argument against the possibility of manufacturing them involves considering the possibilities with respect to people and their relationship with God: people will either desire to some positive degree to enter into a relationship with Him, or be indifferent as to whether they do so, or be positively disinclined to do so. Now, on the one hand, if God manufactured relation-capable persons who had characteristics that inclined them to enter into a relationship with Him, then God would have contributed to bringing it about that they desired to enter into the relationship and to the extent that God had contributed to bringing it about that they desired to enter into the relationship, they would not *freely* desire to do so.

Consider an analogy. If someone trains a watchdog to attack trespassers, he is responsible for its actions if it attacks someone. He would also be responsible if he genetically modified the watchdog so that training it was unnecessary. And, he would be even more responsible if he stipulated the entire genome of the attack animal. To the extent that the trainer is responsible for the watchdog's attacking someone, the watchdog does not attack freely. Similarly, if God specified the genetic make-up of an individual, God would be responsible for the individual's actions. He would be all the more responsible if He determined all the situations the individual would confront. In general, if another agent is responsible for what a person does, then the latter does not act freely – if a puppeteer controls the outcome, the puppet's movements are not free. Hence, manufactured individuals who wanted to enter into a relationship with God would not do so freely. This would be true even in a world in which compatibilism was true: compatibilism does not relieve people who train watchdogs of their responsibility and it would not relieve God of responsibility either.

On the other hand, if God manufactured people with characteristics that made them indifferent or disinclined, then He would be creating persons who *did not desire* to enter into a relationship with Him. It follows that, whatever God did in the way of *manufacturing* individuals, He could not create precisely the kind of persons that, by hypothesis, He wants to create. To return to the original formulation of the claim, God cannot manufacture persons who *freely desire* to enter into, and to *commit* themselves to, a relationship with Him. John Hick holds that God

could have created free individuals by fiat but in fact used evolution.[6] Ignoring the fact that Hick's stance entails that God is a sadistic monster, because He would have no good reason to choose more suffering over less and an evolutionary process would involve more suffering than fiat creation, fiat creation is a form of manufacturing and the argument here is that free individuals cannot be manufactured at all.

Now, consider the case in which God uses artificial selection. In this case, God does not create fully-formed relationship-capable persons. He is therefore not responsible for all of their characteristics. However, when there is evolutionary competition between individuals who are more likely to have relationship-capable descendants and individuals who are less likely to have them, God intervenes in such a way that the former win the competition. He might do this by, say, by intervening to prevent the latter from producing as many offspring as the former even if objective environmental conditions were such that they were not at a disadvantage with respect to fertility. The trouble is that someone who bred watchdogs to do a particular kind of action when certain conditions obtained would be responsible for their actions of that kind in those kinds of circumstances. Similarly, God would still be responsible for the fact that people are relationship-capable. As contended above, if another agent is responsible for an agent's actions, then the latter does not act freely. In this case, God would be responsible for people desiring to enter into a relationship with Him and for their committing themselves to the relationship when they did enter one. Hence, they would do neither of these things freely. Consequently, God could not "breed" relationship-capable persons. Artificial selection offers no advantages over manufacturing when it comes to producing relationship-capable persons as defined.

Third, although God could create an indeterministic world complete with inhabitants that occasionally chanced to want to enter into a relationship with Him, such individuals would be incapable of truly *committing* themselves to the relationship: what chance could bring into existence, chance could eliminate, and commitment cannot be a matter of chance. It is also questionable whether we could accurately describe individuals who just chanced to desire to enter into a relationship with God as persons who *freely* desired to enter into the relationship: random

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[6] John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, London and New York: Macmillan, 2007.

events are not free actions and, similarly, desiring something by chance is not the same as desiring it freely.

Therefore, God's only option is to create an indeterministic universe in which it is possible for relationship-capable persons to evolve and to leave it alone in the hope that they will evolve. If God wants there to be relationship-capable persons as defined, then God must "use" evolution. This situation differs from the pure chance situation because, while it is true that it would be a matter of chance whether relationship-capable persons evolved, it would not be a matter of chance, once they did exist, whether they desired to enter into a relationship with God, whether they committed themselves to God, or whether they remained committed to Him. This type of claim is frequently true in biology, which increases its credibility in the present case. For instance, while it is a matter of chance that mammals predominate on our planet, it is not a matter of chance that mammals nurse their young when they have them. Animals that nurse their young evolved through a series of accidents but there was selection for the retention of the mutations that resulted in nursing because individuals with them were biologically fitter than their competitors. Moreover, God would not be responsible for anyone's desires or commitments in a way that would preclude his freedom. In sum, God has no option but to "use" an unguided evolutionary process to "create" relationship-capable persons. Since it is possible that God wants to create relationship-capable persons, it is possible that God has a goal that can be achieved only by creating a world in which life originates in an indeterministic world and evolves, naturally and without interference.

HOW EVOLUTION DISPOSES OF EVILS

Let us continue to assume that God wants to create relationship-capable persons.[7] As just argued, He can achieve this only by creating an indeterministic universe in which life can arise and evolve into an array of complex forms and in which He does not intervene, allowing the evolu-

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[7] Fransisco Ayala also claims that evolution by variation and natural selection enables us to avoid condemning God but his argument is incomplete. Ayala does not discuss any possible goals for God or any sense in which He could be said to be good. See his *Darwin's Gift: To Science and Religion*, Washington DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2007.

tionary process to unfold without any guidance. The world will have to be a dynamic one: there will have to be changes that can drive evolution by altering the conditions in which organisms try to survive and reproduce. Of course, on the one hand, the world cannot be too dynamic: the changes must not occur so quickly that species become extinct too soon. On the other, it cannot lack dynamism: a world in which there was an ecological equilibrium and few mutations would be one in which little or no natural selection would occur. In short, the world will have to be one in which there are accidents, diseases, predators, natural disasters, and extinctions, albeit not an overwhelming number of them. In turn, this means that it will have to be a world in which there are many natural evils. It follows that natural evils do not constitute evidence against the existence of God unless He could achieve His aim without using evolution or there are reasons to condemn Him for trying to achieve it in the first place.

It might be thought that it is a reasonable objection that God could have achieved His aim in a world that is less or more dynamic than the actual world. In fact, such an objection would be pointless because there is an inverse relationship between how dynamic the world is and how long the process will probably take. If a less dynamic process takes longer than a more dynamic one, a less dynamic process means less suffering per generation but more generations of suffering while a more dynamic process means more suffering per generation but fewer generations of suffering. Provided that the process is not so fast that it burns itself out or so slow that it never gets very far, there will be little if anything to recommend a more dynamic state over a less dynamic one, or vice-versa.

Moral evil is no evidence against the existence of God either. If moral agents are products of evolution by variation and natural selection and if God must refrain from intervening in the process in order to achieve His aim, moral evils can arise whatever God might prefer. Indeed, moral evils are liable to arise, because it is highly probable that any moral agents that evolve will be morally imperfect. One reason that they will probably be morally imperfect is that imperfection is inevitable in the products of variation and natural selection and there is liable to be some moral imperfection as well. Another is that the biological interests of organisms can conflict with moral requirements. Yet another is that there will be variations in moral character just as there are with respect to other

features of organisms and there will always be some people at the extreme ends of the continuum just by chance – there will be great potential sinners as well as potential saints. Whereas natural evils are a necessary means to the end, since they are needed to drive the evolutionary process, morally imperfect beings that do wrong would be an inevitable by-product of the process. It follows nevertheless that the existence of moral evil is no reason to condemn God either, again unless there is reason to condemn his goal.

As the preceding paragraphs make clear, an evolutionary approach would provide a comprehensive explanation of evil, explaining both natural and moral evils very readily, which is a great advantage. In fact, the ease and comprehensiveness naturally moves one to wonder whether it can really be that easy. The answer is affirmative. Unless there are cases in which God does wrong by omission after He has achieved His aim, there appears to be nothing that we consider an evil that is neither caused by the dynamic nature of the world we inhabit, nor brought about by amoral organisms that have evolved in the world, nor brought about by morally imperfect moral agents – moral agents who are imperfect because they are also products of the evolutionary causal processes that are driven by the dynamic nature of the world. The first category includes floods, earthquakes and hurricanes; the second includes bacteria, viruses, parasites, and predators; and the third includes crime, indifference, and ideological insanity of the kind that dominated the 20th century. There are no other kinds of evil in addition to these three.

Another advantage of an evolutionary approach is that it makes it unnecessary to come up with explanations for most particular instances of evil – such as the starving deer of Canada mentioned earlier. Evil is an inevitable or highly probable concomitant of an unavoidable process if God needs to use an evolutionary process in which He does not intervene in order to achieve his aim. From an evaluative standpoint, it is enough to know that the process will bring about a variety of evils; explanations for particular instances of evil will often be causal, not moral. We do not have to justify the death by starvation of individual deer in terms of the putative benefits of their deaths. If there is no reason to condemn God for using evolution to achieve His goal, there is no reason to condemn Him for the consequences of the process.

WHY EVOLUTION IS NECESSARY TO DISPOSE OF EVIL

The fundamental argument to the effect that an evolutionary defence is necessary to avoid a moral condemnation of God *qua* moral agent is as follows. The independent scientific evidence is such that there can be no reasonable doubt that an evolutionary process has occurred on our planet.[8] It is also such that there can be no doubt that the evolutionary process involves pain, suffering, and death, and is the cause of a great deal of what we consider evil. There would be a very great deal of pain and suffering even if we took into consideration only the pain and suffering of actual and potential human moral agents, *i.e.*, relationship-capable persons. It follows that if we are to avoid condemning God, then the evolutionary process is necessary for some reason. When it comes to avoiding a condemnation of God in the face of the evils that we observe, any realistic option must include an evolutionary response.

Anyone who wanted to deny that an evolutionary response is a necessary part of any realistic option would have to hold that evolution is merely a façade behind which God is working out His purposes. One problem with this is that it adds unnecessary complexity. Another is that too many events are too distant, temporally or spatially or both, for us to be able to show that they have all served some specific purpose. Indeed, there are too many contemporary events for us to demonstrate that they all serve a purpose. Since there is not even the beginning of an explanation in many cases, the contention that the matter is beyond our understanding is really an appeal to ignorance: it amounts to declaring that the critic cannot prove that there is no good, non-evolutionary, reason for the evils that we observe and that, therefore, there is, or could be, a reason. Naturally, it would be possible to invoke free-willed demons in response to natural evil.[9] One problem with doing so is that it would also be necessary to explain why God allows their continued existence. More importantly, there is no independent evidence for their existence or activities. In contrast, as already mentioned, there is plenty of independent evidence that evolution has occurred and that the world is of such a nature that evolution can take place. The germ theory of disease

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[8] See Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God*, New York: Harper Collins, 1999, for a survey of the evidence for evolution and against a variety of creationist alternatives.

[9] See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1974.

has ousted the demon theory and the evolutionary theory of natural evil ought to oust the demon theory as well.

There are some theists who deny that evolution occurs. No doubt, they will want to reject the contention that an evolutionary response to the evidential problem of evil must be part of any realistic response. In order to try to prevent them from doing so, I shall present an example that shows that it is not necessary to make an explicit appeal to the occurrence of evolution in order to show that only an evolutionary response will do. The example is one in which the evidence for a state of affairs is non-evolutionary but in which the only way to ensure that God can avoid condemnation is to account for it in evolutionary terms. The example could be multiplied many times over.

The example involves an argument from imperfection, which requires a bit of explanation. The existence of imperfections is compatible with there being an evolutionary explanation for a feature and with its being the case that the feature is highly advantageous in most circumstances. In an evolutionary world, everything is jerry-built and jury-rigged, and peculiarities and drawbacks are inevitable. An argument from imperfection is to the effect that if the feature were created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent Being other than through the use of evolution, then the feature would exist, it would be advantageous, but it would be without the attendant drawbacks unless they were inseparable from the feature for some reason. An example that can be used to illustrate the argument is the human eye. It always has two flaws: the nerves that bundle together to form the optic nerve attach to the front of the retina and the optic nerve goes through the middle of the retina.[10] The attachment of the nerves to the front blurs our vision and the hole in the middle of the retina creates a blind spot. There is no necessity to the arrangement, which we know because the eye of the squid has nerves that attach to the back of the retina. Therefore, the human eye has eliminable defects, a designer with the attributes of God would do better, and hence the human eye is not a product of divine design.

Turning to the example itself now, there are evils caused by the existence of cognitive biases that render human beings less than optimally rational in some circumstances. For instance, one cognitive bias is con-

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[10] See George C. Williams, *The Pony Fish's Glow*, New York: Basic Books, 1997.

firmation bias, which is the tendency to look for confirming evidence and to fail to look for potentially disconfirming evidence that is equally or more important.[11] This does not have to do with a moral flaw in human beings but with a cognitive one: it is not a matter of people believing what they want to believe for some reason because it occurs in cases in which people have no stake in the outcome of the inquiry. It can lead to things like unjust racial stereotypes, because people notice behavior on the part of members of racial groups when the behavior conforms to the stereotype, fail to notice behavior that does not conform to it, and incorrectly conclude that the stereotype is true. Another widespread cognitive defect is that many human beings are more suggestible than is either necessary or desirable. It is possible to implant false memories of being lost in a mall in a quarter of the subjects.[12] Leading questions alone can result in false memories.[13]

Whatever the explanation for the origin of these tendencies, they are not always conducive to morally positive outcomes. This is obvious in the case of racial bigotry. However, it is also easy to imagine how a combination of confirmation bias on the part of investigators and suggestibility on the part of children being questioned could, say, result in false allegations of child abuse. This is undesirable not merely because innocent people can be falsely accused but also because, in the long run, false accusations in some cases will undermine the credibility of children generally, which will make it more likely that real child abusers will be able to get away with their crimes.

If human beings have to be products of evolution by variation and natural selection in order for God to achieve His purpose in bringing them into existence, the evil that results from cognitive biases does not support the contention that there is eliminable evil in the world and, therefore, that there is no God. In contrast, there are grave difficulties

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[11] See Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* 2 (1998), 175-220.

[12] See Elizabeth Loftus and Jacqueline Pickrell, "The Formation of False Memories," *Psychiatric Annals* 25 (1995), 720-725. For a general discussion of human memory as well as this phenomenon, see Daniel Schachter, *The Seven Sins of Memory*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

[13] Loftus points out that leading questions can result in false memories. See Elizabeth Loftus, "Make-Believe Memories," *American Psychologist* 58 (2003), 867-873.

if God is responsible for the characteristics that His creations possess. For instance, the free will defence fails. False allegations of child abuse produced by confirmation bias and suggestibility do not occur because people have free will and have used their free will to do wrong. Instead, they occur because people are flawed inquirers. Indeed, with confirmation bias and human suggestibility, even the most selfless and well-intentioned investigators would sometimes fall into error unless they were aware of their biases and took steps to obviate their influence. Moreover, the tendencies were only discovered in the 20th century, so no one could have been aware of them until recently. As for soul-building, the biases prevent people from acting in a morally responsible way even if they want to, so it is hard to see that they do anything but prevent soul-building.

Even if confirmation bias and suggestibility were useful in normal circumstances, the evidence for imperfection is that they lead us astray in some cases; and that there are now people who know of them, who still function adequately, and who are less susceptible to the kind of moral mistakes to which people ignorant of them are susceptible. Since people who learn about suggestibility and confirmation bias can eliminate, or compensate for, their influence without any adverse consequences, neither is necessary for a greater good. A creator who had the usual attributes imputed to God and who created us without using evolution could have made us better than we actually are. The only possible excuse for Him is that He needs to use unguided evolution to achieve His aim. Since God could have made us so that we were neither suggestible nor susceptible to confirmation bias (when inappropriate), the occurrence of any evil that can be attributed to those flaws means that there is eliminable evil in the world – *unless* God must use an evolutionary process in which He cannot interfere.

The example does not presuppose the truth of evolution. We do not need to appeal to evolution to learn that cognitive biases exist or to discover that they can cause us to act in ways that are not ethically optimal. In sum, we do not need evolution to set up the example but we do need it to respond to it adequately.

OPEN ISSUES

The evolutionary response has been presented as a greater good re-
sponse. There is a background assumption that God is justified in creat-
ing a world in which life can evolve despite the suffering involved be-
cause relationship-capable persons are worth it. In fact, however, evolu-
tion may actually put the greater good approach in doubt. It will put it in
doubt if evolution has not merely produced true beliefs about a pre-ex-
isting moral reality but has created morality itself. This seems to be a real
possibility. I have myself put forth an argument that evolution by varia-
tion and natural selection can produce objective moral facts to which we
have intuitive access.[14] The reason evolution might thus put the greater
good response into doubt is that a morality that is a product of evolution
cannot justify the very process that brought it into existence. In light of
the possibility that evolution has created morality itself, it cannot just be
assumed that value "transcends" the physical world and its inhabitants.
Hence, any response that takes a greater good approach, that assumes
that God is a moral agent, but that fails to include a demonstration that
morality is independent of the biological realm, will be fundamentally
incomplete.[15]

Furthermore, if morality itself is a product of evolution, the prevail-
ing concept of God will have to be modified. If morality is a product of
evolution, moral agents will be products of evolution as well. If morality
and moral agents are products of evolution, not only will there be no
greater good in light of which we can evaluate God and judge Him as
though He were a moral agent, but also God will be outside the range
of the kind of moral evaluation that is properly applied to moral agents.
In that case, the goodness of God could not be glossed as moral perfec-
tion – He could not be viewed as a moral agent who never does wrong
and who never does a bad thing. Instead, He would have to be accounted
wholly good merely from the perspective of relationship-capable per-

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[14] See Brian Zamulinski, *Evolutionary Intuitionism: A Theory of the Origin and Nature
of Moral Facts*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

[15] For examples – in addition to Hick and Swinburne – of this kind of defective ap-
proach, see: Keith Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, Oxford: Blackwell
Publishing, 1982, and Robin Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*, Burlington, VT,
and Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.

sons – in the way natural phenomena are sometimes judged to be good. Naturally, a God whose goodness did not amount to moral perfection could still be a loving God.

Finally, if relationship-capable persons have come into existence, it is necessary to explain why the evolutionary process continues and why God does not prevent evil from afflicting relationship-capable persons. There is more than one way to proceed. One way is to supplement the evolutionary response with one of the more traditional responses. Perhaps, for instance, God wants both relationship-capable persons to exist and for them to undergo a process of soul-building. Another way is to attribute a more complex aim to God. Perhaps, He does not just want to create relationship-capable persons full stop but to create relationship-capable persons who are willing to work to develop just and caring societies. In that case, He would not ordinarily rescue people when they needed saving but would leave the rescue to their fellow human beings. Also, in that case, it would be harder to discover evils that could constitute evidence against God. Indeed, it might actually be possible to conceive of an aim that made it impossible to discover such evils.

It has been assumed in this paper that God's aim is the creation of relationship-capable persons because the assumption made it possible to argue – without distractions – that God had to use evolution. It is now possible to suggest a more complicated hypothesis without the same possibility of confusion, although doing more than making the brief suggestion in the previous paragraph is beyond the scope of this paper. Whatever the aim we attribute to God, the evolutionary response greatly reduces the number of the evils that can potentially be used as evidence against the existence of God, if it does not eliminate them completely.

SOME EVALUATIVE REMARKS

No matter the answers to the questions raised in the previous section, the necessity and desirability of the evolutionary response means that the only way forward is through attempts to answer them. Moreover, while an evolutionary response is necessary if God is to be defended at all, there are reasons to think that an evolutionary response ought to be

attractive to theists even if it were not necessary. First, as Derk Pereboom points out, the problem of evil "still constitutes the greatest challenge to rational theistic belief."[16] Without the evolutionary response, all that can be done with regard to natural evil is to "hold that God's purposes for permitting evil are inscrutable; or . . . reject the assumption that gratuitous evil is incompatible with theism; or, finally, rely on evidence . . . in support of the existence of God in order to offset the negative evidential impact of the problem of natural evil."[17] None of the three options mentioned is both promising and satisfactory. Hence, evolution provides the foundation for a reasonable response in a situation in which other options are realistically unavailable.

Second, by going beyond mere compatibility with evolution, the embrace transmutes evidence for evolution from evidence that has been thought to cause difficulties for theism into evidence that can be used to support theism indirectly by undermining the argument from evil. The argument does not deny God's creation of the world but holds that God had to create a certain sort of world if He was to achieve His aim. All it undercuts is a 19th century variant of the argument to design that becomes implausible – even in the absence of evolutionary theory – once we start taking observable imperfections seriously. Of course, the notion that evolution is God's method of creation is not new.[18] What is new is the suggestion of a reason why God would use a process of evolution in which He does not intervene. There is certainly a great deal to be said for an approach that enables theism to avoid conflict with contemporary science.

Finally, if God needs to use evolution in order to achieve His aim and if the evolution of human beings means that He has actually achieved His aim, humanity could once again be viewed as the crown of creation. It has been said that humanity has suffered a crisis of confidence because science has eliminated the justification for thinking that we are special: Copernicus dislodged us from the physical centre of the universe

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[16] Derk Pereboom, "The Problem of Evil," Ch. 7 in William E. Mann, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 148-170: 167.

[17] Nick Trakakis, "Is theism capable of accounting for any natural evil at all?" *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 57 (2005), 35-66: 59.

[18] Miller advances this contention in *Finding Darwin's God*.

and Darwin showed that we are just another animal.[19] However, if God's aim involves humanity in particular, that is, if we are the kind of being He wanted to bring into existence through the evolutionary process, it would be the case that the universe was created in order to bring beings like us into existence and there would be good reason for God to be especially concerned with us. Neither the obscure location of our planet nor the fact that we are products of evolution by variation and natural selection would give us any reason for doubt on these counts.

CONCLUSION

The prevailing reactions on the part of theists to the idea of evolution by variation and natural selection range from extreme hostility to acceptance that theism and evolution are compatible. Those who go further to say that evolution is God's method of creation do not usually explain why He would use it. The view here is that evolution must be God's method of creation; that it is possible that the reason He must use it is that He wants to create relationship-capable persons and evolution is the only way in which He can do so; that if He has to use evolution, then the argument from evil can be largely or completely neutralized; and that the argument from evil cannot be neutralized completely without appealing to evolution. If so, the prevailing reactions are not the most appropriate from a theist's point of view. Since theism needs evolution, the appropriate reaction is an enthusiastic embrace.

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[19] See Ayala for a relevant discussion.

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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***Philosophy of Religion. An Almanac*. Volumes I & II. Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 2007 & 2010.**

This almanac is published by the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Its editor in chief, Vladimir K. Shokhin, is in charge of the division of Philosophy of Religion at the Institute. The Institute was originally founded by the prominent Russian phenomenologist Gustav Spet in 1921 (then it was called the Institute of Scientific Philosophy). The communist authorities wanted it to diffuse the ideology of dialectical materialism, and yet it defended the liberty of philosophical discourse; as a result many of its members were subjected to repression under Stalin. Since the second half of the 20th century the Institute has become a big center of philosophical research. The Institute publishes 13 reviews (including the *Philosophical Journal*) and three almanacs.

The Almanac of Philosophy of Religion has so far been published in two volumes comprising 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. It is hard to overestimate the importance of such an edition in the Russian philosophical horizon. This branch of philosophy was the first to suffer from the abovementioned attempts to impose dialectical materialism in the Soviet epoch. The Marxist "philosophy" of religion was reduced to understanding religion as the opium of the people (or, in Lenin's even more simplifying formulation, opium *for* the people). Marx regarded religion as a false consciousness – and there can certainly be no philosophy of false consciousness. Marx considered abolishing religion, which is the illusory happiness of the people, as a step towards their real happiness. Besides, religion was meant to express the interests of the bourgeois ruling classes, being a dominant ideology called to legitimate exploitation. According to Marx and Engels, communism abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis.

Most of the Russian religious thinkers such as Georges Florovsky or Nicolai Berdyaev had to move abroad and the greatest Russian

Orthodox theologians wrote in exile (such as Alexander Schmemann, for example).

In the second half of the 20th century some thinkers in the Soviet Union did research in the domain of theology, both biblical and natural (the most prominent was Father Alexander Men), and in the history of Christian culture (like Sergey Averintsev); there were also good specialists in Chinese, Indian, Arab cultures etc. who had to face the religious problematic in their work, but philosophy of religion as such remained taboo.

After the fall of the communist system the taboo on religion was lifted. The Orthodox church as well as other confessions and religions began their expansion. Many people in today's Russia identify themselves as believers even if sometimes the level of religious education leaves something to be desired. No doubt faith (Christian faith anyway) needs the assistance of reason, and the philosophy of religion can be of great importance here. Besides that, the almanac is called to restore in Russia the continuity of philosophy of religion (which is one of the most popular and developed branches of philosophy in the west and yet hardly known in today's Russia), the continuity of which was broken in the communist era.

It is perhaps not fortuitous that the almanac comes into being as late as 15 years after the fall of the communist ideology; indeed, philosophy needs time to reflect on past events and processes and to grasp their sense, and haste is out of place when reflection is concerned. The situation today in the religious sphere in Russia necessitates philosophical reflection, but it also makes such a reflection possible, which was not quite the case a couple of years ago when this situation was still in the making. This makes the publication of the almanac in Russia very timely.

The almanac is conceived as an international periodical and it is edited with the participation of the Society of Christian Philosophers. It is also an interdisciplinary edition; besides philosophers and specialists in religious studies the Institute collaborates also with theologians. Philosophy of religion is supposed to play a coordinating role in these interdisciplinary studies of religion. The structure of the almanac (in its first issue) is as follows: the first section is devoted to meta-philosophical reflection on the identity of philosophy of religion, on its subject-matter. As V. Shokhin, the editor-in-chief, remarks, the discussion of this topic

is needed because of the existence of different conceptions on this issue; the problem of the proper area of philosophy of religion does not seem to be unequivocally resolved. The second section deals with particular problems and it is supposed to have some thematic unity: for example, in the first issue it outlines contemporary theism. The third section is historical (in the first issue it considers the history of natural theology). The fourth section contains translations of classical texts in philosophical theology as well as works of Russian philosophers and theologians. The last section consists of book reviews.

The first volume of the Almanac contains 497 pages; it is particularly noteworthy that the second section contains articles by leading analytical philosophers of religion such as R. Swinburne's comprehensive article on the Anglo-American philosophy of religion (a theme of particular interest for the Russian reader), Robert Adams' *Divine Necessity*, E. Wielenberg's *Omnipotence Again* and N. Wolterstorff's *God is Everlasting*. The third section, as already mentioned, is devoted to the history of Natural Theology from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

I would like to present briefly V. K. Shokhin's long (about seventy pages) introductory article *On the Genesis of Philosophy of Religion: the Problem and Its Most Plausible Solution* as an example of successful application of the historical approach to a (meta)theoretical problem. The article aims at defining the very identity of philosophy of religion by more precisely defining its subject-matter. This goal is absolutely legitimate given that philosophy by definition includes a more significant amount of self-reflection than any other discipline; it is called to constantly define and redefine itself, its own role and scope. Philosophy of religion is no exception, and V. K. Shokhin undertakes a convincing attempt to delimit its proper sphere of studies by having recourse to the history of reflection on the philosophy of religion. Here we deal with an attempt to give a historically grounded solution to a (meta) theoretical problem. The validity of this method becomes clear when we realize how much our conception of philosophy of religion changes depending on whether we set its beginnings as early as in the time of Xenophanes or the Upanishads or as late as in Kant's and Hegel's epoch. Therefore, writing a history of philosophy of religion correlates with defining its subject matter. (We may be tempted to suppose a kind of hermeneutical circle between the two, but this is not what the author explicitly states).

Besides, the history of philosophical reflection and self-reflection sheds more light on theoretical problems than history normally does in other disciplines; it is due to the fact that most philosophical problems do not imply final solutions and so we can make a theoretical use even of the very first philosophic approaches to religion.

After this introduction the author proceeds to a critical review of some conceptions of the history of philosophy of religion and correspondingly to a review of definitions of this branch of philosophy. We will consider briefly those of them which clearly help define the author's own conception.

For example, the contemporary Russian philosopher Yu. A. Kimelev, in his book on philosophy of religion, distinguishes between two meanings of the term; he speaks about "philosophy of religion" in the broad and in the narrow senses of the word. If we take it broadly it will refer to a set of philosophical attitudes towards religion as well as with philosophical ways of confirming the existence of God, considering His nature and His relation to the world and to man. This relation between philosophy and religion has existed as long as philosophy itself. In the narrow sense philosophy of religion is an explicit and autonomous philosophical discourse about God and about religion. It becomes possible during Modernity when religion separates from other human activities and philosophy in its turn becomes independent from religion.

The definition of philosophy of religion as discourse on both religion and God leads Kimelev to its subdivision into the philosophical science of religion and philosophical theology coextensive with natural theology. V. K. Shokhin's criticism of this vision helps to highlight his own conception. In Kimelev's opinion philosophy of religion as the philosophical science of religion studies "religious knowledge"; as philosophical theology it helps *produce* the said knowledge. V. K. Shokhin shows that in this case we are confronted with a confusion of object-language and meta-language: either philosophy of religion is religiology, or it is theology; it cannot be both or otherwise we would be equally entitled to treat literary criticism and the writing of novels as the same kind of activity. The distinction will become clearer below.

The author then proceeds to a review of western conceptions of philosophy of religion. For reasons of space we have to limit ourselves to the theoretical frame of the discussion. V. K. Shokhin divides all the con-

ceptions of the history of philosophy of religion into three categories. 1) The first category comprises those thinkers who understand philosophy of religion only in the broad sense without distinguishing the genesis of philosophy of religion from that of philosophy *tout court*. In their view philosophy of religion is identical with any philosophical connections with religion. 2) The second category is represented by those who understand philosophy of religion both in the broad and in the narrow senses of the term. For them philosophy of religion originally existed as any relationship between philosophy and religion but since Modernity it has been transformed into a specialized philosophical discipline. 3) Finally, the third category includes those who accept only the narrow sense of the term "philosophy of religion". This trilemma can be put in historical terms so that the question of the identity of philosophy of religion becomes related to the question whether philosophy of religion a) does not have any history other than that of philosophy itself, b) both has (in one respect) and does not have (in another respect) such a history, c) has its own history separate from that of philosophy as a whole.

V. K. Shokhin then enumerates and discusses the views of historians of philosophy of religion that represent each of the three categories and proceeds to a criticism of their respective attitudes.

The edge of the criticism is directed towards the first category as completely erroneous in the author's view. The attitude of this category of thinkers is expressed in the long title of a book written by I. Berger, the first historian of religion (published in 1800); he understands philosophy of religion as the *Teachings of the Most Original Thinkers of All Times on God and Religion*. The problem with this formulation is the same as in Kimelev's case mentioned above: here we deal with a confusion of "philosophy in religion" (religious ideas expressed in philosophical terms) and "philosophy of religion" as a philosophical discourse on religion; a confusion, in other words, of theology and religiology, both being supposed to be the object of study of one and the same discipline. This mistake seems to me to result from confusing an object-language (religious language in its occurrence) with metalanguage (correspondingly, a discourse on religious language).

We find an example of such a confusion of levels of language in the view according to which the sages of India, China and Greece made the first steps in the philosophical comprehension of religion when they

posed the problem of the One (cf. e.g. H. D. Lewis, "Philosophy of Religion", *Encyclopedia of the History of Philosophy*, vol. VI, New York, 1967). According to this view, philosophy of religion is not distinguished from religious philosophy; for V. K. Shokhin this is similar to considering the first studies of the development of the Indo-European language as a stage of comparative linguistics.

This broad understanding of philosophy of religion results from unconscious confusion based on false evidence; but there are also philosophers who consciously identify this branch of philosophy with philosophical theology which is none other than natural theology. Yet historically, argues V. K. Shokhin, natural theology always presupposed revealed theology and the reading of the book of nature was not absolutely independent from reading Scriptures; in fact they were parts of one whole. Extra-confessional theology is hardly possible, and even one of the main questions of natural theology – whether we can know God on the basis of the reasonably designed world – is answered differently by, for example Thomists and Calvinists. Besides, when identifying philosophy of religion with philosophical theology we still confuse philosophy-in-religion with philosophy of religion, putting on the same level proofs of God's existence, the problem of His attributes *and* religious language and epistemology. This and some other considerations lead V. K. Shokhin to accept (after a criticism of the other two attitudes) the narrow understanding of philosophy of religion as the only plausible one.

He considers as philosophy of religion any philosophical discourse that has at least some elements of a theoretical treatment of religion oriented towards understanding and not towards control, according to Plantinga's formula. It concerns the origin, essence and significance of religion both taken in itself and related to other aspects of human spiritual life, as well as comprehension of basic religious categories and religious language.

V. K. Shokhin then distinguishes the prehistory of philosophy of religion from its initial history that begins in the 18th century; he proposes his own vision of its prehistory which may start, according to him, with Plato's *Euthyphro* which poses thematically the problem of piety; it continues with Cicero's *The Nature of the Gods*, then with Lactantius; Aquinas' contribution is also underlined as well as that of Nicholas of Cues, Herbert of Cherbury, Thomas Hobbes and Spinoza.

V. K. Shokhin's article is introductory to a series of articles on the same subject. Philosophy of religion, which is still in the making in Russia, needs to clearly define its own frontiers. But his objective is to make more precise the definition of philosophy of religion as such and not only Russian philosophy of religion. He seems to proceed from the assumption of the unity of philosophical activity. This assumption, worthy of a philosopher as it is, remains however at present a kind of Kantian regulative idea. Given the partition of philosophy roughly into analytical and "continental" (which is not the only partition that exists), this unity becomes a horizon to which we can more or less approach, but not a reality we can grasp. V. K. Shokhin's conception of philosophy of religion seems to me personally to be both logically and historically right, and yet we have to count with a plurality of particular philosophical traditions, including the one that embraces also natural theology as part of philosophy of religion (and that produces fruitful ideas). Besides that, many analytical authors reflect on the methodology of natural theology, taking its language as their object of study, and that meta-theoretical attitude is quite consistent with V. K. Shokhin's conception of philosophy of religion. Howbeit, V. K. Shokhin's attention to the history of philosophy of religion and his deep understanding of its relation to the present may contribute significantly to the philosophical discussion on religion.

The second volume of the Almanac (2008-2009) amounts to 524 pages. Some new sections are added: the section of Russian publications and archives is separated from that of classical authors. A section devoted to current events in the area of religious studies is introduced. The section on meta-philosophy of religion is represented by an article by V. K. Shokhin as well as by articles by Richard Shaeffler and Bernhard Kasper. The second section contains not only articles by English and American philosophers (such as R. Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga and others) but also those by Russian philosophers. This issue of the Almanac involves analytical as well as "continental" thinkers. The section of classical texts includes those by Hugh of St. Victor and F.W.J. Schelling.

Below I will present three articles written by Russian authors.

V. K. Shokhin's article *"Philosophy of Religion": the Beginning of Self-Reflection* continues the author's historical and meta-philosophical reflections from the previous volume. Here he retraces the history of philosophy of religion in the 18th century – the time of its birth. He remarks

that these historical considerations are of primary importance for understanding the actual situation of philosophy of religion.

The first author of a "Philosophy of Religion" was an Austrian Jesuit, S. von Storchenau, who pursued apologetical tasks in his book. Philosophy of religion was understood as a philosophical defense of the main religious beliefs. He was followed by another Jesuit, François Para du Phanjas, the author of "*Les principes de la saine philosophie conciliés avec ceux de la religion, ou La philosophie de la religion*", who was called to justify a consensus or a synthesis between the true philosophy and the true religion as well as to clarify the world-view of the Christian religion as a unity of rational and revealed theologies. This work was also meant to refute all the refutations of Christian religious principles.

The first attempt to introduce philosophy of religion into the academic milieu was made by C. L. Reinhold in his *Letters on the Kantian philosophy*. He explicitly considers philosophy of religion as a separate branch of philosophy and calls for a reformation of it. Philosophy of religion is ascribed theological tasks (a teaching about God and about the future life) but it is meant to construct the very principles of religion in this area on the basis of practical reason, according to the Kantian model.

J. F. Kleuker, in a book published in 1789, criticizes this application of Kantian philosophy to a science of religious principles. According to him, philosophy of religion would have the right to justify the teaching about God's being and the immortal soul if there were no true "positive" religion that already contains such a justification; since such a religion exists and is known as Christianity, the Kantian enterprise is neither necessary, nor sufficient. Kleuker himself postulates a comparative approach to religions on the basis of the categories true/false, sufficient/insufficient, aimed at evaluation of religions with regard to the ideal.

Kant's own influence on the formation of philosophy of religion seems to be ambiguous. On the one hand, in the 1780's he did not intend to develop a philosophy of religion, considering it as part of ethics and not as a separate part of his philosophy. Only in the first edition of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793) does he identify the philosophical study of religion as philosophical theology (as opposed to biblical theology) and try to find an autonomous niche for this study. In the second edition of the treatise he calls his research in the religious domain Religionslehre. In the *Contest of Faculties* (1798) he sets the bor-

ders between philosophical and theological studies of religion and outlines the principles of the philosophical hermeneutics of the Scriptures. So, on the one hand, Kant introduced a special term "Philosophische Religionslehre"; on the other hand, he most probably did not conceive of philosophy of religion as a philosophical discipline in its own right.

Yet it is under the influence of his work that philosophy of religion is understood more and more as a separate area of study. Philosophy of religion is considered, for example already by the young Schelling, as a separate philosophical trend of a Kantian orientation.

Fichte treats Religionslehre as a particular application of the general philosophical system of Wissenschaftslehre. He speaks about three levels of consciousness concerning religion: 1) the religious sense itself 2) Religionslehre 3) philosophy of religion called to critically remove false ideas about God, to foster religious education and to clarify the origin and formation of the religious sense as well as to define the very notion of religion. Religionslehre is meant to clarify the relation of God to finite reasonable subjects, unlike theology which studies the Divinity in itself. Philosophy of religion becomes a theory of religion which is placed on a different level from that of religious sense; a philosopher of religion works not so much with religion itself or with its concepts as with "concepts about those concepts".

Finally, the first history of the philosophy of religion (*Geschichte der Religionsphilosophie*) was published in 1800 by Immanuel Berger. Although his vision of the history of the philosophy of religion was too broad (it seems to have been coextensive with history of theology), the very fact of the publication of a history of philosophy of religion witnesses to the fact that by that time it was already a widely recognized and significant cultural and philosophical phenomenon.

The variety of attitudes towards philosophy of religion in the 18th century before Fichte had, in spite of numerous distinctions, one common feature: it was considered rather as a philosophical trend than as a discipline in its own right (with the exception of Kant's ambiguous attitude). By the end of the 18th century it was taken for granted as a philosophical phenomenon, and work on its clarification and identification was not undertaken.

The nowadays widespread broad understanding of the subject-matter of philosophy of religion (as any intersection of philosophy and religion)

recalls the situation at the end of the 18th century – another witness of philosophical eternal return.

Fichte seems to have been the only philosopher who understood religiology as a non-theological discourse. His three-level hierarchy of discourses seems to comprise the phenomenology of religious sense, the ontology of the relation between God and finite subjects and the philosophy of religion proper called to study manifestations of the religious and to define the concept of religion. In other words, philosophy of religion is a hierarchy of the phenomenological, ontological and categorial or conceptual dimensions of the religious – a definition that could be claimed in our time. Besides, Fichte clearly distinguishes philosophy of religion from philosophy in religion, the confusion of which, according to V. K. Shokhin, hinders one from clearly identifying the tasks and the subject-matter of the former.

In his article *Is Hume's Law Correct* M. O. Shakhov poses the question of the validity of Hume's Guillotine, asking whether values can be inferred from our knowledge about the world; to put it in other terms – whether evaluative or prescriptive statements (the distinction is not essential to the author's goal) can be deduced from descriptive ones. The main objective of the article is to examine the well-known Humean solution of the *is-ought* problem.

That the contrary often takes place, when rational discourse is called to justify norms or values already preconceived, is quite obvious but this is not the point of this article. The author distinguishes three answers to his question: in the positive, in the negative and strictly or extremely negative. The first solution belongs to Platonism, as well as any objective idealism and to traditional Christian theology. The second solution is given by David Hume, and the third one comes from the postmodernist milieu.

In Plato knowledge about the immortality of the soul (descriptive statements) and postmortem retribution founds the necessity of observing moral norms. As a matter of fact, in Plato knowledge of the "ought" is not properly inferred from neutral judgments about what is; "ought" itself exists as an entity, as for example ideas of good or justice, that we can get to know. Philosophies that admit an objective world of values (like G. E. Moore's) do not distinguish specifically normative judgments. Moral judgments for example are treated as representing knowledge of what is good; so there is no distinction between descriptive and evaluative.

In Christianity knowledge about the immortal soul and retribution is expressed in corresponding descriptive (even though unverifiable) propositions, but it needs to be completed by evaluative and prescriptive propositions. These are contained in biblical commandments that are instituted by God Himself. Formulated by God Himself and thus objective, they not only prescribe, but also describe the objectively existing law, and so are descriptive-evaluative by nature.

M. O. Shakhov then formulates the general rule which says that if one admits the objective existence of absolute values that are the same for everybody, these values are expressed in descriptive-evaluative propositions and there is no inferred transition from description to evaluation.

Indeed, in Christianity, for example, knowledge about God based on knowledge about the world implies not only descriptive information but a prescription as well, such knowledge becoming a duty to those who believe; therefore there is no gap between "ought" and "is".

The Christian conception of Natural Law is correlated to a vision of Nature as created by God. In its turn, the laicized version of Natural Law derives normative judgments from human nature by itself, but in fact the evaluative and prescriptive statements of the Declaration of Human Rights have no justification in factual statements. Therefore, Hume's law is confirmed as far as human rights and natural law conceptions are concerned: in a godless weltanschauung it is impossible to infer evaluative judgments from descriptive judgments about man and Nature, such that the results are convincing for everybody.

Marxism claimed the logical deducibility of its value system from its world-view, which was supposed by Marxists to be "truly scientific" and to generate knowledge about what the world ought to be like. Contrary to the Humean principle Marxism is an example of a teaching that claims adequate knowledge of reality and makes a transition from "is" propositions to "ought" propositions. And yet such refutation of the Humean principle in the case of Marxism is only partial. Marxism justifies the prescription of transforming the world by having recourse to ideals and norms derived from an adequate description of the world; yet it takes for granted the maxim that demands, once we know the objective laws of development, that we follow them in order to improve human life and do not oppose them. However this maxim is not deducible from

any descriptive knowledge, strictly speaking there is no logically irre-proachable transition from "is" to "ought". Even supposing that we can adequately know the world and its laws, it does not immediately follow that we should observe or implement them.

Here is the difference between Marxism and Christianity as far as this Humean principle is concerned: in Christianity the notions of what is just and morally good have their own ontological status because they express God's will. Norms and prescriptions being divinely instituted, the demand for their implementation is itself founded (for example, but not only, by the idea of retribution). On the contrary, non-theological conceptions of morality have either to implicitly or explicitly confer sub-stantial character to values themselves or to relativise them to a given society or epoch. Besides that, the idea of objective knowledge has been discredited in correlation to the relativisation of ethics; Plato's insight is confirmed according to which knowledge about the immortal soul and retribution founds ethics.

The author concludes that the answer to the question whether Hume's Guillotine is correct should be nuanced: for Christianity and Platonism this principle is incorrectly formulated rather than simply wrong since there is no conclusion from "is" to "ought", values being objective and existing as entities. As for worldviews that deny objective values, this principle is quite correct and entails the impossibility of a logically irreproachable grounding of ethics.

To my mind, the article shows well why Hume's law does not apply to Platonism or Christianity (in the view of those who believe) but it does not really prove its applicability to the human rights conception and to other non-theist moral conceptions. If we take is-statements or de-scriptive statements to be statements about facts (and prescriptive state-ments would relate to values), we have to admit that the very concept of "fact" is problematic and at least for some facts the distinction between fact and value is not sharp. Besides the so-called institutional facts (for example regarding a piece of paper as money) we can ask whether there exist any value-free brute facts that would not be trivial (like "it is rain-ing"). Certainly, this does not refute the fact-value distinction, it only attenuates the dichotomy. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Shakhov's view on Marxism's relation to Hume's Law may suggest a way if not to refute, at least to make more nuanced the affirmation of the impossibility

of deriving "ought" from "is" statements. Indeed, from the (descriptive) statement that the advent of communism is inevitable it does not follow that (prescriptive statement) we should strive for its coming unless we accept another prescriptive statement, for example, that once we know the objective historical laws we should help them come true. Analogically speaking, from the statement that killing is painful or that it does irreversible harm to another person it does not immediately follow that you should not kill unless we admit another value-judgment e.g. that you should not do to another what you would not like to have done to you (of course we have to presuppose another descriptive statement, namely that nobody normally wants to be irreversibly harmed). Cannot it be that a prescriptive statement is justified by a descriptive statement in conjunction with another prescriptive statement? Strictly speaking, this does not demonstrate that prescriptive statements can be deduced from descriptive ones; rather it shows that a descriptive statement can be an argument in favor of following a prescription, an argument that has rather an action-guiding than a purely logical force. Anyway, the problem is too complex and the space is too limited to try any real solution.

In the article *Theism, Postmodernist Burial of Metaphysics and Indian Ātmavadā*, Vladimir K. Schokhin speaks about psychophysical dualism as part of the philosophical foundation of theism. Indeed, the author states that negation of psychophysical dualism deprives theism of its sufficient reason. In this case either the soul is supposed to be destroyed with the death of the body (according to naturalist reductionism) or it is considered to be just a bundle of sensations and cogitations.

For some postmodernist authors both theism and psychophysical dualism are relics of the obsolete euro-centric rationality related to logocentrism. For them (mono)theism, as well as metaphysics claiming universality, are enemies of pluralism and should be overcome together with western rationalism as a whole. In this view psychophysical dualism is to be rejected as part of the tradition of western rationality. It is precisely the last thesis (that says that psychophysical dualism is a purely occidental conception) that V. K. Schokhin intends to refute by having recourse to the Indian philosophical tradition. He briefly mentions a general logical argument against postmodern relativism (any denial of universality itself subreptively claims universality), but the edge of his criticism is

directed against the historical groundlessness of discarding mind-body dualism as a phenomenon relative only to the occidental tradition. In fact this form of dualism does not occur only in the western tradition and therefore does not belong exclusively to western logocentrism.

The author outlines the history of the debate between Indian dualists (that is thinkers professing ātmavadā, a teaching about Ātman as spiritual principle) and materialists. So, for example, in the Chandogya Upanishad (VIII-VII cc. BC) it is said that those who consider Ātman as body are non-believers. So, at the dawn of Indian thought it was realized that reducing soul to body was incompatible with religious faith. During the Śramana period the problem of the body-mind relation was one of the main subjects of discussion. In the period that follows (IVc. BC-III c. AD) the main argument of materialists was that soul and its actions were unobservable whereas dualists affirmed that not all existing entities need to be observed. Then, in the Mahabharata, materialists are said to maintain that all the causal relations work only in the material world (like, for example, a seed and a tree, or a magnet etc.); besides, the only reliable source of knowledge is sense-perception and it does not permit one to affirm any permanent principles. The dualists' response was that separation of soul and body after death does not imply the former's destruction; on the contrary, the idea that the body is the source of life is discredited by the fact that action stops after death.

Dualists of the Samkhya school argued that all the composite bodies were intended for an ontologically different principle; they cannot be conscious by themselves and need to be guided by this principle, they cannot be the subject of self-perception, and since they are perceived, they imply such a principle. Ātman is understood as the subject of predicates needed to constitute experience.

Representatives of the Nyaya school explicitly argue with materialists finding points of contradiction in their teaching.

However, the most elaborate refutation of psychophysical monism was undertaken by Śankara, the founder of the Advaita Vedanta school. It is worth presenting briefly some of his arguments: 1) Thought and memory, unlike other bodily properties, are unperceivable. 2) Understanding consciousness as an attribute of the body is absurd: it is as if fire could burn itself. 3) Unlike permanently changing bodily properties, the subject of knowledge is continual and self-identical. 4) That there

is consciousness when there is body does not entail that the former is a property of the latter. According to Śankara, the main properties of the spiritual principle have nothing in common with bodily properties and the latter depend on the former more often than the contrary.

V. K. Shokhin remarks that some of the arguments of Indian thinkers in favor of dualism still retain their validity – for example, understanding the subject of experience as ontologically different from its objects and everything it can objectify, including its own bodily state; this ontological gap constitutes a condition of the possibility of experience. The argument from the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity as well as the argument from the difference between composite and simple things, and some of Śankara's arguments, can be retained in the contemporary discussion, according to V. K Shokhin.

It becomes obvious that the labeling of metaphysics by postmodernists as a purely occidental phenomenon is not consistent with historical testimonies. Moreover, the reproach of anti-pluralism is also inconsistent: the various versions of Indian body-mind dualism represent *different* types of metaphysical mentality. Besides, V. K. Shokhin remarks that the understanding that the reduction of Ātman to the body is incompatible with religion corresponds to the theist world-view, even if the Indian thinkers did not known of the idea of a created soul.

V. K. Shokhin's article is another example of a historical approach to a theoretical problem; it postulates a close connection between mind-body dualism and religious faith. However we can ask whether psychophysical dualism is necessary for someone to be a Christian (we will not consider other religions) – given the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. Generally speaking can't we rather say that Christian faith or rather Christian doctrine is over-determined with regard to metaphysical theories; that is, it cannot be based on or identified with just one particular theory (Aquinas' philosophy is of course no exception) or even a certain type of theory. Besides, since we do not know well enough all the properties of matter, we cannot treat beforehand any materialism as hostile to religion – in fact only vulgar forms of materialism are. Our contemporary scientific conception of matter is much more complex than it was in ancient times. Does this mean that addressing ourselves to ancient philosophical discussions gives no epistemic gain? To my mind, not at all; indeed, Vladimir Shokhin's article shows the

validity of this approach. One might be tempted to ask whether it is legitimate to consider arguments of Indian thinkers out of their proper context (which is quite different from ours; it also being the case that many of their questions are not our questions) and to employ them in contemporary discussions. And yet according to a saying of A. Gurevich, an outstanding Russian medievalist, any historical knowledge is also self-knowledge; we cannot understand ancient argumentation while abstracting from our own horizon of understanding; even if we are not entitled to impose our own categories on the ancient authors (cf. A.J. Gurevich: *Categories of Medieval Culture*. Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1985). V. K. Shokhin seems intelligently to maneuver between these extremes and he shows that history can be of use for current debates and that forgetting arguments put forward by philosophers of the past can impoverish contemporary thought.

One of the most important tasks of philosophy of religion is to clarify religious concepts, to analyze religious statements. This is particularly necessary in today's Russia where interest in religion is increasing, as is the need to understand it. In this context the appearance of a periodical presenting articles of both Russian and western philosophers and specialists in religious studies cannot but be welcomed. It suggests hope that Russian and western philosophers will further collaborate in this field, thus realizing the unity of the philosophical project two and a half thousand year old.

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Klaus Müller. *Glauben – Fragen – Denken, Vol. 1. Basisthemen in der Begegnung von Philosophie und Theologie*. Münster: Aschendorff-Verlag, 2006.
[Klaus Müller. *Believing – Questioning – Thinking. Main Topics in the Encounter of Philosophy and Theology*. Münster: Aschendorff-Verlag, 2006.]

Klaus Müller (M.) is one of the leading philosophers of religion in the German speaking world. His contribution to the field is large and impressive. Throughout the past two decades M. has set the stage and the agenda for a variety of discussions in German systematic theology. Some important debates are connected to his name – one might think of the discussions around an »ultimate justification« of faith or of the more recent debates related to the »atrocities of a personal God« and the problem of »religion, truth, and violence«. M.'s philosophy reconnects to the tradition of German Idealism and to Immanuel Kant; nevertheless, M. is one of the few in the German speaking world who are aware of major tendencies in analytic metaphysics and analytic philosophy of religion on the one hand and, also, of post-modernism on the other. The result is a promising starting point for a further reconciliation of Continental and Analytic philosophy established on what M. calls a "metaphysics of the self" in many of his writings.

Given this background it is thrilling to have a fresh source published which allows us to dig deeper into M.'s philosophical thinking. During the last four years M. has published a three-volume opus which is meant to serve as textbook[1] for his students. Given the wide range of topics and the sheer magnitude of the books (volumes 2 and 3 have over 800 pages each) the single volumes need to be reviewed separately. This also makes

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[1] "Textbook" in the German speaking world usually means a collection or anthology of classic texts and sources. In this regard M's opus is not a textbook but what in Germany is called "handbook". The American phrase "textbook" as used in this review means any kind of book that serves as a companion for classes on different topics and subjects. It is part of the German tradition to present textbooks as handbooks that introduce a systematically connected variety of topics but are authored by one author only.

sense given the different focuses of the volumes in question. Volume 1 – the concern of the present review – is meant to serve as a stepping stone for students of theology to get immersed in philosophical thinking while volumes 2 and 3 are written for already advanced students of theology that have to take certain, topic-oriented classes in systematic philosophy. It is noteworthy that M.'s textbook-series reflects the particularities of the German educational system as well as the specifics of studying theology in Europe and its traditional background: Philosophy plays a major role in any advanced study of theology. This is an advantage as well as a challenge. The advantage has to do with the fact that German students of theology will be educated philosophers at the end of their university program and will be able to address current philosophical discussions and their relevance for theological thinking. The challenge, however, can be regarded as the question of how to build up a philosophical curriculum that reveals the relevance and impact of philosophy in relation to systematic theology and to the in-depth education of future theologians. Given these challenges, M.'s three volume opus is not just the presentation of sophisticatedly interconnected and interwoven textbooks* but also the programmatic outline of his genuine concept of how to educate future theologians philosophically.

In the first volume of *Believing – Questioning – Thinking* M. presents and discusses the main topics of epistemology, hermeneutics, philosophy of language, metaphysics, philosophical theology, philosophy of religion, ethics and philosophy of mind. He does so in accordance with the history of philosophy, which is presented in certain excursus-sections in volumes 1 to 3 and built around classic profiles and names; but, moreover, philosophy of religion, which he bases on an idealistic form of philosophy of mind (within his metaphysics of the self), serves as the guiding light for the whole opus as such. The result is a genuine contribution to the field that surpasses the standards of average study-oriented textbooks* by far. The contents of study-oriented information are presented through the lens of genuine and stand-alone philosophical reflection. It is also of benefit for any reader that M. is a really gifted writer. His writing style is very consistent but never dry; the tone is very self-aware but sometimes also casual or anecdotal – so that the result is a really entertaining philosophy book (which may sound oxymoronic at first glance).

As mentioned before, volume 1 serves as a basic entry into doing philosophy within a theological setting. Consequently the first chapter (pp. 1-23) is dedicated to the use and to the necessity of philosophy within the curriculum of theology. M. has the gift of addressing rather complicated issues through historical anecdotes and through the lens of a systematic evaluation of historical developments or historically realized patterns and brands of thinking. In this case M. refers to historical incidents (in late antiquity or in the early middle ages) that demonstrate the need for in-depth reflections on pastoral or liturgical practices, which – as a consequence - trigger theological considerations and presuppose philosophical reflections. A second door into philosophy within the realm of theology is, according to M., provided by the fact that basic human ways of relating to the world necessarily involve philosophical thinking: the modes of desire, awe, doubt but also the gifts of communication and the basic principles of understanding, present the foundation upon which the architecture of philosophical thinking can and must be built.

The second chapter (pp. 25-60) elaborates in a more detailed way on related issues, namely the complicated connections between philosophy and theology based on the tensions between faith and reason. M. introduces two main trends within the history of theology: One branch (identified with St. Paul, Tertullian, Bernard of Clairvaux and others) seems to regard philosophy as the wisdom of the world which must not play any role when it comes to reflections on the mysteries of faith. The other branch is identified with Justin the Martyr, St. Anselm and others and can be seen as a role-model for the tendency to embrace philosophy and reason within religion. M. discusses the contributions of Aquinas and identifies further realizations of the above-mentioned antagonistic tendencies in modern and in contemporary philosophy and theology and related eras of history. But, already at this point, it becomes clear that M. himself is eager to defend a reason-based orientation of theology, especially in the contemporary situation in which theology is confronted with the challenges of post-modernism.

The following chapters, 3 to 10, try to get the reader involved in very basic topics of systematic philosophy: epistemology, philosophy of language, hermeneutics, ethics, philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. The guiding principle and the net that holds the variety of topics together is addressed in the title of the three-volume-opus:

believing – questioning – thinking. M. presupposes that any critical believer that opens his or her eyes to the world and to the culture around him/her will have to raise basic questions and, therefore, will be immersed in philosophical thinking almost automatically: What is truth? How can I communicate? What does it mean to be a human being? How can I pursue happiness? Will I ever be in position to justify my religious faith? And why do I even believe in God? Based on these questions religious faith and philosophy overlap and can develop the potential of being mutually enriching. In a university setting in which philosophy has to fight against the impression of being disturbing or superfluously hypocritical in relation to theology M. defends the classic role of philosophy as the foundation for systematic theology.

Within this program chapter 3 (pp. 61-94) is written to address the basic problems in epistemology. M. wraps them around the distinction between 'to be' and 'to appear' – a distinction that helps him to present insights coming from classical philosophy as well as from modern thinking. Interestingly enough, M. closes this chapter with a very up-to-date reflection on the philosophical consequences of virtual entities and cyber-reality.

Chapter 4 (pp. 95-134) presents some main insights into philosophy of language and gives basic information about classical philosophy of language (in Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas) as well as an overview of rivalling brands of contemporary philosophy of language (identified as dialogical philosophy of language, hermeneutical philosophy of language, and finally analytic philosophy of language). But chapter 4 does not just present encyclopaedic information concerning everlasting issues in the field, rather – and this is the true strength of M.'s treatment – it illustrates the problems addressed in the light of their theological relevance and further theological discussions. Consequently M. closes chapter 4 with a reflection on 'naming God', the impact of the analogy of being for the analogy of predicating, and metaphorical theology.

Chapter 5 (pp. 135-158) is developed as a logical consequence of the previous considerations since it is meant to deal with basic hermeneutical topics. M. explains the relevance of interpretation and interpretation-theory for theology, presents the role-models of classic hermeneutics (especially Schleiermacher) and discusses the contemporary challenges of interpretation-theory given the post-modern framework of current

hermeneutical theory-formation. After having discussed the basic ideas that can be found in Gadamer and Ricoeur, M. establishes interpretation as the *ethical* problem of 'reading'. The ethics of reading ultimately open the door to ethics in general.

In chapter 6 (pp. 159-180) M. discusses basic paradigms in ethical theory-formation. Therefore, he contrasts Aristotle's ethics of happiness and virtue with Immanuel Kant's ethics of duty. And, to bring the reader up to date, he discusses what he calls the blind spots of so-called discursive ethics. M.s conclusions are written between the lines. Nevertheless, they are outspoken enough: He argues for a combination of virtues and duties that serve as a non-negotiable basis for the procedural negotiations within ethical discourses.

Chapter 7 (pp. 181-237) is clearly the most important part of the book since it sets the stage for M.'s philosophy of religion and the combination of both idealistic and analytic methods. Chapter 7 is dedicated to basic discussions in philosophical anthropology but focuses especially on the philosophy of consciousness. Thus, this chapter starts with a main introduction to the philosophy of mind (addressing the mind-body and the mind-brain debates) but ends with an extended reflection on 'being a self', subjectivity and the idealistic and existentialistic philosophy of self-awareness and self-sustainment presented by the German philosopher Dieter Henrich and its theologically modified version which was developed by M. himself. Already at this point M. presents the paradox of the self as the need to reconcile two antagonistic insights coming from an analysis of self-awareness: that each self is unique and autonomous but is simultaneously just one among many others and entirely dependent on others as well. For M. this paradox serves as the main tool for spelling out different phenomenological observations regarding anthropology, and for doing philosophy of religion by establishing the roles and 'functions' of religion in reconciling the abovementioned antagonistic insights and tendencies.

Chapter 8 (pp. 239-256) however looks somewhat erratic at first glance, given the systematic outline of the book. Its connection to chapter 7 is a more indirect and implicit one since it deals with an appropriate concept of God in relation to idealistic paradigms for a philosophy of the self. Within this (rather implicitly noted) line of thinking it becomes, nevertheless, understandable why M. discusses the ideas of pantheism

and panentheism and the advantages of establishing a somewhat panentheistic concept of God, given the need to address the paradoxes of the human self in a mature concept of God. Although chapter 8 remains a bit short it serves as a track-switch to the further philosophical theology developed in volumes 2 and 3 and it presents the kernel of M.'s concept of God enclosed in the idea that the difference between God and the world is overridden and simultaneously sustained by the (speculatively and idealistically conceived) identity of God and the world.

Chapter 9 discusses the main models of the modern critique of religion. The discussions of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Comte can be seen as a contrast to the optimistic message of chapter 7 which involved saying that religion is ultimately necessary to resolve a problem (namely the paradox of the self) by way of symbolic and conceptual reconciliation. To address the 'virtues' of questioning and doubting M. forces the reader to consider the need for religion in the light of basic suspicions that the concept of God might just be a projection of human idols, or a socially distributed and approved drug used to sedate human anxieties, or a psychological sickness and disorder, or an expression of a pre-scientific worldview. M. discusses each suspicion separately, points out its validity and also its shortcomings. His conclusion remains convincing: that we cannot do away with the task of reconciling the paradoxes of our very own self-aware existence – a task that is addressed and worked out in religion – and that, therefore, religion is necessary, healthy, truth-oriented, and related to a transcendent reality which is described as the metaphysical contrast to the worldly reality as such.

The final chapter 10 (pp. 291-338) discusses the heart of modern and contemporary philosophy of religion: namely the questions concerning God's existence. M. presents the classic and modern forms of the so-called 'proofs of God's existence'. He introduces the reader to the main types of arguments (the ontological argument, the five ways of Aquinas etc.) and to the most prominent criticisms of these (associated with Immanuel Kant). Moreover, M. also discusses the revitalization of such arguments by Richard Swinburne and the criticism presented by John L. Mackie. However, chapter 10 is not just an overview of the pros and cons of the types of arguments evaluated but also presents a rather speculative conclusion: In accordance with Robert Spaemann's so-called "last proof of God's existence" M. elaborates a way to identify

God as the (necessarily existing) necessity and eternity of truth which guarantees the truth of states of affairs for now and for the future, when the states of affairs themselves will be past and gone entirely. Although this argument is just a somewhat modified and refurbished version of the so-called "alethological" argument (and although it is within this paradigm open to a certain criticism) M.'s conclusion makes sense given his philosophical program, which is based on the metaphysics of the self and of self-awareness. Consequently, any proof of God's existence needs nothing less than a combination of epistemological and ontological categories to establish an idealistic platform.

M.'s textbook* is way more than just an everyday introduction to philosophy within the curriculum of theology. It is a masterpiece written by a master philosopher and theologian – a masterpiece that reveals the benefits of a very German tradition: the ability to combine introductory remarks with speculative thinking, to relate encyclopaedic information with fresh, stand-alone deliberations. The idealistic framework of the book might be a provocation to postmodern as well as rather 'orthodox' analytic philosophers. But it serves as the proposal of a project and as an offer to contemporary philosophy of religion which, at the least, should learn from M.'s programmatic ideas that a reconciliation of the Continental and Anglo-American traditions is unavoidable if philosophy of religion does not want to be swept away by secularism and agnosticism.

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**Paul K. Moser. *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*.
Cambridge University Press, 2008.**

Like many other philosophers writing today, Paul Moser believes
that God's existence is *hidden*, at least for some people at some times,
meaning that God's existence "fails to be not only obvious but also
beyond cognitively reasonable doubt" (p. 1). In this book, Moser presents
an original approach to divine hiddenness and explores the implications
of this approach for religious epistemology. He argues not only that
hiddenness fails to rationally support a skeptical attitude to divine reality
but also that a proper understanding of divine purposes in self-revelation
should lead us to *expect* hiddenness. The book's central thesis is that we
should expect conclusive evidence of God's existence to be *purposively
available* – that is, available in a way that "accommodates the distinctive
purposes of a perfectly loving God." Such purposes, says Moser, "would
aim noncoercively but authoritatively to transform human purposes to
agree with divine purposes, despite human resistance of various and
sundry sorts" (p. 2). On Moser's account, then, God is hidden from some
people at some times because such people, through their unwillingness
to be transformed by God, are not well-positioned to receive (or respond
to) purposively available evidence of divine reality. According to Moser,
the book marks "a Copernican Revolution in cognitive matters about
God's existence" (p. 4), necessitating what he calls a seismic shift in the
epistemology of religious belief. At the heart of this shift is the importance
placed on the human will, over and above the human intellect, in receiving
and responding to conclusive evidence of divine reality. The aim in what
follows is to provide a brief summary of the book's contents, and then to
try and anticipate some of the concerns that some readers may have.

    In chapter one, Moser makes an important distinction between what
he terms 'spectator evidence' and 'perfectly authoritative evidence'. The
former is "evidence pointing to some truth but *not* demanding that its
recipients yield their wills to (the will of) the source of the evidence"
(p. 46). The latter is evidence which does make such a demand. Moser
argues that a perfectly loving God who is interested in establishing

genuinely redemptive relationships with human beings would forego
spectator evidence of God's existence (which, even if conclusive, would
be merely academic and would fail to challenge us in the relevant and
appropriate way(s)). Instead, such a God would reveal himself purposively
and authoritatively (so as to challenge our wills), in a manner that is
"akin to evidence from conscience" (p. 62). The absence of a person's
experience of this evidence in no way makes skepticism normative
for others, says Moser, since it may be that this absence is due to the
person's unwillingness to receive such purposively available authoritative
evidence (hereafter PAAE).

Chapter two develops in more detail the notion of PAAE and explores
the reasons for which a perfectly loving God might choose to remain
hidden (at least from some people at some times). A non-exhaustive list
of these reasons, Moser suggests, includes: "(a) to teach people to yearn
for . . . personal fellowship with God, (b) to strengthen grateful trust in
God . . . , (c) to remove human complacency toward God . . . , (d) to shatter
destructively prideful human self-reliance, and (e) to prevent people
who aren't ready for fellowship with God from explicitly rejecting God"
(p. 107). The third chapter explores God's invitation to set aside our
selfishness and be willingly transformed so that we love others (even
enemies) in a way that more closely approximates the divine unselfish
love for us exemplified so powerfully in Jesus. Of particular interest
in this chapter is Moser's discussion of the underlying epistemology of
his account of our knowing God on the basis of PAAE. Moser argues
that "God's intervening Spirit . . . witnesses to, and thus confirms, God's
reality *directly* for willingly receptive people at God's chosen time" and
that this "yields firsthand foundational (that is, noninferential) evidence
and knowledge of God's reality" (p. 150). Interestingly, readers may
think at this point that Moser is offering us Reformed Epistemology for
evidentialists (with the concept of evidence broadened to include PAAE).
This characterization seems accurate enough. Moser seems to agree with
reformed epistemologists that belief in God can be 'properly basic'; the
main difference is that Moser wants to characterize his view as evidentialist.
What is truly surprising is that Moser mentions "reformed epistemology"
(and Plantinga) in only one paragraph, in the final chapter.

Chapter four discusses the revolutionary changes that would take place
in philosophy if more philosophers prepared themselves to receive PAAE

and let it transform their lives, in general, and their intellectual pursuits, in particular. "[P]hilosophers," says Moser, "should actually participate eagerly in the church community of God's people, as philosophical *servants* rather than self-avowed intellectual superiors, to identify its philosophical needs for the sake of the Good News and then to serve those needs in redemptive love" (p. 232). The last chapter expands on how the epistemological shift argued for in the previous chapters (i.e. the shift from spectator evidence to PAAE) is beneficial to *all* humans, since it puts us in a better position to address two of our most fundamental problems: destructive selfishness and impending death. An appendix to the book attempts to dispel any remaining skeptical worries.

The Elusive God is an interesting, insightful, and at times highly polemical work which provides an original theistic voice in the ongoing conversation about divine hiddenness. Moser's defense of the claim that cognitive issues related to God's existence are significantly affected by whether we humans are willing to be "transformed toward God's moral character of perfect love . . ., thereby obediently yielding our wills to God's authoritative will" (p. 119) represents the book's most important contribution to contemporary religious epistemology. However, controversy will likely surround the notion that this contribution amounts to (or necessitates) a "Copernican Revolution in cognitive matters about God's existence," for reasons that we'll see below.

Moser thinks that an epistemology of PAAE is the only game in town once the relevant aims of a perfectly loving God (including the aim of challenging humans to yield their wills to divine purposes) are fully appreciated and accounted for. He launches critiques against other purportedly viable contenders such as fideism, natural theology, and a religious epistemology centering on 'numinous' or mystical experiences (Plantinga's reformed epistemology is conspicuously absent from the list). Moser argues that fideism is an epistemological non-starter, since it "implausibly entails that theistic commitment need not rest for its cognitive status on supporting evidence," thus making theism "evidentially arbitrary and thus cognitively irrational" (p. 33, italics omitted). Mystical or numinous religious experiences are, says Moser, "not only unnecessary but also dangerous for experientially well-founded theistic belief," since they divert attention from what would be the main aim of God in giving us self-revelation – namely, "the purportedly redemptive

manifestation of a divine authoritatively loving character worthy of worship and thus of obedient human submission" (p. 8). Moser's aversion to this kind of epistemology of religious experience is linked to his distaste for the evidences of natural theology in that he finds both to be spectacular, disinterested, and even academic or trivial with respect to the transformative challenge God makes upon our wills. Moser faults traditional natural theology (with its focus on cosmological, teleological, and other arguments for God's existence) and much recent work in the philosophy of religion for having "simply neglected [PAAE] for the sake of more comfortable, less challenging spectator evidence" (p. 53).

For Moser to make good on his advertisement of the book's "Copernican Revolution," he needs to defend two important claims:

(1) A perfectly loving God would offer only PAAE to accomplish God's aims in self-revelation

and

(2) Other, rival religious epistemologies offer at best only spectator evidence

But readers may find ambiguity in Moser's position with respect to whether he wants to defend (1) or:

(1*) A perfectly loving God would offer *primarily* PAAE to accomplish God's aims in self-revelation.

(1*) may be the easier of the two to defend but would, of course, somewhat weaken Moser's position (since defenders of rival religious epistemologies could agree with (1*)). In any case, many readers familiar with the Jewish and Christian religious traditions will note that there is warrant (in both Scripture and theology) for thinking that God employs many resources – particularly the natural order – in self-revelation. Now Moser briefly discusses St. Paul's remarks to this effect in Romans 1:19-20, and says (p. 48) that the evidence mentioned in this passage yields only 'casual knowledge' that God exists (which would not be adequate to bring people to reconciliation with God). But many readers might find Moser's remarks here puzzling. For, this looks like an admission that God's existence may not be 'hidden' after all, whereas the main aim of the book is to offer an account of PAAE to explain why God is hidden (at least from some people at some times).

Concerning natural theology, Moser complains that "endless disputes about probabilities involving apparent design in biology or cosmology or

about the need for an inaugural cause behind any parade of contingent causes and effects" are "esoteric" and have "nothing directly at all to do with God's inherent character of perfect authoritative love" (p. 136). He goes on to suggest that these arguments don't convince anyone not already committed to certain theistic presuppositions. But of course, many philosophers won't see the presence of intractable disagreement about an argument as an index of its evidential strength. Moreover, what is good for the goose is good for the gander. Moser cites selfish attitudes and willful resistance to setting aside one's autonomy as reasons for why people do not receive (or if they receive, do not respond favorably to) PAAE. But for all we know, these same considerations explain why some people are not convinced by the arguments of natural theology.

Moser's contention in (2), above (that rival religious epistemologies offer, at best, only spectator evidence), is far from obvious. For example, suppose someone (call him Bob) carefully considers anthropic, big-bang cosmological, and fine-tuning arguments which point to the universe having been delicately designed so as to support the eventual appearance of human life (the latter being either a special act of creation or the intended outcome of an evolutionary process whose requisite initial conditions were put in place by the designer). William Lane Craig and others have argued that such arguments pack with them evidence that the designer is a personal Agent. Now suppose Bob finds himself convinced in this way that a very powerful, very knowledgeable, and personal Agent intended his (and other humans') existence. This evidence may well suggest to Bob questions such as whether there are more specific purposes that this Agent has concerning him, and whether this Agent has revealed himself in any other, more specific way. In considering such questions, Bob may already be yielding (or at least beginning to yield) his will to his Creator. (Incidentally, something similar to this scenario is empirically confirmed in the faith journeys of many noted thinkers). So it is not clear that natural theology, for example, amounts to no more than spectator evidence. Readers might also wonder (a) why a numinous experience couldn't have as its object a demanding, authoritative God (and thus involve PAAE), and (b) why Moser, in claiming that only his religious epistemology accounts for PAAE, seems to ignore all of Plantinga's work on the role of the will in religious belief formation (see

Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000), especially chapter seven).

It should be briefly pointed out that in chapter 3, Moser argues for what he calls the 'divine manifest-offering approach to atonement' while launching an in-house critique against "some of the Christian tradition" concerning the historically popular 'penal substitution' theory (which claims that God punished the sinless Jesus in place of sinful humanity – a claim Moser finds "morally distorted" (p. 174)). Whatever readers may think about the success or failure of this polemic, it is not germane to the main argument of the book, since Moser's account of PAAE seems consistent with both the manifest-offering and the penal substitution approaches to atonement.

Finally, with all due apologies to Moser, the book is incredibly verbose. In the 278 pages of text, the reader will be struck with the realization that some of the same phrases keep popping up over and over again, as do some of the same claims (often without additional argumentation). All things considered, it seems reasonable to suppose that the book could have been condensed to around 150 pages. For readers familiar with Moser's previous, crisply argued work, this will seem an odd stylistic development. That said, the essential points Moser presents in *The Elusive God* make an important contribution to the epistemology of religious belief and should be taken seriously by present and future epistemologists and philosophers of religion.

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