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# PRÉCIS OF *MEANING IN LIFE: AN ANALYTIC STUDY*[1]

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In *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study* (Metz 2013), my overarching aims are to articulate a novel theory of what would make a human person's life meaningful and to argue that it is more justified than competitors to be found in the analytic philosophical literature from the past 100 or so years.

This project inherently brings with it certain limitations. In focusing on the meaning of an individual's life, I set aside the issue of what, if anything, might confer meaning on the human race in general. In evaluating theories of meaning in a person's life, I address fundamental principles that purportedly capture what all meaningful conditions have in common, and so do not explore particularist, phenomenological, strictly first-personal or other philosophical approaches that one might adopt. In considering principally analytic texts, i.e., those in the English-speaking, Anglo-American philosophical tradition, I do not thoroughly discuss those in other traditions such as the Continental or East Asian. Finally, in reflecting mainly on philosophical works, I bracket considerations of how research in other fields such as psychology or religion might be revealing.

Given such a focus, I found more than enough authors, works and ideas with which to grapple in *Meaning in Life*. The contributors to this special issue of the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* have by and large elected to stay within the parameters of my project; the debates are immanent to the tradition of analytic philosophy.

In the rest of this overview, I provide a sketch of the three major parts of *Meaning in Life*, which will set the stage for the debates that follow. In the first major part of the book, I analyze the category of

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[1] Much of this précis borrows from a previous one that I had articulated (Metz 2015).

meaningfulness in a way that is intended to be largely neutral amongst competing theories of what meaningfulness essentially is. Specifically, I define what most in Anglo-American philosophy mean by the phrase 'meaning in life' and cognate terms, indicate what the bearer of this value is, and differentiate meaningfulness from happiness, subjectively construed.

With regard to definitional matters, I ultimately maintain that a pluralist, family resemblance model is most defensible at this point. According to this view, talk of 'meaning in life' is about ideas such as purposiveness, transcendence, aptness of emotions such as admiration and esteem, and (I would add now) narrative properties. While each of these ideas captures a large array of theoretical work in the relevant literature, no one of them captures everything on its own.

I next consider what the bearer of life's meaning is, i.e., what it is about a life that can be meaningful or meaningless. Is it only the life as a patterned whole, merely the parts of a life considered in themselves, or both? I conclude in favour of the latter, mixed view; I maintain that there are two independent dimensions of meaning in life, namely, certain parts of a person's life at a certain time, such as a particular action, project or stage (e.g., adolescence) and then also the person's life considered in its entirety. A complete judgment of the degree of meaning in a person's life, which would ground a comparison with the lives of others, must weigh up both dimensions and add them together in some way.

In the rest of part one, I compare and contrast the goods of pleasure and meaning, focusing most on highlighting important differences between them. I contrast pleasure and meaning with respect to six value-theoretic factors, amongst them: what the logical sources of these values are in contrast to their bearers, how luck can play a role in the realization of the values, and which attitudes are appropriate in response to them. I conclude by suggesting that a pleasant life is plausibly to be identified with a happy one, which means that happiness and meaningfulness are two distinct goods that can each contribute independently to making a life choice-worthy.

In the next two major parts of the book, I focus on spelling out and evaluating a wide array of theories of life's meaning, basic accounts of what all the meaningful conditions of a life have in common as distinct from the meaningless ones. I assess theories largely in terms of the extent to which they plausibly entail and powerfully explain intuitions salient in the analytic philosophical literature, particularly as they concern

the meaningfulness of the good (morality, beneficence), the true (knowledge, wisdom) and the beautiful (art, creativity).

Specifically, in the second part, I criticize supernaturalist theories of meaning in life, according to which either God or a soul (or both), as typically conceived in the monotheist tradition, is necessary for life to be at all meaningful. I spend considerable time focusing on the most influential version of supernaturalism, according to which meaning in a person's life consists of her fulfilling God's purpose.

I provide reasons to doubt arguments in favour of purpose theory, and also claim to offer a novel reason to doubt the view itself. According to this latter argument, in order for God to be necessary to confer meaning on our lives, God would have to be qualitatively different from, and higher than, anything that could exist in the natural world. And this means that God would have to be a person who has properties such as simplicity and atemporality, properties that are difficult to reconcile with purposive agency as normally conceived by monotheists, which appears to be essentially complex and temporal.

I also proffer arguments against any supernaturalism, not just the purposive version of it. The most original objection is that many of those who adopt supernaturalism hold views that are in tension with each other. On the one hand, they claim to know that some lives have meaning in them, but, on the other, they claim not to know that anything supernatural actually exists, making it incoherent to claim to know that meaning logically depends on the supernatural. Supernaturalists might have faith in a spiritual realm, but that is of course not knowledge of its existence, which most implicitly maintain they have about the presence of meaning in people's lives.

In the third part of *Meaning in Life*, I present a new naturalist theory that I contend improves upon extant versions of naturalism, the broad view that a life in a purely physical world could be meaningful. I first provide counterexamples to a wide range of existing naturalist views, including the theories that a life is meaningful just insofar as it is creative, promotes welfarist or perfectionist consequences in the long run, or connects with organic unities beyond itself.

I then advance my favoured view at this stage, the fundamentality theory, which is roughly the idea that a life is (particularly) meaningful insofar as exercises reason, does so in a robust, sophisticated way, and orients it towards basic conditions of human existence, ones that are largely responsible for or explain much else about it.

Just as $H_2O$ is fundamental to water, and being a CEO is fundamental to the operations of a firm, so there are certain properties of human life that are fundamental to (i.e., roughly, account for much of) various dimensions of it. For example, space-time, gravity and light are fundamental to the environment in which human beings live; communication, socialization and labour are fundamental to the development of the human species; practical reasoning and communion are fundamental to the course of a human society; and character is fundamental to the way a particular one of us lives (an additional dimension that I did not discuss in the book).

By my theory, great meaning in a life comes from using rationality in complex, willful ways to positively engage with these kinds of 'deep' facets of human life. Sometimes that is a matter of discovering or learning what they are; other times it is a matter of protecting them; and still other times it is a matter of expressing respect for or appreciation of them.

I do not claim that the fundamentality theory is perfect, as it stands. However, I continue to be inclined to think that it is the best springboard for future reflection. It, better than existing rivals in the literature, captures intuitions about the good, the true and the beautiful as central to meaning, intuitions that are salient in the analytic philosophical literature. Or so I argue in the book, a large claim that readers should consider in light of the contributions to this issue of the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion.*

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# PASCAL AND THE VOICELESSNESS OF DESPAIR

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85. *Good sense.* They are forced to say: 'You are not acting in good faith, we are not asleep.' etc. How I love to see this proud reason humbled and begging! Those are not the words of a man whose rights are disputed and who is defending them strongly, arms in hand. He does not waste time saying that his opponents are not acting in good faith, but punishes their bad faith by force.

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Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

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## I. THE DUAL PURPOSES OF MEANING IN LIFE

Thaddeus Metz's *Meaning in Life* is like a magnificent castle, covering vast ground, with towers high into the heavens, and astoundingly intricate architecture. It covers the literature on meaning with enviable completeness and weaves together the many and various strands within that literature, 'towering' over the debates and issues and provides a wide and inclusive perspective on them. *Meaning in Life* is a striking achievement and, just as the intricacy of those fortresses testified to the growing maturity of architecture, so Metz's book is a testament to the growing maturity of the literature on the meaning of life.

But such castles had a dual purpose, which did not always cohere. They were fortresses intended to withstand armed assault, yet they were also supposed to manifest and project the aristocratic loftiness, status, and elegance of their masters. These purposes conflicted, especially in the design of a castle's central tower, the keep or donjon, where elegant ornamentation was most necessary, but which could hamper or compromise its defensive functions. *Meaning in Life* likewise seeks to fulfil a dual purpose: on the one hand, to weave all the literature together

into a coherent conception of meaning, including supernaturalist conceptions of meaning; and, on the other, to neutralize supernaturalist claims that only the existence of God or of an immortal soul could provide the necessary conditions for meaning.

Does Metz's synthesis stand, or has it compromised its defence? Part II, 'Supernaturalist Theories of Meaning in Life', devotes four substantial chapters to exploring, articulating, critiquing, and reconstructing supernaturalist theories of meaning in life. Part II frequently adopts the methodology of Part I and III, which we can find epitomized in 8.4, page 144. Here, Metz writes that he finds the views of supernaturalist sceptics, who doubt that life can be meaningful if God or the soul does not exist, to be extremely 'counterintuitive', and predicts that regardless of how this turns out, 'many will respond' that they continue to find lives like those lived by Einstein, Darwin, Dostoyevsky, Picasso, Mandela, and Mother Teresa' to be meaningful.

> Similar remarks go for actions that confer some meaning on a life, such as rearing children with love, patience, and insight, caring for students, parents, or hospital patients, having deep and long-lasting friendships, sustaining a vibrant and close marriage, engaging in charity work, creating artworks, making intellectual discoveries. These, too, appear capable of making a person's existence somewhat more significant in the absence of a perfect or supernatural condition. If so, then the best theoretical explanation of what confers meaning on a life cannot include the claim that a life would be utterly meaningless in the absence of the spiritual realm.[1]

The argument proceeds in two steps: it first collects a set of intuitive judgments, or judgments that most people would be inclined to agree with, and then it infers the theory that would correspond with these judgments.

But this method is a poor weapon to wield in a debate with the sceptics. It is in fact the first thing that must be safeguarded against attack. This problem may be made clearer if we examine a paradigmatic figure who represents the view that God is necessary for life to have meaning – one of those authors for whom the yearning for meaning appears in the midst of a cry of despair. I will focus upon Pascal, whose own method and conclusions sharply contrast with those displayed within *Meaning in Life*. I will first examine his conception of the human condition, then

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[1] Thaddeus Metz, *Meaning in Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 144.

his explanation for how this condition gives rise to despair and the sense of meaninglessness, and finally how he thinks that the existence of God could restore meaning's possibility. I will then close with some concluding remarks on why a Pascalian sort of supernaturalist would not be satisfied with the arguments made in *Meaning in Life* and would, perhaps, regard them as so many additional evidences to the contrary.

## II. PASCAL ON THE HUMAN CONDITION

Pascal is a difficult author. For all the clarity and logical rigor we find in his published papers, the reader of the *Pensées* encounters an unfinished work of cobbled-together fragments. Its pages shine with brilliant observations but it sprawls out with no obvious order, in apparently disorganized and contradictory array. In this, the work manifests the same apparent disorder it declares the world to possess, and this is an important part of its power. Making sense of his arguments requires patience, care, and constant attention.

Pascal is an anti-systematic thinker. He distrusts the vanity involved in system-building, which serves the pride of the philosopher, especially when this touches upon human nature (fr. 175).[2] We possess 'two different natures' (fr. 144), both 'instinct' and 'reason', 'passion' and 'thought', 'greatness' and 'baseness', the 'angel' and the 'brute', combined in a confused mixture we cannot comprehend (frs. 164, 230). It is dangerous to understand only one of these: we must understand both our 'greatness' and our 'baseness' to think and live as we ought (frs. 153, 513). Yet, as if in procrustean competition, philosophers for the most part have tried to reduce human beings into one of these alternatives: 'Some wanted to renounce the passions and become gods, the others wanted to renounce reason and become brute beasts. But neither group succeeded' (fr. 29).[3] From the Platonists, Stoics, and Epicureans of antiquity down to Descartes and Hobbes in Pascal's own time, philosophers were guilty again and again of oversimplifying the mixture that is humanity to one

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[2] References to the *Pensées* are to Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), with the fragment number cited in text.

[3] Cf. Hubert Dreyfus, '"What a monster then is man": Pascal and Kierkegaard on being a contradictory self and what to do about it', in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. by Steven Crowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 96-110.

side or another of the mixture in order to render it more theoretically tidy and unified.

Pascal refuses either simplification; human nature contains both 'baseness' and 'greatness', and we are thoroughly contradictory (fr. 230). He also denies that we can, or should, aim to become wholly one aspect or the other. We can never escape the needs or properties associated with the half we try to suppress, and the attempt to do so only corrupts the aspect we pursue. Speaking of those who would attempt to live a purely spiritual existence, he says, 'Man is neither angel nor brute, and the unfortunate thing is that he who would act the angel acts the brute' (fr. 358). Human happiness requires that both sides of our nature be fulfilled, and not just one of these or the other. We fail at achieving happiness when either the brute's or the angel's desires are denied (frs. 110, 166) or when the war between these two aspects prevents us from finding any repose (frs. 29, 168).

Not only are we divided between our two aspects, however, we are also incapable of fulfilling the desires of either side of our nature. The rational aspect of our nature desires to know the truth but is trapped between ignorance and knowledge (fr. 230). We cannot help wanting to know the truth about human existence, but its accomplishment is impossible (fr. 110). Human reason is calculative, moving from premises to conclusions, and perfect in itself when its method is sound,[4] but incapable of securing its first premises, which it acquires from 'nature'.[5] What we regard as nature, however, is subject to custom (fr. 164) and to the 'uncertain balance between truth and pleasure [...] in the deepest interior of a human being',[6] in such a way and to such a degree that a person can rarely discern the difference between these, and frequently misleads us. The attempt to use our finite intellect in order to comprehend an infinitely great and infinitely divisible universe disorients our reason, which requires a resting point (fr. 230). For Pascal, human science necessarily includes a 'void' within it, 'at its foundation'.[7] Moral knowledge is incomparably more important to us than scientific knowledge (fr. 57), but the difficulty, or impossibility, of knowing ourselves or our true nature makes it even

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[4] Pascal, 'The Art of Persuasion', in *Pensées and Other Writings*, pp. 196-197.

[5] 'The Art of Persuasion', p. 194.

[6] 'The Art of Persuasion', p. 195.

[7] Jean Khalfa, 'Pascal's Theory of Knowledge', in *Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, ed. by Nicholas Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 122-143 (p. 133).

more elusive (fr. 230, 576). We are unsure even of how far our ignorance goes, because neither scepticism nor dogmatism can be established (fr. 164). The lack of a fixed point leaves us with the realization that for all reason can show us, every aspect of human life is contingent and accidental. The kind of cosmic order that the philosophers have sought, which would give us a clear sense of human identity and purpose, cannot be discerned; the universe is 'silent' (fr. 229).

The interaction of the rational and animal aspects of humanity is disordered. The desires rooted in the two aspects of our nature conflict with each other (fr. 514). They draw us in different directions and require different things of us; the difficulty of reconciling them is what has led philosophers to their inaccurate simplifications of human nature (fr. 29). Their combination produces the imagination, which fights against reason and renders the desires of the brute fantastical, unlimited, and incapable of satisfaction (fr. 78). Furthermore, reason reveals to the 'brute' that it must die. Death undermines contentment, for it is the most inescapable of our ills and our knowledge of its inevitable but unpredictable arrival is itself an enormous evil (fr. 681). Knowledge of death is so miserable that we require constant diversion or distraction to escape from its misery (fr. 166). The two aspects of ourselves do not fit together well; taken as a whole, man is a monstrous, incomprehensible being (fr. 163, 164).

Can the being nature left in painful perplexity overcome its condition by its own efforts at reform and enlightenment? Pascal's answer is a firm No: the causes of human misery escape human control. Our misery is matched by our weakness. The nature of our ignorance is itself a cause of our remaining in ignorance; our ignorance is not simple, so that our ignorance of a moral standard itself prevents us from identifying the moral standard. 'We need a rule' to determine which starting point to begin from, but 'reason is pliable in either direction', and so 'there is no rule' (fr. 455). We have no power to overcome human mortality. And no one has yet found a means of making the passions and reason live with each other; nor is it clear how someone could. The wretchedness of the human condition, combined with our powerlessness to make it anything else, lies at the root of the great restlessness that marks human nature. When happiness is impossible, our happiness is best served if we avoid dwelling upon its impossibility, because doing so would make us even worse off and more miserable than before: 'men have decided for their own happiness not to think about it' (fr. 166). The only remedy available requires turning to God for help, which is contrary to our passions.

Therefore, we 'doggedly refuse to face our misery'[8] and seek distractions instead.


### III. THE DESTRUCTION OF MEANING

Pascal, we sense, is not an optimist about the human condition. How does this inform his sense of the meaningfulness of human life? Because he is not concerned with the question of meaning as such, it requires some work on our part to draw out the nature of the 'meaninglessness' inherent in this condition. First, a point of clarification. The claim that 'without God, everything is meaningless' should be understood to refer to God in the same sense as in Nietzsche's claim in *The Gay Science* that 'God is dead'. 'God' is here used to refer not only to the idea of an omnipotent, omniscient, loving deity, or to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but to a unifying principle or *logos* governing the cosmos that gives the universe order, intelligibility, and meaning – a *logos* that provides the necessary 'proportion' between the human mind and the universe, the quest of the philosophers from even before Socrates. Living well requires understanding and accommodating oneself to this *logos* so that one's own life and life-activities fit into the larger patterns of the cosmos. Proper evaluation of the claim requires constantly holding this understanding in place. Pascal's claim is that the universe, considered in itself, does not bear this kind of proportion to the human mind. We are unable to work out our proper place in the cosmos, if indeed there is any cosmos, and not simply a chaos parallel to the chaos of our passions.

We can find the problem by beginning with a familiar Pascalian motif, the conflict between 'scepticism', or 'Pyrrhonism', and 'dogmatism'. These signify two different attitudes toward our as-if instinctive 'first principles', whether these are first principles of reason (such as that the whole is greater than the part or that nature abhors a vacuum) or of the heart (such as that happiness and life are to be sought or that happiness consists in the fulfilment of the passions). Reason, either theoretical or practical, is discursive and proceeds from premises to conclusions.[9] As such it requires first principles from which to begin its process of calculation. The sceptic, or Pyrrhonist, demands that these first premises

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[8] Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 133.

[9] 'The Art of Persuasion', pp. 194-195.

themselves also be demonstrated by means of reason. That is, instead of allowing the calculative process of reason to begin, they continually regress upon their premises, and require demonstration of *those*. The only truths that survive this sceptical regress are those whose denials are self-contradictory; the rest are rejected or suspended.

The dogmatist, by way of contrast, insists upon accepting the first premises and allowing the calculative process to begin, insisting that 'we are not dreaming' (fr. 85) and the like. The dogmatist has the advantage that our nature is such as to require us to accept some principles and at least act as if they were true; the principles of 'nature' (whether true or false) win out in the field of life. We must act and we cannot avoid the power of these principles over our conduct; 'speaking in good faith and in all sincerity, we cannot doubt natural principles' (fr. 164). Likewise, we cannot avoid living as if life were meaningful.

But the Pyrrhonist retains the advantage of having undermined our confidence in our first premises. The continuous application of reason to our first premises or assumptions not only exposes uncertainty, it exposes arbitrariness and illusions, by making us aware of the groundlessness of our principles and the highly suspect mechanisms, self-deceptions, and all-too-convenient blind-spots that are involved in what we accept. The accidental character of our origin produces insuperable problems (fr. 164). It renders our beliefs and principles not only uncertain, but suspect, and as the method proceeds to find more and more instances of illusion, the suspicion becomes general. We discover that many of our beliefs and convictions of our hearts are due to custom; they vary from time to time and from place to place, and bear the mark of an accidental origin. How many others have this character? How much of what I believe and feel to be true is so only because of my own passions and my country's customs, or arbitrary facts about my origin? We must act, but can we act without a suspicion of ourselves?

We can begin at another point, the heart itself. Pascal's treatment of infinitude (fr. 229) is not meant to apply to astronomy and physics only. The upshot of his argument concerns a more general problem: how to determine a privileged starting point, a resting point – a single perspective among the infinite number of possible perspectives eligible for us to adopt – from which reason can begin. What shall we adopt as our first principles and regard as our truly 'natural desires'? These are the starting points from which reasoning or action can begin. The power of reason does not, in itself, allow us to pin down a starting point.

A reason that could do this, Pascal says, would need to possess a power far exceeding ours; it would need to resemble God's omniscience, so as to contain the totality of knowledge at once. We, however, must make do with starting points that are, from the standpoint of reason, arbitrary and accidental. Since they stand at the beginning of our reasoning, they cannot be supported by it. The heart contains too many kinds of passions – those arising from the 'angel' and those arising from the 'brute', along with the variety of passions within these two groupings – so how can we determine which should be privileged? Given the complexity of the reasons found within the heart, and the conflict among these, 'follow your heart' is a counsel of despair whose folly is only exceeded by its impossibility. Since we must act, we will follow one set or another of principles, one conception of another of happiness, but the particular arrangement we favour cannot be grounded in reason, which only discerns an indefinite number of possible perspectives and approaches by which these principles might be organized.

    Thus, the principles by which we live appear accidental and arbitrary in two senses: accidental in the sense that we cannot find a grounding for the principles we have, all too many of which appear suspect, and accidental in another sense, in that faced by the 'monstrousness' of human nature we inevitably privilege some one aspect of human nature or another without a clear justification for doing so. For Pascal the experience of our contingency is disorienting. Human knowledge and conduct lack foundations; we recognize of an indefinite number of other possible perspectives and possible understandings of human nature, along with any number of possible ways of life corresponding to these, but we lack the power to identify which of these is correct. Is the intuitive, commonsense perspective the appropriate one to begin with, or would it rather be better to adopt the kind of 'broader' and 'extremely alienated'[10] perspective that leads Tolstoy to describe human life as a 'temporal, incidental accumulation of particles' or a 'lump' whose 'fermentation' 'is called your life'?[11] Should we follow the principle of utility or the categorical imperative? Is the correct perspective and starting point for ethics focused upon states of affairs, the formal character of action, the pattern of a person's life, or something else, the agent's character, the

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[10] *Meaning in Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 130, 144.
[11] Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*, trans. by Jane Kentish (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 39-40.

qualities of care and empathy, the development and expression of power, etc.? Pascal's contention is that arguments over which perspective to adopt for evaluating human life will prove endless, as indeed all such discussion in analytic ethics have been; we feel certain that various moral judgments are correct, but we find no certainty once we begin the attempt to ground the judgment of the heart in the principles of reason.

We can now articulate the meaninglessness of life as considered in light of this experience of radical contingency. It is true that, for Pascal, human life's complex of ignorance, misery, and powerlessness could be described as meaningless, because any activities we undertake do nothing to significantly alter our condition. We are miserable and shall remain miserable, although we do at least have the power to distract ourselves through engagement with apparently purposive activities. In light of this life appears Sisyphean and meaningless.

Yet life as defined above can still be conceived of as a struggle in pursuit of a coherent set of goals, such as knowledge, happiness, and life, in which the striving can itself come to form a new form of meaning. For Pascal the interior dynamic of reason and the heart drives in another direction. Reason's sapping work, carried out against our first principles, exposes their lack of foundations, and the constant need nonetheless to live and act as if these principles were sure and true generates an interior conflict that undermines meaningfulness from within by undermining our confidence in all we devote ourselves to. Recognizing that whatever perspective we adopt to be accidental and arbitrary likewise alienates us from our lives and what we devote them to. When the destructive work of reason is finished we are left, finally, with a profound inarticulateness regarding our condition. For even the task of describing our state would require finding a perspective and set of principles and terms appropriate for human nature and our condition with which to articulate it, but it is these very things which we have been denied. Thus, meaninglessness resolves itself not into ceaseless, pointless reiteration, but, precisely insofar as human nature grows in self-consciousness and in the conscientious application of reason and devotion to truth, meaninglessness progresses into disorientation, self-alienation, and finally collapses into voiceless, despairing inarticulacy.

It is in this sense that we should say that Pascal held life to be meaningless without God. For just as Pascal held that only supernatural grace could cure the condition of ignorance, mortality, and misery (and overcome our wretchedness), so too he held we need an anchor outside

ourselves to stabilize both reason and the heart. When Pascal is said to have favoured the 'reasons of the heart, which reason knows not' (fr. 680) this should be understood to apply to a specific set of reasons – not those we find in our corrupt state, which represent a mixture of custom, nature, and fantasy, but those arising from divine inspiration within the heart.

Considered in themselves, reasons provided inspired by divine inspiration are certainly reliable; they represent not an arbitrary, but an absolute, perspective. They are not compromised by our contingency or corruption, and they provide us with the point of view and the language necessary to understand and articulate our condition in all its monstrousness (fr. 681, 'The Art of Persuasion', 193-4). Thus divine reasons would cancel the destructive dynamic driving life toward meaninglessness. But if the reasons provided by divine inspiration are merely true, that will not privilege them in any way relative to the other principles that are undermined in humanity's interior conflict, such as the reasons that not only purport, but really are, grounded in nature. The reasons of inspiration do not possess a different epistemological status (for Pascal intends his conception of human reason to apply to any finite reason which does not grasp the totality of existence at once, fr. 230), but they *are* privileged. Being products of grace they arrive with power: grace transforms the heart by ordering it toward God and God's ways, i.e., by giving it delight in and desire for these things.[12] Our interior conflict is in fact a war of the heart with itself: the calculations of reason, no less than the movement of the limbs, wait upon motives supplied by the heart before they are carried out.

The reasons of grace provide the perspective in which the monstrousness of human life – its doubled duality of mind and body, nature and corruption – is finally resolved in a single coherent point of view and the passion that strains against submission to God is quieted so that the recipient of grace is enabled to hold on to this perspective. We might summarize Pascal's answer thus: God is necessary for meaning because contact with an absolute perspective provides our contingent perspective with a fixed starting point, and divine grace is necessary for this perspective to be established in the heart and come to govern our nature. It is then evident that, according to Pascal, the reason that God is necessary for meaning is not that we need to orient our lives around

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[12] Blaise Pascal, 'Treatise Concerning Predestination', in *Pensées and Other Writings,* p. 223.

a maximal value. God's capacity for curing our restlessness is tied to his capacity for bestowing grace, and not simply his standing as the highest good, fitting our capacity as dual beings who must be addressed not via the mind, the angel, alone, but via the heart, where the mind and body are united.

## IV. PASCALIAN PESSIMISM

Pascal's pessimism about reason (like his pessimism about other subjects) has had a long history of refutations and rebirths. It echoes in Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* and in Rousseau's First and Second Discourses[13] and resounds in the works of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, in Johannes Climacus's treatment of 'the dialectic of the beginning' in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*[14] and in Dostoevsky's portrayal of Ivan Karamazov's disintegrating personality in *Brothers Karamazov*. One also thinks of Camus' 'The Myth of Sisyphus' and Nietzsche's statement that from Pascal he learned 'an infinite amount'.[15] Each highlights a different aspect of the problem and reproduces it again in a different philosophical milieu. Each returns the reader again to face the conviction that there is no proportion between human nature or human reason and our world, and that an absolute commitment to reason yields alienation, not connection, because calculation turned upon itself in the form of reflection undermines itself.

The reason for focusing upon the problem of reason, rather than the problem of futility, is that if Pascal is right (or if any project in the nearby vicinity is correct), then we cannot settle the question of supernaturalism with the method of *Meaning in Life* and typical of much contemporary analytic ethics – the method of bringing theories to stand trial before intuitions. For the Pascalian, appealing to intuitions about meaning to answer the question of whether life can be meaningful must fail, for the erosion of our trust in such intuitions is the presupposition of the experience of meaninglessness. Appeals to intuition, instead of

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[13] Cf. Peter Lawler, *The Restless Mind* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), and Mark Hulliung, 'Rousseau, Voltaire, and the Revenge of Pascal', in *Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, pp. 57–77.

[14] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, A. Hannay (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 94ff.

[15] Nietzsche, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. by Christopher Middleton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), p. 327.

supporting the meaningfulness of life, then might appear to signify the opposite – the suspicion that, after all, we have no very good reasons for thinking it is so, that we must be dogmatic about this, that this is just another humiliation of 'proud reason'. Since the supernaturalist attack is levelled at the reliability of our 'natural' starting points, or intuitions, these cannot be defended by once more reiterating that unintuitive quality of the supernaturalist claim. Systematically anti-intuitive views are bound to be counter-intuitive.

We can see this if we consider how the 'incoherence argument' deployed against John Cottingham, for example, must fail to gain traction against Pascal. Metz argues that Cottingham's argument that life is meaningless in the absence of God fails because Cottingham affirms three propositions with the form: (1) I know 'If X, then Y' is true; (2) I know X obtains; (3) I do not know whether Y is true, where X is wrongness and Y is the existence of God. Metz makes the point that it is incoherent to claim to know that wrongness exists, and to claim to know that if wrongness exists then God exists, while denying knowing whether God exists.[16] Yet if this argument were deployed against the Pascalian, what would the latter reply? 'Do I indeed *know* that anything is wrong?' The Pascalian will therefore diagnose the tendency to reaffirm (2) and deny (1) to the power of the heart. We reaffirm (2) because we are *sure* of it, but that certainty is not based in knowledge; rather, 'judgment goes with feeling' (fr. 671), and so this conviction is based in the heart, and in the impossibility of living without the conviction of wrongness. Once again, the duality of our nature produces confusion by tempting us to treat judgment and thought as equivalent to one another. Dostoevsky was a careful reader of Pascal, and Ivan Karamazov is in many respects a good Pascalian. Ivan's conclusions that without God, everything is permitted, but also meaningless, is a valid interpretation of Pascal's philosophy; the fact that Ivan could not in fact live in this way – that conscience will have its revenge even upon those who do not believe in it – does not refute his conclusion. For the power of conscience will make its claim without reason's support or even in opposition to its claims. By regarding our certainty concerning wrong as a matter of the heart, not of reason, the logical incoherence, if not the existential incoherence, is thereby removed.

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[16] *Meaning in Life*, p. 88.

For this reason, then, it does not seem to me that Metz's two projects entirely cohere. The great synthesis carried out in Parts I and III depends upon deploying a method that can't secure the project against the supernaturalist argument that without God, life is meaningless. Thus, the overall argument of the book appears incomplete. Part II of *Meaning in Life* aims to protect the synthesis from the supernaturalist critique as well as at adopting what can be salvaged from supernaturalist views, but it focuses on an overly narrow understanding of this argument and, by doing so, ignores or is forced to misconstrue how this argument has appeared in the works of its principal exponents. An effective defence against this sort of opponent would require Part II to carry out a very different kind of project. By engaging with the supernaturalist critique, *Meaning in Life* invites a response it is not well-fortified against.

# THE MEANING OF MEANING:
# COMMENTS ON METZ'S *MEANING IN LIFE*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the popular imagination the question of the meaning of life must be the most important philosophical question of all. Just consider how many religious and self-help bestsellers have been devoted to the question. For all that, in the professional philosophical literature the question is quite neglected. More – much more – is written on whether tables exist. More – much more – is written on whether triangularity exists. Why do professional philosophers neglect the biggest problem of all? Why do they spend their time instead debating about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Are they so uninterested in what interests their fellows? Are they so disinterested in money and fame?

No and no. I suspect that the reason is that analytic philosophers are embarrassed by the question. It rings of mysticism and self-help. And analytic philosophers don't do mysticism and self-help; just look at the sections of the bookshop where those bestsellers are sold. Analytic philosophers worry about tables and triangularity. And sometimes about such practical matters as animal rights and abortion. But, even then, they promise morality, not meaning. Analytic philosophers hate being imagined as mystical gurus, and they hardly want to foster the misperception.

I at least have been embarrassed by the question for this reason. To some extent I still am. I made sure to remove the dust-jacket from my copy of *Meaning in Life* by Thaddeus Metz (2013). It's a magnificent dust-jacket. But it has 'Meaning in Life' emblazoned across. I don't want anyone seeing me read stuff like that, least of all my tough-minded and sceptical philosophical colleagues. They'd think less of me: that I'm

a hippie or spiritualist, or touchy-feely or desperate, or in some other way soft-minded and gullible.

Yet there's nothing analytic philosophers should fear on this count when it comes to *Meaning in Life*. It demonstrates all the virtues of analytic philosophical style and seriousness. The definitions stated are clear. The distinctions drawn are precise. The arguments defended are rigorous. The objections and replies are thorough. Indeed, the sheer number of original argumentative moves on every page makes this book a treasure trove for philosophers writing on the meaning of life. *Meaning in Life* is likely the best philosophy book ever written on the topic. No mean feat; despite the relative neglect, there are still some distinguished contemporary contributors to the debate (e.g. Wolf 2010; Benatar 2006; Cottingham 2003; and from the older crowd, Taylor 1970; Nagel 1971; Nozick 1981). It's certainly the sharpest analytic treatment of the topic. Alas, that means Metz won't be raking in the ca$h.

What follows are a couple of unconnected comments on the book. The first point is about the beginning, and the second is about the end. The first point is about the way Metz goes about framing the question, and the second is about the way Metz answers the question. The alternative answers considered in between are not addressed, and I do not summarize any of this either. I do not know whether my comments make for serious objections. The second might turn into some support for Metz's view.

## II. THE FIRST POINT

I'm usually baffled by talk about 'the meaning of life'. I have found most such talk to be almost unintelligible – meaningless, if you will. I am not alone. Before putting forward his own proposal, G. E. Moore admits that he had 'been very much puzzled as to the meaning of the question "What is the meaning or purpose of life?"' (cited in Metz 2013: 25) and characterizes the question as 'vague'. I suspect that sense of vagueness might also be playing a role in scaring analytic philosophers away from the question. Fortunately, the beginning of *Meaning in Life* is devoted to a meticulous analysis of the concept.

Metz lands up with a pluralistic, family-resemblance concept in terms of what gives life purpose, transcendence and admiration: 'To ask about meaning, I submit, is to pose questions such as: which ends, besides one's

own pleasure as such, are most worth pursuing for their own sake; how to transcend one's animal nature; and what in life merits great esteem or admiration' (p. 34). I think I now understand the question and I am willing to pursue answers. The problem is that I do not understand how Metz arrives at his preferred concept.

The trouble is that my intuitions are silent on most of the counterexamples developed against rival analyses. For example, the first analysis considered is in terms of purposiveness. On this view, meaning in life is had by achieving goals, whether one's own or God's. An objection against this analysis is that it rules out the very logical possibility of life being meaningful because of conditions the subject can't control, like being a part of a royal family or being chosen by God. However, even though the idea is contrary to 'modern sensibility, [it] does not seem logically contradictory' (p. 25). The logical possibility of non-purposive meaning counts against an analysis in terms of purposiveness. We're supposed to have the intuition that cases of non-purposive meaning are logically possible. However, I have no such intuition.

Is non-purposive meaning logically possible? Suppose those who understand meaning in terms of purposiveness would contend that it is not. Are they then misunderstanding things? How can we tell? By checking what *most* people would make of the concept? But now we're into empirical questions: Do most people in fact think that it is not logically contradictory? I have no idea. Indeed, I have no idea whether what most people think about such things should bear on the issue at all.

For what it's worth, I similarly have no intuitions about whether respecting people's intelligence could confer meaning (p. 26); whether time in an experience machine could (p. 27); whether honouring one's soul could (p. 29); whether getting what one passionately desires could (p. 30); or whether living in a natural environment could (p. 34). Apparently, my pre-theoretical intuitions about meaning are impoverished. I have no idea whether this cognitive deficit is widespread. Perhaps the reader finds all these cases quite obviously. My first point might amount more to an embarrassing confession than to a real problem for Metz.

## III. THE SECOND POINT

The book ends with a development of an original fundamentality theory of meaning. What confers purpose, transcendence and admiration

is the subject 'employing her reason and in ways that positively orient rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence' (p. 22). The basic idea is then qualified in a few ways, and the conditions of human existence are spelled out in terms of the good, the true and the beautiful.

Very roughly: The good is fundamental insofar as it is positively oriented towards our rational nature, autonomy and shared conditions; thus, Mandela's life was meaningful for promoting liberty and equality. The true is fundamental insofar as it entails many other truths about ourselves and the universe; thus, Einstein's life was meaningful for discovering basic truths of physics. The beautiful is fundamental insofar as its themes are about aspects that bear the most and the most non-instrumentally on human experience; thus, Picasso's life was meaningful for painting *Guernica* and the like.

I wonder whether and how this theory can capture the meaning or lack thereof in certain cases. I have two in mind. The first is where a subject is not directed towards the good, the true or the beautiful but might have meaning. The second is where the subject is directed towards the good, the true or the beautiful but might not have meaning. Given what I said above, I cannot tell whether the life in the first case would have meaning, and whether the life in the second case wouldn't. But in conversations I've had about such cases, others have been apt to use such terms. So I will keep my reticence about counterexamples even while putting forward potential counterexamples. I can have my cake and eat it too.

As for the first case, imagine Bob devotes his life to studying and following religious teachings. He takes the scriptures to be profoundly true, the deeds to be deeply good, and the rituals to be sublimely beautiful. But imagine that he's got it all wrong: there are no gods, there are no substantive moral facts, and there are no substantive aesthetic facts. Thus Bob has not been oriented towards the good, the true and the beautiful. Questions: Could Bob's life still be meaningful? Could religion have made Bob's life meaningful? If so, then meaning in life does not consist in being so oriented.

If the answer is not so obvious – of course, it's not at all obvious to me – consider another question: Would you still engage in religious rituals or moral practices if you discovered that atheism and moral nihilism were true? Some of my friends do not know what they would do. Some answer that they would not. And some answer that they would.

The latter use the term 'meaning' in this regard. They say that these rituals and practices give and would still give their lives 'meaning'. Even if you would totally abandon religious rituals and moral practices, would you deny that others could find meaning in such rituals and practices? If so, then meaning does not consist in being oriented towards the good, the true and the beautiful.

As for the second case, imagine Sue does indeed devote her life to the good, the true and the beautiful. But imagine some sort of doomsday scenario: the day after her death the earth will be destroyed by an asteroid, or people will just stop having children. Samuel Scheffler (2013) describes doomsday scenarios as inducing their subjects with deep dismay and sapping them of motivation. I can't see whether he says doomsday would deprive them of meaningful lives in such terms. But his commentators wonder about it, especially Niko Kolodny (2013). Questions: Would Sue's life still have been meaningful? Would the meaning of her life have been reduced? If her life is deprived of meaning, then meaning in life does not consist in being oriented towards the good, the true and the beautiful.

I'm not at all sure what the right verdict about Bob and Sue are. I suspect that some readers will have the intuition that Bob's life is meaningful, while others will have the intuition that it is meaningless: after all, he's got it *all* wrong. I suspect that some readers will have the intuition that Sue's life is meaningful, while others will have the intuition that it is meaningless, or at least greatly deprived of meaning. Again, this is speculation. And I certainly don't know how the proportions would line up or what they would mean for the fundamentality theory.

However, there might be ways of forestalling the counterexamples altogether. In the first case, we might deny that the counterexample is possible. For example, we might deny that Bob could possibly exist in the absence of the good, the true and the beautiful; maybe there couldn't be a world like Bob's without God or moral facts or aesthetic facts. Indeed, I think that Metz should reject the counterexample for exactly this reason given his commitment to a naturalist moral realism (pp. 91-3), that identifies the good with certain natural facts around Bob. Then insofar as Bob's religion puts him in touch with the good, even if not the true and the beautiful, it helps make his life meaningful.

In the second case, we might deny that there is a real counterexample. We might insist that Sue is deprived of what makes life meaningful even on the fundamentality theory – the good and the beautiful. For the lasting good of Sue's deeds and the beauty of her paintings will be significantly

reduced with the coming apocalypse just as the beneficiaries and the canvases will be reduced to ash. It might be worth considering further how the fundamentality theory relates to the doomsday scenario, given how much attention Scheffler's proposal has been receiving.

If the above responses are right, then Bob and Sue hardly count as counterexamples against the fundamentality theory at all. On the contrary, insofar as the fundamentality theory fits with and explains what is going on in the cases, the cases *support* the theory. My second point might amount more to support for Metz's view than to a real problem.


## IV. ANOTHER POINT

The above sections outline my main questions. I will end on a brief point about something nearer the middle of the book. There Metz relies on a new objection against purpose theory. The theory is, roughly, that meaning in life comes from the purpose God assigns to us. Metz argues that if meaning comes from God then that must be because he has unique attributes (like simplicity or infinity), but that such attributes are not consistent with his assigning a purpose to us, and thus that meaning does not come from God.

However, the argument here come down to questions and bewilderment, to things being 'hard to conceive' or 'difficult to imagine' (p. 117). Thus, for example, 'how could there be a simple and hence unchangeable being beyond time that is purposive? [...] [T]o the extent that we can conceive of an immutable being beyond time, such a being appears unable to engage in goal-directed activity' (pp. 112-3). However, I don't have such appearances, and even if I did I wouldn't take them too seriously without further argument; when it comes to extraordinary things bewilderment doesn't count for anything (compare fundamental physics).

To be sure, Metz recommends a 'promising' (p. 115) avenue in Aquinas for answering the problem, and his treatment of God and meaning (chapters 5, 6 and 8) is otherwise deep and wide. These chapters will be especially interesting to readers of this journal. But the whole of *Meaning in Life* is worth pursuing for its own sake, helps us transcend our animal nature, and merits admiration. It is beautiful and good. Is it also true?

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# METZ'S CASE AGAINST SUPERNATURALISM

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I take it that the central project of Metz's book is to explicate his theory of meaning in life – the fundamentality theory – and to make the case that, when it comes to theories about what makes human lives meaningful, 'the fundamentality theory is now the one to beat' (p. 249). One important rival to Metz's fundamentality theory is *supernaturalism*, the view that meaning in life is constituted by a relationship with a spiritual realm, where a spiritual realm is a realm of 'persons [...] who are beyond (our) space and time and composed of something other than sub-atomic particles' (p. 79). Thus, the existence of God (as traditionally understood in the most prominent version of monotheism) or non-physical souls entails the reality of a spiritual realm. In making the case that the fundamentality theory is the theory to beat, Metz devotes considerable critical attention to supernaturalism. In these remarks I examine Metz's arguments against supernaturalism and make the case that they are, for the most part, unsuccessful. However, it seems to me that Metz's book does contain the materials for a compelling objection to supernaturalism. After criticizing the arguments against supernaturalism that Metz actually gives, I outline a more compelling argument that I think he should have given.

Metz takes the dominant version of supernaturalism to be *purpose theory*, according to which meaning in life is constituted by doing what God intends one to do with one's life (pp. 78-9). He also takes it that the strongest argument in favour of purpose theory is 'that God's purpose could be the sole source of invariant ethical rules, where our lives would obtain meaning by conforming to them, and would be meaningless if such rules did not even exist' (pp. 84-5). I will call that argument *the argument for purpose theory*. A crucial premise of this argument is the claim that the existence of morally wrong actions entails the existence of God.

Metz attacks the purpose theory in two main ways. First, he objects to the argument for purpose theory, suggesting that if this argument fails then 'one of the most influential and powerful reasons for believing in purpose theory should be disbelieved' (p. 97). Second, he advances an objection to purpose theory itself. I have doubts about the success of Metz's objection to the argument for purpose theory as well as about his objection to purpose theory itself.

At the heart of Metz's objection to the argument for purpose theory is the contention that anyone who makes all of the following claims is endorsing a set of claims that is 'inconsistent' or 'incoherent' (p. 88):

(i) I know that some actions are morally wrong.

(ii) I know that the existence of some morally wrong actions entails the existence of God.

(iii) It's not the case that I know that God exists.

According to Metz, each of us should accept (i) and (iii) and therefore should reject (ii). But if we reject (ii), then we are rejecting the claim to know a crucial premise of the argument for purpose theory, in which case that argument cannot give us knowledge of its conclusion. To support the claim that we should accept (i) and (iii), Metz follows John Cottingham in holding that whereas we have conclusive evidence for the truth of (i), the available evidence for the existence of God – i.e. evidence from the observable world and religious experience – is at best ambiguous. As Metz puts it, '[i]n light of the conclusive evidence that wrongness exists and the inconclusive evidence that God does' (p. 91), we should accept (i) and (iii). Consequently, '[t]o be coherent, one should hold that wrongness is a function of something other than God, since [...] one is not likely to find either more evidence that God exists or less evidence that wrongness does' (p. 91). The foundation of Metz's argument here is his contention that we have differing amounts of evidence for the existence of morally wrong acts on the one hand and the existence of God on the other.

I think that this argument fails. To see why, first note that the following three claims do *not* constitute an inconsistent triad:

(iv) S knows that some actions are morally wrong.

(v) S knows that the existence of some morally wrong actions entails the existence of God.

(vi) It's not the case that S knows that God exists.

Consider a subject S who accepts and has conclusive evidence for the existence of morally wrong acts and also accepts and has conclusive evidence for the claim that the existence of morally wrong acts entails the existence of God but simply never reflects on these two claims together. Because S fails to put two and two together, S lacks the knowledge that God exists despite the fact that the existence of God is entailed by the conjunction of two things that S knows. Suppose, then, that at a certain point S comes to reflect on the two claims together. On the basis of such reflection, S is in a position to infer – and hence come to know – that God exists. And S can attain this knowledge even without conclusive evidence for God's existence derived from the observable world or religious experience. Thus, someone who initially knows that some acts are wrong but doesn't know that God exists might come to know that the existence of morally wrong acts entails the existence of God and on that basis (rather than on the basis of evidence derived from the observable world or religious experience) come to know that God exists. Consequently, Metz's position that we should accept (i) and (iii) and reject (ii) appears to be inadequately supported; for all that Metz has said, it is at least as plausible that we should accept (i) and (ii) and reject (iii).

Of course, even if Metz's critique of the argument for purpose theory fails, if Metz's critique of purpose theory itself succeeds then the theory should be rejected in any case. So, let us consider Metz's criticism of purpose theory itself. That criticism has two premises, summarized by Metz thusly: 'Premise 1 contends that the best explanation of a God-centred theory includes the claim that God has certain properties such as simplicity, immutability, atemporality, or perhaps infinitude' and 'Premise 2 maintains that these properties are incompatible with a purposive God' (p. 108). It seems to me that Metz's strategy here is best construed as making the case that purpose theory cannot be true because it entails a contradiction:

### Metz's Incompatibility Argument

(1) If purpose theory is true, then (a) God is simple, immutable, atemporal, and infinite and (b) God is purposive.

(2) But if God is simple, immutable, atemporal, and infinite, then it's not the case that God is purposive.

(3) So, if purpose theory is true, then God is purposive and it's not the case that God is purposive.

(4) Therefore, purpose theory is false.

Metz supports premise (1) of this argument by making the case that the most plausible strategy for supporting the purpose theorist's contention that *only* God could imbue human lives with meaning is to argue that God is uniquely capable of filling this role in virtue of divine properties that are '*utterly* supernatural' and 'that nature simply *could not* exhibit' (p. 110). Metz suggests that the most likely candidates for such properties are simplicity, immutability, atemporality, and infinity (pp. 110-2). And, of course, it is part of purpose theory that God is purposive (i.e. has purposes) since, according to the theory, our lives are meaningful just to the extent that we fulfil God's purposes for our lives.

In support of premise (2), Metz points out that there is at least the appearance of incompatibility between each of the 'qualitative' properties of simplicity, immutability, atemporality, and eternality on the one hand purposiveness on the other. For example, Metz claims that 'to the extent that we can conceive of an immutable being beyond time, such a being appears to be unable to engage in goal-directed activity' (pp. 112-3).

Worries about tension between the divine attributes highlighted by Metz and divine personhood and agency have a long history; as Metz indicates, a number of thinkers sympathetic to traditional western monotheism have attempted to show that such tension is merely apparent by explaining how one or more of the qualitative divine attributes Metz identifies is compatible with divine agency (p. 115, n. 14). However, Metz does not engage with any of that work, and it seems to me that that limits the force of his criticism here. Of course, it may be that proper engagement with such work would constitute a book of its own, so perhaps Metz cannot be faulted too much for omitting such a project in the present book. Still, I think that his lack of engagement with such work leaves at least one important objection to his argument that he does consider without an adequate response.

The objection I have in mind is an objection to the first premise of Metz's incompatibility argument raised by Philip Quinn. Quinn suggests that God could serve as the source of meaning in our lives not in virtue of His possession of simplicity, immutability, atemporality, and infinity but rather in virtue of His being the creator of the universe (p. 114). This is a property that nature itself obviously could not possess. Metz replies to this objection as follows: '[S]ince the universe is essentially spatio-temporal, God must be an atemporal being to have been its creator [...] How could a person who is beyond time create a spatio-temporal world, when doing so would appear to require time?' (p. 115) I take it that Metz

has in mind the following line of reasoning: If God is the creator of the universe, then God is atemporal (because if He were temporal, He would exist within the spatio-temporal universe and hence could not be its creator); however, if God is atemporal, then He cannot be the creator of the universe (because the act of creating the spatio-temporal world would itself have to take place in time). Therefore, God could not be the creator of the spatio-temporal universe.

Notice that if this argument works, it does much more than answer Quinn's reply to Metz's critique of purpose theory; it identifies an incompatibility at the heart of the traditional monotheism, since the God of traditional monotheism is typically understood to have created the spatio-temporal universe out of nothing. It is therefore unsurprising that a number of theistic philosophers have tried to explain how an atemporal God could indeed create the spatio-temporal universe; some prominent contemporary examples include Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (1981, particularly pp. 448-50) and William Lane Craig (1978, 1998).[1] Because Metz does not engage with any of the existent efforts to explain creation of the spatio-temporal universe by an atemporal God, his reply to Quinn's critique of the incompatibility argument is unconvincing.

As I noted above, purpose theory is just one version of supernaturalism. Metz aims to refute not just purpose theory but the broader view supernaturalism as well. His case against supernaturalism itself depends on two main arguments.[2] The first argument is simply that supernaturalism mistakenly implies of many actual lives that they are meaningless if there is no spiritual realm; call this *the argument from cases*. Metz invites the reader to consider the lives of 'Einstein, Darwin, Dostoevsky, Picasso, Mandela, and Mother Teresa', suggesting that many people 'would find these lives to be meaningful in the absence of anything perfect or supernatural' (p. 144). I think this argument has some force, though I think it could be strengthened in a way I explain below.

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[1] An important difference between the view of Stump and Kretzmann on the one hand and Craig on the other is that Craig holds that God is atemporal prior to creating the spatio-temporal universe but becomes temporal upon creating such a universe whereas Stump and Kretzmann do not hold such a view. However, that issue is not relevant to the present discussion.

[2] Metz advances *three* arguments in his critical discussion of supernaturalism, but as he points out the first of these tells at most against one particular type of supernaturalism – 'soul-centred theory' – but not against supernaturalism in its entirety (142-3).

Metz's second argument against supernaturalism parallels his critique of the argument for purpose theory discussed above. He claims that anyone accepting all of the following three claims is guilty of inconsistency or incoherence:

(i+) I know that the existence of meaning entails the existence of a spiritual realm.

(ii+) I know that meaning exists.

(iii+) It's not the case that I know that a spiritual realm exists.

According to Metz, the only reasonable way to avoid incoherence is to reject (i+), which means rejecting supernaturalism (p. 145). However, it seems to me that this argument fails for much the same reason that Metz's earlier critique of the argument for purpose theory fails. It seems open to the supernaturalist to hold that it is (iii+) that should be rejected because her knowledge of supernaturalism and her knowledge of the existence of meaning enable her to know that a spiritual realm exists.

Supernaturalism receives further attention in the final chapter of *Meaning in Life*, this time in the context of the threat of nihilism. When combined with the denial of the existence of a spiritual realm, supernaturalism yields the result that all lives are meaningless (nihilism). In short: supernaturalism + atheism = nihilism. Metz wants to refute such a foundation for nihilism but believes that his two arguments against supernaturalism (discussed above) will not work against a supernaturalist who is also an atheist (p. 242). Accordingly, in the final chapter of the book Metz defends a new argument aimed at showing that 'there is little or no reason to adopt supernaturalism, if atheism is true' (p. 243).

Metz's argument for that claim appeals to evolutionary considerations. The idea seems to be that in a purely natural universe devoid of a spiritual realm our 'central characteristics' – including various dispositions to make certain sorts of value judgments – are entirely products of evolutionary processes. And if such dispositions are products of evolutionary processes, we are not disposed to make value judgments that are informed by or appeal to the spiritual realm because '[t]he kinds of value judgments that would have enabled purely physical creatures to be naturally selected are ones appealing to imperfect standards that could be fulfilled on earth' (p. 244). And if that is the case, then, according to Metz, supernaturalism is undermined and hence the argument from supernaturalism + atheism to nihilism fails because 'one premise provides good reason to reject the other' (p. 244).

One problem with this argument is that it appears to depend on the assumption that if a spiritual realm did not exist then our evolutionary ancestors would have recognized that fact: 'Early members of *Homo sapiens* would not have judged their own or others' behaviour in light of standards that, *ex hypothesis*, could never be fulfilled' (p. 244). But of course our ancestors might have judged behaviour in light of unfulfillable standards if they had mistakenly believed that such standards could be fulfilled, and Metz provides no reason to rule out that possibility.

However, the most serious problem with the argument is that it at most supports a conclusion about what sorts of value judgments *we would in fact make* if atheism were true but does not appear to support any particular conclusion about which value judgments we are *justified* in making if atheism is true. Metz's reasoning yields at most the conclusion that atheism implies that humans will in fact not accept supernaturalism, but the conclusion he is aiming for is that we lack justification for accepting supernaturalism. It appears perfectly reasonable for a supernaturalist nihilist to hold that Metz has provided a plausible evolutionary explanation of why human beings fail to recognize the truth of supernaturalism but that he has not provided any good reason to reject either the claim that supernaturalism is true or the claim that we would be justified in believing supernaturalism to be true. So, as far as I can see, the intended conclusion does not follow from the premises Metz provides.

It seems to me, then, that most of Metz's arguments against supernaturalism and against what he takes to be the strongest form of supernaturalism – purpose theory – have significant weaknesses. The one exception is what I have called *the argument from cases*. That argument rests on the claim that certain lives (e.g. the lives of Darwin, Einstein, and Mother Teresa) are meaningful even if there is no spiritual realm. I said above that this argument could be strengthened. To see how, consider that a supernaturalist might object to this sort of argument by claiming that without a plausible explanation of how the lives of Darwin et al. could be meaningful in the absence of a spiritual realm, the objection is not compelling. While I am not terribly sympathetic to this supernaturalist critique myself, I think it is worth considering, if only because it points toward a way that Metz could strengthen the argument from cases. He could accomplish this by appealing to his own fundamentality theory, the core idea of which is that a human person's life is meaningful to the extent that the person living it 'employs her reason and in ways that

positively orient rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence' (p. 222). As Metz points out, the fundamentality theory can account for both (a) the meaningfulness of the lives of Einstein et al. even in the absence of a spiritual realm and (b) 'the relevance of supernatural conditions for meaning in life' (p. 232). Metz explains how his fundamentality theory accounts for (b) as follows: 'If God existed, it would be incredibly important to know about Him and to make works of art about Him, as He would be largely responsible for nearly everything that goes on in the physical and spiritual worlds and in the human experience' (p. 232). On theism, God is *the* fundamental condition of human life, so the fundamentality theory implies that if theism is true, then God is extremely relevant to whatever meaning human lives might have. In light of this, Metz can plausibly claim that fundamentality theory has an explanatory edge over supernaturalism in that it accounts for both (a) and (b) whereas supernaturalism founders when it comes to explaining (a). It seems to me that this is the most compelling argument against supernaturalism suggested by Metz's book.

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# IN DEFENSE OF SUPERNATURAL PURPOSE THEORY

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I want to thank Thaddeus Metz and the editors of the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* for inviting me to contribute to this discussion of his book *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*.[1] This is the second time I have had the privilege of interacting with Metz's book. My first opportunity was in my review of it in the June 6, 2014 *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*. In this essay, I begin with the seemingly irresolvable ultimate conflict that exists on Metz's view between one's own happiness, which (contrary to Metz) I believe is the most basic form of meaning in life, and being moral. This discussion naturally leads to consideration of supernatural purpose theory about life's meaning. I will briefly try to defend a certain form of it. Finally, I close with a few comments about the intuitive plausibility of the hedonistic view of life's meaning that I believe is correct.

## I.

According to Metz, 'ultimately happiness and meaningfulness [...] form two of the largest and most fundamental values in human life.'[2] With regard to meaningfulness, he advocates what he calls 'the fundamentality theory', which is a form of objective naturalism in which meaning in life comes from actively orienting one's rational nature, which in the first instance involves cognition and intentional action, but extends to rationally responsive conation (e.g., desire), emotion (feeling joy upon awareness of a loved one's success) and affection (e.g., like a work of art), to the fundamental values of the good, the true, and the beautiful.

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Let us consider the good, of which moral action, according to Metz, is a central pillar.[3] Metz is an objectivist about the moral good: certain actions/behaviours are objectively right and others are objectively wrong, where the moral wrongness of an action provides a categorical reason not to perform that action. For example, 'claiming that it is wrong to torture babies for fun does include an overriding reason not to do something, which reason obtains regardless of one's desires and interests.'[4] Metz believes that objective morality obtains in a naturalist world that has the following three characteristics. First, it is a world in which we experience pleasure and where, as Metz acknowledges, these experiences of pleasure make up our happiness.[5] Second, it is a world in which our ultimate end is death/annihilation. And, third, it is a world in which behaviours that are morally right at least sometimes do not promote the agent's happiness. Indeed, those behaviours either amount to a restraint on the agent's pursuit and improvement of his or her happiness or actually undermine that happiness by directly or indirectly producing experiences of pain. Given that this is the case and the fact that Metz acknowledges that happiness is one of the 'largest and most fundamental values in human life', an obvious question that arises is why does the reason for performing the morally right behaviour override the reason for performing an action that makes for the agent's greater happiness?

As best as I can tell, Metz never answers this question. Rather, he simply assumes that the morally right action is overall the most reasonable, even at the expense of the agent's own happiness. But why does moral value trump this non-moral value? A response might be that jettisoning morality for the maximization of one's own happiness *is* immoral. It is. But when one is cognizant that this is the only life one has to live (death is the absolute end of one's existence) and, therefore, the only life in which one will have the opportunity to experience the intrinsic goodness of pleasure/happiness, why not choose one's own happiness over performing the morally right action?[6] Metz might respond that

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[3] Ibid., pp. 91-3.

[4] Ibid., p. 92.

[5] Ibid., pp. 60, 78.

[6] In my review of *Meaning in Life* in the *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*, I raised a similar issue concerning the likelihood that meaning in life (as Metz understands it) and happiness for oneself, which Metz maintains are distinct fundamental values, might

orienting one's rational nature toward the moral good is part of a more meaningful life. And one wants a meaningful life because it is a large and fundamental good. But one's happiness is also such a good and it is not obvious that meaningfulness in life is preferable to happiness.

Now, there is a perfectly reasonable understanding of the question 'Is life meaningful?' that means 'Do things ultimately make sense?', where 'Do things ultimately make sense?' means 'Do things ultimately fit together in the right way?' The problem presently under consideration is this: If the immoral course of action will ultimately yield more happiness for an agent than the moral course of action, it seems that things ultimately don't fit together as they should. Commonsensically, for things to fit together in the right way it should be the case that those who pursue the morally right course of action ultimately end up happier than those who choose the immoral route. In other words, it seems eminently reasonable to think that morality and happiness should not pull apart and run on ultimately non-converging rails. They should ultimately come together. Given this is the case, John Cottingham's comments about reasons for action merit quoting:

> If our reasons for action flow merely from what is good, then if we are rational and unbiased we may recognize an obvious good in some action that serves the interests of others; but we can also recognize a clear and equally valid good in an alternative action that serves our own personal interests. And it's simply not clear from rational analysis alone why the former (the altruistic reason) should have any overriding force. [...] Merely considered in terms of rational action aimed at the good, there seems no reason to give up one's own good for the sake of others.[7]

Thus, while it seems to Metz that a moral consideration is always overriding, it is reasonable to think that this appearance presupposes that acting morally ultimately harmonizes with one's long-term happiness. But in a naturalistic world this harmonization is not guaranteed and is all too often absent. Therefore, the overriding nature of a moral consideration is no longer apparent because it is no longer real.

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ultimately conflict in an irresolvable way. If such were the case, why think that it would be more reasonable to choose meaning over happiness?

[7] John Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 82.

## II.

Erik Wielenberg writes that 'in a godless [naturalistic] universe there is at best a rough correlation between morality and self-interest [...] Without God, there is always the possibility that we will face a deep conflict between what is in our own self-interest and what morality requires of us. That is an important difference between a theistic universe and a godless universe.'[8] With mention of God, we enter the explanatory space that Metz terms 'purpose theory' about the meaning of life. While there are different versions of purpose theory,[9] one that fits the present context best will include at least the following elements: God (a substantively simple, omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent being) exists and creates a human person for the purpose that he or she experience perfect happiness, where (i) perfect happiness is the unending experience of nothing but pleasure, (ii) experiencing perfect happiness constitutes a meaningful life, and (iii) a necessary condition of experiencing perfect happiness is that one choose in the morally right way (more about this in a moment). Metz says several things that are relevant to this version of purpose theory (from here on, *the* purpose theory), some that are supportive and some that are sceptical. I begin with the supportive.

Metz points out that some philosophers have maintained that God's creating human persons for a purpose would disrespect them. Here, he discusses Kurt Baier's claim that 'the purpose theorist "sees man as a creature, a divine artefact, something halfway between a robot (manufactured) and an animal (alive), a homunculus, or perhaps a Frankenstein, made in God's laboratory, with a purpose or task assigned him by his Maker".'[10] Metz says that 'Baier might therefore suggest this principle to govern the creation of rational beings: it is disrespectful to create a person for any purpose other than to pursue its own purposes.'[11] Thomas Nagel has expressed Baier's objection by wondering what one would say if one were told that the purpose for which one had been created was to be food for another species.[12]

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[8] Erik J. Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 59.

[9] Metz, *Meaning in Life*, p. 82.

[10] Ibid., p. 103. The quote is from Kurt Baier, 'The Meaning of Life', in E. D. Klemke (ed.), *The Meaning of Life*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 120.

[11] Metz, *Meaning in Life*, p. 103.

[12] Thomas Nagel, 'The Absurd', in E. D. Klemke (ed.), *The Meaning of Life*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 180.

The purpose theorist, as Metz rightly points out, must hold that it can be respectful to create persons for a purpose other than that of adopting their own purposes.[13] Whether or not it is respectful will depend, at least in part, upon what the purpose is. What if the purpose is that created persons be perfectly happy? It is hard to see how this could be disrespectful because perfect happiness is a great good. Indeed, it is an individual's greatest good. In Metz's own words, 'people who are sane and autonomous would invariably want eternal bliss.'[14] Hence, they could not reasonably consider themselves disrespected upon coming to believe they were created to experience perfect happiness.

Given that any sane person would want perfect happiness, there is an answer to a slightly different objection to the purpose theory that Baier presents. According to Metz's summary of Baier's charge, being created for a purpose would 'treat one's capacity for rational choice as a mere tool to be used for the realization of a purpose that one does not share. It is irrelevant that realizing the purpose would be good for oneself; that would merely add a paternalistic aspect to the degradation.'[15]

Once again, Baier's assertion is highly dubious. Given that no one can choose the bad for its own sake and choosing to reject perfect happiness is doing just that, no sane person could choose to reject (not share) the purpose that he or she be perfectly happy. And because being perfectly happy is a human being's greatest good, Baierian allegations that being created for the purpose that one be perfectly happy is coercive or exploitive[16] are groundless, if not senseless.

While the purpose theory says God creates persons for the purpose that they experience perfect happiness, a version of it also holds that it is possible for persons not to fulfil this purpose. While all persons experience some degree or other of happiness, and thereby confirm Metz's belief that meaning in life 'is a gradient property; something that comes in degrees,'[17] some might never come to experience perfect happiness. Why? Because these persons might not make the right choice. Consider two alternatives, one which is pursuing happiness in one's own way and the other which is giving up this option. With the first choice, one insists on retaining the final say about *how* one will pursue one's happiness

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[13] Metz, *Meaning in Life*, pp. 103-4.
[14] Ibid., p. 127.
[15] Ibid., p. 102.
[16] Ibid., pp. 100-1.
[17] Ibid., p. 22.

and *when*, where sooner rather than later is the typical preference. With the second choice, one does not retain this final word. In the Christian tradition of which I am a member, one is told to die to self, to lose one's life, or to bury the seed so that it might come to life. Death, loss, and burial are metaphors for the idea that one chooses to renounce any final claim to a right to pursue the happiness for which one is created on one's own terms. Instead, one chooses to trust one's Creator to provide in the end the happiness for which one is created, which makes rational one's sacrifice of happiness in each and every ante-mortem 'now' when such restraint is morally required.

It is now time to turn to some of the sceptical things Metz says about purpose theory. While he recognizes that 'neither compensatory nor retributive justice is completely achieved in this world, which means that for our lives not to be non-sensical, they must extend beyond the death of our bodies',[18] it is not clear that perfect justice requires an eternal afterlife:

> It seems that humans would deserve an eternity in heaven only if they did something infinitely good, or an eternity in hell only if they did something infinitely bad, and we may reasonably doubt that infinite (dis)values are possible in a finite world [...] Furthermore, even if they were possible, it would not follow that eternity is needed to give people what they deserve; for supposing that one could do something infinitely (dis)valuable in a finite amount of time here on earth, it would seem that a response proportionate to this deed would require merely a finite amount of time. If infinitely good or bad deeds were possible in a finite timespan, then so would punishments and rewards matching these deeds.[19]

Here I believe it is helpful to look at the idea of retributive justice differently than Metz does. Instead of thinking of it in terms of doing some deed that is infinitely good or bad, one should think of it in Kantian (and Baierian) terms of respect for one's autonomous choice about retaining or giving up the prerogative to pursue one's happiness on one's own terms. If one never experiences perfect happiness – never has the purpose for which one was created fulfilled, it is because one refuses to give up the prerogative to pursue happiness as one sees fit. C. S. Lewis captured this idea in the following comments:

[18] Ibid., p. 125.
[19] Ibid.

> If the happiness of a creature lies in self-surrender, no one can make that surrender but himself [...] and he may refuse. [...] Supposing he *will* not be converted, what destiny in the eternal world can you regard as proper for him? [...] I [...] believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside. [...] They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded [to pursue happiness on their terms], and are therefore self-enslaved.[20]

Existence in an afterlife in which one experiences the perfect happiness for which one was created commonsensically seems to require the existence of a soul that exists from this life into the next (the soul is the self or 'I' that remains numerically the same throughout this life and into the next), regardless of whether or not it is embodied in the future life. Some comments about the soul will help in addressing a further sceptical point that Metz makes about purpose theory. As traditionally conceived, the soul is a simple entity in the sense that it does not have substantive parts. Though simple in terms of lacking substantive parts, it is complex in terms of having a multiplicity of properties, some of which are the capacities to experience pleasure and pain, the capacity to desire, the capacity to believe, the power to choose, etc. That the soul is both substantively simple yet complex in terms of its properties is compatible with it existing in space and time. Indeed, up until the time of Descartes, Christian philosophers who wrote about the soul (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas) standardly affirmed both the temporality of the soul and its presence in its entirety at every point in space that it occupied (which typically was believed to be the space occupied by its physical body).[21]

These comments about the soul are relevant because Metz is sceptical about the purpose theory in part because he takes God's simplicity to entail that God must be beyond space and time. And because God must be beyond time, it makes no sense to say that He engages in purposeful activity: 'it is difficult to conceive of a purposive agent who [...] is absolutely simple and therefore can neither change nor act in time.'[22] But given the intelligibility of the idea that the human soul is simple (in the sense that it has no substantive parts) and acts for purposes while in time, it is not incoherent to affirm that God exists in time and acts for

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[20] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2001), pp. 120, 123, 130.

[21] For much more on this topic, see Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[22] Metz, *Meaning in Life*, p. 114.

purposes. It is true that many theists have affirmed the atemporality of God. My point is that even if Metz is correct and it is nonsensical to hold that such a being can act for purposes, it does not follow that the purpose theory is thereby falsified. God could act for purposes in time, just as created simple souls do. And it is worth stressing at this point that God could act for *multiple* purposes. Metz argues that acting for multiple purposes would be incompatible with God's simplicity.[23] But if a simple human soul can exist and act for more than one purpose (e.g., I can write this paper both for the purpose of fulfilling a commitment and the purpose of learning more about meaning in life), there is no good reason to think that God could not do the same.

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

Belief in the soul's existence is very commonsensical in nature, as I have discussed elsewhere.[24] Most philosophers who reject its existence do not deny this point but instead argue that common sense is mistaken. The idea that pleasure is intrinsically good and that happiness consists of experiences of pleasure is also thoroughly commonsensical in nature. According to Matthew Silverstein, '[h]edonism [about happiness] is an intuitive theory.'[25] But why think that when someone is interested in the meaning of life he or she is interested in happiness? Is this equally commonsensical? It certainly seems so to me, and Metz recognizes that '[t]here are some who might have been inclined to think that a meaningful life just is (substantively) a happy one'.[26] Why might someone like me believe that a meaningful life just is a happy one, and a most meaningful life a perfectly happy one?

   My explanation begins with what Metz, like so many others, recognizes, which is that questions like 'What is the meaning of life?' and 'What constitutes meaning in life?' are vague and need clarification.

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[23] Ibid., p. 113.

[24] See Goetz and Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul*; and Stewart Goetz, 'Substance Dualism', in Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 125-37; and T. J. Mawson, 'Substance Dualism', in James Garvey (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Philosophy of Mind* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 73-91.

[25] Matthew Silverstein, 'In Defense of Happiness: A Response to the Experience Machine', *Social Theory and Practice*, 26 (2000), 290.

[26] Metz, *Meaning in Life*, p. 74.

Hence, it is plausible to think that these questions and others like them are really standing in for a multiplicity of questions, among which there is what Metz thinks of as a family resemblance: 'theories of meaning in life are united by virtue of being answers to a variety of related and substantially overlapping questions that cannot be reduced to anything simpler.'[27] As I have argued elsewhere, I think it is eminently plausible to think the family resemblance is exemplified by the following three questions: 'What, if anything, makes life worth living?', 'What is the purpose of life?', and 'Does life ultimately make any sense in terms of things fitting together in an intelligible way?'[28] In brief, the answer to the first question is experiences of pleasure. The answer to the second is that we might experience nothing but pleasure. And the answer to the third is that those who choose to die to self will ultimately receive nothing but pleasure.[29]

Metz simply stipulates that to enquire into meaningfulness is '*by definition* [not] to enquire into happiness' and, thus, 'it is logically contradictory to think that one's pleasure *in itself*, the mere experience, is meaningful.'[30] I believe there is nothing I can say that would dissuade Metz from this definitional position. To his credit, he acknowledges how often he appeals to intuitions,[31] and I believe it is likely that our differences about how to interpret questions about the meaning of life ultimately come down to a difference in intuitions. But I also think it is appropriate that I should say something brief both in response to his understanding of meaning in life and on behalf of my own.

A major concern of mine about Metz's fundamentality theory of meaningfulness (FT) is that it is exclusive in terms of its intellectualism and unattainability. Here is Metz's final formulation of the fundamentality theory:

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[27] Ibid., p. 9.

[28] Stewart Goetz, *The Purpose of Life: A Theistic Perspective* (London: Continuum, 2012).

[29] The idea of things ultimately fitting together in an intelligible way is naturally captured in a narrative in which the end of the story is the fulfilment of the purpose of the author/creator and brings closure to a problem or problems. See Joshua W. Seachris, 'Death, Futility, and the Proleptic Power of Narrative Ending', in Joshua W. Seachris (ed.), *Exploring the Meaning of Life: An Anthology and Guide* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 461-80.

[30] Metz, *Meaning in Life*, p. 27. For my thoughts about this issue, see my review of *Meaning in Life* in the *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*.

[31] Ibid., p. 240.

(FT₃) A human person's life is more meaningful, the more that she, without violating certain moral constraints against degrading sacrifice, employs her reason and in ways that either positively orient rationality toward fundamental conditions of human existence, or negatively orient it towards what threatens them, such that the worse parts of her life cause better parts towards its end by a process that makes for a compelling and ideally original life-story; in addition, the meaning in a human person's life is reduced, the more it is negatively oriented towards fundamental conditions of human existence or exhibits narrative disvalue.[32]

If I understand Metz's view correctly, what meaning in life essentially comes down to is orienting one's reason toward understanding the *explanations* of things in the realms of the true, the good, and the beautiful. After making clear that a 'necessary condition of X is something that is required in order for X to obtain, whereas a fundamental condition of X is something that is responsible for the obtaining of X',[33] he stresses that 'great meaning does not come from discovering mere coincidences' but 'from making discoveries of the sort that Darwin and Einstein did', where the former discovered that 'human life is in large part a function of natural selection' and the latter that 'the basic facts about the spatio-temporal universe [...] account for a large array of events in it'.[34] With Metz's repeated mention of people like Darwin, Einstein, Mother Teresa, Picasso, and Dostoyevsky, and his stress on the importance of employing one's reason about the true, the good, and the beautiful, I come away from reading *Meaning in Life* thinking that substantial meaning in life is out of the reach of most individuals. After all, even those who are not an Einstein or a Darwin rarely create great works of art (Picasso and Dostoyevsky) or achieve sainthood (Mother Teresa). At one point, Metz writes about 'certain uses of our intelligence [that] are the key to meaning [...] [where] the exemplars of meaning, viz., the true, the good, and the beautiful [...] [involve] the *sophisticated* use of reason.'[35] And elsewhere he claims that his 'fundamentality theory [...] takes fairly literally the idea that considerations of meaning in life are a matter of *deep* or *profound* concerns, which contrast with superficial interests'.[36] Nevertheless, he

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[32] Ibid., p. 235.
[33] Ibid., p. 226.
[34] Ibid., p. 229.
[35] Ibid., p. 43. My emphasis.
[36] Ibid., p. 219. My emphases.

insists that 'the fundamentality theory is not vulnerable to the initially tempting objection that it is an overly intellectual theory'.[37]

I have found it hard not to succumb to the temptation, but rather than continuing to indulge it I will bring my essay to a close by emphasizing that while I believe questions about life's meaning are multiple in nature (see the beginning of this section), the most basic question concerns what, if anything, makes life worth living. And what makes it worth living is the experience of pleasure, which is available to all persons whether or not they are seeking the explanations of things (making a sophisticated use of their reason about deep or profound concerns). However, acknowledging the centrality of pleasure when thinking about the meaning of life does not entail intellectual pursuits concerning the true, the good, and the beautiful are meaningless. Metz uses 'significant' as a synonym for 'meaningful', and a hedonist like me about what basically makes life meaningful can agree with Metz that orienting one's reason toward the true and beautiful can be meaningful in the sense of being significant or important. Of course, its importance will not be fundamental but derivative in nature because of its link at some point to the experience of pleasure (or diminishment of pain) for the agent and/or others. And given that a rational orientation to the moral good is essentially a concern for the well-being of others, where that well-being consists of experiences of pleasure (and the absence of experiences of pain), then the meaning (significance, importance) of this orientation is also derivative in nature. Obviously, we all know that there are both moral and immoral ways to experience pleasure and that in this life the wicked all too often prosper, which leads to thought about the meaning of life in terms of whether or not things ultimately make sense. Metz writes that '[t]hose of us who are resolute deontologists about morality still wish that the consequences had turned out well, after all'.[38] I believe things can ultimately make sense only if God created us for the purpose that we experience perfect happiness and there is an afterlife in which this purpose can be fulfilled. Like Metz, 'I [...] crave immortality'[39] because I crave to be perfectly happy, which is something that I will never be in this world.[40]

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[37] Ibid., p. 223.

[38] Ibid., p. 247.

[39] Ibid.

# THEISM AND MEANING IN LIFE


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### I. 'NATURE' AND THE PITFALLS OF 'NATURALISM'

Propositions are important in philosophy, but so are prepositions. All of us want, and indeed need, to find meaning *in* our lives: this is part of what it is to be human. But is there also a deeper human desire and need to find the meaning *of* life? I myself think there is; though I am aware that the 'of' formulation is objectionable to many, since it appears to point to something outside of, or beyond, human life, something 'external', towards which it is or should be directed, and which supposedly makes it meaningful. One is reminded here of Wittgenstein's famous remark, *Der Sinn der Welt muß außerhalb ihrer liegen* – the sense, or meaning, of the world must lie outside it.[1] Thaddeus Metz's comprehensive and meticulously argued book is, significantly, titled *Meaning in Life*, and indeed on the jacket cover the preposition 'in' is typeset in such as way as to give it special emphasis.[2] The stance taken by Metz is what one might call 'immanentist', in the sense delineated by Adrian Moore in his discussion of the ideas of three notable champions of immanence, Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze:

> At the heart of what they most fundamentally share is a celebration of activity, an affirmation of life, in all its diversity. [They reject] the idea that life needs somehow to be justified, whether by some *telos* towards which everything is striving or by some transcendent structure in terms of which everything makes sense. Nature has no grand design. Nor is

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[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* [1921] (London: Routledge, 1961), §6.41.

[2] Thaddeus Metz, *Meaning in Life. An Analytic Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

there anything transcendent to it. The celebration of activity and the affirmation of life are the celebration and the affirmation of immanence.[3]

The way Metz articulates what might be called the 'immanentist' stance is to say that 'meaning is possible in a *purely natural world*, and indeed in the context of what is more or less available to human beings' (p. 247, emphasis supplied).[4] He may not, of course, agree with all or any of the particular philosophical theses advanced by Moore's trio, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Deleuze, but he does clearly subscribe to the idea that the 'purely natural world' is all there is, and that we had better find what meaning we can within this world. And this in turn explains why he devotes a very substantial portion of the book to unpacking and criticising what he calls 'supernaturalist theories' of meaning in life, within which category he includes my own work, which he discusses at length.

I am most grateful for the attention Metz has given to my views, but I must voice a certain initial disquiet about being classified as a 'supernaturalist'. 'Supernatural' seems to me a very unsatisfactory term, and it's one that I have increasingly tried to avoid in my writings; indeed in *On the Meaning of Life* I mention it only three times, each time going on to register qualms about it.[5] One of the problems with 'supernatural' is that it is a kind of blank, a placeholder (rather like 'non-material'): it purports to classify or inform, but actually it tells us little or nothing about the item so described. Clearly the God of traditional theism is conceived of as having personal characteristics (such as compassion and faithfulness), so has to be thought of as a person, or as analogous to a person; but to add that he is a 'supernatural' person is unlikely to do much more for most people than to conjure up some vague and distinctly unhelpful notion of a Cartesian ghost or disembodied spirit.[6] In any case, the term 'supernatural' implies a sharp antithesis between God and nature which is itself distinctly unsatisfactory. For 'nature' is a highly ambiguous term – one often used nowadays in a very restricted

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[3] Adrian Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 248-9.

[4] Unattributed page references in parentheses in the main text refer to Metz, *Meaning in Life* (see note 2, above).

[5] John Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 75, 87, 92.

[6] It's significant that Metz often characterizes supernaturalism as comprising 'God-centred' and 'soul-centred' approaches to meaning in life. For my own part, I try to avoid the term 'soul' in my work, since I find that its dualistic connotations (to the modern philosophical ear) make it as problematic as the term 'supernatural'.

sense to refer to the empirical world as described by the language of science (hence the contemporary philosophical use of 'naturalism' to mean the view that nothing ultimately exists but the physical world). It is not entirely clear to me how far Metz is drawn to this kind of scientistic naturalism; but there are places where it almost seems as if he has, as they say, 'drunk the Kool-Aid' and subscribed to the over-exalted view of what science can do that is so prevalent in contemporary analytic philosophy, as when he dismisses the 'lingering longing for something greater than what is available to us human beings, *as we are known by scientific means*' (p. 247, emphasis supplied).

I would say that a very large part of what is interesting and important about us cannot be known through the methods and procedures of science. Indeed, the 'humane' turn in philosophy that I have been advocating in recent years is in part an attempt to argue that understanding the human predicament requires *all* the resources of the human mind. A philosophical worldview, if it is to be tenable at all, must not just engage our intellectual and scientifically oriented faculties and abilities, but must take account of all the ways in which we respond to the world, including our emotional and imaginative modes of awareness. Many philosophers in the past have tended to discount these responses, preferring to take refuge in theoretical abstractions that put them at a certain superior distance from the phenomena they are supposed to be understanding. But such distance is achieved at a cost. It's almost as if there is a hypertrophy of the 'left-brain' skills whereby we analyse and classify and dissect phenomena, without proper scope being accorded to the 'right brain' skills that facilitate more intuitive and holistic forms of cognition.[7] Logical and scientific analysis is but one way of understanding the human condition, and to restrict our philosophical toolkit to this domain can lead to a radically impoverished conception of ourselves and the cosmos we inhabit.

To come back to the term 'nature', I would wholeheartedly agree with Metz that the pursuit of meaning is 'fundamental to our human nature', and that this search comprises 'much of what we most prize and are willing to make sacrifices for', including such things as 'justice, art, beauty' (p. 249). But a proper explication both of our own 'nature', as beings who

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[7] See John Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For the contrast between what may, as a convenient shorthand, be called 'left-brain' and 'right-brain' modes of awareness, see Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

pursue these things, and of the 'nature' of the values we pursue, will take us far outside the domain of what can be known by 'scientific means'. The 'nature' we are investigating will be nature in a far richer sense than what is described by the quantitative printouts of mathematical science, or the explanatory theories of the life-sciences, or even the social sciences (if there are any). And a crucial question will now arise as to how our worldview can accommodate this 'enriched nature' that confronts us,[8] a reality that is shot through with meaning and value.

The theistic take on this, of course, is that our cosmos is pervaded by the presence of the divine, the ultimate reality in whom, in St Paul's phrase, we 'live and move and have our being'.[9] One of the most important ways of understanding God, for the theist, is through the natural world, the wonders and beauties of which give us 'intimations of the transcendent'.[10] So nature is not the just the blank impersonal configuration of particles and forces described by modern physics, but comprises the magnificent whirling blaze of the galaxies, the wild rolling of the oceans, and the shimmering green of the woods in Spring. The world, the natural world, is, for the theist, 'charged with the grandeur of God', as Gerard Manley Hopkins famously put it.[11] To label God as 'supernatural' is thus to risk removing him from the very manifestation of the sacred here in the natural world which is one of our most important modes of access to the divine.[12]

## II. THE BASIS OF MORAL VALUE

I am often struck by the surprising amount of common ground between the theistic outlook and the outlook of philosophers like Metz who hold there is an objective basis for the value and meaning we find in the world. Metz, I take it, believes, as I do, in objective moral norms that are not reducible to our desires or preferences, not merely inclinations or commitments that we mistakenly project onto reality, but genuine,

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[8] See Fiona Ellis, *God, Value, and Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[9] Acts 17:28.

[10] See John Cottingham, 'Human Nature and the Transcendent', *Philosophy*, supplementary volume 70 (2012); and Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion*, Ch. 3, sectn 4.

[11] From Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems (1876–1889)*, in W. H. Gardner (ed.), *The Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953).

[12] For more on this, see John Cottingham, *How to Believe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

authoritative, universal and binding requirements that we are obliged to follow, whether we like it or not, and which remain binding even when, as so often, we fail to act on them. But those who have such a firm belief in the universal and objective status of moral norms seem to me to be taking a view of the true nature of reality whose implications bring them very close to the theistic worldview, as I hope will appear shortly.

First, though, there are two basic objections that Metz has, as I see it, to a theistic account of the status of such objective moral norms. The first is a consistency problem. Consider a moral truth such as that cruelty is wrong, or that compassion is required of us. We know such truths, Metz points out, with greater certainty than we know that there is a God. Yet this makes the theistic moral theorist's position incoherent, according to Metz, since if God is to be the basis for cruelty's being wrong, or compassion's being required, 'the evidence for both must be comparable' (p. 90). In other words, the evidence for God ought to be as strong as the evidence of these moral requirements, yet that is patently not so. This objection is supposed to have force not just against my position, but against that of anyone who holds that rightness and wrongness have their basis in God.

I have to confess to being puzzled by the 'parity of evidence' requirement that Metz wishes to impose here. After all, scientists frequently propose that some manifest feature of the world $M$ is a function of some theoretical entity $T$, but they are surely not logically committed to saying that the evidence for both must be comparable. Theoretical entities such as quarks are often problematic items that are shrouded in obscurity, and certainly not as palpable as the ordinary observable things (apples and pears) they are posited in order to explain.[13] God, in the traditional

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[13] This is essentially the response I made when Metz first formulated this type of objection to a theistic metaethics. See his 'God, Morality and the Meaning of Life', in N. Athanassoulis and S. Vice (eds), *The Moral Life: Essays in Honour of John Cottingham* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 212; and my 'The Self, the Good Life and the Transcendent', same volume, p. 266. Metz takes up the debate again in *Meaning in Life*, pp. 96-7, but I have to say that my puzzlement about the 'parity of evidence' requirement remains. In these later remarks Metz allows that one who takes my position may coherently be more *confident* that wrongness exists than that God exists (p. 97), but insists my position must be formulated in stronger terms than mere degrees of confidence: 'the relevant principle is one that appeals to differential *knowledge*' (p. 96). The point seems to be that my claim that God is the basis of moral requirements must be a claim to conclusive knowledge, but I am unclear as to why my position has to be formulated in this epistemically maximal way.

theistic picture, is shrouded in even greater obscurity than the posited entities of theoretical science, dwelling, as the Scriptures have it, in 'light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen nor can see' (I Timothy 6:16; cf. Exodus 33:20). Yet the divine reality is, for all that, supposed by the believer to be glimpsed in the nature of the reality we inhabit, a reality whose nature includes the existence of moral constraints that are not derivable from the natural world as described by the scientist.

A complication in this debate which is perhaps worth mentioning (though it takes us onto a slightly different tack from the last paragraph) concerns the notion of 'evidence', which Metz tends to construe along strict scientific lines – as what might be called 'spectator evidence', to use Paul Moser's apt expression.[14] In my more recent work, I have argued that the theistic outlook is based not on an 'epistemology of detachment', but on an 'epistemology of receptivity': that is to say, unlike the data which serve to confirm the theories of the scientist, the kinds of evidence relevant to religious faith are those that require certain transformations in the subject in order to make themselves manifest.[15] There is no space to develop these ideas here, but they may make a difference to some of the moves Metz makes in combating the claims of theism to underwrite morality. For example, he observes that any appeal to subjective experience in this kind of context would face the problem that 'not many of this book's readers will have had such religious experiences', and that where such experiences do occur, they are unlikely to manifest sufficient convergence to count as *proper evidence* (p. 90, footnote, emphasis supplied). But there are many genuine phenomena (consider the properties of a complex piece of classical music) which are such that by no means every detached and rational observer (or listener) will apprehend them, or apprehend them in the same way. Everything depends on the right kind of receptivity. Complex training and transformation in the subject are required for the relevant musical properties to be discerned. And hence the evidence may be neither widely available nor uniform across different groups; but the apprehension of the properties in question, when it does occur, may nonetheless reasonably be considered authentic and authoritative.

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[14] Paul Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 47.

[15] Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion*, Ch. 1; *How to Believe*, Ch. 1 and Ch. 3.

Metz's second main reason for rejecting the theistic account of moral requirements is that he considers there is a 'more coherent meta-ethical position' that is available, one that preserves parity of evidence between the manifest moral requirements, on the one hand, and what explains them, on the other. This is the view that moral requirements are a function of natural properties. 'Given that we do not know that a spiritual realm exists, and given that we do know that matter exists, a naturalist absolute morality would fit much better with what else we think we know about the world' (p. 91). And hence a naturalist metaphysics is a much better candidate than a theistic one for underwriting what Metz terms an 'absolute' ethical system (one involving objective universal necessary normative truths).

The type of naturalism that Metz favours in this context is not a crude reductive naturalism (for example one that deflates moral requirements into mere subjective preferences, or disguised hedonic drives). Instead, it is a species of moral realism (sometimes known as 'Cornell realism') that is analogous to scientific realism. On this view, moral truths express synthetic *a posteriori* necessities (analogous to scientifically established natural-kind identities, like 'water is $H_2O$'). Thus it is supposed that just as we have discovered that water is identical to $H_2O$, so, for example, 'we have learned empirically over time that our terms "wrongness" and "degradation of persons" essentially refer to one and the same class of actions [so as to make it] universally, objectively and necessarily true' that it is wrong to degrade people (p. 92).

The analogy with 'water is $H_2O$' does not initially look very promising, since this particular scientific identity claim, unlike what we find in the moral case, involves an identity of composition (water droplets are made up of molecules composed of hydrogen and oxygen atoms). But this is only the start of the trouble. A deeper worry is that moral requirements are just that, *requirements*: they have normative or authoritative force, calling upon us to act or refrain from acting in certain ways. And here the analogy with the empirical discoveries of physics, on the one hand, and the kind of 'realism' expressed by synthetic identity statements about rightness or wrongness, on the other, seems to break down entirely. Metz acknowledges this kind of worry, but takes the objection to boil down to the complaint that 'moral language is not reducible to the language of [...] sense-based inquiry' (p. 93); and he replies that the moral realist under discussion does not need to maintain that normativity can be

apprehended directly through one of the five senses (any more than the scientific realist has to maintain that we literally see causation). It is not a question of what can be directly detected via the senses, Metz argues, but rather of the metaphysical status of the properties in question. Just as the scientific realist can maintain that causation is a physical relation, so the naturalist in meta-ethics can maintain that 'normativity is a physical relation', even though neither normativity nor causation can be directly observed through the five senses.[16] Metz summarizes his position by saying that 'at the core, naturalism is a metaphysical thesis about what exists (only the physical), and, in the meta-ethical realm, about the nature of ethical properties (they are physical)' (p. 93).

The term 'physical' is, to begin with, a difficult one, since it is going to have to embrace rocks and stones and molecules and atoms and quarks and quantum fluctuations; and when one looks at the profoundly heterogeneous nature of the items in such a list, one begins to suspect that they are going to have nothing in common beyond that they figure in the descriptions and theories of natural scientists. But in any case, nothing in the physical world as normally conceived could possibly embrace the idea of something's being incumbent upon us, of something's being an authoritative requirement that requires our allegiance, irrespective of the actual empirical configuration of natural desires and inclinations and preferences that we happen to have. At this point, I suppose, the meta-ethical realist-naturalist could say that reality is stranger than we might suppose: just as there are weird and surprising quantum properties floating around, waiting to be identified by empirical investigation, so the cosmos contains normative properties, similarly waiting our investigative inquiry.

But notice the claim that is being made, or implied, here. The claim is that reality, in its essential nature, is such as to make *authoritative normative demands* upon us. Reality, as Hilary Putnam has put it, is 'not morally indifferent'.[17] Yet once we have got this far, it should perhaps begin to be clear why I began this section by observing that the

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[16] At least if we accept David Hume's view of causation. Hume famously thought that we only observe successive correlations, never causal transactions as such (*A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739-40], ed. by D. F. and M. J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Bk I, Part 3, Section 14. Contrast R. Harré and C. Madden, *Causal Powers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

[17] Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 6.

implications of Metz's defence of this kind of position (concerning the real objective status of moral norms) appear to bring him surprisingly close to the theistic picture. For to say that reality has this fundamentally and essentially *moral* or *normative* nature seems to be precisely the kind of claim that traditional theism has been making all along. If one counters by saying that the naturalist-realist view under discussion is radically different, and much more down-to-earth, because the relevant moral properties are essentially identical with physical properties, then one will have to explain how a purely physical property can be such as to instantiate this kind of normative power (whereas it is no mystery how a certain molecular structure could be such as to instantiate the property of wateriness).[18] I suspect that in the end the attractiveness of this kind of scientifically modelled 'moral realism' is less a function of its explanatory force than its conformity with the metaphysical dogma that 'only the physical exists'. I put this perhaps over strongly; but it does seem to me a curious feature of the contemporary philosophical climate that a (fully justified) admiration for the achievements of natural science has led so many otherwise sober and acute philosophical thinkers to try to trim all of reality to a Procrustean physicalist bed that much of it patently does not fit.

## III. TRANSCENDENCE AND TELEOLOGY

Let me end, briefly, by recording my broad concurrence with the substantive account Metz provides of the values which make for a meaningful life. What he calls his 'fundamentality' theory is notable for its resolute rejection of wholly subjectivist accounts of meaningfulness (which I agree with him have 'deeply counterintuitive' implications (p. 220)); and it also seems to me admirable in its insistence that a meaningful life is one that must be rationally oriented towards what is objectively true, good, and beautiful (pp. 227-232), where 'reason' and 'rationality' are construed broadly, so as to encompass affective and desiderative aspects of our human nature that are responsive to rational

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[18] To gloss this normative power as the power of providing us with all-things-considered overriding reasons to act in certain ways independently of our desires and interests (cf. Metz, p. 93) seems to me to highlight the problem rather than to mitigate it. A physical property might, to be sure, provide a prima facie reason for my acting in a certain way, given that I have certain desires or objectives, but this falls far short of the strong overriding normative authority envisaged.

deliberation (p. 223). Another important plus is that the Metz account of a meaningful life has what one might call a 'holistic' character, which he construes in terms of a meaningful life's having 'narrative value' when taken as a whole (though the precise details of how this is to be achieved are, reasonably enough, left as an agenda for future reflection).

The overall framework within which this account is situated is a conception of the 'deep or profound concerns' (p. 219) that make human life worth living; or, to use another formulation employed by Metz, the account is 'grounded' by an appeal to 'deep facets of human life' (p. 219), or 'fundamental conditions of human existence' (p. 235). There is, a seriousness of commitment in all this, and a kind of ultimately positive vision of the human condition, which for me makes Metz's outlook seem very close to a religious one (though he may not like this label, and might perhaps prefer 'quasi-religious'). But I can perhaps bring out something of what I mean here by quoting a passage from Bernard Williams, which points in a very different direction, and encapsulates just why, to many in the modern age, the quest for a meaningful life for humans seems unlikely achieve a satisfactory outcome:

> [The]most plausible stories now available about [human] evolution, including its very recent date and also certain considerations about the physical characteristics of the species, suggest that human beings are *to some degree a mess,* and that the rapid and immense development of symbolic and cultural capacities has left humans as beings for which no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially... [This contrasts with a] deeply teleological outlook [...] according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave. On that view it must be the deepest desire [...] of human beings to live in the way that is in the objective sense appropriate to them ... The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is *no such teleology at all*, and that there is *no orchestral score provided from anywhere* according to which human beings have a *special part to play*, still has to find its way fully into ethical thought.[19]

The phrase 'to some degree a mess' flags up the fact that 'human

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[19] Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 109–110; emphasis supplied. The importance of this passage is well brought out in David McPherson's illuminating paper 'Cosmic Outlooks and Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 55, no. 2 (June 2015), pp. 197-215.

nature' can, for those who follow Williams, no longer be thought of as foundational for an objective conception of the good and meaningful life. On the contrary, evolution has landed us, as Williams puts it elsewhere, with an 'ill assorted bricolage of powers and instincts'[20] – a ragbag of desires and dispositions and capacities which can be utilized in many possible ways, without anyone being entitled to declare that such or such a usage is objectively preferable. And the upshot will be, given the demise of objective teleology in our post-Darwinian world, that finding gratification in, for example, domination, or a Nietzschean will to power, or individual creativity that rides roughshod over the feelings and entitlements of others, or any such route to self-realization, may be as 'valid' as those modes of living which foster respect and enhance the rational nature of one's fellow humans – which latter modes are advocated, rightly in my view, by Metz. But my siding with Metz here does not assuage my philosophical qualm: that his notions of 'fundamentality' and 'fundamental conditions of human existence' are ones that he may not be entitled to use in the way he does, namely to underwrite the objectivity of the recipe he favours for the good and meaningful life. For in a Godless universe, which consists at its deepest essential level in a purposeless physical nexus with no guiding teleology, our human nature *has* no ultimate *telos* which could play the required normative role.

A theistic perspective, by contrast (which Metz of course rejects, but which the whole direction of his thinking, if I am right, implicitly cries out for) does clearly imply that our human nature is, in principle, structured towards a *telos*, however often we may resist it, or fall short of attaining it. And central to understanding this, for the theist, will be an acknowledgement of the significance of those distinctive and 'fundamental' intellectual and moral capacities of which we find ourselves possessed: an acknowledgement that what has happened on this planet (and for all we know elsewhere in the universe) is, in Thomas Nagel's significant phrase, 'the development of consciousness into an instrument of transcendence that can grasp objective reality and objective value.'[21] And what this will mean, on the theistic view, is that

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[20] Bernard Williams, 'Replies,' in J. Altham and R. Harrison (eds.), *World, Mind, and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 199; cited in McPherson, 'Cosmic Outlooks'.

[21] Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) p. 85.

among our 'rather ill-sorted *bricolage* of powers and instincts', there is a fundamental awareness of the good, a responsiveness to something objective that is not merely a projection of our various contingently evolved inclinations and preferences, and that the meaning of life for human beings must lie in our orienting ourselves towards that good. Theism may be unfashionable in the current philosophical climate, but if the argument of this paper has been on the right lines, it succeeds in finding a home for certain very fundamental human intuitions about meaning and objective value which it will be very hard to accommodate adequately within the prevailing naturalist worldview.

# FURTHER EXPLORATIONS OF SUPERNATURALISM ABOUT MEANING IN LIFE:
## REPLY TO COTTINGHAM, GOETZ, GOLDSCHMIDT, JECH AND WIELENBERG

### THADDEUS METZ

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## I. REVISITING SUPERNATURALISM

It is an honour for the editors of the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Janusz Salamon and Yujin Nagasawa, to have devoted a special issue of it to my book, *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study* (Metz 2013a), and for them to have assembled such a distinguished group of commentators. They have made welcome, thoughtful contributions about several key claims made in the book. I am grateful to John Cottingham, Stewart Goetz, Tyron Goldschmidt, Alexander Jech and Erik Wielenberg for having taken the time to share their expertise and insight with me and the rest of the field.

In *Meaning in Life*, I critically engage with Anglo-American theoretical analyses of what, if anything, would make a human person's life meaningful, setting aside the more holist or cosmic questions of what the point of the human race is or why there is a physical universe. I maintain that the question of what could confer meaning on an individual's life is roughly equivalent to asking what beyond one's own pleasure most merits pursuit, how to transcend one's animal self, and what about one's life merits great esteem or admiration. I group theoretical answers to these questions under two major headings, supernaturalism and naturalism, where the former is the view that God or a soul as typically conceived in the monotheist tradition is necessary for meaning in a life.[1]

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[1] Cottingham does not like the term 'supernatural', as it suggests to him that there is not meaning to be found in nature (2016: 47-50). However, that is clearly not intended

I provide new arguments against not only the specific supernaturalist view that meaning is constituted by fulfilling God's purpose, but also supernaturalism as a general category, which I contend is motivated at bottom by the implausible view that engagement with perfection is essential to meaning. After having sought to provide sufficient reason to reject this perfection thesis and its supernaturalist offshoots, I advance a new naturalist view, the 'fundamentality theory', which I contend is more attractive than previous versions of naturalism from the literature.[2]

There are several respects in which my interlocutors would like to convert me to the view that God or a soul is necessary for meaning in life, or at least maintain that I have not provided sufficient reason to reject it. In the following I reply to them, grouping their discussions thematically, according to four major kinds of criticism they make.

To begin, some of the contributors question my methodology. In the book, I treat the question of life's meaning as a theoretical matter, and evaluate general principles about what all meaningful conditions have in common as distinct from meaningless ones mainly by appealing to intuitions, particular judgments of what is meaningful and what is not. Goldschmidt and Jech doubt that this strategy gets me very far (section II).

Next, a number of the commentators seek to defend the supernaturalist view that meaning is constituted by fulfilling God's purpose from the objection I make to it (section III). I contend that in order for God to be necessary to confer meaning on our lives, God would have to be qualitatively different from and higher than anything that could exist in the physical world, that this means that God would have to be a person who has properties such as simplicity and atemporality, and that these properties are incompatible with purposive agency, at least as typically conceived by monotheists. Goetz, Goldschmidt and Wielenberg contend that this argument fails to convince.

I then address the way that my interlocutors seek to defend supernaturalism as such from the 'incoherence argument' I mount against it (section IV). I contend that most inclined towards supernaturalism

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by those using the term, and probably does not even have that connotation to them; for the entire debate is about whether meaning in this, earthly life would exist were there not something beyond it in another, higher dimension, something *supra* natural.

² For a somewhat longer summary of the book's key claims, see 'Précis of *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*', published elsewhere in this issue of the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*.

would hold a collection of claims that contradict each other if they were to do so. Roughly, on the one hand, most supernaturalists claim to know that some lives have meaning in them, but, on the other, they claim not to know that anything supernatural actually exists, making it incoherent to claim to know that meaning logically depends on the supernatural. Supernaturalists often have faith in a spiritual realm, but that is of course not knowledge of its existence, which most implicitly maintain they have about the presence of meaning in people's lives. Cottingham and Wielenberg take issue with this argument.

Finally, I consider the way that critics have responded to the fundamentality theory, my favoured account of what makes a life meaningful (section V). According to it, a life is particularly meaningful insofar as it exercises reason in a robust, sophisticated way and orients it towards basic conditions of human existence, ones that are largely responsible for or explain much else about it. I aim to show that the exemplars of meaning in people's lives, namely, 'the good' (morality, beneficence), 'the true' (enquiry, wisdom) and 'the beautiful' (creativity, art), are best captured by a principle that prescribes positively contouring one's intelligence towards fundamental aspects of human life. Here, Goetz and Goldschmidt are not persuaded.

Ever since I began thinking about what might make a life meaningful, I have been *drawn towards* religious or spiritual views but never *believed* them. I have *wanted* both supernaturalism and theism to be true, so that God and a soul would be necessary for meaning and would be known to exist. However, I have not been able to bring myself to *think* that either of these claims is true. At the end of the book I note this discrepancy between the conative and cognitive parts of my self, indicating that while I wish I were fulfilling a purpose God had assigned me and were destined to live well forever consequent to having done so, I do not believe that such would be necessary for my life to be meaningful (2013a: 247-248; see also 127-128). It is uncomfortable having to revisit this tension, which Goetz and Jech both press in their contributions, but, then, growth is invariably accompanied by discomfort.

Upon exploring supernaturalism further in replying to my esteemed interlocutors, I do not find the tension dissolved. I continue to maintain that a life could be meaningful if only the physical universe exists, and I continue to hope (which is distinct from expecting) that there is more to life than merely what can be found in the physical universe. One way to account for this discrepancy, which I toyed with in the book (2013a:

242-247), is that human values are distinct from human idealizations. However, another potential explanation, which I did not discuss in the book (but cf. 2013a: 159-160) and intend to explore in future work, is that there are two dimensions or kinds of meaning in life, such that a deeper or higher (depending on your preferred metaphor of verticality) sort requires perfection. I am convinced that, if there is a kernel of truth in supernaturalism, it lies in articulating, defending and applying this distinction between types of meaning in a life (for some recent starts, see Metz 2015a: 239-240, 2016; Swinburne 2016).

## II. HOW TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF MEANING

The method used to support a conclusion about what makes a life meaningful in my book is new in one respect, but not in another. It is not in that it is (intended to be) identical in form to the standard approach taken by analytic philosophers when constructing theories of the nature of well-being, right action, epistemic justification, personal identity, free will and much else. Just as the moral philosopher evaluates a general principle of what distinguishes permissible acts from impermissible ones by appealing to particular cases that are less controversial than the principle being evaluated, i.e., to 'intuitions', so I do the same when it comes to theories of meaning. I evaluate them, and defend my favoured view, principally by considering the extent to which a given theory plausibly entails and powerfully explains less contested judgments about what does and does not confer meaning on a life.

To the extent that there is novelty in the book's method, it is that I apply this kind of argumentative strategy with some rigour to the topic of what makes a life matter. I point out that the field has for over 100 years tended to take the good, the true and the beautiful as quintessential instances of meaningfulness, and so I take intuitions about them to constitute fair, common ground by which to evaluate competing theoretical accounts of what confers meaning on a life. Both supernaturalists and naturalists have held that there can be substantial meaning in, for instance, helping other people, discovering facts about the world and creating artworks. I run through about two dozen different general principles in search of the one that does the best job of accounting for such particular judgments, with recurrent mention of the intuitively meaningful accomplishments of Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, Vincent van Gogh and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Jech contends that this method is inappropriate. According to him, intuitions are epistemically insecure, and, because of that, they are ineffective at providing reason to doubt supernaturalism. The 'erosion of trust in such intuitions', he says, means that they cannot be invoked to doubt any 'systematically anti-intuitive views' that supernaturalists might have (2016: 15, 16).

Jech advances these claims consequent to an eloquent, revealing and compelling analysis of Pascal's *Pensées*. Indeed, I submit that Jech's beautiful exposition of Pascal has conferred some meaning on his life (even if there exists neither God nor a soul!). According to his reading of Pascal, the only epistemic reasons we finite humans can ever access are incomplete and therefore shaky. They are bound to be, in Jech's terms, 'uncertain', 'arbitrary', 'groundless', 'accidental', 'a product of custom', 'variable' and 'contingent'. Alternately, they are not ones, again using Jech's words, 'whose denials are self-contradictory' or that 'contain the totality of knowledge at once' or that are grounded on an 'absolute perspective', where only such kinds of justification can satisfy the demands of rational enquiry. Supernaturalists ought therefore not be bothered if their views are shown to be counter-intuitive, and I ought not criticize them as such.

I do not take issue with Jech's account of Pascal, but rather with the implications he draws from it. First off, I suspect that Jech, and his Pascal, end up in self-refutation or self-stultification of some kind. On the one hand, they claim that all our beliefs are insufficiently justified by virtue of their arbitrariness, accidentalness and the like. On the other hand, they *believe precisely that claim, they assert it as true and justified*. Doing so means they implicitly either deem that belief (about the status of our beliefs) not to be arbitrary, accidental, etc., or think that the latter conditions do not undercut epistemic justification. Jech and Pascal both end up convinced about an awful lot about the human condition, and reasonably so by their own lights, despite the fact that what they are reasonably convinced about is that we cannot be reasonably convinced about much about the human condition.[3]

My second reply to Jech is that his and Pascal's standards for justified belief are much too high. The best way to see that, beyond the charge of self-refutation that I have just levelled, is to consider humanity's most

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[3] Cf. my discussion of Sho Yamaguchi (2015), who contends that an appeal to intuition on my part lacks justificatory force, but whom I argue himself appeals to intuition in order to defend that contention, and probably does so unavoidably (Metz 2015a: 248-250).

successful epistemic enterprise with respect to the nature of external reality, namely, contemporary science. Scientific claims are uncertain, they change over time, they are a product of particular histories and cultures, and all the rest. And, yet, for all we can tell, we do know that water is $H_2O$ and that the earth is round and not flat.

The success of science holds important lessons for the nature of epistemic justification, one of which is that certainty, absoluteness and the like are not necessary for it. Humans have not always employed chemical concepts. Only certain societies came up with these concepts. Their application to the nature of the world is only probabilistically accurate, and not certain. And, yet, they do ground knowledge: water really is $H_2O$.

My suggestion, following post-positivism in general and the Cornell realism of Richard Boyd, David Brink, Richard Miller and Nicholas Sturgeon in particular, is that beliefs about values can be justified in much the same way beliefs about reality can be (cf. Metz 2013a: 7, 91-96, 169-172). Concepts about meaning in life have not always been invoked by human beings. Only some societies have done so. And the evidence for their application will invariably be less than certain, a matter of probability. However, if beliefs about what exists can be justified in the face of these conditions, so, too, can beliefs about what is meaningful.

Like Jech, Goldschmidt provides reason to doubt the procedure of appealing to intuitions to defend a position, at least when it comes to the topic of meaning in life. I appreciate the transparency, sincerity and intellectual integrity evinced by Goldschmidt's discussion. With respect to several matters on which I pronounce having an intuition, he reports that he has none. And he notes that someone might have an intuition opposed to mine. Then the question becomes: what does this mean for justification?

> Is non-purposive meaning logically possible? Suppose those who understand meaning in terms of purposiveness would contend that it is not. Are they then misunderstanding things? How can we tell? By checking what *most* people would make of the concept? But now we're into empirical questions. [...] I have no idea whether what most people think about such things should bear on the issue at all (Goldschmidt 2016: 21).

In making these points, Goldschmidt need not be read as rejecting the entire method of evaluating a general principle by appeal to less

controversial particular judgments. Rather, he is sensibly read as suggesting that such a procedure fails to generate epistemic reason for belief when there are differences amongst the intuitions of interlocutors.

In reply, everything depends on the extent to which the intuitions of the interlocutors were authoritatively developed and how great the divergences are between those with the requisite credentials.[4] First off, I take relevant intuitions to be ones that are substantially the product of careful and thorough consideration of the subject matter. If a deaf person lacks a sense of which music is beautiful, and if a janitor fails to judge that there is a proton spiralling off upon a collision of particles in a cloud chamber, their lack of intuition does not undercut the presence of one amongst composers and physicists. Some kind of expertise is needed.

Furthermore, the epistemic aim is not to find a theory that plausibly entails and explains all extant intuitions of a given interlocutor, even those of an expert, but is rather to find one that best accounts for intuitions held after the (usually lengthy) process of reflecting theoretically on them. For example, if someone who had thought for a while about issues of meaning judged Hitler's life to have been meaningful, then I would seek out some *other*, ideally *stronger* intuitions that he has, and make the case that they support a certain, more general principle (or cluster of them) that gives him reason to *revise* his Hitler intuition. Intuitions are not fixed; they are neither immune from cognitive influence, nor are they self-justifying à la foundationalism.

Secondly, I maintain that epistemic justification is going to track the degree of convergence amongst experts consequent to such a reflective process. Unanimity is not necessary. Instead what is appropriately sought and often achieved in contemporary science is a very large majority of experts agreeing that certain theoretical options are plausible or not, upon thorough investigation of the matter. Such substantial agreement – but not full-blown consensus – is strong evidence for a view about the nature of the physical world, e.g., about quantum mechanics and the theory of human evolution. Where there is not much agreement amongst experts over time, then there is not much justification, at least of a sort that would give either enquirers epistemic reasons to change their minds or laypeople strong grounds to trust their testimony.

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[4] This and the following couple paragraphs borrow some ideas and phrasings from Metz (2015a: 250).

Supposing these reflections about the epistemic status of justification in science are plausible, I apply them to the context of enquiry into what makes a life meaningful. To begin, notice that Goldschmidt himself does not say that he has intuitions opposite to mine about meaningfulness. Rather, he usually claims that he has 'no intuitions' (2016: 21) and that his 'intuitions are silent' (2016: 21) about an array of issues. It therefore might be that Goldschmidt is too new to enquiry into life's meaning to count as an expert. He might need to reflect more on the matter to develop the ability to form judgments of particular cases.

Goldschmidt does proffer a case of someone else who has an intuition that differs from mine, specifically, someone who believes that non-purposive meaning (meaning without having pursued, or at least brought about, an end) is logically impossible. Here, I would note that the mere *possibility* of someone with a different intuition is not epistemically relevant; actual difference of intuition amongst experts consequent to much theoretical discussion and other reflection is what should really give one pause. So, I would need to know whether someone familiar with the philosophy indeed maintains that the meaning of the phrase 'meaning in life' rules out the prospect of it inhering in non-purposive conditions.

Note that the mere fact that someone holds a general principle that has clear implications for particular cases does not mean that her judgments of the latter will in fact align with the former. Quite often those with different theoretical perspectives still share the same intuitions. Utilitarians about right action have taken seriously the barrage of deontological criticism mounted since the 1970s because they, too, have often enough had the same judgments of particular cases about when to harvest organs from innocents and when to sacrifice them to lions for the entertainment of spectators. So, in the present case, it could be that the adherent to purposive-only meaning at a theoretical level would in fact share my intuition about cases in which a non-purposive sort is available.

Suppose, now, there in fact exists an interlocutor of the sort Goldschmidt has in mind, roughly an expert who has an intuition opposed to mine. Then, it might be that she would have strong reason to change her mind if I were to point her to additional evidence, and there are times when I like to think that I can know that. Other times, I also believe that I can know that, even if this particular interlocutor would not come to share my view or have reason to do so, substantial

convergence in my favour amongst experts exists or is forthcoming about a certain issue.

I of course have not provided reason to believe that Goldschmidt's particular counterexample about the concept of life's meaning is flawed. I have read him as proffering it mainly to illustrate a point about the justificatory force of intuitions, and hope I have said enough to clarify, and motivate, my view on that methodological issue.

## III. THE ROLE OF GOD'S PURPOSE IN A LIFE'S MEANING

In my book, I work hard to give supernaturalist theories a fair shake. I use a large amount of space to defend them from objections that have been prominent in the literature on life's meaning. However, after showing that extant criticisms of supernaturalism can be rebutted without too much difficulty or at least with some conclusiveness, I aim to provide new criticisms that are not so easy to refute or to be sanguine about being able to refute. One target is the influential view that a life is meaningful only if, and perhaps just insofar as, it fulfils a purpose that God has assigned it. After arguing that this view can avoid the major objections that have been made to it (Metz 2013a: 98-106; see also Metz 2013b), I present a new objection (Metz 2013a: 106-118).[5]

Specifically, I maintain that in order for God to be necessary to confer meaning on our lives, God would have to be qualitatively different from and higher than anything that could exist in the physical world. For God to be essentially, perhaps solely, responsible for any meaning in our lives, God would have to have certain qualities that *cannot* be found in the natural world, these qualities must be *lexically* superior to any goods possible in a physical universe, and they must be what ground meaning in it. The best candidate for such qualities, I submit, is being a person who has properties such as simplicity and atemporality, which plausibly constitute certain superlative forms of unity and independence that confer meaning upon contouring one's life towards them. And these properties are probably incompatible with purposive agency, which appears to be essentially complex and temporal. If this argument is strong, or at least worth taking seriously, then, if one is drawn towards a God-centred account of meaning in life, one should develop and

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[5] I first advanced this objection in Metz (2000), and then also defended it in Metz (2007), before the book appeared. For replies to this objection beyond those I address in this section, see Affolter (2007) and Poettcker (2015).

consider a non-purposive version of it, and in the book I sketch what that might plausibly look like (Metz 2013a: 119-122).

Goldschmidt (2016: 24) and Wielenberg (2016: 30-31) reply mainly by pointing out that I have not undertaken the metaphysics needed to conclusively nail down this objection. They note that in the book I acknowledge there have been accounts of, say, how a simple and atemporal God could create a temporal universe despite it appearing to be the case that creation takes time and would involve complexity, but that I do not critically discuss them. They are correct about that, as Jason Poettcker is when he makes a similar point (2015: 190-192).

Here I echo my reply to Poettcker (drawing on Metz 2015a: 255-256). Basically, I am not a metaphysician, and also wanted to avoid intricate debates in metaphysics as much as I could in order to focus on the analytically under-explored issue of meaning (which I suggested on occasion at Metz 2013a: 111, 120, 134, 145-146, 170, 243). So, I drew upon traditional concerns in the literature about whether a radically other God could interact us in ways that adherents to purpose theory normally conceive, presenting a challenge to the latter to show that purposiveness can cohere with simplicity and atemporality (or that God need not have such properties in order to ground meaning). That is, I aimed to provide a new, difficult problem for purpose theory and 'the most significant' one (2013a: 113) that would provide reason to consider an alternative God-based theory of what would make life meaningful (2013a: 118).

Goetz goes a step farther and takes up this challenge (2016: 41-42). He replies not by trying to shift the metaphysical burden of proof back to me, but rather by trying to explain how a simple God could both act in time and for multiple purposes. Goetz interestingly draws an analogy between God and a soul, pointing out that a soul has often been conceived as a simple spiritual substance but nonetheless as existing in time and as pursuing several different ends. If a soul can be conceived to have all these properties at the same time, why not God?

The trouble with the analogy, I think, is that the kind of simplicity ascribed to God traditionally, and also plausibly when it comes to meaning, differs from the sort ascribed to a soul. Basically, the kind of simplicity that is compatible with being in time (and perhaps having multiple purposes) is not the sort that God must have in order to be qualitatively different from, and higher than, anything possible in nature and hence to be essential to ground meaning. If nothing in nature on its

own could ground meaning, and God were necessary for it, then God would probably have to exhibit a unity and independence constituted by a simplicity that is atemporal. Recall, for instance, the 'feebleness of division' of which Plotinus speaks, which plausibly applies to a being with either spatial or temporal extension.

In sum, even if we can conceive of a simple God acting in time, that is not the sort of simple God that is plausibly required for meaning in life, because He would then be insufficiently above and beyond nature. Drawing on the perfect being theological tradition, that would seem to require a person whose immediate awareness is not limited to the now, who is always already perfect and so could 'only go downhill' were He to be in time, and who cannot even be conceived to have parts (cf. Metz 2013a: 87n6, 111-112). How, and even whether, *that* sort of being could create a physical universe remain genuine puzzles.

## IV. INCOHERENCE IN SUPERNATURALISTS' BELIEFS?

In the book I argue that those inclined to hold supernaturalism should not adopt it, since doing so would be in tension with claims they already hold, or at least sensibly should. Specifically, if they claim to know that meaning exists, as most supernaturalists do, and then if they also claim not to know that God exists (even if they have faith in God), as many do and should, then they would be contradicting themselves to claim to know that if meaning exists, then God exists, a principle implied by supernaturalism (2013a: 88-97, 145-146, 158-159). In the following, I unpack this tersely stated objection and consider how Cottingham and Wielenberg reply to it.[6]

In addition to this argument, which is directed against supernaturalists who claim to know that some meaning exists in our lives, in the final chapter of the book I develop another incoherence argument, against those supernaturalists who claim to know that there is no meaning in our lives (2013a: 240-246). Wielenberg is the only one to have yet noticed and replied to this argument, and I take up his replies at the end of this section.

Consider now those supernaturalists who think they know that there is some meaning in our lives. According to the core of my argument

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[6] For additional critical discussion of this objection, see Waghorn (2015) but also Metz (2015a: 258-262).

against them,[7] there is a logical inconsistency in making the following three claims: (1) I know 'If X, then Y' is true; (2) I know X obtains; (3) I do not know whether Y obtains. Now, I maintain that most supernaturalists would be committed to an instantiation of the three claims. Specifically, for those who claim to know that meaning exists as well as that supernaturalism is true, it would be the case that they would then hold the following version of the three claims: (1*) I know 'If meaning exists, then God exists' is true; (2*) I know meaning exists; (3*) I do not know whether God exists. My contentions are that supernaturalists must drop one of these claims to avoid contradiction and, specifically, that they ought to drop (1*), the God-based theory of life's meaning, since (2*) and (3*) are much more defensible.

(1*) is the claim that one has enough epistemic reason for knowledge of a God-based theory of meaning in life. (2*) is the default position of most philosophers, including supernaturalists, working in the field of meaning in life; a large majority reject scepticism and nihilism when it comes to meaning in individual lives and for what they think is conclusive reason. For all we know, there was indeed meaning in the lives of people such as Mandela, Einstein and Picasso. And (3*) is the idea that, even if one has faith in God, or *some* epistemic reason to believe in Him, it is extremely difficult to maintain that one has enough epistemic reason to claim knowledge of His existence; many religious believers, even philosophical ones, deny that they know God exists, even if they elect to believe in Him anyway. One cannot consistently hold (1*), (2*) and (3*), and ought to jettison (1*).

In the book I deploy this kind of argument not merely against supernaturalism, but also, as Cottingham and Wielenberg note, against an argument for (a version of) it, namely, an appeal to the divine command theory of morality. Cottingham, for instance, has argued in his work that God is the source of meaning in life, since only He could create the kind of moral system that would confer meaning on our lives upon living up to it (2005: 37-57). I contend, however, that there is also a kind of incoherence in this position, insofar as Cottingham claims to know that some acts are right and some are wrong (2005: esp. 55) but also not to know that God exists (2003: esp. 6-8, 18, 61-62, 92). Those two claims are logically incompatible with the assertion of the divine

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[7] Here I borrow from a recent restatement of the argument in Metz (2015a: 258).

command theory, which implies that if rightness or wrongness exists, then God exists.

Cottingham now replies to this argumentative strategy in two major ways, going beyond earlier statements, and it is a pleasure to continue a debate with him that began in 2008.[8] First, at one point he appears to deny claiming to know that God is the basis of moral requirements and hence of meaning in life. He points out, sensibly, that, for any statement of the form 'If X, then Y', it can be coherent to believe that both X and Y obtain even if the evidence for the existence of X is not 'as strong as the evidence' of Y (Cottingham 2016: 51-52). I accept that point in the book, and work to clarify that an incoherence most clearly obtains if the discrepancy between the amount of evidence is *stark*, for instance to the point where one claims to have enough evidence for knowledge of X but not enough evidence for knowledge of Y (2013a: 96-97). At this point in the dialectic, Cottingham says, 'The point seems to be that my claim that God is the basis of moral requirements must be a claim to conclusive knowledge, but I am unclear as to why my position has to be formulated in this epistemically maximal way' (2016: 51).

I do not use the phrase 'conclusive knowledge', and do not intend to appeal to any sort of epistemic maximum when maintaining that there is an incoherence in the beliefs of many supernaturalists. Rather, in the book I sometimes speak of 'conclusive evidence', which I define as evidence sufficient for a claim to knowledge (2013a: 97). The incoherence argument is that one cannot coherently claim to know that some acts are morally required (or meaningful), to know that if some acts are morally required (or meaningful), then God exists, but, further, not to know whether God exists. Cottingham appears to make all three claims, and many others would be committed to all three were they to accept the divine command theory (or supernaturalism). My suggestion is that they reject the latter, to avoid the incoherence.

Perhaps Cottingham is denying a claim to know that if some acts are morally required (or meaningful), then God exists. That is an avenue that Nicholas Waghorn (2015: 153) has suggested Cottingham could take. However, the cost of doing so is obvious, namely, forsaking

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[8] For my initial statement, see Metz (2008), and for Cottingham's initial reply, which required me to tighten up the argument as (usually) presented in *Meaning in Life*, see Cottingham (2008: 264-268).

a philosophical defence of the divine command theory of morality and a God-based account of what would make a life meaningful.

Cottingham's other reply concerns not the claim (1*) I know 'If meaning exists, then God exists' is true, but rather (3*) I do not know whether God exists. Cottingham suggests that there are ways of knowing that God is real that he rightly suspects I do not accept. Whereas in Cottingham's first book on what makes a life meaningful (2003), it looked as though he did not believe he could know that God exists, in his present discussion Cottingham speaks of 'understanding' and 'apprehending' the theistic nature of reality, and in an 'authoritative' way through 'emotional and imaginative modes of awareness' and, in particular, through 'religious experiences' (2016: 52). Cottingham and other supernaturalists could indeed avoid the incoherence if they had good grounds for claiming to know that God exists.

And so the key question becomes: do they? That is a mighty big question, one I am not going to be able to settle in this reply to five critics of various facets of my book on life's meaning. I merely note that, as I briefly mention in the book, an appeal to religious experience *most promises* to ground knowledge of God when the phenomenologies of those who have them are similar, or at least not radically different (Metz 2013a: 90n8). However, Christians tend to report experiencing a world of beauty that has its source in a spiritual person with the three omni-properties, whereas many Hindus report experiencing the ultimate nature of reality as indivisible, without separate persons at all, many Confucians report experiencing the presence of an impersonal Heaven that imposes standards to which we must conform, and many indigenous African people report experiencing the presence of ancestors (invisible persons who have survived the deaths of their bodies and continue to reside on earth) through whom alone a human being has any ability to learn about God. The best explanation of such radical difference, I submit, is that religious experiences are not reliable guides to what exists independent of us.

In reply to this point, Cottingham draws a fascinating analogy with knowledge of music.

> Complex training and transformation in the subject are required for the relevant musical properties to be discerned. And hence the evidence may be neither widely available nor uniform across different groups; but the apprehension of the properties in question, when it does occur,

may nonetheless reasonably be considered authentic and authoritative (Cottingham 2016: 52).

Applied to the religious case, the claim would have to be something like Hindus, Confucians and Africans simply have not had 'the right kind of receptivity' (Cottingham 2016: 52), given Cottingham's commitment to Christianity. They have not been primed to detect the evidence of monotheism.

The natural question to pose is what reason there is to think that the Christians, or any particular religious groups, are having the veridical religious experiences, as opposed to the others. In order to know which phenomenologies are more accurate than others, it appears necessary to go beyond them, and, in particular, to go back to appealing to what Cottingham calls 'spectator evidence' (2016: 52), which I find most compelling when seeking to apprehend the nature of the external world, namely, consideration of which perspectives best facilitate prediction of future events, control over which events occur, and explanation of comparatively uncontested data.

Another concern I have is about the strength of the analogy. It is true that those trained in tonal, Western music will initially have trouble comprehending, let alone appreciating, other styles of music, such as Indian *raags* or the atonal music of, say, Anton Webern. However, with enough exposure and attention, often the experts are able to agree to a large extent about what they are hearing and whether it is musically important (even if what they *like* continues to differ). I doubt that a similar sort of convergence in judgment is forthcoming amongst religious people. Hindus are not likely to come to see the world as having sprung from a person, just as Christians are unlikely to come to see the world as an indivisible unity that is devoid of separate persons, even upon acquaintance with the opposing perspective.

I am sure that Cottingham would have revealing things to say in what I hope will be another stage of debate between us. Like Cottingham, upon carefully and accurately presenting my charges of incoherence, Wielenberg also argues that divine command theorists of morality and supernaturalists about meaning can best avoid them by rejecting the claim that they do not know that God exists. However, his rationale differs from Cottingham's. Wielenberg contends that supernaturalists who initially did not know that God exists might *now* plausibly claim to know that God exists, precisely in light of knowing that a God-based

account of meaning is true and that meaning exists (2016: 29).

Others have suggested this manoeuvre (Roger Crisp cited in Metz 2013a: 97n17; and Waghorn 2015: 159-160), and my replies to them still seem strong to me (Metz 2013a: 97n17, 2015a: 260-261). In a nutshell, I contend that such a move is unpromising, since it is the God-based account of meaning that is in question. In the context of debate about life's meaning, it is a highly contested supernaturalist theory in need of philosophical defence, not a stable premise to be used to draw a conclusion about the existence of God.

Outside of debate about which theory of life's meaning is most justified, and when seeking to decide matters with real rigour, it would be apt to weigh up all the available evidence for and against the relevant claims, which include the assertions of supernaturalism and theism. However, I would be content to have shown that Cottingham and other supernaturalists must choose between the three claims of knowing that if meaning (or rightness) exists, then God exists, of knowing that meaning (rightness) exists, and of not knowing that God exists, and to have noted that, on balance at the moment, philosophical opinion counsels letting go of the first claim.

The incoherence argument just discussed applies only to those supernaturalists who claim to know that some lives have meaning in them. However, not all supernaturalists do, for some are atheists who hold that while meaning requires God to exist, God does not exist. As Wielenberg aptly sums up, 'supernaturalism + atheism = nihilism' (2016: 32), the view that all lives are meaningless. I also present an argument in the book meant to show that those who hold this combination of views suffer from a kind of incoherence amongst their beliefs.

Specifically, I argue that, probably, if atheism is true, then supernaturalism is false. If atheism is true, then humanity's deepest value judgments have not come from God but instead are a product of natural selection, i.e., are ones that helped us to survive and to flourish. Which kinds of judgments would have been likely to have helped us do so?

> Cooperation, or any other action of the sort that would have enabled our ancestors' genes to be passed on, would not have done so had it been predicated on facts about a maximally conceivable ideal that could obtain only in a spiritual realm, which the friend of the present argument for nihilism asserts does not exist. Early members of *Homo sapiens* would not have judged their own or others' behaviour in light of standards that,

*ex hypothesi*, could never be fulfilled. They would not have judged their lives to be worthy of great esteem in light of a state of perfection that is non-existent (Metz 2013a: 244).

Instead, the kinds of value judgments that would have helped us to survive and flourish, I contend, are ones appealing to 'imperfect standards that could be satisfied by earthly lives' (Metz 2013a: 244) such as naturalist conceptions of meaning.

Wielenberg offers two replies to this argument against supernaturalists who are nihilists. First, he suggests that 'our ancestors might have judged behaviour in light of unfulfillable standards if they had mistakenly believed that such standards could be fulfilled, and Metz provides no reason to rule out that possibility' (2016: 33).

In response, note that the historical record strongly indicates that monotheism, and more generally the appeal to spiritual idealization, is a recent phenomenon. For all we can tell, it began no more than 6,000 to 10,000 years ago, with the rise of a division of labour, agriculture, writing systems and the like, whereas humanity has been around for millions of years. It is *possible* that early hominids had images of perfection that guided their interaction and that they mistakenly believed they could reach or approximate it. However, it is unlikely that such a conceptual repertoire had been developed prior to the advent of 'civilization'.

Wielenberg's deeper reply is that the logic of my argument misfires, and does not reach its target of supernaturalism. According to him, it provides merely an explanation of why people would not believe supernaturalism, but does not provide a reason to believe that this view is unwarranted. 'Metz's reasoning yields at most the conclusion that atheism implies that humans will in fact not accept supernaturalism, but the conclusion he is aiming for is that we lack justification for accepting supernaturalism' (2016: 33).

In fact, I think I am entitled to the stronger, and more relevant, claim. For one way to see this, turn away from what talk of 'meaningful' would have connoted to our ancestors, and instead consider what it would have denoted, i.e., picked out in the world. Suppose that some variant of the causal theory of reference is true of value terms. If atheism were also true, so that there is no spiritual dimension, as is the case by the present version of supernaturalism I am seeking to rebut, then when our ancestors used terms such as 'meaningful', they could have referred only to physical properties. The extension of the word 'meaningful' would

have to have been constituted by certain patterns of being and doing in the natural world. Just as the extension of the word 'water' is stuff made up of a certain chemical composition, such that water *just is* $H_2O$, so what counts as meaningful for us would be constituted by certain natural facts alone. But that implies the falsity of supernaturalism.

At the end of his contribution, Wielenberg draws on certain claims in my book to usefully reconstruct what he considers to be a more powerful objection to supernaturalism. Since it appeals to my substantive theoretical account of which properties constitute meaning in a life, I address it only after defending that view from objections, in the following section.

## V. IS MEANING FUNDAMENTAL?

In posing the question of this heading, I have two things in mind. One is whether meaningfulness is a basic value, one that is distinct from happiness, hedonistically construed as pleasure. Another is whether, if it is, its content (at least when it is particularly great) is well captured by (partial) appeal to fundamental facts about human existence, those responsible for, or that explain, much else about it in a given domain.

Goetz provides reason to doubt both, maintaining that meaning is identical to happiness *qua* pleasant experiences. I address Goetz's position first, before tackling counterexamples that he and Goldschmidt have advanced against the fundamentality theory of the nature of meaningfulness.

As Goetz points out, I hold the view that it is logically contradictory to think that meaning is exhausted by pleasure (Metz 2013a: 27). That is, I maintain that what talk of 'meaning' connotes, at least to a large majority of philosophers, is a higher intrinsic good other than any experience that feels good. Setting that strong view aside, however, I still spend a lot of time in the book arguing that there are many respects in which meaning and pleasure are distinct goods. For example, I provide putative examples of unhappy or unpleasant meaningfulness as well as of meaningless happiness or pleasure (2013a: 5). I provide analyses of the concepts of meaning and pleasure, pointing out that they connote different ideas (2013a: 60-61). And I suggest several substantive, value-theoretic differences between the two, for instance with regard to which kind of attitude is appropriate to take towards them, whether they can be realized posthumously, and when they are to be preferred in a life (2013a: 65-74). Goetz is an informed and careful interlocutor; how can

he and I have such extremely divergent views about what would make a life meaningful?

My suspicion is that Goetz and I are talking past one another. What he means by the word 'meaningful' differs from what I mean by it. Crucially, for Goetz, when posing the question of what makes a life meaningful he is at 'the most basic' level asking the question, 'What, if anything, makes life worth living?' (2016: 45). I, however, believe that the meaningful and the worthwhile are distinct (even if somewhat overlapping) properties, where pleasure can invariably make life worth living but cannot, in itself, make life meaningful. I did not argue that point in *Meaning in Life*, but did elsewhere soon after I had submitted the manuscript to the press (Metz 2012, 2014: 102-103).

In these latter texts, I suggest, for example, that a person's life could be more meaningful if she voluntarily underwent a life that were not worthwhile so that others would not have to undergo the same fate (*vide* Mandela having spent 27 years in prison). If such a thought experiment is coherent, then the meaningful and the worthwhile are indeed distinct!

Another reason for thinking that the meaningful is not reducible to, or even centrally captured by, the worthwhile concerns the reasonableness of suicide. Take a classic lifeboat scenario where there are not enough seats for all those who need them, and where you volunteer to give yours to someone else. This could well be a meaningful action on your part, but it is one that makes your life worth ending, not one that makes it worth living.

A third reason I proffer for divorcing the meaningful from the worthwhile is the availability of posthumous meaning. It is plausible to think that van Gogh's life was made more meaningful by the recognition and appreciation his paintings received after his death, but implausible to think that the latter made his tormented life any more worthwhile, especially when worthwhileness is deemed to be exhausted by pleasure.

Given these and other arguments, my view is that Goetz advances a prima facie plausible account of what makes a life worth living,[9] but not so attractive a view of what makes it meaningful. My hope is that these considerations provide additional reason, beyond the intuitions and other arguments in the book, for denying that a meaningful life just is a pleasant one.

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[9] Albeit not one that I hold since I think there are objective goods that enhance worthwhileness – meaningfulness being one of them!

Even if Goetz is incorrect that a life is meaningful merely insofar as it is pleasurable, his objections to my alternative, fundamentality theory could still be correct. He maintains that it posits an overly intellectual and unattainable standard for most people. However, these characterizations are based on misinterpretations of the view, ones that I unfortunately did not do enough to forestall in the book (cf. Kershnar 2014, who voices similar concerns).

I maintain that the meaning in a life is in the first instance a function of the development and exercise of one's rational nature, where the latter includes attitudes such as emotions, insofar as these are responsive to judgment. Using one's intellectual, emotional and others forms of intelligence in sophisticated, robust ways (and without violating certain moral constraints), perhaps merely to play games, can confer *some* meaning on one's life.

However, *noteworthy* meaning comes from contouring one's intelligence towards a particular kind of object, namely, one fundamental to human existence in some way, and doing so in a successful manner. By a fundamental object I mean a fact or property that that is causally or explanatorily responsible for much else in a given domain. For example, in the book I spoke of reasoning and relating as conditions fundamental to the course of a typical human life; they account for much of its direction. I also addressed reproduction, labour, neurosis, communication, religion, love and natural selection as conditions fundamental to the course of a human society. The standard conceptual categories used in biology, psychology and sociology pick out properties that are responsible for much of how a given society functions or how the human species has developed. In addition, I characterized knowing about space-time, gravity and causation as about conditions fundamental to the human environment. And in more recent work (Metz 2014: 104-106), I have contended that coming to know and support the character of a particular human person, i.e., what makes her tick, as opposed to her more surface properties such as her appearance, would be a particularly meaningful enterprise.

In sum, substantial meaning consists of orienting one's rational nature in a complex, willful and positive way towards such kinds of fundamentality, and by making some kind of advance with regard to the latter, sometimes by discovering fundamental facts, other times by protecting them, and still other times by expressing respect for them. For example, when it comes to the good, Mandela and Mother Teresa

had superlative meaning in their lives because they greatly supported people's abilities to reason and to relate, properties that are responsible for much of a characteristic life. With respect to the true, Darwin and Einstein discovered facts that account for much about human nature and humanity's environment (respectively), where that important knowledge conferred importance on their lives. And regarding the beautiful, Picasso's *Guernica* and Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* were significant, making their lives such, because they creatively addressed themes such as war and morality that determine much of our social interaction.

In the book I focused on exemplars of meaning in life, and so discussed greats such as Mandela, Einstein, etc. I can see why, in light of such recurrent illustrations, Goetz would worry about 'unattainability', about expecting too much of people for them to count as having lived meaningfully. However, my strategy was to start with the clearest instances of meaningfulness and then to 'work my way down' to more everyday lives. I mentioned the latter at times in the book (e.g., 2013a: 216, 226, 228, 230), but it was admittedly not the dominant motif. Let me do a bit to clarify now.

Although meaning of the sort that really stands out involves (1) sophisticated and robust rationality that is (2) contoured towards fundamental facts about human beings and (3) successfully makes some kind of large advance in that respect, more everyday kinds of meaning need not involve all three, or, in fact, any of the three. Sophistication and robustness are matters of degree, and so somewhat less complex and willful exercises of reason could confer some meaning, simply in themselves, apart from the importance of the object towards which they could be directed; *vide* the example above of playing games. More meaning would come if a person's intelligence were positively directed towards the right sort of object, a fundamental one, but instead of contouring it towards what is fundamental to humanity in some way, as per Darwin, one might do so towards what is fundamental to a particular person, say, the character of one's spouse. And then some meaning can come from merely trying to help, learn or create, even if one fails to do so in ways that reach their target, let alone in ways that make major advances with regard to them.

Another concern that Goetz has about the fundamentality theory is 'intellectualism', as he thinks that for me, 'what meaning in life essentially comes down to is orienting one's reason toward understanding the *explanations* of things in the realms of the true, the good, and the

beautiful' (2016: 44). This, however, is not my view. One way, but not the only way, of acquiring meaning in life is by discovering or understanding fundamental facts, ones that explain much else about a human domain. Another way of doing so is by supporting them, e.g., when one enables people to reason and to relate, or when one cares for the fundamental dispositions of one's beloved. Yet another way of doing so is by creating a work of art that is about some dimension of humanity that is responsible for much else about the course of our lives, e.g., love, beauty, neurosis, loneliness, loss. Furthermore, as I have said above, it is only substantial meaning, not meaning as such, that I maintain requires engagement with fundamentality.

Goldschmidt is also unclear about the implications of the fundamentality theory, and wonders about their plausibility to the extent he can tease them out. He questions what this view entails for the meaningfulness of engaging in rituals, on the one hand, and for the meaningfulness of our lives on the supposition that there would be no future generations, on the other (2016: 22-24).

The first case, regarding rituals, is meant to be one in which there is not engagement with either the good, the true or the beautiful, but in which there is intuitively meaning.[10] More specifically, Goldschmidt imagines that neither God nor morality actually exists, and then considers whether religious rituals might still be meaning-conferring.

Goldschmidt helpfully offers one potential reply on my behalf, but I mention some others. For me, much depends on the nature of the ritual. If the ritual involves communion with other persons, there could well be a dimension of the good, i.e., participation and beneficence, that is meaningful, even if it were not imbued with moral value.

Another thought is that a ritual could be instrumentally valuable, meaningful as a means (as it were), even if it lacked meaning in itself. If engaging in the ritual helped one to step out of one's routine, to reconsider the path of one's life, and then to exercise one's reason in beneficent, reflective and creative ways in the future, that might adequately capture its intuitive worth.

Goldschmidt's second counterexample has the inverse structure of the first; it is one in which there is engagement with the good, the true and the beautiful, but in which there is intuitively little or no

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[10] Kershnar (2014: 99-100) presents a similar sort of case, although, in hindsight, I see that I neglected to reply to the respect in which ritual was a part of it (in Metz 2014).

meaning, since the human race is soon to die out. Drawing on Samuel Scheffler's influential conjectures (2013), Goldschmidt wonders whether a person, Sue, having oriented her rationality towards fundamentality, would have real meaning in her life if she were of the last generation of human beings; perhaps having some kind of influence on future human beings is necessary for meaning, or at least what one would describe as a 'meaningful life on balance', for Sue.

Once again, Goldschmidt resourcefully considers how I might plausibly reply to the concern, suggesting that 'the lasting good of Sue's deeds and the beauty of her paintings will be significantly reduced with the coming apocalypse' (2016: 23-24). That is indeed the sort of point I would make, and at times in the book I noted that meaning is in many cases available posthumously, in virtue of the 'ripples' one's life might have upon washing over others (2013a: 23, 50, 54, 130-131, 247-249). Although I am not a consequentialist, and so deny it is merely the long-term results of one's actions that constitute meaningfulness, I accept that they can enhance it (e.g., 2013a: 198, 221).

However, I would qualify this approach in some ways. For one, I do not believe that future generations are *necessary* for one's life to have meaning, perhaps even substantial meaning, in it. For example, much meaning could come from working to comfort others aware of the impending doom of the human race.

For another, insofar as I believe that future generations can affect the meaning of our lives, it is in fact usually not in virtue of one's influencing them causally. As I argue elsewhere, what best explains most of the sense we have that meaning would be lost were the human race to die out soon is not so much that we would no longer be able to do future generations any good, but rather, roughly, that we identify with the good that they would have done (Metz forthcoming).

In closing, I note an implication of the fundamentality theory that I am heartened that Wielenberg has highlighted and appreciated, and that I did not emphasize enough in the book.[11] It is that one could view the fundamentality theory as common ground between a moderate kind of supernaturalist and the naturalist, and hence potentially as a way to resolve the debate between them. I maintain that substantial meaning in life comes from contouring one's rational nature towards conditions largely responsible for much else about human existence. It is an open,

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[11] But that I have noted since then in Metz (2015b: 121-122), from which I crib here.

metaphysical question what those conditions are. If God existed, then He would constitute fundamentality. As Wielenberg says, 'On theism, God is *the* fundamental condition of human life, so the fundamentality theory implies that if theism is true, then God is extremely relevant to whatever meaning human lives might have' (2016: 34). However, if instead atheism is true, then human lives could still be meaningful, in virtue of orienting their intelligence towards certain physical facts that causally or explanatorily account for much else about them. Although debate continues about what is fundamental to our lives, for all sides, perhaps upon reflection, fundamentality is what matters.

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# FOUR (OR SO) NEW FINE-TUNING ARGUMENTS

## LYDIA MCGREW

**Abstract.** Both proponents and opponents of the argument for the deliberate fine-tuning, by an intelligent agent, of the fundamental constants of the universe have accepted certain assumptions about how the argument will go. These include both treating the fine-tuning of the constants as constitutive of the nature of the universe itself and conditioning on the fact that the constants actually do fall into the life-permitting range, rather than on the narrowness of the range. It is also generally assumed that the fine-tuning argument should precede biological arguments for design from, e.g., the origin of life. I suggest four new arguments, two of which are different orderings of the same data. Each of these abandons one or more of the common assumptions about how the fine-tuning argument should go, and they provide new possibilities for answering or avoiding objections to the fine-tuning argument.

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the knottier criticisms of the fine-tuning argument (FTA) has been that of McGrew, McGrew, and Vestrup (2003, hereafter MMV) based on the possibility of infinite ranges for universal constant values. MMV argue that, if the range of the possible values that some constant of physics could take is infinite, and if there is no rational way to treat some of these values as more probable than others for purposes of the FTA, it is impossible for the proponent of the fine-tuning argument rationally to assign a low probability that that constant would fall within the life-permitting range given no design, because the relevant probability is strictly inscrutable. They base this conclusion on the fact that an equiprobability distribution across an infinite number of possibilities would violate the probabilistic requirement of countable additivity. In short, their argument is that infinity should not be treated in probabilistic terms as akin to 'very, very large'. On this argument, the likelihood

comparison between the probability of a life-permitting universe given design and its probability on no design is simply impossible to make, and the FTA fails.

The four new fine-tuning (or fine-tuning-type) arguments given here may have remaining problems, but three of them appear to be in the clear as far as the specific MMV objection, and the fourth (here, argument #2), though it bears the greatest similarity to the original, classic, FTA, is sufficiently different that there is at least some reason to hope that it escapes the MMV objection. The conditional ordering suggested for argument #2 has an additional attraction – the fact that it appears to render moot the long-running discussion of observer selection effects.

Not all of these arguments are independent of each other. In particular, arguments #3 and #4 are actually two different ways of incorporating the same evidence – namely, evidence typically used in the biological design argument. In one of these, we incorporate that evidence before considering the specific evidence of the FTA, and in the other we incorporate it afterwards.[1]

Proponents of fine-tuning should be interested in the possibility of having more strings to their bow. And opponents and proponents alike should be interested in the probabilistic results of greater argumentative flexibility when we abandon some long-held assumptions about the way fine-tuning arguments work.

## II. ARGUMENT #1: COSMOLOGICAL CONSTANT FINE-TUNING AS AN IN-WORLD EVENT

Robin Collins (2009) discusses the fine-tuning of the cosmological constant at some length. Collins specifically describes the various contributions to the vacuum energy which, he says, are 'far in excess of the maximum life-permitting amount' (Collins 2009: 215). Here is how Collins describes the contribution of the Higgs field:

> The first contribution we shall consider arises from the Higgs field postulated as part of the widely accepted Weinberg-Salem-Glashow electroweak theory. According to this theory, the electromagnetic force and the weak force acted as one force prior to symmetry breaking of the Higgs field in the very early universe when temperatures were still

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[1] A reasoner who rejects argument #2 as vitiated by the MMV objection will likely consider the distinction between arguments #3 and #4 to be trivial.

extremely high. Before symmetry breaking, the vacuum energy of the Higgs field had its maximum value $V_0$. This value was approximately $10^{53}$ [times the maximum vacuum energy density compatible with the existence of life]. After symmetry breaking, the Higgs field fell into some local minimum of its possible energy density, a minimum which theoretically could be anywhere from zero to $10^{53}$ [times the maximum vacuum energy density compatible with the existence of life] [...] (Collins 2009: 216).

Collins has something similar to say about the contribution of the inflaton field postulated by inflationary cosmology.

Inflationary universe models hypothesize that the inflaton field had an enormously high energy density in the first $10^{-35}$ to $10^{-37}$ seconds of our universe, resulting in an effective cosmological constant that caused space to expand [...]. By around $10^{-35}$ seconds or so, however, the value of the inflaton field fell to a relatively small value corresponding to a *local minimum* of its energy. Now, in order to start inflation, the initial energy density of the inflaton field, $D_i$, must have been enormously larger than [the maximum vacuum energy density compatible with the existence of life] [...]. The fact that the effective cosmological constant after inflation is less than [the maximum vacuum energy density compatible with the existence of life] requires an enormous degree of fine-tuning, for the same reason as the Higgs field mentioned [...] (Collins 2009: 217).

What is immediately noticeable about both of these accounts of the fine-tuning of contributions to the vacuum energy is that the descriptions give the distinct impression that these fine-tunings are in-universe events. From a layman's perspective, the picture here shows the contributions of both the Higgs field and the inflaton field as having exceedingly high values in the almost unimaginably early universe and then, for no apparent reason, falling suddenly to within an exceedingly narrow range as compared to those initial values – the range necessary for the universe to be life-permitting.

The entire MMV objection turns on the very different concept of fine-tuning as taking place pre-universally and across an infinite number of possible values of some constant, which values must be regarded as equiprobable if we assign probabilities to them at all, where the value selected will be partially constitutive, from the outset, of the universe that comes into existence. In-world events are an entirely different matter. While it may be difficult to come up with a principled probability,

conditional on there being no design involved, for some in-world event, it does not at least *prima facie* have to involve anything like laying down a flat probability distribution over an infinite number of possibilities. In this case, the initial value that the fields actually did have provides at least some grip on the nature of the actual universe against the background of which the sudden fall to a local minimum took place and the probability of particular values. It is that fall in value that requires explanation, just as some other in-universe event – say, a car's sudden drop in speed and its stopping just a few inches away from a child in the road – which requires an explanation.

Although Collins devotes much space (pp. 240-251) to arguing for finite comparison ranges as one approach to answering the MMV objection, he never takes the in-universe event approach to any of his fine-tuning examples. He prefers to argue for an 'epistemically illuminated range' – the range about which scientists can make predictions given their current theories about our universe – as a relevant finite comparison range in order to avoid the problem of infinite ranges. But someone who accepts the MMV objection would understandably reply that the mere fact that our theories do not tell us what would happen if the values of certain numbers fell outside of this 'illuminated range' does not mean that possible values outside of that range do not exist and hence can be conveniently ignored.[2] Indeed, Collins himself admits that outside of the epistemically illuminated range there might be more ways for a universe to be life-permitting (pp. 246, 248). In all of this, however, fine-tuning is being treated as constitutive of a universe rather than as an in-universe event with the other properties of the actual universe as a background. It seems plausible that Collins does not treat the fine-tuning of the cosmological constant as an in-universe event because he wants to discuss the fine-tuning of another contribution to the vacuum energy, the contribution of the zero-point energies of the fields associated with forces and elementary particles (p. 217). For this aspect of the fine-tuning of the constant, Collins has to find a comparison range in the Plank energy scale, which is, in fact, something very much like the epistemically illuminated region – the point at which quantum field theory breaks down and is no longer applicable. Since that fine-tuning of the cosmological constant apparently cannot be treated as an in-universe event, Collins presumably prefers not to emphasize the possibility of treating other aspects of the

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[2] MMV (2003: 206) do make this reply in response to John Leslie.

cosmological constant's fine-tuning as in-universe events.

For those who do not find the illuminated region response to MMV convincing but who remain interested in seeing what can be done with some variety of fine-tuning argument, this motive will not be compelling. If there are some aspects of the cosmological constant fine-tuning that appear to be immune from the MMV objection in the first place, these are worth special attention.

## III. ARGUMENT #2: CONDITIONING ON THE NARROWNESS OF THE LIFE-PERMITTING RANGE

The MMV objection presupposes that what is conditioned on in the FTA is the fact that the values of various constants do fall within the range required for the universe to be life-permitting. This is the classic form of the argument.

Temporally, of course, actual human subjects know from the time they are able to reflect on the matter that, *whatever* the necessary conditions are for life to exist in the universe, those conditions are satisfied. People know that life exists long before they learn (if they ever do learn) that there are such things as 'universal constants of physics' or that there is such a thing as the 'apparent fine-tuning' of such constants. Yet it seems that when a person is presented with the fine-tuning argument he has learned something new. The usual structure of the fine-tuning argument therefore corresponds to a hypothetical deletion of the proposition, 'The constants of the universe fall into the life-permitting range' from one's body of knowledge. *Ipso facto*, this is a deletion of the fact that life exists. (See Monton 2006: 415-17.)

Suppose that, instead, we structured the argument like this: Have as background evidence the fact that life exists and that, therefore, the necessary conditions for life to exist and for the universe to be life-permitting (whatever those are) are satisfied. Then condition on what we *actually learn* when first presented with the fine-tuning argument – namely, that specific universal constants must fall within a narrow range, i.e., that their falling within this narrow range is a necessary condition for the universe to be life-permitting. Call this new evidence N, or, more precisely, $N_1$-$N_n$ for some n pieces of alleged fine-tuning evidence.[3]

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[3] This argument is similar to the 'infrared bull's-eye' argument advanced by John Roberts (2012). One difference is that it is unclear that Roberts is putting as much

What advantage might this ordering have over the classic ordering as far as avoiding the MMV objection? One possible advantage is this: In the classic ordering, the proponent of the FTA puts N into background evidence and then considers instead L – namely, that the universe is indeed life-permitting, which, since we have N in background, entails that the constants fall into the narrow life-permitting range. The proponent of the classic FTA needs to show that P(L|D) > P(L|~D) – that is, that the probability that the constants (or whatever specific constant is in question) fall within the life-permitting range is greater given that an intelligent agent selected the constants than given that no intelligent agent did so. The MMV objection centres on the right-hand probability – P(L|~D) – alleging that it is inscrutable because of the problem of infinite possible ranges and equiprobability.

If instead we take L to be in the background and condition on N, we are arguing that it is more probable that we would find the life-permitting range to be narrow given both L and Design than given L and no Design. We are arguing that P(N|D & L) > P(N|~D & L). But in arguing for this probabilistic inequality we need not obtain either probability by comparing the life-permitting range to an infinite range of possible constant values. Rather, we are saying that we would expect more strongly to find, given L and ~D, that the life-permitting range was 'not narrow', where 'not narrow' could include any much larger but finite life-permitting range.

One can argue for this inequality in something like the following way: If some powerful designer set up the necessary conditions for the existence of life, including whatever universal constant values were required for that purpose, and life exists, then it is not particularly surprising that some universal constants have a narrow life-permitting range. The powerful designer would be quite capable of seeing to it that they fell within such a life-permitting range despite its narrowness. If, however, the universe somehow came into existence through a non-intelligent process, and life exists, we should expect more strongly to find that it is easy for the universe to be life-permitting, that things did not have to be 'just so' in order for life in the universe to be possible. Hence, we would on this hypothesis more strongly expect that the range

emphasis on the narrowness of the required range or 'target', as it is in his version. My argument #2 was conceived independently of his and this paper drafted before his became available.

of life-permitting values for these constants would be very large – i.e., not narrow.

This new casting of the FTA, despite its reversal of background and evidence, is not very unlike the original FTA, and for that reason a proponent of the MMV criticism could raise the most objections to it. First, there is the definition of 'narrow'. Collins, for example, sometimes uses definitions of 'narrow' that are tightly tied to his notion of the 'illuminated region' that he proposes as a finite comparison range for probabilistic purposes (Collins 2009: 244). If, as I am assuming here, the proponent of the MMV objection is unconvinced by Collins's argument for using the finite 'illuminated region' to generate a manageable probability in the classic FTA, it is difficult to see why the proponent would allow the same finite ranges to generate a concept of 'narrow' for this version.

The re-casting of the FTA, if it is to avoid the MMV objection, will have to rely not on Collins's illuminated finite ranges to supply a comparison in order to define 'narrow' but rather on examples for which a qualitative and intuitive notion of 'narrowness' appears to be sufficient. For example, consider the example of the relative fine-tuning of the force strengths of gravity and the electromagnetic force. The electromagnetic force is roughly $10^{39}$ times stronger than gravity. According to Dean Overman (1997: 134-5), if the relation (which it seems best to understand as a ratio) between these two forces were changed by one part in $10^{40}$, all stars would be either red dwarfs or blue giants, and life as we know it (dependent on a star like our sun) would not be possible.

Another example would be this one, from Collins:

> One of these is the fine-tuning of gravity relative to the density of mass-energy in the early universe and other factors determining the expansion rate of the Big Bang – such as the value of the Hubble constant and the value of the cosmological constant. Holding these other parameters constant, if the strength of gravity were smaller or larger by an estimated one part in $10^{60}$ of its current value, the universe would have either exploded too quickly for galaxies and stars to form, or collapsed back on itself too quickly for life to evolve. (Collins 2009: 215)

In a footnote (p. 215, n. 10) Collins notes that this same point can be expressed by saying that 'the density of matter at the Plank time [...] must have been tuned to one part in $10^{60}$ of the so-called critical density'. These seem to be examples in which we can simply say in a qualitative sense

that the life-permitting range of the constants in question, or of their ratios, is narrow.

Moreover, MMV do not appear to question the proposition that the life-permitting range of the constants is narrow. In fact, they appear willing to grant it:

> [L]et us grant that there is a plausible convention we may adopt as to the line of demarcation between life-friendly and life-unfriendly universes, and that this convention will give us a range, perhaps even a narrow one, within which each variable will have to fall in order for the universe to be life-friendly. (2003: 201)

More interesting still, the MMV rejection of the 'coarse-tuning argument' (CTA) implies that they grant at least a meaning to the concept of a narrow life-permitting range. The CTA, originally developed by MMV as an attempted *reductio* for a certain construal of probability in the FTA, involves comparing the ratio of the life-permitting range to an infinite range. Since any finite range has measure zero on an infinite range, the mere finiteness, not the narrowness, of the life-permitting range carries the entire strength of the argument. An acceptance of this argument has what MMV call the 'unhappy consequence' that a requirement for the constants to fall within *any* finite range, even one within a 'few billion orders of magnitude of our values' (in other words, a non-narrow finite range) would have equal force as an argument for design to the force of the FTA. (2003: 204)

In a later symposium McGrew and McGrew reject the CTA as obviously forceless (more so even than the FTA) precisely because it abandons the importance of a narrow range.

> [T]he role of physics in the CTA is drastically attenuated; physical considerations do no more than indicate that the life-friendly [probabilistic] region [...] is finite. But *all* of the excitement about the FTA has centered on the alleged narrowness of the life-friendly regions, and even Collins's own comparison classes are derived by painstaking attention to physical considerations. We doubt that anyone would have considered the CTA to be even a possible argument for design were it not for the objections that have been raised against the FTA. (McGrew and McGrew 2005: 433)

Despite the term 'alleged' before 'narrowness', it seems fair to say that this argument for rejecting the CTA would lose much of its force if the

concept of a narrow life-permitting region as used in the FTA were literally meaningless.

Another, and more telling, objection that a proponent of the MMV position might raise concerns the argument for the likelihood inequality where N is the evidence.[4] Consider the brief version of that argument above. What does it mean to say that we would expect it to be easy, or easier (as opposed, presumably, to difficult) for the universe to be life-permitting given no design? And how can we defend that statement? One is tempted to give a simple probabilistic modelling, and therein lies the difficulty. If one attempts to model the notion of 'easiness' or 'difficulty' of the production of a life-permitting universe by non-design, an obvious way to do so is by means of a stochastic process, such as the random selection of balls from an urn. If we get a black ball from an urn and are asked to guess whether the urn contains, say, one black ball out of a million or 500,000 black balls out of a million, the fact that we got a black ball supports the latter hypothesis over the former. This model, though, will not do if one takes the MMV objection seriously in the first place. For in such an ordinary model, the total number of balls over which the stochastic process ranges is finite, though it could be very large, and though our number of draws may be in principle infinite. When we think of the makeup of the population, however, we are thinking of the ratio of balls with the property of interest (being black) to the total number of balls. If the total number of balls were infinite and we were asked to imagine the chance process as 'ranging randomly' over such an infinite space, such a ratio would not, according to the MMV objection, yield a meaningful probability.

In other words, one obvious casting of the *argument* for the likelihood inequality even in this version of the argument takes us back to saying that the probability of a life-permitting universe on ~D is low if the range is narrow and would be higher if the range were larger. Of course, the proponent of the MMV objection will not allow any such argument. If we could say that the probability of a life-permitting universe is low if the range is narrow, we could use the classic FTA in the first place!

It is difficult to say whether the proponent of the MMV objection will be able to be convinced, therefore, of a likelihood inequality for N favourable to D. The best approach to trying to convince him is not to use the above model but rather to say simply that, all else being equal,

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[4] I owe this ingenious and difficult objection to David Glass.

it would be easier, given ~D, for the universal constants to fall within the life-permitting range if the range were large than if the range were narrow; hence, we should expect, given that the universe is life-permitting and given no design, to find that the range is not narrow. The *ceteris paribus* condition specifies that, if we compare a situation in which some non-design process is generating the universe (whatever that would look like) and the life-permitting range is narrow to a situation in which the same process is generating the universe and the range is large, this does not involve any change in the total possible universes from which the process is choosing. It does not specify that this total possible range is either finite or infinite and does not, *per se*, require directly using the concept of low probability derived from comparing the life-permitting range to the total range of possibilities.

It is possible that the proponent of the MMV objection will still reject this version of the argument.[5] If so, there remain (for answering that critic) the other versions discussed in this article. But there is one more point to be made before leaving argument #2: Much philosophical argument has gone on about a different objection to the FTA – the objection based on an observer selection effect. Here is John Leslie's characterization:

> Any intelligent living beings that there are can find themselves only where intelligent life is possible. (Leslie 1996: 128)

Or, as Leslie quotes B. Carter,

> [W]hat we can expect to observe must be restricted by the conditions necessary for our presence as observers. (Leslie 1996: 128)

The idea, then, is that we should not be terribly surprised to observe that our universe is life-permitting, as a life-permitting universe is the only sort of universe we could observe anyway. Perhaps, for all we know, there have been many 'failed' (i.e., not life-permitting) universes generated (which we could not have observed), and ours just happened to be the one out of the many that was life-permitting.

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[5] It seems more plausible that he would do so because MMV in their original article reject, given that the possible range is infinite, any attempt to take the ratio of the narrow range to the total possible range as indicative of probabilistic force. (MMV 2003: 204) The salient question is whether some notion of the ratio of the life-permitting range to the total range of possibilities is being smuggled in here under the heading of its being 'easier' or 'harder' for a non-design process to generate a life-permitting universe depending on the size of the life-permitting region.

There are many things that can be (and have been) said in answer to this 'anthropic principle' and its concomitant invocation of an ensemble of 'failed' universes. (See McGrew, L. 2005.) One point that has not perhaps been sufficiently considered, and that relates indirectly to something discussed below (there, a Cartesian *objection* to the FTA), is that if one is a Cartesian dualist the entire anthropic objection may be moot; a life-permitting universe is not, on that view, a necessary condition for 'our' presence as observers, especially when 'we' is construed, as it must be in the observer selection effect objection, to refer to whoever is in fact observing the world. Disembodied beings could be observers of non-life-permitting universes, so perhaps we should be surprised at not observing a non-life-permitting universe after all.

The new FTA discussed in this section makes the observer selection effect objection to the FTA irrelevant in yet a different way. Even if one were to grant for the sake of the argument that we could not observe anything if life were impossible in our universe, it would not be impossible for us to observe ~N. If we put L into our background and concede that, indeed, we are here to observe whatever we do observe, it remains surprising that the life-permitting range is narrow. Why did it not turn out that the life-permitting range was large, that there is nothing special about it, that things did not have to be 'just so' for our universe to permit life? There is simply no observer selection effect in *that* observation at all. It seems that we could quite easily have observed ~N. (This point was independently made by Roberts 2012.)

If one looks into the argument for the likelihood inequality – P(N|D & L) > P(N|~D & L) – there still seems no place for the observer selection effect to get purchase. The argument for the likelihood inequality says that given ~D (and a life-permitting universe) we should be somewhat surprised to find that N, since it would have been easier for a non-design process to generate a life-permitting universe given ~N. An acknowledgement of this point is implicit in the very multiplication of universes which, together with an observer selection effect, is presented on the non-design side as an 'explanation' in response to the classic FTA. If we had observed ~N in the first place, no such explanation as a series of multiple, botched universes, resulting eventually by sheer multiplication of chance resources in one life-permitting universe, would have been postulated. It is precisely the apparent difficulty of producing a life-permitting universe in a single 'run' of a non-design process that gives rise to the multiverse-plus-selection-effect theory.

A person unmoved by the MMV objection may find this new version of the FTA attractive because it avoids the observer selection effect issue.[6] It is the narrowness of the range that we are conditioning on, and we could easily have observed otherwise.

The idea of conditioning on N rather than on L can be applied to argument #1 as well, and hence is available, for purposes of not having to worry about the observer selection effect response, to someone who rejects argument #2 but is open to argument #1.


## IV. ARGUMENT #3: THE BIOLOGICAL DESIGN ARGUMENT FIRST

Suppose that you think that an argument for the design of some biological entities within this universe – for example, the argument from the origin of life – has significant force. It would be easy to assume that the fine-tuning argument must be made first and the biological design argument later. It would also be easy to assume that the biological design argument (BDA) has no particular relevance for the specific conclusion of the FTA – that a powerful intelligent entity selected the values of some or all of the fundamental constants of the universe.

Both assumptions are mistaken. The structure of argument #2 helps us to see why the first assumption is mistaken. If we do the FTA by conditioning not on the fact that the universe is life-permitting but rather on the narrowness of the life-permitting range, we are not required to 'subtract out' all arguments that entail (either by their evidence or by their conclusions) that the universe is life-permitting. Therefore, we are not absolutely required to do the FTA before the BDA.

Bradley Monton (2006: 418-19) uses the apparent need to do a radical deletion of the fact that the universe is life-permitting to argue that some subjects might reasonably have a very low prior probability for theism when going into the FTA. For example, Monton points out that any argument from miracles takes as background information the fact that life exists. Any argument from the appearance of design of specific biological entities (Monton instances Paley's argument about the eye)

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[6] A person who thinks this version does avoid the MMV objection has the avoidance of the observer selection effect issue as an additional reason for preferring the approach of conditioning on N rather than on L. Moreover, as we shall see in the next section, there are independent reasons why one might wish to consider the biological design argument before doing the FTA, and in that case one would have in background the fact that the universe is life-permitting before doing any version of the FTA.

assumes that the universe is life-permitting. So, Monton argues, to the extent that the FTA is intended to be an argument for even a generic form of theism, the only arguments that can be made prior to it and can help to set a 'decent' or 'not very low' prior probability for theism before the FTA will be metaphysical arguments such as the cosmological argument or the ontological argument.[7]

The possibility of setting L as background gives us more options for ordering, but it's unclear that Monton's point is a sufficient reason for wanting to reverse the order and do a biological design argument first. After all, some proponents of the cosmological and ontological arguments would say that those arguments give a *very* high probability to theism, perhaps even probability 1, so this point of Monton's will not faze them.

But even aside from a theistic interpretation of the fine-tuning argument and the prior probability of theism, a successful BDA, or a BDA with some significant force, gives us reason to believe that a very powerful, intelligent entity or entities exist with an interest in bringing about biological life on earth. If that is true, then it becomes less improbable that this being, or a being of this type, would bring about the *necessary conditions* for life on earth. If the subject has the concept of fundamental constants that can take varying values, he can form the belief that a designer might have been around and motivated to do any fine-tuning of those values that happened to be necessary to make the universe life-permitting. In other words, the conclusion of the BDA – e.g., that a powerful intelligent being was responsible for the origin of life on earth – raises the prior probability of the conclusion of the FTA – that an intelligent being selected the values of the fundamental universal constants.[8]

We can see this point fairly readily in reverse: If a powerful being did take the trouble to select the fundamental constant values to make the universe life-permitting, this gives us some reason to believe that a being exists who is both capable of making life on earth and desires to bring

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[7] Monton also says that the force of the argument from consciousness would have to be deleted. I disagree, since one's access to the existence of one's own consciousness is direct and does not depend on empirical premises about the existence of biological life.

[8] It need not even, strictly speaking, be the same being, though the positive relevance is stronger on the assumption of *some* connection (even a connection of planning or anticipation on the part of the being designing the fundamental constants) between the beings.

about life on earth. To give a simple example, suppose that you were to find in the lounge of a college dormitory a fish tank containing water. This would give you some reason to think that the person or persons who took the trouble to provide these necessary conditions for keeping live fish in the lounge would eventually provide the fish (since fish do not arise spontaneously in fish tanks). This makes it fairly evident that, if the conclusion of the FTA is true, and if it turns out that living cells on the early earth, like fish in an aquarium, are highly unlikely to appear on their own by purely natural processes, we have some reason from the conclusion of the FTA alone to think that a powerful intelligent agent deliberately brought about life on earth. I will return to this point in the next section.

Positive relevance is symmetrical. If the conclusion of the FTA is positively relevant to the conclusion of the BDA, then the opposite relevance relation also holds: The conclusion of the BDA is positively relevant to the conclusion of the FTA. An intelligently provided fish tank gives us reason to expect fish. Intelligently provided fish give us reason to think that someone deliberately provided the (absolutely necessary) fish tank as well.

This point regarding the positive relevance between the conclusion of the BDA and the conclusion of the FTA is relevant to what we might call a Cartesian objection to the FTA. Suppose that consciousness is possible in non-biological entities. Suppose that there could be conscious black holes or conscious red dwarf stars. In that case, even if there exists a powerful designer (say, God), and even if this designer wanted to design the universe to be a certain way, do we have sufficient reason to believe that he would make the universe life-permitting?[9] If the only reason for thinking that life might be special to a designer is the connection of complex life with consciousness and the idea that a designer would want to bring about other conscious, intelligent beings somewhat like himself, a Cartesian could argue that he would be just as likely to implant consciousness in black holes or other 'boring' forms of matter and would have no special interest whatsoever in complex life of the sort that requires universal fine-tuning as a necessary condition.

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[9] As noted above, if one takes seriously the possibility of conscious black holes and the like, one cannot then make use of the observer selection effect as a putative weakness of the FTA. So one cannot consistently press both a Cartesian objection to the FTA and an observer selection effect objection.

This objection can be answered in a number of ways. One important point is that the advocate of the FTA merely needs a likelihood inequality. He needs to show that the probability of L (or of N, depending on which direction he is doing the argument) is *greater* on D than on ~D, not that it is positively *high* on D. Still, it could be quite useful for the FTA proponent to have already in hand other evidence directly supporting the existence of at least one powerful designer who does want to have complex life in the universe and hence, presumably, wants a life-permitting universe.

## V. ARGUMENT #4: BIOLOGICAL DESIGN ARGUMENT SECOND

This argument represents another ordering one might use for taking into account the impact of the BDA on the conclusion of the FTA. As noted at the outset, it is therefore not independent of argument #3 but is rather a different use of the BDA argument in relation to the FTA. Some reasoners might find it conceptually preferable or cleaner to do the FTA (with whatever force it has) first and then to layer on top of that any further evidence for in-world design of biological entities.

In this argument ordering, then, one has already taken into account both L and N. We are envisaging a situation in which the reasoner already knows that the universe is life-permitting and indeed contains life (of some kind) and that the life-permitting range for the values of fundamental universal constants is narrow. The reasoner has not yet taken into account the details of, say, the organization of the cell and the challenge these pose for abiogenesis theories.[10] Let us suppose that, when he does so, this version or aspect of the BDA provides some support worth noting for the conclusion that life on earth was intelligently designed.

The point to be noted here, which we have already discussed to some extent while looking at argument #3, is that this conclusion gives further support of its own for the conclusion of the FTA – that the values of the fundamental constants of the universe themselves were selected by

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[10] There is a resemblance here between the BDA and conditioning on N rather than L for the FTA. When it comes to biology, people know *in some sense* that life exists long before they learn anything about the structure of DNA or anything else about detailed cellular structure and the fact that this microstructure had to be 'just so' in order for life to begin on earth. It is that new information that they actually condition on when they study the details of a BDA based on the origin of life.

a powerful intelligent agent. If an intelligent designer took the trouble to make intelligent life on earth, this gives us some reason to think that a powerful intelligent designer also would be motivated, if it were necessary, to design the universe itself to be a life-permitting 'habitat'. Conversely, if a designer took the trouble to provide a life-permitting universe, he or perhaps others like him were not indifferent to whether or not life actually came into existence in the universe and, if necessary, would and could provide further necessary conditions for the actual appearance of life on earth. The conclusion of the BDA is positively relevant to the conclusion of the FTA and *vice versa*, whichever order one considers them in.[11]

This point is relevant to complaints such as that of Elliott Sober (2007) to the effect that advocates of a design hypothesis in biology have absolutely no idea what motives or goals a designer might have and hence no purchase for making a probabilistic comparison between the probability of the biological evidence given design and given no design. As in the case of the hypothetical Cartesian objection to the FTA considered above, there are more answers than one to Sober's complaint. (See McGrew, L. 2004.) But as with argument #3, so here: Whichever order one chooses for conditioning on the evidence used in the BDA and the FTA, to the extent that either argument has any force on its own, it provides evidence concerning precisely the 'goals and interests' question Sober is raising about a powerful designer and the existence of complex life on earth.

Moreover, a reasoner who considers the probabilistic FTA to be forceless or nearly forceless, e.g., a reasoner convinced that the MMV

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[11] Throughout this discussion I am treating the FTA, concerning the fundamental laws and constants, and the BDA, concerning life itself or the details of some aspect of living creatures, to be separate arguments based on separate sets of evidence. Richard Swinburne (2004: 172, 189) is, unfortunately, rather unclear on this point. Although he acknowledges that the fundamental laws and constants mentioned in the FTA are necessary but not sufficient for the actual existence of life, he also says that they make the existence of life in the universe probable, which is, to put it mildly, a contentious claim and forms no part of the FTA. The FTA concerns merely *life-permitting* laws and constants, not (for purposes of the argument) *life-producing* laws and constants. Swinburne goes so far as to assert (p. 189) that, from the existence of human and animal bodies, there will be an argument to the existence of God that has any strength 'via fine-tuning' only if fine-tuning makes it significantly probable that such bodies will develop, which is an extremely puzzling statement, since no version of the FTA involves conditioning on the actual existence of human and animal bodies.

objection is insuperable for both the classic FTA and for the somewhat similar argument #2 above, can grant the positive relevance of the BDA to the FTA conclusion. If the evidence for the conclusion of the BDA is any good in itself (obviously, a separate and highly contentious question), it provides some evidence, since we are assuming that N is also already in one's background, for the conclusion of the FTA, that a powerful intelligent agent 'tuned' the fundamental constants and laws of the universe to be life-permitting, *independent of* the success of a classic, probabilistic FTA. Therefore, even a reasoner who does not draw the conclusion of the FTA from the FTA evidence *by itself* may draw this conclusion later after conditioning both on N and on the evidence used in the BDA.

## VI. A WORD ON EXPLANATION

The various new fine-tuning arguments examined here are possible in no small part because a piece of evidence can support an hypothesis even if the hypothesis does not explain the evidence. It is attractive to think of evidence-hypothesis connections as explanatory and to think of Bayesian inference as a probabilistic parsing out of inference to the best explanation. So it often is, but it need not always be so. Consider the example of an archer and a target. Suppose that we do not know the size of the target but are told that Susan has hit it. If we then discover the target to be very small, we have some reason to believe that Susan is a skilful archer. This inference – from the smallness of the target that has been hit to the skill of the archer – is not an explanatory inference. The archer's skill does not explain the smallness of the target. Rather, having already been told that the archer hit the target, we know that this will be easier for an unskilled archer if the target is very large than if it is very small. Hence, we expect the smallness of the target more strongly on the hypothesis that the archer was skilled, and the discovery that the target was small supports the hypothesis of a skilled archer. Somewhere buried in all of this we can find an explanatory move – namely, in the idea that the skill of the archer explains the fact that the archer hit the target even though the target is small. But if we discover that the archer hit the target first and that the target is small second, the probabilistic inference that the archer was skilled from the smallness of the target is not in itself an explanatory inference. This argument, of course, is very roughly analogous to argument #2, above.

I have emphasized repeatedly that the conclusions of the FTA and BDA are positively relevant to each other, but neither of them explains the other. The conclusion of the BDA is relevant to the conclusion of the FTA for more indirect reasons – roughly, because they both point either to a powerful designer or to a set of powerful designers who desired and/or intended to bring about the existence of life in the universe. It is the action of such a designer or designers that is asserted in both conclusions. Hence, arguments #3 and #4 are not explanatory in the usual sense, either.

Of all of the new fine-tuning arguments considered here, the only explanatory one is #1 – the argument from the fine-tuning of the cosmological constant, construed as an in-world event. There, the deliberate action of a powerful intelligent agent is being treated as the explanation for the fact that the relevant contributions to the vacuum energy suddenly fell to within the narrow, life-permitting range.

We increase our flexibility in making and understanding arguments if we do not tie ourselves too tightly to the explanatory model – a point that can be helpful not only to proponents of fine-tuning and other design arguments but also to those making and considering evidence in other scientific areas.

## VII. SOME SAMPLE ORDERINGS

In the course of this discussion we have already seen, in outline, some ways that various design and fine-tuning arguments could be ordered, but it may be helpful to note in more detail how they, and their component parts, could go. The possibility of separating L in its generic form from empirical details about what is required for the existence of life or for a life-permitting universe, which the subject will usually acquire much later, plays an important role in permitting a variety of possible design argument orderings.

Example 1: The subject, who never considered the MMV objection to have any serious force and is unfazed by the selection-effect-plus-multiple-universes objection, first runs a classic FTA. That is, he places N into background knowledge, subtracts L from his knowledge, and conditions on L. (L and N taken together entail that the universal constants do fall into the life permitting range.) Since he was not bothered by the MMV objection in the first place, he makes no special distinction between the cosmological constant fine-tuning as an in-world event and

any other fine-tuning. He then conditions on evidence for some version of the BDA and, having read this paper, recognizes that the BDA provides evidence not simply for its own conclusion regarding, say, the origin of life but also provides additional evidence for the deliberate fine-tuning of the universal constants.

Example 2: This subject is much like the subject in example 1, except that he has been concerned about the observer selection effect objection. (He doesn't consider the MMV objection to be a problem.) He therefore first puts L in a generic form into his background evidence – namely, that life does exist in the universe and hence that whatever the necessary conditions are for life (not specifying these but including a generically life-permitting universe), they are satisfied. He runs the FTA by conditioning on N (rather than L) in order not to have to worry about the observer selection effect and multiple universes. From there on he proceeds as does the reasoner in example 1.

Example 3: This subject has been bothered by the MMV objection. Though he doesn't necessarily consider the selection effect objection to be a problem, he is supremely bored by the vast literature on observer selection effects and multiple universes. He puts generic L into background. He then conditions on evidence for the BDA, which gives some support to the conclusion that life on earth was deliberately designed by an intelligent agent. He also recognizes that, if that is the case, that gives us some reason to think that a powerful intelligent agent would have designed the fundamental constants of the universe if necessary, so he has some reason to believe the conclusion of the FTA. It is also useful to realize, from the conclusion to the BDA, that there is less reason later to worry about the Cartesian objection (concerning non-living intelligences) to the FTA. He next conditions on $N_1$, concerning the narrowness of the life-permitting range for the cosmological constant and its apparently having fallen into that range in the very early universe. He construes its falling into the life-permitting range as an in-world event. He considers this to provide significant evidence for the conclusion of the FTA with regard to the cosmological constant. He then conditions on $N_{2-i}$, for other fundamental constants. All of these N's say that the conditions for a life-permitting universe had to be 'just so'. This subject considers that the N's strongly support the conclusion for the FTA – that is, that the probability of N given design is significantly greater than the probability of N given no design. This gives him additional, stronger support for the conclusion of the FTA.

Example 4: This subject is somewhat similar to the subject in example 3, except that, even after examining the argument given here, he continues to think that an MMV-type objection is fatal both to the classic FTA and to argument #2, above. He therefore casually places both L and $N_{2-i}$ into background evidence, though that does not raise, in his mind, the probability of the conclusion to the FTA. He then conditions on $N_1$ for the cosmological constant as did the subject in example 3. This subject agrees that the apparent fine-tuning of the cosmological constant does raise the probability of the conclusion to the FTA. He follows this by conditioning on the evidence for the BDA, which, since he considers it to have force in favour of its own conclusion – that life on earth is significantly explained by the action of an intelligent designer – also raises the probability of the conclusion to the FTA. He, like the subject in example 3, is quite pleased not to have to wade through any more articles on observer selection effects and multiple universes, not even in order to condition on the fine-tuning of the cosmological constant.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Suppose that you, the reader, do not think that either the FTA or the BDA has much force or is terribly interesting. Perhaps, especially when considering the BDA, you think that the evidence is exceedingly poor and that intelligent design theorists are charlatans attempting to fool an unwary and ignorant public. Perhaps you have some other objection to the FTA not addressed here.

Even so, the probabilistic considerations raised here have interest that transcends their direct application to these design arguments. Consider the issue of argumentative order. It is a natural assumption that we should layer our arguments causally, first presenting evidence concerning the origin of some necessary set of pre-conditions for some later development, then presenting evidence about how that later development actually happened. The new FTA arguments here show that it need not always be so and that sometimes we can gain epistemic enlightenment and get a probabilistic grip on a problem by reversing that order.

The issue of explanation has been discussed above in detail. It is useful to have Bayesian arguments for hypotheses that do not explain the evidence for them as a tool in our probabilistic toolkit.

Finally, the possibility of assuming a generic notion of L – that the universe is evidently life-permitting (e.g., because life exists) – and then conditioning on further information showing how *difficult* it is for life to exist or for the universe to be life-permitting allows a more sophisticated understanding of deletion and conditioning than has previously been evident in design arguments. This understanding is relevant even to non-design causal inferences in science. We may know quite well in general terms that some biological system exists, but there is no need to 'subtract out' this generic knowledge when comparing, say, two different evolutionary models for its coming into existence. They can be compared for their virtues as explanations of the details of the system, details that turn out to be necessary for its existence and operation but that need not be brought into the picture insofar as the system is conceived in generic terms.[12]

The probabilistic flexibility exemplified by these four (or so) new fine-tuning arguments is therefore to be recommended generally in science and in the philosophy of science.[13]

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[12] When considering the evidence for and against various scenarios, such as varying evolutionary scenarios, for the origin of the mammalian eye, scientists make use of data collected using, *inter alia*, their own eyes. If we did a truly radical deletion of a proposition like, 'The mammalian eye reliably conveys information about the environment', we would find it difficult to gain access to most of our evidence *about* the visual mechanism. After all, that evidence itself rests on the tacit assumption that the investigating scientists' eyes are working properly. But scientists sense instinctively that such a radical deletion is not required; it is the underlying *details* of the visual mechanism, not the existence of some working visual mechanism or other, that we are treating as an explanandum.

[13] My thanks to David Glass for lengthy and challenging correspondence on the topics in this article which forced me to qualify my conclusions concerning Argument #2.

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# A CRITIQUE OF AND ALTERNATIVE TO
# NANCEY MURPHY'S CHRISTIAN PHYSICALISM

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**Abstract.** For some time now, Nancey Murphy has been a major voice on behalf of a certain form of Christian physicalism. This is a part of her project of reconciling science with Christian faith. In what follows, I shall state and criticize the three central components of her Christian physicalism, followed by a presentation of a dualist alternative along with a clarification of its advantages over Murphy-style physicalism.

## I. THREE CENTRAL COMPONENTS OF
## MURPHY'S CHRISTIAN PHYSICALISM

*Murphy's neutralization of biblical teaching*: Given that almost everyone for two thousand years has interpreted the Bible as implying some sort of dualism, Murphy must find a way to diffuse this fact and argue that the Bible either teaches physicalism or has no particular view of the ontology of human persons. She opts for the latter and proffers the following sort of argument (Murphy 2006: 1-37; cf. Murphy 1998). First, the fact that Christians have interpreted scripture dualistically is due to various cultural factors in church history, especially the influence of Greek philosophy on biblical interpretation.

Second, she claims that for two reasons, we should conclude that the New Testament authors were not intending to teach anything about humans' metaphysical composition. For one thing, a survey of twentieth century theology, especially liberal theology, shows a gradual displacement of a dualist account of the person, along with the correlated notion of the immortality of the soul, and when this theology

is compared to the dualist theological anthropology of conservative Protestant and Catholic teaching during this time period, we see that no clear consensus has been achieved. For another thing, dualist (e.g. Cooper 2000; 2007; 2009a; 2009b) and physicalist (e.g. Green 1998; 2008) exegetes of the New Testament have to rest their cases on detailed word studies of terms such as 'Paradise' in Second Temple Judaism and, queries Murphy, 'do Christians really need to work through a long list of non-Canonical books in order to determine what the Bible teaches on this issue?' (Murphy 2006: 21) The fact that no consensus can be reached about New Testament teaching, and the fact that its teaching is so unclear that fastidious study must be undertaken of Intertestamental literature to try to resolve the anthropological dispute are best explained by the claim that the New Testament authors simply weren't intending to teach any particular view of the matter. Thus, Christians are free to develop physicalist anthropologies if other facts warrant such an approach.

In reply, regarding Greek influence on early biblical exegesis, property and substance dualism are the commonsense views held by the overwhelming number of humankind now and throughout history. As Charles Taliaferro points out, this is widely acknowledged by physicalists, including Michael Levin, Daniel Dennett, David Lewis, Thomas Nagel, J. J. C. Smart, Richard Rorty, Donald Davidson, and Colin McGinn. (Taliaferro 2001: 60) Throughout history, most people have been substance and property dualists, even in cultures with little or no Greek influence. Thus, regarding the mind/body problem, Jaegwon Kim's concession seems right: 'We commonly think that we, as persons, have a mental and bodily dimension [...]. Something like this dualism of personhood, I believe, is common lore shared across most cultures and religious traditions.' (Kim 2001: 30) And regarding issues in personal identity, Frank Jackson acknowledges: 'I take it that our folk conception of personal identity is Cartesian in character – in particular, we regard the question of whether I will be tortured tomorrow as separable from the question of whether someone with *any* amount of continuity – psychological, bodily, neurophysiological, and so on and so forth – with me today will be tortured.' (Jackson 1998: 45)

People don't have to be taught to be dualists like they must if they are to be physicalists. Indeed, little children are naturally dualists. Summing up the recent research in developmental psychology, Henry Wellman states that 'young children are dualists: knowledgeable of mental states

and entities as ontologically different from physical objects and real [non-imaginary] events.' (Wellman 1990: 50)

In light of these facts, Murphy misconstrues the early situation among the Church Fathers. Regarding Trinitarian and incarnational themes in scripture, the Fathers turned to Greek philosophy to provide tools to flesh out what they already saw in scripture independently of and prior to their employment of Greek philosophy. The same is true with respect to dualism. Based on common sense and the clear meaning of scripture, the Fathers pressed Greek philosophy into service to flesh out what they already knew to be the case independently of and prior to appealing to the Greeks.

Further, Murphy's claim that there is no clear consensus about theological anthropology is seriously misleading. For nineteen and a half centuries, everyone interpreted the Christian faith to entail dualism. The only ambiguity has largely been in comparison to theological liberalism in the last half-century or so as Murphy herself admits. Conservative scholars have largely continued to support dualist exegesis. This is not meant to be a pejorative point about theological liberalism. Rather, the point here is that theological liberals have a lower view of biblical authority compared to conservatives, and, accordingly, are more likely to engage in revisionist eisogesis of scripture in support of physicalism.

Second, where there is ambiguity that does not result from revisionist eisogesis, it is due to confusions about dualism on the part of biblical and theological scholars. As a paradigm case of such confusion, consider the writings of N. T. Wright. He is on record as claiming that human persons are (or have) souls that are spiritual realities that ground personal identity in a disembodied intermediate state between death and final resurrection. According to Wright, this was clearly the Pharisees' view in Intertestamental Judaism, and Jesus (Matthew 22:23-33; cf. Matthew 10:28) and Paul (Acts 23 6-10; cf. II Corinthians 12:1-4) side with the Pharisees on this issue over against the Sadducees. (Wright 2003: 131-34, 190-206, 366-67, 424-26; cf. Cooper 2000; 2007; 2009a; 2009b). However, in a paper delivered in March 2011 at the Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, Wright explicitly disavowed dualism. (Wright 2011) Yet, in the same paper, he affirms a dualist reading of II Corinthians 5:1-10, Acts 23:6-9 and II Corinthians 12:2-4 in keeping with his thesis that the Jews of Jesus' day, and the New Testament, affirm life after life after death: death, followed by a disembodied intermediate state followed by the general resurrection.

Wright's confusion becomes evident when we distinguish dualism simpliciter (the soul/mind/self is an immaterial particular that is different from the physical body) from radical Platonic dualism (the body is of little value and may, in fact, be evil, the soul is capable of immortal existence on its own steam without needing to be sustained by God, and disembodied existence is the ideal state in heaven with no need for a resurrected body). Wright is not careful to distinguish these, but it is the latter, not the former, that he rejects. I suggest a similar confusion plagues much of the rejection of dualism on the part of biblical and theological scholars. It is worth noting that Murphy herself seems guilty of this confusion. She says that in theological and biblical studies, there has been 'a gradual displacement of a dualistic account of the person, with its correlative emphasis on the afterlife conceived in terms of the immortality of the soul.' (Murphy 2006: 10) Even if this is true, it follows only that radical Platonic dualism has been replaced, not that dualism simpliciter is – or should be – replaced.

Finally, what about Murphy's complaint about the fact that since we have to consult non-Canonical books to settle biblical teaching, this supports the idea that biblical authors were not affirming anything about human metaphysical constitution? Now this is not an exegetical paper, so I won't comment on Murphy's treatment of specific scriptural texts. But her philosophical hermeneutic is an important part of this dialectic, and her claims exhibit a failure to grasp two key features of an appropriate hermeneutical methodology.

First, one should interpret the biblical text in terms of what the author's original, intended audience would have understood by that text. The Pharisees significantly shaped Jewish thought in New Testament times, so their ideas often define the original audience's framework regarding New Testament authors when addressing Jewish culture. Now the non-Canonical Intertestamental literature helps us get at Pharisaic thinking on central anthropological issues relevant to interpreting New Testament teaching and set the default view of New Testament teaching. There is nothing unusual about this.

Second, in trying to formulate what scripture teaches about some issue P, one should start with clear texts whose intent is to teach about P or which fairly obviously imply something important about P. Then one should go to less clear or less explicitly relevant texts and interpret them in light of the clear, more explicit ones. Why does this matter? For this reason: Christian dualists take Matthew 22: 23-34, Acts 23: 6-9,

II Corinthians 12:2-4 to be the clearest, most explicit New Testament texts supporting dualism, and to my knowledge, nowhere does Murphy even mention these texts, much less interact with them. Her exegetical rebuttal of dualism rests on a treatment of less explicit, less clear texts and, thus, her results follow from a faulty hermeneutical methodology.

*The alethic and epistemic status of substance dualism*: According to Murphy, 'science has provided a massive amount of evidence suggesting that we need not postulate the existence of an entity such as a soul or mind in order to explain life and consciousness.' (Murphy 1998: 18) This evidence consists of the fact that 'biology, neuroscience, and cognitive science have provided accounts of the dependence on physical processes of *specific* faculties once attributed to the soul.' (Murphy 1998: 17; cf. 13, 27) Elsewhere she claims: 'My argument in brief is this: all of the human capacities once attributed to the mind or soul are now being fruitfully studied as brain processes – or, more accurately, I should say, processes involving the brain, the rest of the nervous system and other bodily systems, all interacting with the socio-cultural world.' (Murphy 2006: 56) Murphy acknowledges that dualism cannot be *proven* false – a dualist can always appeal to correlations or functional relations between soul and brain/body – but advances in science make it a view with little justification (Murphy 2006: 112).

I have three things to say in reply to Murphy. First, she fails to see what her concession to dualist correlations implies. To grasp the entailment, let us recall that two theories are empirically equivalent just in case they are consistent with all and only the same empirical observations. Now Murphy's concession implies what dualists eagerly affirm, namely, that dualism and physicalism are empirically equivalent theories and, thus, no amount of empirical data counts in the least for physicalism vs. dualism. It is not that the evidence strongly supports physicalism and is barely consistent with dualism. Rather, the empirical evidence is simply irrelevant as is science generally. If Murphy thinks otherwise, I invite her to cite one scientific finding that counts in favour of physicalism and for which a dualist could not easily offer an account. Indeed, in the next section, I will sketch a specific version of dualism that actually predicts precisely the sort of detailed neurological findings we are currently discovering. Murphy's description of the dialectical situation is simply wrong.

The fundamental issues involved in the physicalist/dualist debate are philosophical and theological, not scientific. And (epistemic) theoretical

simplicity cannot be cited in favour of physicalism. Why? Because (epistemic) theoretical simplicity is a dialectical tie-breaker, and the dualist will argue that the philosophical/theological considerations are not, in fact, stalemated. In the next section, I will offer a list of advantages that follow from my version of dualism over against Murphy's physicalism.

Second, the non-scientific nature of the physicalist/dualist dispute follows from Murphy's concession about correlations. But it also follows from a distinction made by Alvin Plantinga between Augustinian and Duhemian science. (Plantinga 1996: 177-221) Plantinga contrasts Duhemian and Augustinian science derived, respectively, from the ideas of Pierre Duhem and St. Augustine. According to Duhem, religious and, more importantly, metaphysical doctrines have often entered into physical theory. Many scientists have sought explanations of the phenomena, the appearances, in terms of underlying material causes. A proffered characterization of those causes often employs divisive metaphysical commitments as when Aristotelians, Cartesians and atomists gave disparate accounts of the phenomenon of magnetism.

If the aim of physical theory is to explain phenomena in terms of the ultimate nature of their causes, says Duhem, then physical science becomes subordinate to metaphysics and is no longer an autonomous science. Thus, estimates of the worth of a physical theory will depend upon the metaphysics one adopts. When practitioners of an area of physical science embrace different metaphysical schemes, progress is impeded because there is a compromise in the cooperation needed for progress. Successful science, if it is to be common to all, should not employ religious or metaphysical commitments only acceptable to some, including theism or physicalist naturalism. For Duhem, it is not the absence of metaphysics as such that serves the prudential interests of science, but of metaphysical views that divide us.

Augustinian science stands in contrast to Duhemian science. An Augustinian approach to science eschews methodological naturalism, and employs religious or metaphysical commitments specific to a group of practitioners not widely shared throughout the scientific community. Augustinian science sanctions the use of scientific data to justify a religious or metaphysical proposition specific to a group of practitioners.

According to Plantinga, Duhemian science will not 'employ assumptions like those, for example, that seem to underlie much cognitive science. For example, it could not properly assume that

mind-body dualism is false, or that human beings are material objects; these are metaphysical assumptions that divide us.' (Plantinga 1996: 209-10) More generally, the fact that there is a distinction between Duhemian and Augustinian science and that the former can be practiced at all seems to justify the non-scientific nature of the dualist/physicalist debate by showing that the progress of and data derived in accordance with Duhemian science (which Murphy regularly cites) are usually not of fundamental importance for resolving the deeper metaphysical issues that divide practitioners into different Augustinian camps.

Here's my third reply to Murphy: Here own list of descriptors for neuroscientific discoveries are underdetermined with respect to dualism and physicalism and, thus, they undercut her assertion that those discoveries provide a massive amount of evidence for physicalism. According to Murphy (all italics are mine): All the human capacities once attributed to the soul are now being *fruitfully* studied as processes *involving* the brain (2006: 56) and are *products* of complex brain structure (2006: 57). The pursuit of food is *mediated by* pleasure centres of the brain (2006: 59). Recognitional tasks *depend on* activation of large assemblies of neurons (2006: 62). Recognizing others' intentions has a neural *basis* (2006: 63). The amygdala plays a *crucial role* in developing a certain form of memory (2006: 64). Core steps in the speaking process are *subserved by* certain left-hemisphere regions that are *involved in* those processes (2006: 65). Finally, regarding religious experience, she says that '... if one is a physicalist, as I am, it is not surprising that brain regions are *involved in* religious experience ...' (2006: 68)

A dualist can only scratch his/her head at these statements. Are dualists supposed to think that during religious experiences, the brain shuts down or disappears altogether? And the italicized descriptions above are precisely the ones dualists eagerly employ. What, exactly, is supposed to be the problem here? It cannot be that we now know that the neurological correlations involve specific regions of the brain. As C. Stephen Evans notes regarding the findings of localization studies:

> What, exactly, is it about these findings that are supposed to create problems for dualism? [...] Is it a problem that the causal effects should be the product of specific regions of the brain? Why should the fact that the source of the effects are localized regions of the brain, rather than the brain as a whole, be a problem for the dualist? It is hard for me to see why dualism should be thought to entail that the causal dependence of

the mind on the brain should only stem from holistic states of the brain rather than more localized happenings. (Evans 2005: 333-34)

*The disciplinary nature of physicalism and dualism:* Finally, Murphy asserts that 'the best way to view the contest between dualism and physicalism is to treat each position not merely as a philosophical thesis but as the "hard core" of a scientific research program.' (Murphy 2006: 115) In point of fact, philosophical considerations carry little weight for Murphy and are, in any case, inconclusive. It is the scientific research that 'provides as much evidence as could be desired for the physicalist thesis' (Murphy 2006: 116). Further, 'If we recognize that the soul was originally introduced into Western thought not from Hebraic scripture but as an *explanation* in biological terms, then we can certainly say that for scientific purposes the hypothesis has been shown to be unnecessary.' (Murphy 2006: 69)

I offer three responses. First, many substance dualists do not believe in a substantial ego primarily because it is a theoretical postulate with superior explanatory power. Rather, they take the ego to be something of which people are directly aware. Thus, belief in a substantial, simple soul is properly basic and grounded in self-awareness. The point is not that dualists are right about this. Given this dualist approach, the point is that advances in our knowledge of mental/physical dependencies are simply beside the point. And the further debate about which approach is the fundamental one for defending substance dualism is not something for which advances in scientific knowledge are relevant.

Second, in those cases where substance dualism *is* postulated as the best explanation for a range of purported facts, typically, those facts are distinctively philosophical and not the scientific ones Murphy mentions. Arguments from the unity of consciousness, the possibility of disembodied survival or body switches, the best view of an agent to support libertarian agent causation, the metaphysical implications from the use of the indexical 'I' are typical of arguments offered by substance dualists, and the facts Murphy mentions are not particularly relevant for assessing these arguments.

Finally, the discovery of 'the dependence on physical processes of *specific* faculties once attributed to the soul' does not provide sufficient grounds for attributing those faculties to the brain rather than to the soul. There is an important distinction between describing the nature, proper categorization and possessor of a capacity vs. explaining what conditions

are necessary for its actualization. To see this it is important to get clear on the use of 'faculty' as the term has been historically used in discussions of substances in general and the soul in particular. Roughly, a faculty of some particular substance is a natural grouping of resembling capacities or potentialities possessed by that thing. For example, the various capacities to hear sounds would constitute a person's auditory faculty. Moreover, a capacity gets its identity and proper metaphysical categorization from the type of property it actualizes its manifestational property. The nature of a capacity-to-exemplify-F is properly characterized by F itself. Thus, the capacity to reflect light is properly considered a physical, optical capacity. For property dualists, the capacities for various mental states are mental and not physical capacities. Thus, the faculties that are constituted by those capacities are mental and not physical faculties.

Now, arguably, a particular is the kind of thing it is in virtue of the actual and potential properties/faculties essential and intrinsic to it. Thus, a description of the faculties of a thing provide accurate information about the kind of particular that has those faculties. Moreover, a description of a particular's capacities/faculties is a more accurate source of information about its nature than is an analysis of the causal/functional conditions relevant for the particular to act in various ways. The latter can either be clues to the intrinsic nature of that particular or else information about some other entity that the particular relates to in exhibiting a particular causal action. Remember, there is a difference between attempts to describe, categorize and identify a capacity's nature and possessor as opposed to proffering an explanation of the functional/causal conditions that must be present for that capacity to be actualized.

For example, if Smith needs to use a magnet to pick up certain unreachable iron filings, information about the precise nature of the magnet and its role in Smith's action does not tell us much about the nature of Smith (except that he is dependent in his functional abilities on other things, e.g., the magnet). We surely would not conclude that the actual and potential properties of a magnet are clues to Smith's inner nature. Similarly, functional dependence on/causal relations to the brain are of much less value in telling us what kind of thing a human person is than is a careful description of the kind-defining mental capacities, i.e., faculties, human persons as such possess.

## II. AN ALTERNATIVE TO MURPHY'S CHRISTIAN PHYSICALISM

All contemporary versions of body/soul (mind) dualism are consistent with deep causal/functional interaction between the two entities and are, thus, empirically equivalent with Murphy's physicalism regarding neuroscientific findings. However, in this section I will offer two versions of Aristotelian-style dualism that actually entail the sort of neuroscientific data that Murphy claims to support physicalism. The first is strictly a metaphysical thesis I shall call Metaphysical Aristotelianism (MA), though, as I have said, it entails certain things about the body/brain. The second I will call Organicism, and it is more of a metaphysical/scientific thesis than MA that, among other things, implies certain scientific theses that are currently in disfavour.

My delineation of these two distinct Aristotelian-style views has been noted by what is most likely the most authoritative treatment of the Aristotelian metaphysics of substance in the late Middle Ages – Robert Pasnau's *Metaphysical Themes: 1274-1671* (Pasnau 2011). Says Pasnau:

> [S]cholastic authors do offer metaphysical entities as principles of explanation on a concretely physical level, as efficient causes in competition with a corpuscular-mechanistic account of the natural world. The hylomorphic theory admits of an alternative formulation, however, as an explanatory schema at a different level of analysis, not competing with a corpuscular-mechanistic theory, but accounting for abstract, structural features of the world – in particular, the unity and endurance of substances [...] One diagnosis of the decline of scholastic thought [...] is that the scholastics lost their grip on hylomorphism as a metaphysical theory, conceiving of it instead as a concrete, physical hypothesis. (Pasnau 2011: 100-101; cf. 558-65)

(1) *Metaphysical Late-Medieval Aristotelianism (MA).* According to MA, living organisms are not mereological aggregates/systems composed of separable parts, bundles of properties, or concrete organisms construed as some sort of whole. Rather, the consensus during this period was that the living organism is a thin particular, viz., an essence exemplified by an individuator (usually prime matter), that stands under (sub-stands) the accidental features of the organism, including its body. (Paunau 2011: 99-134) The thin particular is identical to the organism's soul, it is mereologically simple (not composed of separable parts) and metaphysically complex (containing a complex essence, exemplification,

and an individuator), and it is holenmerically present throughout the organism's body.

There were three central metaphysical roles played by the thin particular: (1) It grounded the special sort of synchronic unity of living things, especially in comparison to mereological aggregates/systems. (2) It grounded a living thing's ability to be a continuant, sustaining strict, absolute identity through certain changes (including part replacement in the organism's body). (3) It provided the ontological ground for placing the organism in its natural kind and unifying that kind.

A second feature of MA is that its advocates clearly distinguished attempts to provide an ontological classification of the nature of various capacities and their possessors from proffering an explanation of the bodily conditions required for the exercise of those capacities, and they were clearly interested in the former, not the latter. As Dennis Des Chene points out:

> The Aristotelians, while acknowledging, even insisting, on the necessity of a material basis for the instantiation and exercise of vital powers, did not seek to reduce them to complexes of powers found also in inanimate things [...] For them, the project was not to find a chemical basis for life, but to describe and classify vital powers, and then, in keeping with the scheme of Aristotelian natural philosophy, to define the genera and species of living things in terms of those powers. (Des Chene 2000: 7)

The third feature of MA, hinted at in the quote just given, is the central importance of the body for the functioning of the thin particular's (soul's) powers in the normal course of things and the actualization of its various capacities. Speaking of the human soul, Des Chene observes that 'The human soul is not merely joined with the body in fact. It is the *kind* of soul which, though capable of separate existence [...], nevertheless by its nature presupposes union with a body, and moreover with a particular kind of body, a body with organs, in order to exercise all its powers – even reason.' (Des Chene 2000: 71) Elsewhere, Des Chene notes: 'Even the intellect requires, so long as the soul is joined with a body, a certain disposition of the brain.' (Des Chene 2000: 96)

Thus, the search for specific neurological causal/functional conditions associated with the actualization of the soul's capacities is not only consistent with, but is entailed by MA. This form of dualism predicts the existence of contemporary neurological findings every bit as much as Murphy's physicalism. It follows, then, that the two views are empirically

equivalent with those findings and they cannot be appropriated to support physicalism vis a vis MA. Proponents of MA would be sanguine about Murphy's own list of descriptors for neuroscientific discoveries that I cited above.

Moreover, while physicalism may be the hard core of a neuroscientific research program, in the specific sense in which this is true (there will be neurophysiological conditions in deep causal/functional dependency with the various capacities for life and consciousness), physicalism is also part of the hard core of an MA research program. It is important to keep in mind that, except for this entailment about the importance of the body, MA is primarily a metaphysical thesis, and its epistemic credentials in comparison to Murphy's physicalism must be decided by theological and philosophical considerations, not scientific ones. The fact that most contemporary scientists are physicalists and not dualists or advocates of MA, is a mere contingent sociological fact about contemporary scientific culture and education; it is not a factor relevant to assessing the merits of dualism, especially MA, vs. physicalism, especially Murphy's version of it.

(2) *Scientific Late-Medieval Aristotelianism (Organicism):* There was a second view among the late-Medieval Aristotelians that must be kept distinct from MA. This view, which I shall call by the contemporary name 'Organicism' has certain things in common with vitalism, though whether or not it should be thusly classified is a matter of controversy. In any case, this viewpoint is not accepted by the vast majority of contemporary scientists and philosophers. Pasnau notes that on this view, the soul 'plays a straightforwardly causal role, explaining both the behaviour and the physical structure of an animal's body.' (Pasnau 2011: 558; cf. 549, 560-565). In this sense, the soul becomes an internal efficient cause of the development and structure of the body.

Here, the soul is a substance with an essence or inner nature which contains, as a primitive unity, a complicated, structural arrangement of capacities/dispositions for developing a body. Taken collectively this entire ordered structure is unextended, holenmerically present throughout the body, and constitutes the soul's principle of activity that governs the precise, ordered sequence of changes that the substance will (normally) go through in the process of growth and development. The various physical/chemical parts and processes (including DNA) are tools – instrumental causes – employed by higher-order biological activities in order to sustain the various functions grounded in the soul.

Thus, the soul is the first efficient cause of the body's development as well as the final cause of its functions and structure which is internally related to the soul's essence. The functional demands of the soul's essence determine the character of the tools, but they, in turn, constrain and direct the various chemical processes that take place in the body as a whole. In this way, organicism implies that the organism as a whole (the soul) is ontologically prior to its bodily parts.

Moreover, those parts are inseparable parts that stand in internal relations to other parts and to the soul's essence; they are literally functional entitles constituted by their role in the organism as a whole. The body is developed and grows in a teleological way as a series of lawlike developmental events, rooted in the internal essence of the soul. The first-efficient cause of the characteristics of an organism's body is its soul; the various body parts, including DNA and genes, are important instrumental causes the soul uses to produce the traits that arise.

(3) *An assessment of MA vis a vis Murphy's Physicalism:* In this article, my commitment is to MA, not to Organicism, so let us set the latter aside and focus on the advantages that MA has over Murphy's anthropology. To begin with, let us consider the synchronic unity of consciousness. It is widely acknowledged that the unity of consciousness is easy to solve as a dualist: All of one's mental properties are simultaneously instantiated by the same, simple subject. But things are not so easy for the physicalist because the brain (animal, object constituted by an animal, and so forth) is a complex aggregate of separable parts. Now as William Hasker has pointed out, 'The functioning of any complex object such a machine, a television set, a computer, or a brain, consists of the coordinated functioning of its parts, which working together produce an effect of some kind.' (Hasker 2010: 181)

And this is just what we find regarding consciousness and the brain. A simple act such as observing a coloured object involves different sub-systems of the brain associated with the size, shape, location and colour of the object. Now even if a physicalist does not identify in some way a state of, e.g., phenomenal consciousness with a token brain state, but, rather, appeals to some sort of emergent supervenience to flesh out his/her view, there is still a problem here for the physicalist. Jaegwon Kim notes: 'Most of us have a strong, if not overwhelming, inclination to think that types of conscious experience, such as pain and itch, supervene on the *local* states and processes of the brain no matter how they are hooked up with the rest of the body or the external world.' (Kim 2006: 164) Thus, given

supervenience, the various aspects of seeing a coloured object would be supervenient upon, and in this sense, owned by non-identical physical states/processes. There is literally nothing that is aware of the state as a whole, nothing to serve as a unifier for the state and, a fortiori, for synchronic consciousness in general. Neural synchronization won't solve the problem because it still involves the coordination of numerous, non-identical entities. There is no single part of the brain that is activated as a causal correlate, much less possessor, for one's entire state of consciousness.

Lurking in the neighbourhood is the so-called binding problem. Given the considerations just mentioned, however, the binding problem seems to be unsolvable in principle for the physicalist, because there is no adequate, complex physical entity to serve as the unifier of consciousness and as that which is having the entire awareness as a whole.

What if the physicalist appeals to an atomic simple to solve the binding problem? Now besides the fact that this would no longer be an empirical solution (atomic simples are theoretical, philosophical posits, not empirically observable entities), an atomic simple will not solve the binding problem any better than a complex whole composed of separable parts. An atomic simple is spatially extended, but it seems to me that any entity adequate to unify synchronic consciousness must be spatially unextended. Why? If it is spatially extended, then irrespective of whether or not it is composed of separable parts, there will be various non-identical regions within that extension with which different aspects of, say, one's visual field, overlap. The self will be like a movie screen construed as uncomposed. There is no region of the screen that overlaps with the entire movie at a particular time. One cannot merely say that it is the screen itself that exemplifies the movie, because this is not an unanalyzable fact. The screen can be reduced to a sum of the iteration of an arbitrary region (e.g., a foot tall and wide), and the movie picture can be similarly reduced such that each such region of the picture overlaps with one and only one such region of the screen. There is no further, relevant screen 'over and above' this reduced one. Similarly, regarding the self, there will be no single entity that has all the different visual experiences or the entire holistic experience if the self is extended. MA (and most versions of substance dualism) fares well regarding the synchronic unity of consciousness, but various forms of physicalism do not, or so I have argued.

What about the diachronic unity of the human person? Are we continuants that remain literally the same through accidental change, especially through change in body parts? We have pretty deep intuitions that we are literal continuants. In my view, this is a properly basic belief grounded in self-awareness. For example, the simple act of attending to oneself humming through a tune is such that the literal continuity of the self is made evident, and it is the self that unifies each aspect of humming the tune into the experience of one, single subject. Now nearly everyone these days wants to avoid mereological essentialism, roughly, the view that the separable parts of a whole are essential to that whole such that it could not have had different parts and still existed. Again, MA (and most versions of substance dualism) provide a fairly straightforward way of grounding human persons as continuants while avoiding mereological problems regarding an organism's body, in this case, the human body: We are simple, immaterial wholes and not mereological aggregates, our persistence conditions are different from those of our bodies, and the fact – if it is a fact – that mereological essentialism applies to our bodies does not affect us.

Why is mereological essentialism a problem for virtually all versions of physicalism besides those who identify us with an atomic simple (and this is not Murphy's view)? Because, at the end of the day, these versions of physicalism identify us as mereological aggregates, and mereological essentialism cannot be avoided for such wholes.

Here is a definition of a mereological aggregate: It is a particular whole that is constituted by (at least) separable parts and external relation-instances between and among those separable parts (there is a debate as to whether or not one should add an additional constituent, viz., a surface or boundary to the analysis). Murphy seems to agree that living things are mereological aggregates. She acknowledges that all one needs 'is the proper functioning of a suitably complex entity and it would be alive. Life is an emergent property that is dependent on complex organization, not on an additional entity or non-material stuff [...] Thus, a sphere of proteins and other large molecules is living if [...] it has a membrane separating it from its environment.' (Murphy 2006: 57)

Why think that mereological essentialism characterizes mereological aggregates? Because a proper metaphysical analysis of such wholes does not provide an entity adequate to ground their literal identity through part alteration. To see this, suppose we have some mereological aggregate W, say a car, in the actual world w at some time t, and let 'the ps' refer

distributively to all and only the atomic simples (assuming such) that make up W. Now, given that the ps just are a specific list of simples taken distributively without regard to structure, it would seem obvious that if we have a different list of simples, the qs, it is not identical to the ps even if the two lists share all but one part in common. This same insight would be true if we took 'the ps' and 'the qs' collectively as referring to some sort of mereological sum. In either case, there is no entity 'over and above' the parts that could serve as a ground of sameness through part alteration.

Now, W has different persistence conditions than, and, thus, is not identical to the ps. W could be destroyed and the ps (taken in either sense) could exist. Let S stand for all and only the various relations that stand between and among the ps. S is W's structure. Is W identical to S and the ps? I don't think so. W has its own structure, say in comparison to some other whole W* that is exactly similar in structure to W. W and W* have their own structures. Given that S is a universal, it is not sufficient for individuating W's specific structure. For that we need SI, W's structure-instance, W's token of S, and SI will consist of all and only the specific relation-instances that are instantiated between and among the ps. Let 'the rs' stand for all and only the relevant relation-instances that compose SI. I think it is now obvious that SI is a mereological aggregate composed of the rs. If the rs undergo a change of relation-instances, it is no longer the same list of relation-instances. Given that SI just is a mereological aggregate or, perhaps, a specific ordering of the rs, if the rs undergo a change of relation-instances, SI will cease to exist and a different structure (perhaps exactly similar to SI) will obtain since there is no entity to serve as a ground for SI's sameness through part replacement. If W is the ps plus SI, it seems to follow that W is subject to mereological-essentialist constraints. Adding a surface/boundary to W won't help avoid these constraints.

Murphy attempts to develop an account of personal identity that avoids the implications of the reasoning just presented and that allows for that identity to be sustained even though there is a temporal gap of non-existence between death and final resurrection. (Murphy 2006: 132-44). In my view, Murphy's account of personal identity is not sufficiently robust to undercut the problem that mereological essentialism surfaces for her views.

Three features of Murphy's account are essential to her position. First, appropriating David Wiggin's view that the identity of some x at $t_1$ with some y at $t_2$ is sortal dependent such that criteria of identity need to be

tailored to fit the relevant sortal concept, Murphy claims that it is not the body qua material object that is of interest to the topic of personal identity. It is the body qua person.

Second, when we focus on the concept of a person, we discover that the following lie at the core of personal identity: continuity of memory, continuity-of-consciousness (e.g., recognition of oneself as oneself over time), continuity of moral character, and continuity of our relationships with others, especially those in the body of Christ, and most especially, our relationship with God (God's remembering, recognizing and relating to me). Regarding interpersonal relationships, Murphy claims that those in the body of Christ and our relationship with God are internal relations (Murphy 2006: 139-40)

Third, while these various higher order states and capacities are 'dependent on', 'produced by', 'enabled by', the body which provides 'the substrate for' and 'bears' them, it is a contingent, empirical fact that the spatio-temporal continuity of the body is required for these relationships to obtain. Spatio-temporal continuity is only a contingent part of our commonly accepted concept of a person. There is no reason in principle why a different body could not support the same characteristics. Moreover, material objects can retain their identity through change in material components. Either way, personal identity could be sustained through gappy existence between death and final resurrection.

Does Murphy's account succeed in providing a view of personal identity that is absolute and objective, despite the mereological essentialist problems under the covering concept 'material object?' I don't think so. To see this, note first, that not all covering concepts are created equal. In some cases, one covering concept has such pervasive implications for the object's persistence conditions that alternative sortals cannot be taken to provide strict, philosophical identity though change. Rather, these alternative sortals merely specify a way of *taking* the object to be the same through change in a loose, popular sense and for certain pragmatic purposes.

Consider a lump of clay and an associated statue, and grant that the former constitutes the latter. Given that the lump is a mereological aggregate, it is subject to mereological-essentialist constraints as argued above. Can the statue retain absolute Leibnizian identity through part replacement? It is very hard to see how. After all, it is a mereological aggregate, too, and there is no entity in the statue that can serve as a ground of such identity. If someone disagrees with this judgment, he/

she is invited to provide an account of exactly what that entity is and how it is able to function as a sufficient ground for Leibnizian identity. It is more likely that our concept of a statue leads us to take the statue as the same through part replacement in the loose, popular sense for certain purposes.

I believe the very same problem arises in regard to the person on Murphy's view, because the person just is a material object with various higher order capacities. Still, when the material object undergoes alteration of parts, the person loses identity because the person just is a mereological aggregate with various higher powers. Murphy asserts that material objects can retain their identity through change in constituents, but her claim is just that – an assertion. She provides no evidence whatsoever for justifying the assertion, and until she does, mereological essentialism would seem to be the default position to take regarding mereological aggregates. She also claims that spatio-temporal continuity of the body 'is only a contingent part of commonly accepted concepts of the person' (Murphy 2006: 141). But it seems to me that this is true because our commonly accepted notion of a person is a dualist one, a truth regularly admitted by physicalists.

Second, the various higher order capacities constitutive of personhood are not adequate to support Leibnizian identity through certain changes. For one thing, it is pretty easy to come up with thought experiments to show that her list of such capacities is neither individually necessary nor jointly sufficient for sustaining personal identity. The literature on personal identity is peppered with such arguments, so I won't rehearse them here. But I believe they are successful. For another thing, these various capacities are in constant flux: one gains memories and loses them, one's sense of oneself as oneself is a degreed property, one's moral character waxes and wanes, and one's personal relationships with others change over time. It is hard to see how these capacities have the sort of endurance needed to ground Leibnizian identity.

A special word should be mentioned about the claim that certain personal relations are internal relations, especially those in the body of Christ and with God Himself. It is hard to believe this. If this were true, then when one entered the body of Christ upon conversion, this would be a case of the unbelieving person ceasing to exist and the new convert coming-to-be. As new relationships in the body of Christ are formed and old ones lost, one would literally become a new entity.

What about one's relationship to God? That changes, too. As one grows spiritually, learns to draw near to God, and so forth, one's relationship to God and His relationship to us changes. These relationships are not static or singular – the relationships are constituted by a vast array of sub-relationships (e.g., one comes to add the notion of God as shepherd sometime after conversion, and to reject the notion of God as harsh critic). What about the creator/creature relationship? Is that sufficiently stable to constitute absolute personal identity through one's life? I don't think there is any such relation and I would give this reductive analysis of it: For all temporal particulars x, God stands in the creator/creature relationship with x at some time t if and only if God makes or sustains x at t. It simplifies our ontology if we take it as a brute fact that God makes or sustains temporal particulars without needing to stand in a creator/creature relation to ground this. If I am correct here, there just is no creator/creature relation. Even if there is, it is just one relation among many other interpersonal relations we stand in to God, and it would seem that our identity would be constituted by all these relations, and not just one of them. If so, then a change in just one such internal relation would cause the creature to go out of existence.

If we are, indeed, enduring continuants, then MA (or some other form of substance-style dualism) explains that fact while Murphy's physicalism denies it. This, I take it, is a metaphysical point in favour of MA vis a vis Murphy's views.

Besides the synchronic and diachronic unity of living organisms, especially human persons, there are two other advantages to MA compared to Murphy's physicalism. Space considerations forbid me from developing them in detail, but I believe they are worth getting on the table to foster further dialog. The first one is the issue of free will. Murphy offers a very sophisticated account of human freedom (Murphy 2006: 71-110; cf. Brown and Murphy). The details of her account are not relevant, but one thing is clear. While Murphy's views may allow her to avoid biological determinism, they do not permit an avoidance of physical determinism. At the end of the day, her position turns human agents into smart bombs, equipped with self-directed feedback and self-monitoring systems that enable a sort of reasons-responsive guidance control. But her account is a compatibilist one and one's actions are determined by one's overall physical structure and environmental inputs. Now it is widely, though not universally agreed, that the most plausible account of free will, given a physicalist anthropology, is some version of

compatibilism, and that the most plausible account of the agent sufficient to support libertarianism is a dualist account of some sort. Given that this is so, for those who accept compatibilism, MA will not be judged advantageous on this score. But for those who embrace libertarianism, MA will be more plausible than Murphy's physicalism.

Finally, there is the issue of Near Death Experiences (NDEs). I mention NDEs for two reasons. First, they are seldom addressed in philosophical discussions between dualists and physicalists, and as far as I know, Murphy does not interact with them. This is a serious omission. Second, there is a growing literature that strongly supports the veridicality of NDE accounts (see Long 2010; Kelly and Kelly 2007: 367-421). I can't delve into that literature here. But one thing needs to be mentioned in light of our comparison of MA to physicalism, including Murphy's. When critics reject NDEs, they do so by employing two strategies: they seek to undermine the evidence for them and they offer alternative accounts of that evidence.

What is almost never offered is an a priori rejection of NDEs on the grounds that throughout a range of minimal physical duplicates to the actual world, NDEs are metaphysically impossible because physicalism is true. Such a response would be intellectually irresponsible for two reasons: (1) It would egregiously beg the question against advocates of NDEs. (2) The veridicality of NDEs really does turn on a proper assessment of the evidence for and alternatives to claims made by NDE advocates, and has little or nothing to do with the laws of physics, the happenings that occur to the brain, and so forth. The fact that it is evidence that is the court of appeal in debating NDEs strongly suggests that genuine out-of-body experiences are metaphysically possible throughout the relevant range of minimal physical duplicate worlds. But if this is true, then Murphy's physicalism is false, given that some body or other is a necessary condition for the existence of the person. And MA entails the metaphysical possibility of disembodied existence, however unnatural that might be.

In this article, I have identified and responded to three core components of Murphy's physicalism. And I have offered a dualist alternative – MA – that has the same neuroscientific implications as Murphy's view but which is superior in four ways, or so I have argued. Much more can and should be said about these issues, but I hope enough has been provided to foster further dialog about these important matters.

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# GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE:
# A DEFENCE OF THE CLASSICAL VIEW

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**Abstract.** I defend Christian classical theism's view that God is aspatial in the strict sense but omnipresent only in a loose sense. I consider ten different proposals according to which God is strictly omnipresent and reject them all. I then present two arguments for the claim that God is strictly aspatial. Finally, I argue that, given God creates and sustains all else, God is loosely omnipresent.

Jewish and Christian scripture teaches us that God is omnipresent. The Psalmist writes: 'Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.' (Ps. 139:7-12). The prophet Jeremiah writes: 'Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God afar off? [...] Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. [...]' (Jr. 23:23-24). Classical theists say that God, being perfect, is aspatial. And Christian classical theists affirm that God is both aspatial and omnipresent.[1] By 'spatial' I mean *is located at some place*. So by 'aspatial' I mean is located at no place. Nothing, of course, is both spatial and aspatial. But it seems that anything omnipresent is spatial. How then do we reconcile these

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[1] See Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), 2.7, 5.9, Boethius, '*De Trinitate*', in *The Theological Tractates*, trans. by H. F. Stewart et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 4.54-59, Anselm, '*Monologion*', in *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 20-23, '*Proslogion*', in *Works*, 13, and Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, vol.3, trans. by Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), 3.68, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1a.8.

claims? I argue, in defence of Christian classical theism, that God is
aspatial in the strict sense but omnipresent only in a loose sense.

I assume that God is immaterial, simple, omniscient, and omnipotent,
and that God creates and sustains all else. By 'immaterial' I mean *is not
physical,* i.e. lacks physical features. By 'simple' I mean *is not composite*,
i.e. lacks proper parts. By 'omniscient' I mean *knows every truth*. By
'omnipotent' I mean *has the power to do anything possible*.[2] And by
'creates and sustains' I mean *causes to begin and continue to exist*. I also
assume that there are spatial regions, any material substance is located at
some spatial region, and location is a fundamental (or perfectly natural)
relation.[3] Anyone who thinks that there are no such regions may tell
a similar story.


## I. STRICT AND LOOSE SENSES

To say that a cat is healthy is to say that it is healthy in the strict sense.
To say that the cat's food is healthy is to say its food is healthy in a loose
sense in that the cat's food has the power to cause the cat to be healthy.
Perhaps any loose sense is not literal but figurative. Or perhaps any
loose sense is literal but analogical.[4] Or perhaps some loose senses are
literal and others not. Either way, strict and loose senses of a word are
distinct but related. The strict sense is central. Any loose sense is more
peripheral. I suggest that one uses a predicate *F* in a loose sense just if
that loose sense stands in some salient relation to the strict sense, where
what counts as salient is contextually determined.

I now argue for two claims:

(1) God is strictly aspatial.

(2) God is loosely omnipresent.

Why think that God isn't strictly everywhere? I now go through a list
of ten proposals according to which God is strictly everywhere and say
why it's (at the very least) unclear that God is strictly everywhere in any
of those ways.

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[2] This will do for my purposes. Perhaps, though, it is better to say that God has maximal
knowledge and power, where 'maximal knowledge' means *it couldn't be something has
more knowledge*, and 'maximal power' means *it couldn't be something has more power*.

[3] A fundamental relation is any relation that belongs to a minimally complete
supervenience base that accounts for the relational aspects of similarity and difference;
see footnote 9.

[4] Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.13.

## II. KNOWLEDGE, CAUSATION, AND POWER

Aquinas, following a saying of Gregory the Great, claims that God is everywhere by essence, power, and presence. God is, according to Aquinas, everywhere by essence in that God is in all else because God creates and sustains all else. God is everywhere by power in that all else is subject to God's power because God is omnipotent. And God is everywhere by presence in that God knows all else because God is omniscient.[5] Aquinas, it seems, believes that God is aspatial in the strict sense but omnipresent in an analogical sense. Nevertheless, I now consider each of these as a proposal according to which God is strictly everywhere.

So first, perhaps God is everywhere because God directly knows every truth about every place and anyone who directly knows every truth about some place is located there. God is omniscient and so knows every truth about every place. There are only three senses of 'direct' here: non-inferential, non-testimonial, and causal. God has perfect knowledge. So in each sense, God directly knows every truth about every place. But why think that anyone who directly knows every truth about some place is located there? Why can't there be direct knowledge at a distance? I return shortly to whether there could be direct causation at a distance. As for the rest, it seems there could be such knowledge at a distance.

Secondly, perhaps God is everywhere because God directly causes every place to exist and anything that directly causes some place to exist is located there. God creates and sustains all else and so causes every place to exist. Every place God causes God does so not by way of another agent. So God directly causes every place to exist. But why think that anything that directly causes some place to exist is located there? Why can't there be direct causation at a distance? The idea that there could be such causation is a source of discomfort to many. But distinguish (broadly) logical from nomological possibility. The concept of logical possibility is primitive.[6] But a proposition $P$ is nomologically possible just if it is logically possible that $P$ is true and the actual laws of nature hold. Even if action at a distance is nomologically impossible, it seems logically possible. And this equally applies to the suggestion that God is everywhere because God has the power directly to cause every place to exist and anything that has the power directly to cause some place to

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[5] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.8.3.
[6] See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), ch.1.

exist is located there. If there could be action at a distance, there could be the power to act at a distance. And as there's no good reason to think that anything that directly causes some place to exist is located there, so there's no good reason to think that anything that has the power directly to cause some place to exist is located there.

## III. THE FEATURE OF BEING

Perhaps instead God is everywhere because God is the feature of being, any feature is located at any place any instance of it is located, and every place has the feature of being. David Armstrong, for example, thinks that universals are present where their instances are.[7] Consider three versions of the proposal: God is the Platonic form of Being itself, God is the immanent universal of being, and God is the maximal fusion of duplicate tropes of being. Let me explain the terminology.

There are many true claims but what makes such claims true? For every truth, is there a truthmaker, i.e. an entity in virtue of whose existence that truth is true? Consider the claim that Tibbles exists. Tibbles, all by herself, makes this claim true. Nothing else is needed. A predication is any claim that predicates a feature of something. A feature of some entity is essential just if that entity can't exist without having that feature. So a feature of some entity is non-essential just if that entity can exist without having that feature. An essential predication is any claim that predicates an essential feature of something. So a non-essential predication is any claim that predicates a non-essential feature of something. Consider a true essential predication: e.g. Tibbles is a cat. Again, Tibbles, all by herself, makes this claim true. But now consider a true non-essential predication: e.g. Tibbles is black. If there is an entity in virtue of whose existence this predication is true, what is it? One thing necessitates another just if the first couldn't exist without the second. A necessary condition for an entity to be a truthmaker of a truth is that that entity necessitates that truth's truth. So it can't be Tibbles that makes it true that Tibbles is black, for Tibbles could exist and it be false that Tibbles is black. And it can't be the feature of blackness, for blackness could exist and it be false that Tibbles is black. And it can't be the fusion of Tibbles and blackness, for the fusion could exist and again it

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[7] See D. M. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), ch.3.

be false that Tibbles is black.[8] Perhaps then the truthmaker is the fact that Tibbles is black or the state of affairs of Tibbles' being black, which has as constituents Tibbles and blackness. Or perhaps the truthmaker is the trope of Tibbles' particular blackness, distinct from any other cat's duplicate trope of blackness.

Moreover, entities resemble each other in some respects but differ in others. What explains this? Are there features by virtue of having which entities resemble? Consider two entities that have the same feature, e.g. two black cats. If blackness exists, what is it? Perhaps it is the Platonic form of Blackness itself, an entity that is the perfect example of something black, the standard by which one measures all else that is black, and an entity that all else that is black participates in in that the form causes it to be black. Or perhaps it is the immanent universal of blackness, an entity that recurs in each of its instances. Or perhaps it is the maximal fusion of duplicate tropes of particular blacknesses, where a fusion of duplicate tropes is maximal just if it is a fusion of all and only duplicate tropes?[9] I now look at each proposal in turn.

So thirdly, perhaps God is everywhere because the Platonic form of Being itself is everywhere and God is such a form. A feature is intrinsic just if it never can differ among duplicates.[10] Augustine says that anything great is great by being identical to or participating in Greatness itself, and Greatness itself is greater than anything that participates in it, but nothing is greater than God, so God is identical to Greatness itself, and the same holds of every intrinsic feature God has, which includes being.[11] So if God is Being itself, God is the perfect example of something that *is*, the standard by which one measures all else that *is*, and all else participates in Being itself in that Being itself causes it to *be*. But why think that any

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[8] For any x and ys, x is a *fusion* of the ys just if each of the ys is part of x and every part of x overlaps some of the ys.

[9] I restrict the domain of truth-makers to minimal truth-makers and features to fundamental features. Armstrong writes: 'If T is a minimal truthmaker for *p*, then you cannot subtract anything from T and the remainder still be a truthmaker for *p*' (D. M. Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 19-20). David Lewis writes of natural properties: 'Sharing of them makes for qualitative similarity, they carve at the joints, they are intrinsic, they are highly specific, the sets of their instances are *ipso facto* not entirely miscellaneous, there are only just enough of them to characterise things completely and without redundancy' (David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 60).

[10] See David Lewis, *Plurality*, pp. 61-2.

[11] See Augustine, *Trinity*, 5.11.

Platonic form is located at any place something that participates in it is located? Participation consists in a form causing an entity to be like it in a certain respect. But if there can be likeness at a distance and if there can be direct causation at a distance, which it seems there can, it also seems there can be directly causing to be like at a distance.

Fourthly, perhaps God is everywhere because the immanent universal of being is everywhere and God is such a universal. Any immanent universal is wholly located where its instances are – it's not partly located at different places by having different parts at its different instances. But if there are immanent universals at all, why think there's a universal of being? One should posit a universal only if it accounts for non-essential similarity or difference among particulars. Otherwise, the particulars themselves can, all by themselves, account for such similarity or difference. Of necessity, however, any two particulars, no matter how much they might otherwise differ, resemble in respect of being and so do not differ in that respect. So there's no non-essential similarity or difference among particulars here. Furthermore, one should posit a universal only if it is a determinate and not also a determinable of any determinate. Having a determinate necessitates having any determinable of that determinate. So what makes it true that a predicate for that determinate is true of a particular also makes it true that a predicate for any determinable of that determinate is true of that particular. So there's no need to posit, in addition to the determinate, a further determinable universal. Having any other universal necessitates having any universal of being. So what makes it true that a predicate for any other universal is true of a particular also makes it true that a predicate for any universal of being is true of that particular. So there's no need to posit, in addition to other universals, a further universal of being. And so there's no good reason to posit a universal of being and indeed good reason not to.

Fifthly, perhaps God is everywhere because the maximal fusion of duplicate tropes of being is everywhere and God is such a fusion. Any trope is wholly located where its instance is. But any fusion of different tropes is only partly located at different places by having different parts at its different instances. But if there are tropes at all, why think there are tropes of being? One should posit a trope only if it provides a truthmaker for a true non-essential predication. Otherwise, the entity itself provides the truthmaker. Of necessity, however, any entity *is*. So there's no non-essential predication here. Every entity already makes it true that that entity *is*. So there's no need to posit, in addition to that entity, a trope

of being. But if there are no tropes of being, there's no maximal fusion of such tropes either. So there's no good reason to posit tropes of being and indeed good reason not to. So it seems there's no good reason to think that God is omnipresent because God is the feature of being.

## IV. SUBSTANCES AND ACCIDENTS

Perhaps God is everywhere because every place is in God and anything some place is in is located there. Aristotle, in *Categories*, makes a distinction between substance and accident: no substance is in anything else as a subject (e.g. an individual human or horse), but every accident is in something else as a subject (e.g. an individual knowledge is in a soul; an individual white is in a body), where an entity is in something as a subject just if it is in that subject, not as a part, and can't exist separately from that subject.[12] J. L. Ackrill, in his notes on *Categories*, interprets this as '*A* is 'in' *B* (in the technical sense) if and only if (*a*) one could naturally say in ordinary language either that *A* is in *B* or that *A* is of *B* or that *A* belongs to *B* or that *B* has *A* (or that ...), and (*b*) *A* is not a part of *B*, and (*c*) *A* is inseparable from *B*'.[13] Moreover, Aristotle lists ten categories of things that are said of another: the first is substance; the other nine are accidents, which include where (or place).[14] No place is a proper part of God, for God is simple. And no place could exist without God, for God creates and sustains every place and nothing God creates and sustains could exist without God. Could one naturally say in ordinary language that every place is in God, or etc.? It seems not – at least, not in the sense that some accident is in some substance. Nonetheless, we now consider two forms of the proposal that every place is in God in the sense that an accident is in a substance: the Berkeleyan view that every place is an idea in God, and the Spinozistic view that every place is a mode in God.

Sixthly, perhaps God is everywhere because every place is an idea in God and anything some place is in is located there. Berkeley argues that there are only minds and their ideas. There are many finite minds but only one infinite mind: God. Berkeley argues that every physical object

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[12] See Aristotle, 'Categories', in *Categories and De Interpretatione*, trans. by J. L. Ackrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), ch.2.

[13] See J. L. Ackrill, *Categories and De Interpretatione*, p. 74.

[14] See Aristotle, 'Categories', ch.4.

is an idea in God.[15] Moreover, he argues that every place is a physical object.[16] It follows that every place is an idea in God. But even if every place is an idea in God, why think that God is located at every place? I return to this presently.

Seventhly, perhaps God is everywhere because every place is a mode in God and anything some place is in is located there. Spinoza argues that there's only one substance: God (or Nature), and so everything else is either an attribute or mode of that substance.[17] Descartes' thought provides the proper background for Spinoza's thought here. Descartes thinks that there are only substances, attributes, and modes. A substance is anything that depends on nothing else for its existence; in this sense, he thinks there's only one substance: God. In a derivative sense, a substance is anything that needs only God's concurrence to exist; in this other sense, he thinks there are substances of only two kinds: mind and body.[18] Descartes thinks that any attribute or mode is a feature of some substance: any attribute is a highest determinable; any mode is a determinate of some attribute. Finally, Descartes thinks that every substance has only one principal attribute and that there are principal attributes of only two kinds: thought and extension.[19] Spinoza follows Descartes in many ways but departs in many others. Spinoza claims that there's only one substance, which has every possible attribute and so has thought and extension.[20] Spinoza defines the word 'God' as an infinite being, that is, a substance that has infinite attributes, by which he means that it has every possible attribute.[21] Finally, Spinoza claims, like Descartes, that matter is space and so every place is a body, but claims, unlike Descartes, that every body and so place is a mode in God.[22] But even if every place is a mode in God, why think that God is located at every place?

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[15] George Berkeley, 'Principles of Human Knowledge', [1710] in *Philosophical Works*, ed. by M. R. Ayers (London: Everyman, 1975), §1-4, 'Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous', [1713] in *Works*, §230-1.

[16] George Berkeley, 'Principles', §116-17.

[17] Note that, on Spinoza's concept of God, God is not a person.

[18] René Descartes, 'Principles of Philosophy', [1644] in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol.1, trans. by John Cottingham et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), §51-2.

[19] René Descartes, 'Principles', §53.

[20] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'Ethics', [1655] in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol.1, trans. by Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), Prop.14.

[21] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'Ethics', Def.6.

[22] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'Ethics', Prop.15.Note.

The initial argument went like this: every place is in God, anything some place is in is located there, so God is everywhere. But there are two relevant senses of the word 'in' here. The first is the sense in which an accident is in a substance. The second is the sense in which one place is in another place. It seems the first occurrence of 'in' in the argument uses the first sense, but the second occurrence uses the second sense, and so the argument equivocates. Being an accident is one thing; being located in is another. There's no reason to think the first implies the second. So, even if every place is an idea or mode in God, it seems there's no good reason to think that God is omnipresent because every place is in God in the sense in which an accident is in a substance.

## V. THE NULL INDIVIDUAL

Eighthly, perhaps God is everywhere because the null individual is everywhere and God is the null individual. As the null set is a subset of every set, so, some have suggested, the null individual is a part of everything.[23] And the null individual is everywhere because it is part of every place and anything that is part of some place is located there. Suppose the null individual exists. What's it like? First, there is at most one such individual. Suppose, for *reductio*, there are at least two. Then each is part of the other. But parthood is anti-symmetric: for any $x$ and $y$, if $x$ is part of $y$, and if $y$ is part of $x$, then $x=y$. So they are identical. So, by *reductio*, there aren't at least two. Secondly, the null individual is a simple. The null individual is a part of everything. So any part of the null individual is such that the null individual is part of it. So, by the anti-symmetry of parthood, any part of the null individual is identical to the null individual. So the null individual has no proper parts. Thirdly, the null individual is the only simple. The null individual is a proper part of everything else. So everything else is not a simple.

Why think such a thing exists? There are reasons for.[24] But it seems the reasons against outweigh them. First, it seems some things are disjoint, i.e. don't overlap. For example, it seems we are disjoint. If you think we share some universal as a common part, pick two maximally dissimilar things that share no universal as a common part. If, however,

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[23] See David Lewis, *Parts of Classes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 10-13. Lewis rejects this suggestion.

[24] See Hud Hudson, 'Confining Composition', *The Journal of Philosophy* 103 (2006), 631-51.

the null individual exists, no two things are disjoint. Secondly, it seems something has proper parts that are disjoint. Consider two plausible supplementation principles. The strong supplementation principle says:

> **(SS)** For any $x$ and $y$, if $x$ is not part of $y$, some $z$ is such that $z$ is part of $x$ and $z$ is disjoint from $y$.

The weak supplementation principle says:

> **(WS)** For any $x$ and $y$, if $x$ is a proper part of $y$, some $z$ is such that $z$ is a proper part of $y$ and $z$ is disjoint from $x$.

It seems that at least one of these principles is true. Suppose, though, that the null individual exists. Then, as seen above, no two things are disjoint. So nothing has proper parts that are disjoint. So (WS) is false. But, since (SS) implies (WS), (SS) is also false. So if the null individual exists, each supplementation principle is false. Thirdly, it seems that there isn't only one simple: either there is less or more than one simple. Perhaps there are immaterial simples: souls and angels. Or perhaps there are material simples: quarks and electrons. In either case, there is more than one simple. If, though, the null individual exists, there's only one simple. Fourthly, say an object is gunky just if every part of it has a proper part.[25] If the null individual exists, no object is gunky because every object has some part that is simple (viz. the null individual). But say an object is quasi-gunky just if every non-null part of it has a non-null proper part. And consider the following very weak supplementation principle:

> **(WS')** For any $x$ and $y$, if $x$ is a proper part of $y$, some $z$ is such that $z$ is a proper part of $y$ and $z$ is distinct from $x$.

If the null individual exists and (WS') is true, then every object is quasi-gunky. Suppose the null individual exists. The null individual is quasi-gunky because it has no non-null part. Now consider some non-null object $a$. $a$ has some non-null part (namely, itself). And every non-null part of $a$ has a null proper part. But, by (WS'), no non-null part of $a$ has only one proper part. So, by (WS'), every non-null part of $a$ has a non-null proper part. So every non-null object is quasi-gunky. So if the null individual exists and (WS') is true, then every object is quasi-gunky. It seems, though, that (WS') is true but not every object is quasi-gunky. Fifthly, if the null individual is located at every place, then anything else

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[25] See David Lewis, *Parts*, p. 20.

is partly located at every place because anything else has a proper part that is located at every place. It seems, though, that something is neither located nor partly located at every place. So there's good reason to think that the null individual doesn't exist.

In any case, why think that the null individual is everywhere? The null individual is part of every place. But why think that anything that is part of some place is located there? Being part of is one thing. Being located at is another. So, even if the null individual exists, it seems there's no good reason to think the null individual is everywhere.

## VI. THE WORLD, SPACE, AND EMBODIMENT

Ninthly, perhaps God is everywhere because the world or space is everywhere and God is the world or space. By 'the world' I mean *the fusion of all and only substances*. By 'a space' I mean *a fusion of all and only spatially related places*. There's more than one substance and there are different places spatially related to each other. So the world and space are composites. God, however, is simple. So God is neither the world nor space. But perhaps God is everywhere because everything embodied in an entity is present where that entity is and God is embodied in the physical world or space. By 'the physical world' I mean *the fusion of all and only physical substances*. One might think that every embodied human person is an immaterial simple humanly embodied in a human organism. Suppose that's right. Then to be embodied is for there to be distinctive pairs of active and passive causal powers between the person and the organism. On the one hand, the person causally affects the organism because the person has an active causal power to affect the organism, which has a corresponding passive causal power to be affected by the person. On the other hand, the organism causally affects the person because the organism has an active causal power to affect the person, who has a corresponding passive causal power to be affected by the organism. So such embodiment involves pairs of powers for distinctive causal interaction. This causal interaction is a many-splendored thing. In the human case, the organism causes perceptual experiences and bodily sensations and the person intentionally acts through the organism. So suppose God is embodied in the physical world. Then there are distinctive pairs of active and passive causal powers between God and the physical world. God causally affects the physical world and the physical world

causally affects God. Perhaps the physical world causes God to have perceptual experiences and bodily sensations and God intentionally acts through the physical world. But why think that any immaterial simple person is located where any material substance that embodies it is located? Of course, when a person is humanly embodied, there is a peculiarly intimate association between the person and organism so that it is perfectly acceptable to attribute mental features of the person to the organism and also physical features of the organism to the person. It is perfectly acceptable to say, even if you are a dualist, that you can see yourself in the mirror or that you can hold your child in your arms, even though, strictly speaking, you can only see or hold a physical object. Roderick Chisholm says:

> Speaking in a loose and popular sense, I may attribute to myself certain properties of my gross macroscopic body. (And speaking to a filling station attendant I may attribute certain properties of my automobile to myself: 'I'm down there on the corner of Jay Street without any gasoline.' The response needn't be: 'How, then, can you be standing here?' One might say that the property of being down there is one I have 'borrowed' from my automobile.)[26]

But, though this helps us see how it might be acceptable to say and so true in some loose sense that some immaterial simple is located where some material substance is, it doesn't help us see how this could be true in the strict sense. So it doesn't help us see how it could be true that God is located where the physical world is.

Finally, perhaps God is everywhere just because. There's no explanation. It's a brute fact.[27] One should, of course, posit as few brute facts as possible. And that already counts against the view. I can't be sure, however, that I've considered every possible view according to which God is strictly everywhere. So I now directly argue that God is strictly aspatial.

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[26] Roderick Chisholm, 'Which Physical Thing Am I? An Excerpt from "Is There a Mind-Body Problem?"' [1978] in *Metaphysics: the Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 294.

[27] This is how I interpret John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, [1690] ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 2.15, Isaac Newton, '*De Gravitatione*', [1685] in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Andrew Janiak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 25-6, 'The *Principia*', [1687], in *Writings*, p. 91, and Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, [1704] ed. by Ezio Vailati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 33-5.

## VII. GOD IS STRICTLY ASPATIAL

If God is strictly everywhere, what follows? Hud Hudson, who provides one of the best discussions on the metaphysics of location, defines four ways for a substance to be located at a spatial region: pertension, entension, spanning, and multiple location:[28]

**(L1)** '$x$ is entirely located at $r$' $=_{df}$ $x$ is located at $r$ and $x$ is located at no region disjoint from $r$.

**(L2)** '$x$ is wholly located at $r$' $=_{df}$ every part of $x$ is located at $r$.

**(L3)** '$x$ is partly located at $r$' $=_{df}$ $x$ has a proper part entirely located at $r$.

**(L4)** '$x$ pertends' $=_{df}$ $x$ is entirely located at some composite region, $r$, and for any proper sub-region of $r$, $r^{\star}$, $x$ is partly located at $r^{\star}$.

**(L5)** '$x$ entends' $=_{df}$ $x$ is wholly and entirely located at some composite region, $r$, and for any proper sub-region of $r$, $r^{\star}$, $x$ is wholly located at $r^{\star}$.

**(L6)** '$x$ spans' $=_{df}$ $x$ is wholly and entirely located at exactly one composite region, $r$, and no part of $x$ is located at any proper sub-region of $r$.

**(L7)** '$x$ is multiply located' $=_{df}$ $x$ is located at more than one region and $x$ is not located at the fusion of the regions at which $x$ is located.

Hudson claims that the predicate 'is located at' is primitive, that the location relation the predicate expresses is fundamental, and that any substance that bears the relation to some region completely fills that region, but perhaps not conversely.[29] Suppose there's a table in my office. First, at which regions is the table *entirely* located? It is located at some table-shaped region $T$. And it is located at no region disjoint from $T$. So, by (L1), the table is *entirely* located at only $T$. Secondly, at which regions is the table *wholly* located? It is located at $T$. But no proper part of it is located at $T$. So, by (L2), the table is not *wholly* located at $T$. What about other regions? If the table is located at no proper sub-region of $T$, then, by (L2), the table is *wholly* located at no region. But suppose the table

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[28] See Hud Hudson, *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 99-103. I delete reference to 'space-time' and replace 'non-point-sized' with 'composite'. For a similar list, see Josh Parsons, 'Theories of Location', *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics 3* (2007), 201-232.

[29] See Hud Hudson, *Metaphysics*, pp. 98-99, 102-103.

is located at every sub-region of *T*. For any proper sub-region of *T*, *T\**, the table has a proper part not located at *T\**. For example, if some leg is located at some proper sub-region of *T*, *T\**, another leg is not located at *T\**. So even if the table is located at every sub-region of *T*, then, again, by (L2), the table is *wholly* located at no region. So if the table is located at only *T*, or if the table is located at every sub-region of *T*, by (L2), the table is *wholly* located at no region. Thirdly, at which regions is the table *partly* located? The table has proper parts entirely located at proper sub-regions of *T*. If for any proper sub-region of *T*, *T\**, the table has a proper part entirely located at *T\**, then, by (L3), the table is *partly* located at every proper sub-region of *T*. Finally, if for any proper sub-region of *T*, *T\**, the table is partly located at *T\**, then, by (L4), the table pertends.

What about God? Suppose God is strictly everywhere: God is located at every region. First, at which regions is God *entirely* located? Suppose some region *M* is maximal: every region is a sub-region of *M*.[30] Then God is located at every sub-region of *M*. But, since no region is disjoint from *M*, God is located at no region disjoint from *M*. So, by (L1), God is *entirely* located at only *M*. So if some region is maximal, God is *entirely* located at only it. And suppose no region is maximal: every region has a proper super-region.[31] Then for any region, there's some region disjoint from it. So for any region *R* at which God is located, God is also located at some region disjoint from *R*. So, though God is located at every region, by (L1), God is *entirely* located at no region. So if no region is maximal, God is *entirely* located at no region and so, by (L4), (L5), and (L6), God neither pertends, nor entends, nor spans. Secondly, at which regions is God *wholly* located? God is located at every region. And God is simple and so has no proper parts. So, vacuously, every proper part of God is located at every region. So, by (L2), God is *wholly* located at every region. Thirdly, at which regions is God *partly* located? Again, God is simple and

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[30] There is at most one maximal region. Suppose, for *reductio*, there are at least two. Then each is a sub-region of the other. But being a sub-region is anti-symmetric: for any x and y, if x is a sub-region of y, and if y is a sub-region of x, then x=y. So they are identical. So, by *reductio*, there aren't at least two.

[31] A space is any fusion of all and only spatially related regions. Suppose it must be that the sub-regions of any region are spatially related. And suppose there's more than one space. Then, for a different reason, no region is maximal. Even if the fusion of the spaces exists, the fusion isn't a region. If, though, a region is any fusion of regions, and if for any regions there's a fusion of them, and if there could be more than one space, then there could be some region with spatially unrelated sub-regions.

so has no proper parts. So, by (L3), God is *partly* located at no region. Fourthly, does God pertend? Suppose some region *M* is maximal. If *M* is simple, no region is composite and so, by (L4), God doesn't pertend. But, presumably, *M* is composite. And if *M* is composite, *M* has proper sub-regions. Since God is simple and so has no proper parts, God has no proper parts located at any proper sub-region of *M* and so, by (L4), God doesn't pertend. Henceforth, I assume that any maximal region is composite and so has proper sub-regions. So God doesn't pertend. Fifthly, does God entend? Suppose some region *M* is maximal. Then, since God is *wholly* located at every sub-region of *M*, God entends. So if God is everywhere, God entends everywhere. Sixthly, does God span? Suppose some region *M* is maximal. Then, since *M* has proper sub-regions and since God is located at every sub-region of *M*, by (L6), God doesn't span. So God doesn't span. Seventhly, is God multiply located? Since there is more than one region and God is located at every region, God is located at more than one region. But is God located at the fusion of the regions at which God is located? God is located at every region. So does the fusion of the regions at which God is located exist? And if it does, is the fusion itself a region? If some region is maximal, then the fusion of the regions at which God is located exists and is a region and so, by (L7), God isn't multiply located. But if no region is maximal, then the fusion of the regions at which God is located either doesn't exist or isn't a region and so, by (L7), God is multiply located. So, God neither pertends nor spans. If, though, God is everywhere and if some region is maximal, then God entends everywhere but isn't multiply located. And if God is everywhere and if no region is maximal, then God is multiply located everywhere but doesn't entend. So could God entend or be multiply located everywhere?

There are two plausible principles, each of which conflicts with the claim that God entends or is multiply located everywhere:

(**P1**) Every spatial substance is material.[32]

(**P2**) No spatial substance is located at different regions at once.

If either of these principles is correct, God is aspatial. I now consider each principle in turn.

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[32] Cf. Boethius, who says that, 'Things which are incorporeal are not in space' is a claim self-evident only to the learned: '*Quomodo Substantiae*', in *The Theological Tractates*, 1.18-27.

## *Every Spatial Substance is Material*

By (P1), every spatial substance is material. But God is immaterial. So if (P1) is true, God is aspatial. But why think (P1) is true? Here is an argument. Suppose some substance is spatial. Then it is located at some region *R*. *R* has spatial geometrical, topological, and metrical features. Call the conjunction of these features its 'shape'.[33] Any substance located at *R* has the same shape as *R* does. Otherwise, the substance wouldn't fit into *R*. For example, if *R* is spherical, closed, and has a diameter of one meter, then any substance located at *R* is also spherical, closed, and has a diameter of one meter. Any substance, however, that has a shape is material because any shape is a physical feature and any substance that has a physical feature is material.[34]

## *No spatial substance is located at different regions at once*

By (P2), no spatial substance is located at different regions at once. There are different regions. But if God is spatial, God is located at different regions at once. So if (P2) is true, God is aspatial. But why think (P2) is true? It might seem that any substance extended in space is located at different regions at once. Isn't the table in my office located at some table-shaped region *T* and every sub-region of *T*? Perhaps there's some sense in which the table is located at more than one region. Recall, however, that I am assuming that the location relation is fundamental. Any substance that is so located at some region completely fills that region. And any substance so located has only one shape, which any region at which it is located determines. This is part of the role any fundamental location relation plays. So the table is located at only *T*. Otherwise, it would have more than one shape. And otherwise, the table and its proper parts would be co-located. For any proper sub-region of *T*, *T\** at which some proper part of the table is located, the table and that part are co-located at *T\**. In what sense, then, if any, is the table located at every sub-region of *T*? The table, as I said, is located at no *proper* sub-region of *T*. But it is *partly* located at every *proper* sub-region of *T*. So the sense in which

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[33] See Kris McDaniel, 'No Paradox of Multi-Location', *Analysis* 63 (2003), 310.

[34] Each region itself has a shape and so has a physical feature and so is material. If regions are substances, and if regions are distinct from their occupants, then regions and their occupants are distinct but co-located material substances. Even if this is so, however, regions and their occupants are substances of very different kinds, and I don't object, in principle, to co-location of distinct material substances if the substances are of very different kinds.

the table is located at every sub-region of *T* is that it is either located or partly located at every sub-region of *T*. That takes care of ordinary material composite substances. Perhaps, though, not every spatial substance is ordinary. On some views of quantum theory, for example, a single photon can be located in two regions at once.[35] So if you think for this reason that a single substance is located at different regions at once, here's another but related principle:

> (**P2'**) No spatial substance is located at different regions with different shapes at once.

(P2') allows for the possibility that a single substance is located at different regions at once so long as those regions have the same shape. But (P2') still implies that God is aspatial. There are, of course, different regions with different shapes. But if God is spatial, God is located at every region at once. So if God is spatial, God is located at different regions with different shapes at once. So if (P2') is true, God is aspatial. But why think (P2') is true? Here's an argument. Suppose some spatial substance is located at different regions with different shapes. Every spatial substance has the shape of any region at which it is located. So the substance has different shapes at once, which is impossible. Nothing, for example, can be both square and circular at once. So no spatial substance is located at different regions with different shapes at once.

You might object that it isn't any region at which a spatial substance is located but rather any region at which it is *entirely* located that determines shape. After all, it is the region at which the table is *entirely* located that determines the table's shape. So if God entends everywhere, God is *entirely* located at only one region and so has only one shape, and if God is multiply located everywhere, God is *entirely* located at no region and so has no shape.

But this won't do. Every spatial substance has a shape. And if God is spatial, God has a shape. So the fact that if God is multiply located, God is *entirely* located at no region is a problem for the view that *entire* location determines shape. It is true that the region at which the table is *entirely* located determines the table's shape. But this is only because the region at which the table is *entirely* located is also the region at which the table is located *simpliciter*. There is nothing special in itself about the region,

if any, at which a substance is *entirely* located. Suppose some photon is located at only two point-sized regions *P* and *P'* at once. The photon has a point-sized shape: the same in every point-sized region at which it is located. But since the photon is located at only *P* and *P'*, and since *P* and *P'* are disjoint, the photon is *entirely* located at neither *P* nor *P'* and so the photon is *entirely* located at no region. So the photon has a shape but is *entirely* located at no region. The regions that determine shape are the regions at which a substance is located *simpliciter*. So, whether or not God entends or is multiply located, if God is located at different regions with different shapes, God has different shapes, which is impossible.

You might object that it's not impossible to have different shapes at once. And there are a number of proposals you might offer at this point. If some substance has different shapes at different regions at once, you might either divide the having relation or divide the features to remove the apparent contradiction. Suppose God is located at a square-shaped region *S* and a circle-shaped region *C* and so God is square and circular at once. First, you might divide the having relation: God bears different having relations to different regions at once. So God bears *having being square at* to *S*, and bears *having being circular at* to *C*. Secondly, you might divide the having relation in a different way: God bears different having relations to different features at once. So God bears *having at S* to being square, and bears *having at C* to being circular. Thirdly, you might divide features: God has different features at once. So God has the feature of *being square at S* and the feature of *being circular at C*.

But this won't do either. Suppose some spatial substance is located at some region *R* and so has some shape *S*. I can allow that it bears having being *S* at *R*, that it bears having at *R* being *S*, and that it has being *S* at *R*. But I insist that the spatial substance also has being *S simpliciter* and can't have another shape *simpliciter* at the same time. If you deny this, you deny that the spatial substance has any shape in itself. But if we know what shape is at all (and I think we do), we know that any substance that has a shape has a shape in itself.[36] I can also allow some loose sense in which a spatial substance has different shapes at once. In some loose sense, as said before, the table is located at every sub-region of some table-shaped region *T* because the table is located or partly located at every such sub-region. And so in that same sense, the table has different shapes at different regions at once because it has the shapes

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[36] Cf. David Lewis, *Plurality*, p. 204.

of the different sub-regions of *T*. But in no strict sense can some spatial substance have different shapes at once.

## VIII. GOD IS LOOSELY OMNIPRESENT

So, plausibly, God is strictly aspatial. In what sense then, if any, is God omnipresent? I suggest, following Aquinas, that God is loosely omnipresent in that God directly causes every place to exist because God creates and sustains every place. There's a peculiarly intimate association between God and every place and what makes for that association is, among other things, God's activity. Presumably, there are many ways in which there's a peculiarly intimate association between God and every place. But one of these ways is that God directly causes each place to exist.

Suppose that my wife and I video call each other by phone. Each of us at the time sees and hears what the other does and each of us converses with the other. Suppose a friend innocent to the marvels of technology overhears me apparently speaking to someone. Naturally concerned for my sanity, he asks: 'to whom are you speaking'. I reply: 'to my wife?' My friend, looking around and seeing no one, asks: 'where's your wife?' I point to the phone's screen or speaker and say 'she's right here'.

You might object to the example. The screen displays an image that represents my wife. And the speaker emits a sound that represents my wife's voice. So perhaps when I point to the screen or speaker and say 'she's right here', I point to the location represented, and not the screen or speaker's location. But suppose due to technical error I temporarily neither see nor hear my wife because the screen and speaker is not working. But I know that my wife sees and hears me on the other end and so I carry on talking. In that case, if my friend asks: 'where's your wife?' I can still point to the phone and say: 'she's right here'. In this case neither the screen nor speaker represents my wife or her voice. So I don't point to any represented location. Rather I point to the location of the camera or microphone, which causes my wife to see and hear me. And in the first case, I think it's clear that I needn't intend to point to the represented location. I could point to the screen or speaker and intend to point to the screen or speaker's location. So it's natural to say, when we video call each other, that each of us is where the other is. Of course, neither of us is where the other is in the strict sense but each of us is where the other is in some loose sense. And note that the truth of these claims doesn't depend

on both of us knowing about the video call. I could accidentally video call my spouse, learn only later on that she was watching and listening the whole time, and so judge that she was there the whole time though I didn't know it then (cf. Gn. 28:16). My wife, as Chisholm says, borrows the property of being here from my phone because there's a peculiarly intimate association between her and the phone. The phone causes her to see and hear what goes on here. And my wife causes an image to be displayed and a sound to be emitted here. But if, in the example, my wife is loosely here because she causes the phone to be some way, then, all the more, God is loosely everywhere because God directly causes every place to exist.

There's a further benefit to considering how God's activity generates a loose sense in which God is omnipresent. There are different modes of God's activity. God acts in all places. But God acts in different places differently. For example, God may cause a miracle to occur in one place but not another. If, though, God acts in different places differently, this can generate a loose sense in which God is in some places in a way God isn't in another. Consider some of the ways that Jewish and Christian scripture speaks of God as being present. God appears to Abraham when three men visit (Gn. 18:1-2). God wrestles with Jacob (Gn. 32:24-33). God appears to Moses from the burning bush (Ex. 3:2). God goes before his people in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22). The glory of God rests on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:16; cf. Ex. 19:17). The glory of God passes before Moses (Ex. 33:19-23). The glory of God fills the tent of meeting (Ex. 40:34). The commander of God's army appears to Joshua (Jos. 5:13-15). The angel of God appears to Gideon and then Samson's mother (Jg. 6:11-24, 13:2-23). The glory of God fills the temple of Jerusalem (1 K. 8:10-11). God passes by Elijah and is found in a still small voice (1 K. 19:11-12). God calls Isaiah in a vision in the temple (Is. 6). God calls Ezekiel in a vision by the river Chebar (Ezk. 1-3). The Father speaks from heaven and the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove and rests on him at his baptism (Mt. 3:13; cf. Mk. 6:17, Lk. 3:21). The Father speaks from heaven at the transfiguration of Jesus (Mt. 17:1; cf. Mk. 9:2, Lk. 9:28). With tongues as of fire that come to rest on the disciples, the Spirit fills them on the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:1-4). And, finally, in a way that differs in kind from the others, the Word, who is God, becomes incarnate (Jn. 1:1-18). In all these examples, it seems there is a sense in which God is in one place in a way in which God is not

in other places. So the loose sense in which God is omnipresent can also help us see a loose sense in which God is in some places in a way that differs from the way God is in other places.[37]

# AUGUSTINE'S USE OF THE KK-THESIS IN THE *CITY OF GOD*, BOOK 11

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**Abstract.** It seems odd that in such a densely theological text that Augustine would bring up something like the KK-thesis, which is so epistemological. Yet, as one progresses through the book it does begin to make sense. In this paper, I aim to try to come to some understanding of how and why Augustine uses something like the KK-thesis in Book 11 of *The City of God*. The paper will progress in the following way: First, I discuss Jaakko Hintikka's work on the KK-thesis in order to have a clear idea of what the KK-thesis is, and some associated problems with it. Next, since Augustine most explicitly deals with the KK-thesis in *De Trinitate*, with the help of Gareth Matthews work, I discuss Augustine's use of the KK-thesis there. Finally, I return to *The City of God*, in order come to an understanding of Augustine's use of the KK-thesis there.

In Book 11 of *The City of God* Augustine explicitly begins his treatment of 'the origin and end of the two cities'.[1] That being so, it seems odd that Augustine would bring up epistemological issues, at least on first blush. However, as one progresses through the book it does begin to make sense. What is of particular concern in this paper is Augustine's use of something like a KK-thesis at 11.26. The KK-thesis is the idea that if one knows, then one knows that one knows. There are, famously, some serious potential problems with the KK-thesis, issues that will be discussed below, but those are side issues for the purposes of this paper. Rather, in this paper, I aim to try to come to some understanding of how and why Augustine uses the KK-thesis in Book 11.

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[1] Augustine, 'The City of God, Book 11', in *The City of God: De Civitate Dei contra Paganos*, trans. by Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009), p. 310.

With the foregoing in mind, this paper will progress in the following way. In section I, in order to have a clear idea of what the KK-thesis is generally, and some of the associated problems with it, I discuss Jaakko Hintikka's work on the KK-thesis. In section II, since Augustine most explicitly, and thoroughly, deals with the KK-thesis in *De Trinitate*, with the help of Gareth Matthews work I discuss Augustine's use of the KK-thesis there. Building on the previous two sections, in section III, I return to *The City of God*, in order come to an understanding of Augustine's use of the KK-thesis in Book 11.

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

In this section, I will briefly present Hintikka's analysis of the KK-thesis that he presents in *Knowledge and Belief*. After coming to a clear understanding of what Hintikka has to say, it will be suggested that, at least on Hintikka's account, the KK-thesis, far from being problematic, is in some sense trivial. However, there is the potential for an interpretation of the KK-thesis that could be problematic.

Setting aside the fact that, as Hintikka notes, the statement 'knowing that one knows that $p$ ... is [a] rather strange'[2] thing to say, there is something, at least intuitively, that seems problematic about second order knowledge claims. What is valuable about Hintikka's discussion is that he shows that '[k]nowing that one knows [is] virtually equivalent to knowing'.[3] What Hintikka means is that the two are logically equivalent, which can be proven as follows:

> Let the statement $a$ knows that P be represented as KaP. Thus, $a$ knows that $a$ knows that P can be represented as KaKaP. To say that KaP is logically equivalent to KaKaP can be represented as KaP ↔ KaKaP. Now, if Ka is taken as epistemic modal operator that functions equivalently to □, then in a modal system at least as strong as S4 it is true that KaP ↔ KaKaP.

> (1)| KaP (by assumption)
> (2)| KaKaP (1 by S4)
> (3) KaP → KaKaP (1-2 by →I)

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[2] Jaakko Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief: An Introduction to the Logic of Two Notions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 104.

[3] Ibid.

(4) | KaKaP (by assumption)

(5) | KaP (4 by T)

(6) KaKaP → KaP (4-5 by → I)

(7) KaP ↔ KaKaP (3, 6 by ↔ I)

If KaP and KaKaP are logically equivalent, as has been shown, then the KK-thesis – which formally amounts to KaP → KaKaP – seems trivial. As Hintikka, himself, states: 'knowing that one knows "only differs in words from knowing".'[4]

However, the KK-thesis has a long history in philosophy, which Hintikka discusses, of being problematic. The problem, though, is not the result of mere logical equivalence – even if the solution might be. The problem is the introspective, or 'quasi-psychological'[5] in Hintikka's words, implications of the KK-thesis. To be clear, there are two related problems with a KK-thesis: 1) it seems to entail infinite knowledge, and 2) the problem of cognitive ascent. As to the first, if KaP → KaKaP, then KaKaP → KaKaKaP, and this can continue *ad infinitum*, then any knowledge claim implies, and perhaps even necessarily entails, that there is an infinite number of things that one knows – knowing that P is one thing, knowing that one knows is a second et cetera. For some, such infinite knowledge is prima facie problematic, because the human mind, or so it would seem, is incapable of such infinite knowledge.

Now, as to the problem of cognitive ascent, understood logically, the KK-thesis 'need not mean that one is performing whenever one knows something, another act of self-observation'.[6] But, understood introspectively, the KK-thesis would mean that one is performing another, and infinitely many, acts of knowing, and *that* does seem to be a problem – this is the problem of cognitive ascent. There are actually two related problems with cognitive ascent. First, each iteration of the KK-thesis is a higher-order knowledge claim, so not only does one have an infinite amount of knowledge but each claim is qualitatively different. Second, assuming that iterations of the KK-thesis, understood introspectively, requires the passage of time then for any act of knowing it would entail that the mind would be occupied for an infinite amount of time.

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[4] Ibid., p. 111.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

There is an issue that needs to be addressed at this point. Hintikka's logical analysis of the KK-thesis does not seem to do justice to what the problem really is. It does not seem that the statements 'I know that P' and 'I know that I know that P'[7] *mean* the same thing. Thus, presupposing the introspective view, KaP implies one kind of act and KaKaP implies a different act, even if it is of the same kind. Hintikka can freely acknowledge the difference in meaning without conceding anything to the introspective perspective – remember it is the introspective interpretation of the KK-thesis that seems to lead to problems. As an issue of pragmatics KaP and KaKaP might have different connotations, but as a matter of fact 'all those circumstance which would justify one in saying [KaP] will also justify one in saying [KaKaP]'.[8] Alternatively, KaP and KaKaP, while being logically equivalent, again can connote different things, for example when uttered, KaKaP indicates 'that the person in question is aware that he is in a position to know'[9] or that 'he feels certain [...] that he knows'.[10] These connotations, however, are what Hintikka calls 'residual meanings'[11] and should not be confused with the real epistemic issues.

There are many other matters that Hintikka discusses relating to the KK-thesis, and, of course, Hintikka's analysis and considered responses are more nuanced than presented here. However, the point of this section was to give an idea of what Hintikka had to say regarding the KK-thesis. What has been discussed, though, will be sufficient for the purposes of this paper, and the discussion of Augustine.

## II.

As has been noted, Augustine discusses the KK-thesis and related matters not just in *The City of God*, but also in *De Trinitate*. I will return to Augustine's use of the KK-thesis in *The City of God*, below. However, since the use of the KK-thesis is most fully explained in *De Trinitate* and much of the secondary literature relates to its use there, by getting clear

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[7] For simplicity I will use 'KaP' and 'KaKaP' as stand-ins for the phrases 'I know that P' and I know that I know that P', respectively.

[8] Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief*, p. 111.

[9] Ibid., p. 114.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 121.

on Augustine's use in *De Trinitate* one can then return to *The City of God*, in a better position to understand its use and purpose there. Thus, what will be discussed in this section of the paper is Augustine's response to scepticism as presented in book 15 of *De Trinitate*. It will be shown that it does appear that Augustine is asserting something like the KK-thesis to iterate knowledge claims to show that, contrary to what the sceptic believes, one does have a great deal of knowledge. The work of Gareth Matthews will be helpful in coming to understand: 1) whether or not Augustine is using the KK-thesis, and 2) what Augustine's purposes are for introducing, at least, a KK-like-thesis.

As was just mentioned, Augustine in Book 15 of *De Trinitate* introduces something like a KK-thesis as a way to establish that, despite what the sceptic claims, there is a great deal that one does in fact know. It is worth quoting Augustine at length to make this point clear:

> The knowledge by which we know that we are alive is most intimately inward, and cannot be touched by an Academic [sceptic] ... So someone who says he knows he is alive can never be lying or be deceived. Let a thousand kinds of illusion be objected against the man who says 'I know I am alive'; none of them will worry him, since even the man who suffers from an illusion is alive.
>
>      But if this is the only kind of thing that really pertains to human knowledge, then there are extremely few instances of it – except that any point of knowledge can be so multiplied that its instances, far from being few, turn out to extend to infinity. Thus the man who says 'I know I am alive' says he knows one thing: but if he says 'I know that I know I am alive', there are two things. The fact that he knows these two things makes a third knowing; and in this way he can add a fourth and a fifth and a countless number more, if he has the time. But because he cannot either comprehend an innumerable number by adding up single ones or give it innumerable expression, what he certainly does comprehend is both that this is true, and that it is so innumerable that he cannot comprehend or express the infinite number of its word.[12]

So, there are two things which Augustine is articulating in the above quote. First, Augustine is establishing that there is at least one piece of knowledge that one can have that is completely immune to scepticism – viz. 'I know that I am alive.' Thus, like Descartes even if one is dreaming

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[12] Augustine, 'De Trinitate, Book 15', in *The Trinity: De Trinitate*, ed. by John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), p. 412.

or is being deceived one can still know that one is alive to be dreaming or deceived. 'I am alive' here should be construed very broadly to mean roughly that 'I exist' as Gareth Matthews has pointed out.[13] However, Augustine rightly acknowledges that if that was all one could know, it would not be much of a response to the sceptic, and therefore goes on to articulate how, based on 'I know that I am alive' there are in fact many things that one knows.

In order to establish that there are many things one knows, it seems that Augustine is putting forward a KK-thesis. Thus, Augustine states that since I know that I am alive – let that be represented as KaP, where P stands for 'I am alive', and Ka stands for 'I know that' – it does not seem to be a stretch to establish that KaKaP. That is to say, from KaP one derives KaKaP, or KaP → KaKaP. Roughly then, it seems that Augustine seems to be positing something like epistemic closure under known entailment – i.e. if S knows that p, and p entails q, then S knows that q. Basically, the second knowledge claim, KaKaP, follows from modus ponens and the fact that knowledge – at least some knowledge – is closed under known entailment.[14] Formally, Augustine can be seen as arguing, implicitly, as follows:

(1) KaP → KaKaP (known entailment)

(2) KaP (established by argument)

(3) KaKaP (1, 2 modus ponens)

There is an open question of how Augustine comes to believe that KaP → KaKaP is true. Perhaps he believes that it just naturally falls out of any adequate definition of knowledge – which seems to be exactly what Hintikka had in mind. Alternatively, Augustine might be confusing the claim 'I am certain that P' with KaKaP, and has thus inappropriately established KaP → KaKaP. Augustine could also be introducing the introspective perspective that Hintikka was worried about, and at pains to dismiss. To take Augustine in this last way would be to say that if KaP, and one reflects on what KaP really means, then one will see that KaKaP. To understand Augustine along this introspective/reflective model would suggest that the modus ponens argument is actually just

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[13] Gareth B. Matthews, *Augustine* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), p. 40.

[14] We can bracket for now the criticisms of epistemic closure, since many of them claim that closure fails because of global scepticism. But the antecedent in this case is immune from scepticism *eo ipso* anything that would logically follow from it would at least appear to be immune as well.

an approximation of Augustine's view, but, even so, Augustine must certainly be asserting something like the KK-thesis even if it is not one of logical entailment.

From establishing KaP and KaP → KaKaP, Augustine can then be understood to be multiplying one's knowledge by repeated iterations of the KK-thesis. Thus, from KaP and KaP → KaKaP, one goes on to establish that KaKaP, KaKaKaP, and so on *ad infinitum*. For Augustine, then, he believes that he has proven that far from having no knowledge, as the sceptic contends, humanity actually has an infinite amount of knowledge, even if humanity is unable to express it.[15]

In his book on Augustine,[16] Gareth Matthews takes Augustine to task precisely for using the KK-thesis, as has been presented thus far, as a way to refute the sceptics that would deny humanity knowledge. Regardless of whether or not the initial claim that KaP can be established and is true, Matthews believes that there are at least three difficulties with the iteration of knowledge claims that arise from the application of the KK-thesis. First, if KaKaP is, as Hintikka takes it to be, virtually equivalent to KaP, 'then the multiplication of knowledge claims may be only an illusion, each iteration being virtually equivalent to its predecessor.'[17] Second, even if the KK-thesis is valid for first-person 'I claims', there does seem to be problems with 'third-person instantiations of the KK-[thesis]. Jane may know that *p*, but not know that Jane knows that *p* because she does not know that she is Jane.'[18] Third, even if KaP one might be frustrated by the fact that there is a lack of consensus about what it takes for one to know, and therefore KaKaP fails to obtain because one is sceptical about what the conditions for knowledge are. As Matthews states:

[i]f I know anything, and surely I do know something, I know that I exist. But to *know that I know* I exist I must also, it may well seem know what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing something. And this I do not know.[19]

However, Matthews only mentions these in passing before moving on to the more important point of Augustine's purposes for his repeated iterations of knowledge. Unlike Descartes who wanted to 'begin again from the original foundations [...] [in order] to establish anything firm

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[15] I will return to Augustine on humanity's infinite knowledge below.

[16] Matthews, *Augustine*.

[17] Ibid., p. 41.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

and lasting in the sciences',[20] 'Augustine has here no ambition whatsoever to provide a rational reconstruction of all he knows on the indubitable foundation of "I exist".'[21] According to Matthews, Augustine's purpose is to highlight 'an inner realm of knowledge each of us has open to us',[22] which by its very nature is immune to scepticism.

Since 2005, Matthews has changed his views about Augustine and his use of the KK-thesis in two important ways. First, Matthews suggests that Augustine was actually using something different, though similar to, the KK-thesis to multiply human knowledge. Second, Matthews has put more emphasis on Augustine's project in *De Trinitate* such that he has realized that Augustine was less concerned with responding to the sceptic and more concerned with establishing an image of God in the mind of man.

Matthews begins his (re-)analysis of Augustine by pointing out that where it appears Augustine is using the KK-thesis to multiply knowledge – i.e. from KaP and KaP → KaKaP one can go on, by repeated iterations to KaKaP → KaKaKaP and KaKaKaP, and so on out to infinity – Augustine is not using logical entailment or material implication to multiply said knowledge. Rather, Augustine is actually multiplying knowledge by forming conjunctions. Matthews believes the conjunction reading is more accurate because after Augustine has established KaP and KaKaP he says: '*Iam hoc vero quod scit haec duo tertium scire est*, which, in a rather clunky literal translation says, Now this that he surely know these two, is to know a third thing.'[23] It is useful to quote Matthews at length here:

> It seems, then, that what Augustine has in mind is the following. Suppose I know that I'm alive. Let's call what I know when I know this 'K1.' Then let's call what I know when I know *that I know* K1 'K2.' Now Augustine says, in knowing K1 and also knowing K2 I know a third thing, namely, the conjunction of K1 and K2, which we can call 'K3.' But then I can know not only K1, K2, and K3, but also a fourth thing, the conjunction

[20] Rene Descartes, 'Meditations on First Philosophy', in *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy. 3rd edition*, trans. by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p. 59.

[21] Matthews, *Augustine*, p. 42.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Gareth Matthews, 'Skepticism and Knowledge in Augustine's *De Trinitate*' (paper presented at Mind and the Structure of Reality: A Conference on Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, September 28-29, 2007), p. 10.

of these three, which we can call 'K4,' and so for innumerable cases 'if one should be up to it' (*si sufficiat*). Let's call this result 'the Multiplication Thesis,' and contrast it with what we can call the 'Iteration Thesis,' which is the result of successive applications of the KK-[thesis].[24]

Thus, according to Matthews instead of epistemic closure under known entailment, Augustine is putting forward, something like, epistemic closure under conjunction. Granted, Matthews is unsure how Augustine moves from the first-order claim that KaP to the second-order claim that KaKaP, but once Augustine does the rest follows naturally. It should also be pointed out that *si sufficiat* is integral to the argument. Because of that caveat, Augustine is not committed to cognitive ascent, with the regress problems that arise regarding it. Augustine is pointing out that the mind could, given an infinite amount of time, know an infinite number of things, but it is just that the mind has the potential to do so, not that the mind actually has to, or does do so.

The second thing, which Matthews takes note of, that he failed to in 2005, is that the purpose of *De Trinitate* is to show that there is an image of God in the mind(s) of humanity. By taking Augustine seriously here, one is better able to understand how the Multiplication Thesis – the KK-like-thesis – is to function for Augustine. It is not merely the refutation of scepticism; rather Augustine wants his readers to delight in the power of the mind insofar as it is an image of God.

So, first, because humanity is able to multiple its knowledge, potentially infinitely, with the Multiplication Thesis, Matthews maintains that Augustine

> wanted us, his readers, to thrill at the idea of infinite mental iteration [or multiplication]. [...] Perhaps the idea that we can infinitely [multiply] some or all of our knowledge claims would tell us something interesting and important about ourselves, or about our minds, that would fit into Augustine's more general project in *De Trinitate*.[25]

Second, according to Augustine, nothing is so present to the mind as the mind itself,[26] and since the mind cannot even comprehend its own ability – viz. the ability to have infinite knowledge – the mind is thus a fitting image of the divine. '[I]n the incomprehensibility of our

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 9.

[26] Augustine, 'De Trinitate, Book 10', in *The Trinity: De Trinitate*, ed. by John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), p. 297.

own minds to ourselves [we find] a reflection of the vastly greater incomprehensibility of God.'[27] Thus, Augustine introduces his KK-like-thesis 'to bring us closer to God by helping us appreciate another respect in which our own minds are images of the Divine mind.'[28]

The purpose of this section was to make clear how Augustine uses something like the KK-thesis in *De Trinitate*. Since *De Trinitate* is Augustine's most explicit use of something like the KK-thesis, and since he was working on *De Trinitate* while also working on *The City of God*, by getting clear on Augustine's use of something like the KK-thesis in the former a better understanding of his use of something like the KK-thesis in the latter can be had.

## III.

In this section of the paper, I turn to *The City of God*, and to Augustine's use of the KK-thesis there, in an effort to try to come to some understanding of how and why Augustine uses the KK-thesis. This section builds on the previous two sections, it will be shown, or at least suggested, that although there are clear similarities between Hintikka – which will not be discussed explicitly – and Augustine's use of something like the KK-thesis in *De Trinitate* and *The City of God*, there are also important differences. Since Hintikka, Matthews and Augustine in *De Trinitate*, seem to have answers to the problematic nature of the KK-thesis – e. g. its implications for infinite knowledge and cognitive ascent – there is little reason to discuss these issues in this section.

In the previous section, there were two main conclusions drawn regarding Augustine's use of something like the KK-thesis in *De Trinitate*. First, it was suggested that Augustine wants his reader to delight in the mind and its abilities insofar as it is an image of the divine. Second, by demonstrating the partial incomprehensibility of the mind, Augustine was also demonstrating the majesty of God of whom the mind is an image. Now, the explicit purpose, or at least one of the purposes, of *De Trinitate* is to show how humanity can be understood to be made in the image of a Trinitarian God. Similarly, in Book 11 of *The City of God* in chapters 24 through 28, Augustine is discussing the Trinitarian nature

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[27] Matthews. 'Skepticism and Knowledge in Augustine's *De Trinitate*', p. 27.
[28] Ibid.

of God and 'its presence scattered everywhere among its works',[29] and then in chapter 26, in particular, Augustine is discussing 'the image of the supreme Trinity, which we find in some sort in human nature'.[30] This obvious similarity of the contexts in which the KK-thesis, or something like it, as discussed in each of Augustine's works – viz. *De Trinitate* and *The City of God* – might lead one to hastily conclude that Augustine's use of the KK-thesis in *De Trinitate* can be directly mapped on to his use in *The City of God*. I discuss, and give, textual support from Book 11 of *The City of God* that will demonstrate that there is reason to think that Augustine might want his readers to draw the same conclusions about God and the mind that he wants his readers of *De Trinitate* to draw. However, there are important differences in Augustine's use of something like a KK-thesis, and even the broader context of, Book 11 which leads to different, or additional, conclusions about Augustine's use of the KK-thesis in *The City of God*. Textual support will also be given for these additional conclusions.

I now turn to some textual support for the idea that Augustine wants his readers to draw similar conclusions from his use of the KK-thesis in Book 11 of *The City of God* and his use of the KK-thesis in *De Trinitate*. Again, in *De Trinitate* Augustine wants his reader to delight in the power of the mind and how much greater God is than man, who is made in his image.

Of course Augustine establishes that man is made in the image of God. Augustine states: 'And we indeed recognize in ourselves the image of God, that is of the supreme Trinity, an image which, though it be not equal to God.'[31] This quote clearly shows that not only is man an image of God, but also inferior to God. Moreover, it is the mind, or something like the mind, which is where the image of God is most present, as when Augustine claims that '[f]or since man is most properly understood [...] to be made in God's image, no doubt it is that part of him by which he rises above the lower parts he has in common with beasts, which brings him nearer the Supreme[, i.e.] [...] the mind itself.'[32]

Further, since according to Augustine, 'the knowledge of the creature is, in comparison of the knowledge of the creator but a twilight',[33]

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[29] Augustine, 'The City of God', p. 331.
[30] Ibid., p. 333.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., p. 311.
[33] Ibid., p. 316.

Augustine is again establishing how much greater God's powers and abilities are compared to the powers, abilities and intellectual capacities of the human mind. Even though humanity, and its mental capacity, pale in comparison to that of God, Augustine still wants his reader to 'delight in our being, and our knowledge of it'.[34]

Granted, none of the above quotes speak directly to the KK-thesis, or Augustine's use of it. What is of importance is that Augustine wants his reader to come to the same, or similar, conclusions regarding humanity, and its mind and knowledge, and the nature of God and his knowledge in both *De Trinitate* and Book 11 of *The City of God*. On the other hand, the anti-sceptical conclusions that Augustine establishes with the KK-thesis in the *De Trinitate* are also explicitly present in Book 11. First, Augustine begins with the indubitable piece of knowledge that he knows that he exists, and thus he is 'not at all afraid of the arguments of the Academicians',[35] i.e. the sceptic. Then, based on this piece of knowledge, Augustine adds more knowledge by application, or iterations, of something like a KK-thesis. For example, 'I am most certain [know] that I am, and that I know and delight in this',[36] or again 'neither am I deceived in knowing that I know [...] [f]or as I know that I am, so I know this also, that I know'.[37] In other words, if 'KaP' stands in for 'I know that I am', then Augustine is explicitly claiming that 1) $KaP \rightarrow KaKaP$ – i.e. he has something like a KK-thesis in mind – and 2) he is using it to refute the sceptic – i.e. the Academic.

There are clearly parallels between Augustine's thinking, in general, and his use of the KK-thesis, and philosophy of mind, in particular, in *De Trinitate* and Book 11 of *The City of God*. Most importantly, that while man is made in the image of God, it is in humanity's mind that this image is present. Further, Augustine wants to establish the majesty and, in some ways, the incomprehensibility of God, particularly in relation to humanity and its intellectual powers. Finally, Augustine is using something like the KK-thesis, to iterate and expand man's knowledge, and to respond to the sceptic, though in both works responding to the sceptic is not Augustine's main concern. However, there are also some important differences between Augustine's use of something like the

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[34] Ibid., p. 333.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

KK-thesis, and the issues surrounding it, in *De Trinitate* and Book 11 of *The City of God*, and it is to those differences I now turn.

I think that the conclusions discussed above are all correct, and there is no reason to think that Augustine did not have those things in mind when he was writing *The City of God*, in fact I believe I have shown there is at least some reason to think that he did. However, by looking closely at Book 11 there are important things that can be learned regarding Augustine's use of the KK-thesis in *The City of God*, that are different from his use in *De Trinitate*.

What is particularly distinctive about the use of the KK-thesis in Book 11 is that Augustine only, for lack of a better term, iterates knowledge once – i.e. he only asserts KaP → KaKaP – and then stops. In *De Trinitate* Augustine states:

> But if this is the only kind of thing that really pertains to human knowledge, then there are extremely few instances of it – except that any point of knowledge can be so multiplied that its instances, far from being few, turn out to extend to infinity. Thus the man who says 'I know I am alive' says he knows one thing: but if he says 'I know that I know I am alive,' there are two things. The fact that he knows these two things makes a third knowing; and in this way he can add a fourth and a fifth and a countless number more, if he has the time.[38]

In contrast, in Book 11 Augustine only claims 'I am most certain [know] that I am, and that I know and delight in this, [...] neither am I deceived in knowing that I know [...] [f]or as I know that I am, so I know this also, that I know.'[39]

There are at least two possible implications of this difference. First, it seems that Augustine in *The City of God* is *much* less concerned with responding to the sceptic. Second, in *The City of God*, Augustine seems more concerned with downplaying, as opposed to elevating, the abilities, powers, and standing of humanity, as compared with God.

As to the first, in *The City of God*, in general, and Book 11, in particular, Augustine's project is more explicitly metaphysical, and theological – in the sense of his concern with salvation, sin, the city of God, et cetera. Thus, the sceptic is less a part of the conversation than he might be in *De Trinitate*, which of course is also theological, but has

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[38] Augustine, 'De Trinitate', p. 412.
[39] Augustine, 'The City of God', p. 333.

much more to say about the philosophy of mind, and questions about epistemology. Further, throughout Book 11, Augustine actually spends a significant amount of time pointing out that humans are incapable of attaining knowledge, of at least certain things on their own. For example, Augustine states that

> the Scripture which is called canonical, which has paramount authority, and to which we yield assent in all matters of which we ought not to be ignorant, and yet cannot know of ourselves. For if we attain the knowledge of present objects by the testimony of our own senses, whether internal or external, then regarding objects remote from our own, and we credit the persons to whom the objects have been or are sensibly present. Accordingly, as in the case of visible objects which we have seen, we trust those who have (and likewise with all sensible objects), so in the case of things which are perceived by the mind and spirit, that is which are remote from our own interior sense, it behooves us to trust those who have seen them set in that incorporeal light or abidingly contemplate them.[40]

Thus, it seems incongruous for Augustine to, on the one hand, revel in man's (potentially) infinite knowledge, while drawing attention to the fact that there are many things man cannot know, at least without assistance of another – and this of course relates also to the second point, viz. that in *The City of God*, Augustine seems more concerned with downplaying, as opposed to elevating, the abilities, powers, and standing of humanity, as compared with God.

Related to the above quote, at 11.26, Augustine discusses how man comes to know sensible things, which is 'by some bodily sense [...] colours, for example, by seeing, sounds by hearing, smells by smelling, tastes by tasting, hard and soft objects by touching'.[41] Thus, Augustine is, in some ways, taking it for granted that the sceptic is wrong, and instead of building up human knowledge simply out of the raw intellectual abilities of a single thinking subject – as Descartes tried to do – Augustine is telling the reader the very many ways one can come to know a variety of things. Not only can one know a great many things simply by iterations of something like a KK-thesis, one can come to know based on sense experience, the testimony of other humans, and the testimony of the canonical scriptures.

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[40] Ibid., p. 312.
[41] Ibid., p. 333.

Again, however, Augustine does not want to build up humanity's intellectual/epistemological abilities too much, particularly vis-à-vis God. Thus, Augustine draws attention to the fact that 'we indeed recognize in ourselves the image of God, that is, of the supreme Trinity, though it be not equal to God, or rather, *though it be very far removed from Him* – being neither coeternal, nor, to say all in a word, consubstantial with Him.'[42]

Before moving on to another unique aspect of Augustine's use of something like a KK-thesis in Book 11, there is one additional issue to be brought up regarding the KK-thesis as a response to the sceptic. Notice that Augustine has said that 'I am most *certain* that I am, and that I know and delight in this.'[43] This quote can be taken in two ways. Either one is certain that one knows that one exists, and knows, and delights in, that one is certain. Alternatively, one is certain that one exists, one is certain that one knows that one exists, and one is certain that one delights in one's existence. On either interpretation there is an important clue as to how Augustine is thinking about the KK-thesis. Unlike Hintikka, who, at least at times, suggested that knowing that one knows might, as a matter of pragmatics, just be another way of saying that one is certain, for Augustine knowing that one knows and being certain clearly come apart. Thus, taking what Augustine says in *De Trinitate* and in Book 11 of *The City of God*, Augustine's KK-like-thesis seems fairly distinctive. Leaving aside the conjunctive aspect of the KK-thesis in *De Trinitate*, Augustine seems clear that an iteration of the KK-thesis is neither collapsible into a mere linguistic issue, nor does it commit Augustine to cognitive ascent – i.e. KaKaP is not necessarily a second-order knowledge claim. Therefore, some of the problematic aspects of a KK-thesis do not occur for Augustine.

The most interesting aspect of Augustine's use of a KK-like-thesis in *The City of God* is the non-epistemic application, or reinterpretation, of the KK-thesis. As was mentioned above, in *De Trinitate* Augustine states that: 'the man who says "I know I am alive" says he knows one thing: but if he says "I know that I know I am alive", there are two things. The fact that he knows these two things makes a third knowing; and in this way he can add a fourth and a fifth and a countless number more, if he has

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[42] Ibid. emphasis added.
[43] Ibid. emphasis added.

the time.'[44] However, in *The City of God* Augustine, as I have said, stops after the first iteration – i.e. with the claim of knowing that one knows. Augustine actually does not stop the iterations, but the iteration takes on a non-epistemic aspect. So, Augustine claims that 'as I know that I am, so I know this also, that I know',[45] the straightforward KK iteration of knowledge, but then he goes on to say that '[a]nd when I love these two things [his existence, or being, and his knowledge], I add to them a certain third thing, namely my love, which is of an equal moment'.[46]

Not only is Augustine departing from the KK-thesis, the second iteration being a love claim, not a knowledge claim, he is also adding a distinctively metaphysical/ontological flavour. Notice that in the above quote Augustine states that his existence and his knowledge 'is of an equal moment'[47] with his love. In other words, one's existence and knowledge and love are basically the same thing, yet different and mutually interact and support each other. Thus, at the end of 11.27 Augustine states that: 'I am assured that I am, and that I know this; and these two I love, and in the same manner I am assured that I love them.'[48] That is to say one's knowledge and love exist, one's existence is known and loved and one's love and existence is known, they are all of a piece, which is a kind of Trinitarian doctrine of the self.

So, although Augustine discusses something like a KK-thesis to talk about the Trinitarian image of God in man in both *De Trinitate* and *The City of God*, in *The City of God*, Augustine is using it – i.e. the KK-thesis – explicitly to try to understand the nature of the Trinity, particularly as it is in man. Augustine says as much when he converts the KK-thesis into what might be called an LL-thesis – i.e. If one loves, then one loves that one loves, or LaP → LaLaP, where P can stand for either one's existence, knowledge or love of all three or any combination of two. Augustine asks rhetorically at 11.28 '[w]hether we ought to love the love itself with which we love our existence and our knowledge of it, that so we may more nearly resemble the image of the divine Trinity'.[49] However, in asking and answering this question Augustine wants to be clear that humanity's Trinitarian nature is but an inferior image of the divine nature, while at

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[44] Augustine, 'De Trinitate', p. 412.

[45] Augustine, 'The City of God', p. 333.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., p. 335.

[49] Ibid.

the same time raising humanity up by reaffirming that man is capable of coming to at least a close approximation of an understanding of these things through its own power – limited though it may be. I quote Augustine at length to make this last point.

> But we are men, created in the image of our Creator, whose eternity is true, and whose truth is eternal, whose love is eternal and true, and who Himself is the eternal, true, and adorable Trinity, without confusion, without separation; and, therefore, while as we run over all the works which He has established, we may detect, as it were, His footprints, now more and now less distinct even in those things that are beneath us, since they could not so much as exist, or be bodied forth in any shape, or follow and observe any law, had they not been made by Him who supremely is, and is supremely good and supremely wise; yet in ourselves beholding His image, let us, like that younger son of the gospel, come to ourselves, and arise and return to Him from whom by our sin we had departed. There our being will have no death, our knowledge no error, our love no mishap. But, now, though we are assured of our possession of these three things, not on the testimony of others, but by our own consciousness of their presence, and because we see them with our own most truthful interior vision, yet, as we cannot of ourselves know how long they are to continue, and whether they shall never cease to be, and what issue their good or bad use will lead to, we seek for others who can acquaint us of these things, if we have not already found them.[50]

In this section of the paper, I have tried to come to some understanding of Augustine's use of something like the KK-thesis, and the role that it plays in *The City of God*, particularly in Book 11. It was shown that there is textual support for believing that Augustine's understanding of something like a KK-thesis in *The City of God* is consistent with his understanding and use of something like the KK-thesis in *De Trinitate*. However, there is also textual support for a richer, more metaphysical/ontological and theological, and less epistemic use and purpose of a KK-like-thesis that is distinctive in *The City of God*.

In both works Augustine is concerned with trying to create a sense of wonder both for humanity's mind, and God's majesty, and also with responding to the sceptic. In *The City of God*, however, these aspects are less important than the metaphysical/ontological implications of the KK-thesis' use. In particular, in *The City of God*, Augustine uses something

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like the KK-thesis to help his reader better understand the Trinitarian nature of the image of God in humanity. Finally, although the KK-thesis has been criticized for leading to potential, primarily epistemological, problems, such as cognitive assent, Augustine's use of something like the KK-thesis avoids these problems without resorting to the deflationary logico-linguistic strategy of someone like Hintikka.


## IV.

To conclude, in this paper I have tried to come to some understanding of Augustine's use of something like a KK-thesis in Book 11 of *The City of God*. I began by reviewing Jaakko Hintikka's work on the KK-thesis as a way to introduce the idea, point out some of the potential pitfalls of the KK-thesis and as a foil to show the distinctiveness of Augustine's view. Since Augustine also presents something like a KK-thesis in *De Trinitate*, his use of it there was discussed with the help of Gareth Matthews work on the subject. In *De Trinitate*, Augustine uses the KK-thesis for predominately epistemological purposes, and to elaborate his philosophy of mind. While much of Augustine's use of a KK-thesis in *De Trinitate* is consistent with his use of it in *The City of God*, in the latter Augustine adds a distinctively metaphysical and theological flavour to the KK-thesis itself. This shift in the use of the KK-thesis explains why, though on a first pass it may appear to be, it is not at all strange that Augustine would incorporate something so seemingly epistemological into a work that is so densely theological.

# DIVINE ETERNITY AS TIMELESS PERFECTION

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**Abstract.** Should we interpret God's eternity as mere everlastingness or as timelessness? We are still confronted with an ongoing debate between the two positions. That God is timeless or completely outside time might be called 'the classical view of divine eternity'. But this view can be interpreted in various ways. In reverting to some of Aquinas' texts I want to focus on the account of God's timelessness as a perfection. In trying to defend this view I will not offer any new arguments; I simply adopt the classical assessment of the meaning of the predicates we use when we speak about God. That God lives, loves, thinks, acts, etc., are claims which cannot be understood in the same way as when they are made of human persons.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The classical doctrine of the peculiarity of our assertions about God relies on the distinction between the epistemic approach and the ontological dimension: What is prior in the order of knowledge need not be prior in the ontological order. We first see smoke and infer from it that something burns. In the realm of things, however, fire comes first, smoke being one of the effects of fire. Priority can be considered as merely epistemic, relative to our way of perceiving, thinking or getting knowledge (*quoad nos*) or on the ontological level (*per se*).

Scholastic scholars apply this distinction in the account of the meaning of God's predicates. One aspect of these predicates' meaning is brought about by our epistemic approach or by the way we learn to use a predicate, the other aspect pertains to the intended reference and thus to the peculiarity of the object to which we apply the predicate. The content of the statements about God can thus be considered as relative to our way of understanding, i.e., *quoad nos*, or relative to God's reality, i.e., *per se*.

In his famous *quaestio* 13 on the semantics of God-talk, Aquinas distinguishes accordingly between a predicate's mode of signifying (*modus significandi*) and its referent (*res significata*), between the realm from which the meaning of an expression is taken and the realm of the application or reference of the same expression: that from which (*ex quo*) an expression is derived can differ from what it is intended to refer to (*ad quod*).[1]

This distinction might help to weight the arguments for and against the classical view of God's eternity. It certainly helps to understand why God's predicates connote *quoad nos* limitations and change in time, but exclude them *per se*. If God really is *causa prima* He cannot depend on any *causa* whatever, on any outer reality. He thus cannot suffer any limitations.

In this respect I share Tapp's concern with the relation between God's eternity and His infinity. God does not have any limits in his perfections and is thus infinite. Infinity, however, should not be interpreted in a mere quantitative sense, but in a deeper one. When God is called infinitely good, 'He is meant to be good in a very special, a perfect way, exceeding the usual spectrum of meanings of this word.'[2] Similarly, – as Stump points out – to predicate of God that He is eternal is to predicate more than that He is timeless: ' ... a careful consideration of the texts [of Aquinas] shows that a-temporality alone does not exhaust eternality as Aquinas conceived of it ... '[3]

Abstract objects are a-temporal, but their being outside time is far from a perfection. Further, it cannot be said that they exist – if they exist at all – simultaneously with, before, or after any other entity. There is no simultaneity with other beings in time. If, however, eternity is understood as a kind of perfection, simultaneity is not excluded. We will see that the condition of being all-at-once (*totum simul*) is part of the *explanans* of the classical definition of eternity and that this all-at-once signifies perfection. Pasnau[4] has strongly argued in favour of this classical understanding. In his terminology, a 'mereochronic' entity is one which partly exists at some instant in time, but also existed or will

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[1] *... in significatione nominum, aliud est quandoque a quo imponitur nomen ad significandum, et id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur ...* (S.Th. Iᵃ q. 13 a. 2 ad 2).

[2] Christian Tapp, 'Eternity and Infinity', in *God, Eternity, and Time*, Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (eds) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 99-116 (p. 99).

[3] Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 131.

[4] Robert Pasnau, 'On Existing All at Once', in Tapp, *God, Eternity, and Time*, pp. 11-28.

exist at other times. A 'holochronic' entity, by contrast, exists as a whole, all at once, for all of its existence.[5] God is a-temporal in the sense of being 'holochronic' all at once.

Taken as a perfection God's timelessness does not exclude duration as such, even though it excludes duration in our human sense. As perfection it does not have a 'before' or an 'after', nor any kind of succession. It cannot be captured either by a B- series or by an A-series. As said, eternity in the classical sense does not exclude duration; on the contrary, it is the highest form of duration. In scholastic terminology the term 'duration' does not express the same meaning when predicated of created finite entities as when predicated of God. But from this it does not follow that the term 'duration' is used equivocally. The different meanings are similar or analogical. 'For Aquinas, analogical predication is the traditionally recognized solution to what otherwise would seem to be an insoluble dilemma.'[6]

The special or analogical meaning of 'duration' and the other predicates predicated of God in the Thomist tradition is a consequence of the arguments of the *quinquae viae*, of the five ways to prove the existence of the *causa prima*. If one does identify the unmoved mover, the highest Aristotelian ousia, with the Christian God one is confronted with the thesis of God's simplicity and the consequences thereof. The predication of properties and actions of God must accordingly be interpreted in such a way that they do not contradict this identification of the Christian God with the *causa prima*.[7]

If God is the *causa prima* of all of reality, He cannot be contingent, i.e., He cannot depend on any entities whatsoever. He cannot be composed, not even of matter and form.[8] Being absolutely simple He cannot have properties in the way contingent entities can have properties: He must be identical with any properties He has, and these properties cannot be but pure perfections (*perfections purae*), i.e. they cannot be affected by change in time. His simplicity excludes all properties implying finite determination or alteration.

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[5] Pasnau, 'On Existing All at Once', p. 11.

[6] Stump, *Aquinas*, p. 146. See also Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2004).

[7] See: S.Th. Ia, qq. 2-13.

[8] See also Suárez, 'Disputationes Metaphysicae', *Opera Omnia* 25/26 (Paris 1861), DM 50, 3, 9.

In this paper I thus will refer to the Thomist definition of eternity, then mention one of the main arguments against this classical view and revert to the analogical understanding of God's perfections based on the mentioned distinction between our human approach to them (*quoad nos*) and the intended reference (*per se*).

## II. THE THOMIST BOETHIAN DEFINITION

Aquinas adopts and defends the Boethian definition of God's eternity as complete possession all at once of illimitable/interminable life (*interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*).[9] In her comment Stump calls attention to the elements of the *definiens*, among them the conditions that an eternal God has illimitable life and that He has this life all at once (*totum simul*).[10] Aquinas himself points to these two determining elements of the *definiens*: first, what is eternal is interminable, that is, has no beginning and no end; secondly, eternity has no succession, being simultaneously whole.[11]

Tapp sees in these elements of the *definiens* a correspondence with the thesis of God's infinity as 'outside the limits': "'*Interminablis vita*", "illimitable life", excludes that the life of God [...] has ever had a beginning or an end. "*Tota simul*", being completely at once, excludes [...] the succession of temporal parts. "*Perfecta*", being "perfect", excludes the limitations of being that is received in something else and is thereby limited.'[12]

We humans cannot imagine or visualize being in such an unbounded state all at once. But we can arrive at a conception of it by abstracting or negating certain aspects which are typical for our way of experiencing life. In trying to specify what eternity is, according to Aquinas, we cannot but begin with our own experience of change, one state coming after the other, i.e., by experiencing succession. By abstracting or negating change we put ourselves on the road to conceiving of eternity as duration lacking succession, being immutable duration.

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[9] Iᵃ q. 10 a. 1.

[10] Stump, *Aquinas*, pp. 133f.

[11] Primo, ex hoc quod id quod est in aeternitate, est interminabile, idest principio et fine carens ... Secundo, per hoc quod ipsa aeternitas successione caret, tota simul existens. Iᵃ q. 10 a. 1 c.

[12] Tapp, *God, Eternity, and Time*, p. 108.

Aquinas believes that as humans we generally arrive at the idea of simple things via the negation of aspects of compounds. We cannot have direct knowledge e.g. of a geometrical point, but we can form an idea of it by negating its being extended or having parts. Aquinas explicitly claims that our intellect, which first apprehends compound things, cannot attain to the knowledge of simple things except by removing complexity.[13] Thus, we obtain the idea of eternity by negating or abstracting the compound aspects of succession.

Since succession occurs in every movement, and one part comes after another – Aquinas unfolds – the fact that we reckon before and after in movement makes us apprehend time. Now in an unchanging thing, which is always the same, it makes no sense to assume a before or after.[14] Likewise, the idea of eternity consists in apprehending the uniformity of what is completely outside of movement.[15]

Eternity follows immutability, as time follows change or movement. Hence – Aquinas argues – as God is supremely immutable, it supremely belongs to Him to be eternal. Nor is He only eternal rather, He is His own eternity. No other being, by contrast, is its own duration, as no other is its own being.[16] Eternity truly and properly so called is in God alone.[17] In his concise style Aquinas states that since God is maximally immutable He is to the highest degree eternal.[18]

## III. CAN GOD ACT?

There is an ongoing debate on the Thomist classical conception. One objection is: If God is eternal in the defined sense how can He act? If actions are events and if events are changes, then one cannot consistently

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[13] *... intellectus noster, qui primo apprehendit composita, in cognitionem simplicium pervenire non potest, nisi per remotionem compositionis.* (Iᵃ q. 10 a. 1 ad 1).

[14] *In eo autem quod caret motu, et semper eodem modo se habet, non est accipere prius et posterius.* (Iᵃ q. 10 a. 1. c).

[15] *... ita in apprehensione uniformitatis eius quod est omnino extra motum, consistit ratio aeternitatis.* (Iᵃ q. 10 a. 1 c).

[16] *... ratio aeternitatis consequitur immutabilitatem, sicut ratio temporis consequitur motum ... Unde, cum Deus sit maxime immutabilis, sibi maxime competit esse aeternum. Nec solum est aeternus, sed est sua aeternitas ...* (Iᵃ q. 10 a. 2 c).

[17] Iᵃ q. 10 a. 3 c.

[18] *Unde, cum Deus sit maxime immutabilis, sibi maxime competit esse aeternum.* (Iᵃ q. 10 a. 2 c).

say of God that He acts. One attempt at a way out, given by Leftow, questions the assumption that all events are changes and the assumption that necessarily, any event occurs before or after another event.[19] And Tapp asks why it should not be possible to consistently assume that there be change without time.[20]

The Thomists, however, counter the objection by distinguishing between the meanings of those predications which imply change and those which can be combined with immutability. Saying of God that He acts and saying that He is timelessly eternal is not necessarily contradictory. Whether these statements contradict each other depends on the meaning of the statement that God acts.

The mode of signifying of 'acting' is taken from our experience of acting as human beings, but we intend to refer by the same expression to acts of a different agent, an agent having immutable duration. The *modus significandi* is taken from everyday life, but the *res significata* exceeds the realm of our experience. Due to His absolute simplicity God is *per se* essentially changeless, absolutely unable to change, but He is temporal relative to our ways of speaking, thinking and sensing.

For us it seems inconceivable that there be actions without succession. But that does not exclude the possibility of actions which *per se* do not imply a change in the agent. Because of the reasons supporting the thesis of God's simplicity and immutability it is plausible to assume that God's actions are *per se* without succession, even though we humans perceive of them *quoad nos* as actions in succession.

Aquinas argues forcefully for this already in the ScG: God's act of creation is *per se* neither motion nor change.[21] Nevertheless, creation appears to us to be a kind of change. From the point of view of our way of understanding, creation appears to be an act with succession, in that our intellect grasps one and the same thing as not existing before and as existing afterwards.[22]

Furthermore, in any act of producing, our knowledge and experience of the doing come before the product itself. If creation were like a human

    [19] Brian Leftow, 'Eternity', in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (ed. by Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 257-263 (p. 262).
    [20] Tapp, *God, Eternity, and Time*, pp. 111f.
    [21] ScG. II, 17.
    [22] *Videtur tamen creatio esse mutatio quaedam secundum modum intelligendi tantum: inquantum scilicet intellectus noster accipit unam et eandem rem ut non existentem prius, et postea existentem.* (ScG. II, 18).

act there would be something preceding the thing created. But this would be contrary to the very idea of creation. If creation is *ex nihilo*, it cannot be preceded by something with the disposition to be realized or manifested by change. There is no prerequisite to creation; nor does God lack anything for accomplishing his action which he might have after the action.[23]

As Eleonore Stump notes, a distinction must be made between acting in such a way that the action itself can be located in time, and acting in such a way that the effect of the action can be located in time. For an eternal being on Aquinas's view, only the first way of acting is impossible. That a divine action is not a successive event in time does not prevent God from causing effects located in time: 'Even though his actions cannot be located in time, he can bring about effects in time ...'[24] This applies to God's knowing as well: "God timelessly knows that the temporal entities *are* temporal; the mode of his knowing them is not the same as the mode of their existence, nor need it to be.'[25] And Schärtl warns of slipping from 'God is eternally aware of x' to 'For God x is eternal'.[26]

Stump defends the notion of a-temporal duration, she grants, however, a certain apparent incoherence, but attributes this to the experience of our own duration. For us the past no longer exists, the future does not exist yet, and the present is evanescent. For Aquinas genuine duration cannot be like that; it has to be fully realized duration and such fully realized duration must be a-temporal duration: 'Atemporal duration [...] is duration none of which is not – none of which is absent (and hence future) or flowed away (and hence past). On this way of thinking about time and eternity, eternity, not time, is the mode of existence that admits of fully realized duration.'[27]

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[23] *In creatione autem nihil praeexigitur ex parte materiae: nec aliquid deest agenti ad agendum quod postea per motum ei adveniat, cum sit immobilis, ut in primo huius operis ostensum est.* (ScG. II, 19).

[24] Stump, *Aquinas*, p. 151.

[25] William Hasker, 'God, Time and Knowledge', in *Philosophy of Religion*, Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murray (eds) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 53-57 (p. 56).

[26] Thomas Schärtl, 'Why we need God's eternity', in Tapp, *God, Eternity, and Time*, pp. 47-62 (p. 61).

[27] Stump, *Aquinas*, p. 145.

## IV. UNCREATED AND CREATED DURATION

In scholastic philosophy it is commonplace to distinguish between uncreated and created duration. The former is infinite and proper to God; the latter is finite and can include the duration of incorruptible, everlasting spiritual entities, or of elapsing corporeal things. Created duration is successive like motion and change, whereas uncreated duration is all at once (*tota simul*), without any succession. God's eternity is thus infinite duration, lacking any before and after: *Dicitur Aeternitas Duratio Dei infinita: Itaque; non habens prius, nec posterius.*[28]

Suárez too clearly distinguishes between uncreated and created duration.[29] The uncreated duration is proper to God. It is a real perfection. Those who deny its reality do so because they take it as essentially combined with succession. This is our human way to conceive of the co-existence of things in their duration. But God does not depend on any external reality whatsoever.

God has the most excellent kind of eternity, affecting not only His being, but the whole of His reality. His kind of eternity includes all perfections, all acts, and all inner operations. Since God is identical with the perfections of being, He is identical with the fullness of duration. His eternity is full duration of His operations as well. This kind of eternal duration differs from any other kind of duration which is linked to succession – be it permanent, immutable, or indivisible.[30]

It is thus cogent to assume that in God there is neither past nor future. That He has neither past nor future applies not only to his being, but to his knowledge, to His love, and to all other perfections as well. If an entity is eternal in the full sense, everything in it has to endure through true eternity, such that nothing can pass away or supervene; everything has to remain for ever.[31]

Following Aquinas, Suárez does not exclude however that in religious language we speak and conceive of God's eternity *quoad nos*, i.e. according to our way of sensing, as if it were everlastingness. We then speak as if there were succession and thus past and future in God. We say

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[28] Rudolph Goclenius, *Lexicon Philosophicum*, 196, 561.

[29] DM 50, 3, 1.

[30] *Ac proinde recte discernitur aeternitas ab omni alia duratione, quae, quantumvis permanens aut immutabilis vel indivisibilis videatur, successionem habet adiunctam ...* (DM 50, 3, 10).

[31] *Nam si res vere aeterna est, quidquid in ea est per veram aeternitatem durat; et ideo nihil horum transire potest nec succedere in ipsa, sed semper manere.* (DM 50, 3, 11).

of God that He always was, that He always is and that He always will be, because we conceive of an eternal entity not as it is in itself, but according to our way of perceiving.[32]

We human beings conceive of eternity as being infinitely extended or as a kind of everlasting stream. But in God's reality there is no flux, no flowing. This is only an extrinsic way of speaking which is due to our existence in time and which accords with our way of perceiving and thinking.[33] To say that something is past is to say that it no longer exists; and to say that it is future, that it does not exist yet. But God's perfection excludes that He ever had things that He no longer has and that He will have things he does not yet have. This applies also to His knowledge, love, and all of his proper and internal acts or perfections.[34]

## V. NO THIRD WAY

The Thomist and scholastic strategy of distinguishing between *per se* and *quoad nos* should not be confused with the so-called third way, proposed by Padgett.[35] Padgett tries to avoid the main objections against God's eternity conceived as absolute timelessness. God should accordingly be timeless relative to the created space-time cosmos, but also in some ways temporal. God is the Lord of time, not its prisoner.

The intuition behind Padgett's view is, 'God is still temporal in some sense: God is immutable in essence, but changing in inter-relationship with the world and with us [...] For this reason there are intervals within God's life, but those intervals have no specific or intrinsic temporal measure.'[36] One should thus distinguish between physical time, which began with the creation of the universe, and metaphysical time which

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[32] *Dicimus enim et Deum fuisse semper et esse et futurum esse, quia nos non concipimus rem aeternam prout in se est, sed nostro modo*. (DM 50, 3, 12).

[33] *... in ipsa aeternitate Dei nullus est fluxus, et consequenter nec praeteritum aut futurum, sed per denominationem extrinsecam ex coexistentia nostri temporis, iuxta modum concipiendi nostrum*. (DM 50, 3, 12).

[34] *... intelligendum est de scientia, amore et de aliis propriis et internis actibus seu perfectionibus Dei*. (DM 50, 3, 12).

[35] Alan G. Padgett, 'The Difference Creation Makes: Relative Timelessness Reconsidered', in Tapp *God, Eternity, and Time*, pp. 117-125; 'Eternity', in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Chad Meister and Paul Copan (eds) (London/New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 287-295.

[36] Padgett, 'The Difference Creation Makes', p. 118.

can go on without change and without laws of nature and which had no beginning.

Padgett's concern seems to be to defend the possibility of God's performing real actions. For this he assumes a kind of succession on the part of the divine and says that we need a theory of direct divine action according to which 'God acts upon and interacts with temporal things at moments which do not and *cannot* all exist at once'.[37] God might have been immutable before creation, but we have to think of him as having been capable of change in virtue of his creating something: 'For all eternity past, even before all creation, God is at least capable of changing in order to make reality *be* in the first place'.[38]

On the other hand, the third way maintains the view that even after creation God is in a certain sense outside time: He always transcends space and time. None of the qualifications of physical time makes sense when applied to God's infinite and eternal being.

Padgett explicitly says: 'Thus I argue against Craig and Swinburne that some aspects of God's relative timelessness before creation continue to apply even when God changes with a dynamic creation. We might say that God becomes more robustly temporal after creation by becoming a changing being. But God for eternity past was always temporal in a bare metaphysical sense, since God was always capable of change'.[39]

According to the so-called third way, God is temporal in a minimalist sense of the word, transcending the limitations we associate with ordinary finite temporal beings. God is both temporal and yet also relatively timeless. This diverges from the classical standpoint: God is per se *timeless*, but *quoad nos* as if He had duration with succession.

## VI. THE ANALOGICAL SENSE OF GOD'S PREDICATES

What is special about the expressions referring to God? Let us look at the *quaestio* 13 '*De nominibus Dei*'. Aquinas sticks to the Aristotelian semantics: Words do not refer directly to the things signified, but refer only via the conceptions of the speakers. The speaker's intellectual conception is a means or a medium for the reference of the words he uses.[40]

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[37] Padgett, 'The Difference Creation Makes', p. 121.
[38] Padgett, 'The Difference Creation Makes', p. 121.
[39] Padgett, 'Eternity', p. 294.

Reference is thus at least a three-place relation between the word, the speaker grasping the referent, and the referent. Without the speakers' conceptions words would not have any reference. It is because of speakers' intentions, ideas, and notions that the words they use have reference. Speakers use expressions in order to refer to things or state of affairs insofar as they form an idea (*ratio*) or a representation of them. In the ideal case speakers grasp the essence of the referent. But even speakers who lack an adequate conception of the referent might still be successful in their referring acts.

The Aristotelian semantics allows for the assumption that expressions with differing meanings, linked to different conceptions and ideas, can nonetheless have the same referent. The ideas expressed by or likened to the expressions can be more or less adequate, but these ideas are viable as long as they indicate how to refer to the intended referent. Aquinas thus states that we can give a name to anything insofar as we can understand or grasp it.[41]

Reference to human beings, for example, is guaranteed by the knowledge we have of the essence of '*homo*'. In the case of God things turn out to be tricky because we cannot know what the divine essence is. But our referring acts might nonetheless be successful because of other conceptions we have of Him. These are inadequate but do not necessarily hinder the reference. God can be named by us, although not in such a way that the name signifying Him expresses the divine essence.

In his study on the peculiarity of God-talk, Gregory P. Rocca shows that even in the case of expressions referring to absolute perfections, there is always a creaturely connotation (*consignificatio*) insofar as our manner of understanding the perfection is necessarily influenced by our experience of material reality.[42]

And what should we say about the relation between God and His creatures? Is it a real relation? Aquinas accounts for the relation between God and the creatures as a mixed asymmetric relation and thus does not exclude the possibility of predicating attributes which import change, but real change can occur only in creatures – not in God. One can say

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[40] *Et sic patet quod voces referuntur ad res significandas, mediante conceptione intellectus.* (Iª q. 13 a. 1 c).

[41] Secundum igitur quod aliquid a nobis intellectu cognosci potest, sic a nobis potest nominari. Iª q. 13 a. 1 c.

[42] Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, p. 343.

that the relation between God and the creatures is real insofar as the creatures really refer to God.[43]

Aquinas conceives of such an asymmetric relation as mixed, i.e., real in one *relatum* and unreal (*rationis tantum*) in the other. For instance, a relation between a sensing and knowing subject on the one hand and the sensed and known thing on the other is grounded in real change in the subject but not in the intentional object. One can say that the relation is real inasmuch as the subject is intentionally directed toward the intentional object, whereas it is not real considered from the side of this object.[44]

In order to illustrate this asymmetric relation Aquinas refers to a further example: We can say that somebody is at the right of a column, but that does not imply that we predicate of the column a special attribute. Aquinas explains, 'standing on the right of the column' is not grounded in the column, but in the person.[45]

What are the consequences of this argument? It is possible to say of God that He is Creator, Lord, and Redeemer, predicates which import a relation to the creatures and thus to time, but these predications imply merely that the creatures depend on God but not that God depends on His creatures.[46] To predicate of God that he is Lord (*dominus*) is to say something true. He really is the Lord because the creatures really are subject to him. Since the relation of subjection is real in the creature, it follows that God is Lord not merely in idea, but also in reality.[47]

Aquinas concedes that it makes sense to say of God that He was not Lord before there were any creatures. However, one can accept this without having to assume any real change in God himself. It is similar to

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[43] Iᵃ q. 13 a. 7 c.

[44] *Sicut sensus et scientia referuntur ad sensibile et scibile, quae quidem, inquantum sunt res quaedam in esse naturali existentes, sunt extra ordinem esse sensibilis et intelligibilis, et ideo in scientia quidem et sensu est relatio realis, secundum quod ordinantur ad sciendum vel sentiendum res; sed res ipsae in se consideratae, sunt extra ordinem huiusmodi. Unde in eis non est aliqua relatio realiter ad scientiam et sensum; sed secundum rationem tantum, inquantum intellectus apprehendit ea ut terminos relationum scientiae et sensus.* (Iᵃ q. 13 a. 7 c).

[45] *Et similiter dextrum non dicitur de columna, nisi inquantum ponitur animali ad dextram, unde huiusmodi relatio non est realiter in columna, sed in animali.* (Iᵃ q. 13 a. 7 c).

[46] Iᵃ q. 13 a. 7 ad 2.

[47] *... cum relatio subiectionis realiter sit in creatura, sequitur quod Deus non secundum rationem tantum, sed realiter sit dominus. Eo enim modo dicitur dominus, quo creatura ei subiecta est.* (Iᵃ q. 13 a. 7 ad 5).

the case of unknown things which become known. When the potentially known becomes actually known it does not undergo any real change. The change only affects the knower. Still, because the meaning of 'Lord' includes the idea of a servant and vice versa, these two relative terms, 'Lord' and 'servant', are simultaneous by nature. Hence, God was not 'Lord' until He had a servant subject to Himself.[48]

There is thus nothing to prevent expressions which ascribe a relation to the creature from being predicated of God temporally, not by reason of any change in Him, but by reason of the change of the creature.[49]

## VII. CONCLUSION

God's eternity in the classical sense is not only timelessness, but a perfection (*totum simul*). Taken as a positive attribute it does not exclude duration as such, even though it excludes duration in our human sense having a 'before' and 'after'. This classical conception is consistent with the thesis that God is infinitely perfect and simple, which is a consequence of the thesis that God is *causa prima* of the whole of reality.

However, if one adheres to this classical view one is confronted with the objection that such an eternal God cannot act and is no person. But saying that God acts and saying that He has immutable duration is no contradiction as long as we distinguish between the *modus significandi* and the *res significata*. The mode of signifying of 'acting' is taken from our experience of acting as humans beings in time, but we intend to refer by the same expression to the acts of a different agent, an agent with immutable duration. The *res significata*, i.e., the intended referent, exceeds our experience: that from which (*ex quo*) an expression is derived can differ from what it is intended to refer to (*ad quod*).[50]

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[48] ... *quia tamen in significatione domini clauditur quod habeat servum, et e converso, ista duo relativa, dominus et servus, sunt simul natura. Unde Deus non fuit dominus, antequam haberet creaturam sibi subiectam.* (Iª q. 13 a. 7 ad 6).

[49] *Cum igitur Deus sit extra totum ordinem creaturae, et omnes creaturae ordinentur ad ipsum, et non e converso, manifestum est quod creaturae realiter referuntur ad ipsum Deum; sed in Deo non est aliqua realis relatio eius ad creaturas, sed secundum rationem tantum, inquantum creaturae referuntur ad ipsum. Et sic nihil prohibet huiusmodi nomina importantia relationem ad creaturam, praedicari de Deo ex tempore, non propter aliquam mutationem ipsius, sed propter creaturae mutationem.* (Iª q. 13 a. 7 c).

[50] ... *in significatione nominum, aliud est quandoque a quo imponitur nomen ad significandum, et id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur* ... (Iª q. 13 a. 2 ad 2).

The main arguments against the classical view thus lose some of the force attributed to them.

# CHARITABLE LOVE:
# BEARING THE OTHER'S TRANSCENDENCE

## PAUL MOYAERT

*KU Leuven*

**Abstract.** According to a popular view charity is reduced to mercy and benevolence. Through an exploration of traditional, Christian, charitable acts – both corporeal and spiritual in nature – I set out to develop an alternative view. Why, for example, is the simple act of laying the dead to rest considered an act of charity? Feelings of pity and commiseration offer an insufficiently firm basis for justifying such an attribution. By adopting the burial of the dead as a sort of touchstone, I suggest that the (corporeally or spiritually) indigent other finds him- or herself in need of charity at the precise moment that he or she loses the ability to react as a person. Sometimes being charitable comes to expression in relinquishing one's demands that the other behave as morally responsible people ought to behave. Charity involves the question of how to bear the other's 'transcendence'.

In *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (2001), Martha Nussbaum gives voice to a number of reflections on the nature and meaning of charity.[1] Her account develops an understanding of charity, or compassionate love, in terms of clemency and mercy, or more to the point, from the viewpoint of a 'merciful judge': '[m]ercy is defined as the inclination of the judgment toward leniency in selecting penalties: the merciful judge will often choose a penalty milder than the one appointed in law for the offense' (p. 365). Ultimately, Nussbaum's focus on charity forms an important part of her moral-philosophical appeal for greater compassion, an appeal that she aims directly at the ethical theories of philosophers like Spinoza, who maintain that benevolence and humanity should be sought (and defined) independently of the emotional whims of compassion. Drawing from Seneca, she outlines

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[1] Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thoughts. The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

a total of three arguments in support of her idea that charity *qua* compassion is an expression of moral goodness. *Firstly*, she argues that mercy accords with an aristocratic and virile ideal of self-esteem. Instead of demanding an attitude of self-debasement and servility, it actively affirms one's power. It is thus anything but a sign of weakness or of a cringing unwillingness to cause pain to others. *Secondly*, she sees mercy and leniency as being rooted in a deeper understanding (or appreciation) of the flaws, vulnerabilities and failings of human beings. She even goes so far as to argue that a view of human nature which sees only beauty, goodness and strength in individuals betrays a certain shortsightedness and moral shallowness: "'I'll love you only to the extent that you exemplify properties that I otherwise cherish.' This attitude has no room for mercy, for an embracing unconditionality in love seems well suited to a life of imperfection and vulnerability.' (p. 499) Just as compassion is willing and able to accept the other's failings, shortcomings and so forth, so a lack of such compassion is clearly at odds with true love. *Thirdly*, Nussbaum argues that compassion both nourishes and undergirds the shared life of human communities. Insofar as it spares the other from being cast out or barred from communal life, it actively restores relationships between friends and neighbours, or between a child and his or her parents. What's more, it is even powerful enough to *create* new bonds of communal solidarity. In short, the more compassion is exercised by members of a community, the stronger the community grows. Indeed, Nussbaum even charges, somewhat more broadly, that communities are not shaped and maintained through duties and rights alone, for generosity also plays a key role in binding them together. While there may not be any possibility of exercising generosity apart from the law, it nevertheless opens up a communal space beyond the law. And while other members of your community may be able to evaluate and measure your acts of compassion and generosity, there is no way for them to lay any blame at your feet for lacking in it.

In the following remarks, I would like to focus in particular on two claims that Nussbaum advances: that compassion ought to be viewed as a form of *clemency* or *leniency*, and that its principal source of value derives from its dual-capacity both to *foster* and *restore* communal life. By and large, I imagine it's safe to assume that few will be tempted to challenge these claims. In what follows, however, I shall argue that the mindset of the clement judge, on the one hand, and the wellbeing of the community, on the other, fall short of offering a robust view of charity. As

I hope to show, clemency fails to give full expression to what's ultimately at stake in acts of charity, and while discussion of a close relationship between compassion and communal life may be superficially correct in certain instances, it remains fundamentally misleading in others. Please don't misunderstand my larger aim here: charity is undoubtedly a form of altruism – I am not interested in disputing this point, nor in advancing a completely different view. What I would like to challenge, however, is Nussbaum's view that this particular form of altruism necessarily works for the greater benefit of the community. As I would like to argue, any effects on the life of the community are secondary in nature.

In order to set up the following discussion and frame a richer and more comprehensive picture of charitable love, I would like to draw from what Christian theologians and philosophers have long referred to as the fourteen acts of charity, which can be found in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* 2a 2ae, quaestio 32, art. 2. The specific term Thomas employs here is *eleemosynae*,[2] and he divvies each of the fourteen deeds up into two separate categories. Under the heading of physical deeds of charity, firstly, he includes offering nourishment to the hungry, giving drink to those who thirst, clothing the naked, providing refuge to the foreigner, visiting the sick at their bedside and prisoners in their cells and, finally, burying the dead. Next, the spiritual acts of charity include instructing the ignorant, offering counsel to those in doubt, providing consolation to the afflicted and those in mourning, admonishing the wayward sinner, bearing with those who are burdensome or troublesome with patience and longsuffering, forgiving your enemies and praying for everyone, whether living or dead. While these lists may not offer an explanation of what charity effectively consists in, they do provide us with a number of helpful examples of how compassionate people act in certain circumstances.

In Christian spirituality, these fourteen acts of charity are also meant to serve as a practical illustration of how the command to love one's neighbour as oneself ought to be understood and put into action. It is of course a well-known fact that this command is far from being unique to the Christian tradition. In addition to figuring explicitly in the Old Testament, it also features prominently in a number of other major spiritual traditions. The one thing that marks Christian neighbourly

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[2] *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Bd. X, kol. 1052-1054, <Werke der Barmherzigkeit> (Freiburg i. B.: Herder, 1965).

love as unique and rather peculiar – indeed, the one thing that brings
it closest to utter anarchy – is the extension of the command to cover
*love of one's enemies*. This is undoubtedly far and away the most contra-
natural demand ever placed on human shoulders – a demand utterly
bereft of any conceivable natural foundation. Traditionally, naturalistic
conceptions of moral sensibility have viewed pleasure and pain as
precursors, or natural templates, of good and evil. In addition to offering
natural expressions of good and bad, they also serve as trusty guides for
one to follow. Insofar as our bodies love what is good and hate what
is bad or harmful, pain and pleasure figure as spontaneous, bodily
expressions of love and hate. To follow the command to love my enemy
as myself demands that I embrace someone who makes me suffer or
violates something I cherish. It flies directly in the face of my natural
inclinations and is totally impossible to respect, as a command, without
first redirecting my aggression, naturally targeted at my enemy, against
myself. Adherents and disciples of Christianity are perfectly aware of the
command's disturbing character. They do not fail to see it as a stumbling
block, or as a kind of moral insanity, that directly conflicts with the
ideals of fairness and justice. Criminals *ought* to suffer punishment –
they do not merit love, and particularly not the love of those they harm
and violate. Indeed, Nietzsche and Freud were both clearly justified in
claiming that, with this command, Christianity planted a bitter seed of
infinite guilt directly into the beating heart of our moral sensibility. It
is utterly impossible to understand – let alone heed – this command
without a keen awareness of its disturbing, unnatural cruelty. Whatever
I may do, or however I may react to the wrongdoing of my enemy, it is
never enough. And if I fail to do more than I did, the blame rests entirely
on my shoulders, for the command forbids nothing.

   The first thing to take note of in Thomas' list of charitable deeds is that
it does not answer (let alone raise) the question of *who* my neighbour is.
Nowhere is the neighbour identified as a friend or family member, for
example; nor does Thomas' list single 'the neighbour' out as a member
of a given race or nation, or as someone who shares my beliefs. Indeed,
no social relation whatsoever is offered as a point of reference capable
of determining who may (or may not) be my neighbour. Instead, the
list seems to define my neighbour quite simply as he or she to whom
*I* show compassion, toward whom *I* act in a neighbourly way. In other
words, *I* am the neighbour of him or her to whom I show mercy – not the
other way around. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, for instance,

we see this reversal of perspective brought quite plainly to the fore. After recounting the parable, Christ asks his listeners: 'Which of the three was, according to you, the neighbour of the victim of the robbers?' (Luke 10:36)

With this in mind, let's take another look at the double list. What the list makes immediately clear is that the paradigm of the clement judge is far too weak to fully grasp what's at stake in charitable love. Take for example the burial of the dead: how could the act of laying the dead to rest possibly be viewed as a form of clemency or leniency? If I single out this charitable deed in particular, it is not without reason, for the peculiar status of the other's lifeless corpse helps to give a clearer and much more vivid idea of the ontological condition of him or her who, as a *living* human being in need, makes a claim on my charity. Both the living person in need of my love and the still, cold corpse are situated in the same ambiguous space of an ontological 'in-between' – they are, at one and the same time, both inside and outside the field of communal, social life. Taking the burial of the dead as a paradigm helps us to clarify why acts of charity cannot be defined uniquely in terms of their positive social impact. On my view, the core of charitable love is to be found, not in mere clemency, but in patience and longsuffering. What charity bears with, or *suffers*, is precisely the community's powerlessness to fully restore itself, or to mend the tear that ruptures it internally. It steadfastly occupies the gap that tears the community's social fabric from within; it accepts the fact that the wound, or gap, between myself and my neighbour, cannot be healed. Later on, in the second part of my paper, I will elaborate on this view in greater detail. Afterwards, in the conclusion, I will then discuss the sense in which patience, or longsuffering, gives shape to the spiritual dimension of charitable love.

Firstly, however, we have a pressing question to respond to: how is the act of laying a dead body to rest so helpful in illustrating what's going on in charitable love?


## I. BURYING THE DEAD: A CHARITABLE DEED?

It should be relatively obvious why this particular act of charity fails to chime with Nussbaum's view as outlined above: neither leniency nor compassion play any role in motivating the act of laying the dead to rest. It is particularly instructive for us as philosophers insofar it undermines our frequent inclination to reduce altruism to a form of benevolence,

to a reduction of pain and suffering, or to assisting those in need. The other's lifeless body doesn't need my help at all; in contrast to someone in need, it doesn't suffer anything whatsoever. From a certain point of view, of course, you could make the argument that the act of laying the dead to rest can be re-inscribed in a broader altruistic framework, or in a more comprehensive, derivative need. For example, you could point out that giving the body a proper burial helps assuage the grief of surviving friends and family members. This line of argument isn't entirely convincing, however, for it clearly begs the question of what you were doing in 'helping' the corpse as such.

The act of burying the dead is not the only charitable deed that compels us to rethink our common understanding of charity as a form of benevolence, assistance or reduction of the other's suffering. Suffering, of course, can take at least two different forms: physical suffering and mental suffering. If we revisit Thomas' list of the spiritual deeds of charity, we stumble across a number of charitable acts that have little if anything to do with diminishing mental suffering, or providing spiritual assistance. Indeed, suffering doesn't even seem to enter the picture in some of the spiritual, charitable acts. Take the example of patiently tolerating the annoying and troublesome aspects of a person's behaviour (or character). People with obnoxious habits and character flaws don't necessarily suffer, themselves, from these flaws – on the contrary, it's his or her friends and family who do all the suffering! Or take the example of praying for others. Charitably praying for others, as their neighbour, is a fundamentally *symbolic* act, which cannot be measured up in terms of its efficacy in helping (or failing to help) those in need.[3]

While these sorts of observations might tempt us to try to rethink charity completely independently from our usual notions of aid and compassion, what I would simply like to draw attention to is how they force us to reconsider the deeper significance of helping those in need, or ministering to the other's suffering. The willingness to help others (or actually helping them) is commonly associated with an attitude of subordination and servitude: someone who helps others makes him- or herself subservient to them, which requires an attitude of *respect*, *awe* or *reverence*.

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[3] Arnold Burms, 'Moral Taboos and the Narrow Conception of Morality', in A. W. Musschenga (Ed.), *Does Religion Matter Morally?* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), pp. 95-107.

This is precisely what we find going on in the act of burying the dead, or indeed in any act of charitable service: burial honours the deceased and pays respect to them. Rather than 'meeting the needs' of the deceased, which is of course quite meaningless, I pay my respects to his or her dignity as a fellow human being.

Honouring someone, whether living or dead, requires that I recognize the special place that he or she occupies in the world. What this involves is a fundamental affirmation, taken to the extreme, of the basic, ontological difference between man and other living (or non-living) beings, such as plants, animals and brute matter: I affirm and resolutely insist upon this difference *out of respect*, even and especially when it risks being effaced or when I have trouble discerning it, such as when someone passes away. In the moments immediately following a person's death, their face may still be clearly recognizable, but it doesn't take long before it finally breaks apart – at which point the difference between man and lifeless matter (or daisy-fodder) ultimately gives way. It is precisely in these moments when nature's indifference cruelly reasserts itself, however, that we re-inscribe this difference by means of a symbolic gesture, such as burying the dead. By covering the body with a white sheet, cremating it or laying it to rest deep in the earth, we re-affirm the difference between man and other natural beings. In this way, we guard the human body from anything that threatens to nullify its fundamental dignity. In a very real sense, we hold the deceased back from dissolving into nothingness, protecting him or her from the impersonal, natural forces that threaten to obliterate his or her unique place in the world. By 'paying respect' to the deceased's body, I do something for it that it's powerless to do for itself: I honour and dignify it at the very moment when it loses hold of its human dignity. While this is quite clear in the case of burying the dead, couldn't we also recognize the same fundamental intention, or the same respectful appreciation of the other's dignity, in clothing the naked and other charitable deeds? Even while clothing the naked may serve the vital interests of sheltering the body from the elements and physical harm, at a deeper level, it is also a way of taking the body's dignity into protection. In a similar way, the other physical deeds of charity (such as feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty) not only meet the needs of the body but restore and reaffirm its dignity in the face of nature's impersonal forces. Ultimately, this is the aim of the service involved in acts of charitable love: restoring the dignity of those suffering under inhuman and degrading circumstances. On a superficial level, of course,

charity may (in *some* cases) serve to alleviate the other's suffering, but the underlying metaphysical motivation is clear: *to restore human dignity*. If we strive to diminish other people's suffering, it is ultimately because the suffering gnaws away at their dignity. This, as I would argue, is where Nussbaum's account falls short: in focusing exclusively on benevolence and acts of leniency, it fails to seize hold of the deeper motive force driving the exercise of charitable acts.

In a phenomenological perspective, the corpse bears the ambiguous status of an ontological 'in-between', as Gorgio Agamben would put it.[4] Though it is definitively cut off from life, it doesn't automatically reduce to the level of brute, lifeless matter either. It still bears the form and appearance of the living being that it was when alive, and yet it no longer has a place in the world of the living. And while it no longer shares in the sphere of human meanings and values, this doesn't mean that it's simply cast out of that sphere either. On Freud's view, the corpse belongs to the field of the *uncanny* as *a presence without a proper place*: though it clearly isn't 'here in our midst' in the same way that we are present 'in the midst' of other, living people, it isn't simply 'gone' or 'absent' like a student is absent from class. Marked by an unsettling excess that is impossible simply to tuck away somewhere, hidden from view, it falls both inside and outside our world. The act of laying the body to rest out of charitable love is a *recognition* of the peculiar ontological position it occupies with respect to the community of the living.

We can gain an insight into the human condition by more closely examining this peculiar ontological position occupied by the human corpse. But what insight is that, exactly? Human beings straddle two different worlds at one and the same time. While we belong to a world shared in common with other, fellow human beings, as individual men and women, part of us, of necessity, falls outside the scope of what we hold in common. We are thus members of a larger social body and beings without full membership to that body. As individuals, we are beings without a proper home, without a horizon of shared meaning held in common with each other – hence the sense of desolation and isolation we feel even as we live our lives in common with other members of a larger social body. A radical sense of isolation is inherent in our very existence, an isolation that social interaction, communication or the

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[4] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power And Bare Life* (1942) (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998).

care of others can never completely eradicate. Complete 'socialization', or full membership in the social group, is simply not an option. *This*, as I would argue, is precisely what the radical loneliness of a dead body reminds us of. What it brings so forcefully to the light is the awkward, 'in-between' position that we occupy as socialized human beings, this position both in and outside the social world, which, in our daily lives and interactions with others, we are so quick to lose sight of. The account we find Nussbaum advancing fails to understand charitable love within this larger ontological perspective on the human condition.

In our daily lives, the deeper, metaphysical insight I have outlined above most often remains lurking somewhere in the background. In the rare moment that it comes to light in our experience, it vanishes just as quickly as it appears. When someone calls out to us and makes an appeal on our charity, it is ultimately *this* feature of our human condition – *not* a mere need or want – that forcefully imposes itself on us. My neighbour – or rather, the one whom *I* am called to love as a neighbour – beckons to me from somewhere 'beyond' the shared space of the social body. The other's appeal on my charity confronts me, not simply with a fellow human in need of my help, but with the abject and pathetic loneliness of his or her condition as a human being. Allow me to be clear: there isn't any need for us to understand this 'beyond' as some sort of hidden reality tucked away behind the familiar façade of social life. On the contrary, all I understand by this 'beyond' is the pure and simple impossibility of being wholly inscribed within the shared space of the social body. Part of who we are, as humans, simply does not – and cannot – belong. With this, we've found our way back to the theme I highlighted earlier on, namely of patience or longsuffering, or of what I am referring to as the radical core of charitable love.

## II. SPIRITUAL ACTS OF CHARITY: BETWEEN ACTS OF LOVE AND LOVING INACTION

Charity is frequently thought to extend ordinary forms of loving social interaction beyond their usual scope, or as an expansion upon what we already find ourselves doing for others. But how exactly should we understand this extending, broadening movement? Taken at face value, it would seem to imply a simple expansion of the social field where we usually act out of love and compassion. What we already do without

a second thought for friends and members of our family, we do for those who stand at a greater remove from these more intimate social circles. In other words, according to this view, charity consists in loving action carried out for humanity as a whole. Of course, this clearly assumes that the love involved in our more intimate social relations – love for our children or elderly parents, for instance – are themselves already charitable in nature. In other words, on this view, there isn't any essential difference between charitable love and the spontaneous compassion we already show to those we hold dear in some measure or another. Indeed, the story of the Good Samaritan is frequently interpreted in precisely these terms: what we need to do, as charitable neighbours, is to extend our kindness and compassion to those standing outside our community.

While there's little doubt that we ought to act charitably toward those who don't happen to fit within our social circle, the simple notion of expanding the scope of our altruism fails to clarify much of anything as far as charity is concerned. But why not? What it mistakenly leads us to assume is that our relations to friends and family members are themselves already charitable in nature. In other words, it fails to take into account the highly specified circumstances in which others make an appeal to our charity. Rather than understanding charity as a simple extension of loving, social relations, what we need to seize hold of is how it completely *suspends* and *transforms* existing social relations, however fleeting or temporary this suspension may be.

In order to more firmly hammer this point out, allow me to establish a distinction between two different ways of understanding personhood, one metaphysical in nature, the other practical. The metaphysical conception of personhood, which Kant and Gaita define in terms of sanctity, bears upon the dignity that a person holds irrespective of his or her qualities or capacities as an individual or of the social group to which he or she happens to belong.[5] Simply put, the basic ontological fact that one is a member of the human species means that one bears an indelible and inalienable dignity as a person. On the other hand, the practical conception of personhood concerns one's capacity to participate in the field of human values and meanings in appropriate ways, that is, in the ways that people are *expected* and *supposed* to participate. While someone with a major disability may no longer be able to make conscious, deliberate

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[5] Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity. Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002).

decisions or act as a 'person' normally would in certain circumstances, she nevertheless retains her personhood in the metaphysical sense of the term. Even though she lacks the practical capacity to act or to determine the course her life will take, this doesn't deprive her of her dignity, or sanctity, as a person. Ultimately, what I'm trying to get at here with this practical conception of personhood relates to what Strawson has in mind when he speaks of 'reactive attitudes' in *Freedom and Resentment*.[6] What Strawson understands by reactive attitudes is a set of capacities allowing one to take responsibility for one's actions, or more broadly, a sensitivity to and understanding of the complex interplay involved in the motivations and intentions that give shape to human behaviour. A 'person' in the practical sense of the term is someone who, quite simply, cares how others view and judge her behaviour, who is capable of feeling pride and shame, who grasps the practical significance of guilt, repentance, responsibility, forgiveness and so forth. In the end, it proves rather difficult (and beyond the scope of this essay) to frame a definition of reactive attitudes that is both precise and globally comprehensive, for practical notions of personhood vary significantly over the course of history and from culture to culture. For the purposes of the present study, all we need to draw from the practical conception of personhood is, firstly, this notion of a sensitivity to practical motivations and moral values and, secondly, the idea that it provides the moral basis of personal responsibility.

In order to better clarify what's at stake with the practical understanding of personhood, consider the following, simple examples. When I offer help to someone in need, I am not overstepping my bounds when I expect him or her to express a certain measure of gratitude to me. Expectations of this sort are given shape to a large extent in the process of socialization, such as when a child is taught to say 'thank you' even for a disappointing birthday gift. Similarly, when people find themselves afflicted with adversity, they are encouraged to bear their hardship with at least a modicum of dignity. If I erupt in a childish tantrum when things don't go my way, I am rightly blamed for behaving inappropriately. People expect me to understand that my outburst lacked the necessary decorum, or that certain excuses fall short of justifying my reaction, even though they may have been appropriate in other circumstances. The basic assumption undergirding these sorts of practical considerations

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[6] P. F. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974).

is that people generally pay heed to how others view and judge their behaviour.

To my mind, charity can only truly be practiced for people who, for one reason or another, no longer have the capacity to react appropriately, or who can no longer fully take part in the shared, interpersonal space of human values and meanings. Instead of starting out from the question of who my neighbour is, the question we first need to be asking is this: under what conditions or circumstances does someone become an object of pity for me? If my normal way of behaving and relating to people is conditioned by certain assumptions about their practical motivations and expectations, what sort of circumstances need to come into play for a person to make an appeal (either expressly or implicitly) to my charity? As I would like to argue, charity only really enters the picture when the set of reactive attitudes that normally govern human interactions is significantly altered in some way or another. In other words, charity consists much less in an *expansion* of my normal attitude than in its radical *suspension*, however temporary or fleeting: rather than broadening my spontaneous expressions of altruistic behaviour, charity radically transforms and modifies my altruism.

The reader will likely have little difficulty seeing how this view of charity falls right in line with our earlier discussion of burying the dead, for while the deceased individual clearly lacks any practical capacity to behave in any way whatsoever, he or she undoubtedly remains a 'person' in the deeper, metaphysical sense of the term. Precisely insofar as he or she falls, at one and the same time, both *within* and *beyond* the scope of everyday, interpersonal interactions, the deceased becomes an object of my charitable love. What this example makes clear, in other words, is how acts of charity are ultimately grounded in the insight that the practical understanding of personhood has at least temporarily lost its grip on him or her who stands in need of my loving care. As long as he or she continues to take part in the sphere of human meanings, values and practical motivations, charity cannot and need not enter the picture. Only when someone's misery, poverty or disability disengages her from the sphere of common, interpersonal, reactive attitudes, is my neighbourly, charitable love really at stake. The crux of the charitable attitude is precisely to bear with this crippling poverty and incapacity, just as Christ bore with the stubborn ignorance of those who cruelly cried out for his crucifixion: 'Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

We are mistaken when we see charity necessitating a limitation on our egoism, for what needs to be limited above all else is much less our egoism than the reactive attitudes that inform and give shape to our social relations. When I carry out an apparently charitable deed and refuse to hold myself back from *exhorting* the other to react in an 'appropriate' way, or as people normally would react, I nullify my charitable love with cruelty. Why do we find it so challenging to put these inclinations to exhort and morally admonish the other in check? Quite simply, because they give shape to what it means to be a 'person' in the practical sense of the term. With charity, in contrast, I have to learn to move and behave somewhere 'in between' the expectations that I usually place on the other's behaviour and the temporary suspension, or neutralization, of these expectations.

The understanding of charity as a temporary bracketing of our reactive, interpersonal attitudes clearly chimes with the exercise of *patience* or *longsuffering*. Charitable love is a fundamentally patient love, a love that bears with the other's transcendence as a person. (With this definition, I'm drawing directly from the passage from Paul's first letter to Corinth (1 Cor. 13:4) where he writes that love is patient and kind, not boastful or arrogant.) One importance consequence of defining charity in this way is that actions like consoling those in distress, instructing the ignorant or counselling those in doubt cannot, in and of themselves, be counted as acts of charity. Indeed, these are actions that we already perform for our friends, equals and those close to us without a second's thought; they make up some of the basic modes of conduct through which we interact with each other as persons (in the practical sense of the term). How is it, then, that these sorts of altruistic actions can be made to transform into acts of charity? Allow me to present a few, simple examples to help clarify my point of view.

*Counselling those in doubt* only becomes a charitable act when the person in doubt finds herself mired in indecision, or when, in spite of being open to my advice, she feels herself powerless to pay any heed to it at all. As someone seeking and demanding the counsel of others, she clearly takes part in normal, interpersonal relations, but, at the same time, she is also broken off from these relations insofar as my advice cannot but 'fall on deaf ears', as we say. By virtue of this indecisiveness and impermeability to my advice, the person becomes an object of my charity. In this case, then, we find that charity consists in a willingness

to lovingly bear with the other's incapacitating lack of resolution and 'deafness'.

In a similar way, *consoling those in distress* (or 'mourning with those who mourn') becomes a charitable deed in the precise moment when the person in distress becomes *numb* to the commiseration of others. Instead of expecting my consoling words to assuage the other's grief, I act as a loving neighbour when I recognize my powerlessness to make a dent in her radical inconsolability.

Consider next the example of *forgiveness*. Without any further qualifications, I would be remiss to see forgiving the offenses of others as an act of charitable love in and of itself. If, for example, I forgive someone who has already shown regret for offending or harming me in some way, then my forgiveness is much less an act of charity than a normal 'reactive' response to her admission of wrongdoing. Indeed, to admit one's failings and to forgive the failings of others are essential components of our spontaneous moral attitude. It is only when I *patiently bear with* an offense or insult as such, without any expectations of reciprocity, that I act charitably towards my neighbour. On this point, my view undoubtedly diverges to a certain extent from that of the Christian tradition, for as I am arguing, charity does not require a willingness to pardon ever-greater offenses. To my mind, charity has much less to do with continually turning the other cheek, or forgiving the unforgivable, than with the recognition of our powerlessness to forgive all wrongs. In other words, rather than seeing forgiveness as an omnipotent balm capable of healing every wound, or of standing in the breach of every rupture in the community, a charitable approach to wrongdoing and injury patiently suffers with *wrongs that cannot be righted*. If anything, true charity requires that we swallow the hard and bitter fact that the community cannot fully rid itself of division and strife, that it cannot heal all its wounds or pardon every wrong.

In extreme circumstances – that is, in circumstances demanding something beyond our usual reactive attitudes – we find ourselves compelled to accept our radical *powerlessness* to change anything whatsoever about the other's 'in-between' situation. Here we meet up with a fundamental limit to the powers of our compassion and benevolence, a limit just beyond which the charitable dimension of certain actions (such as forgiveness) comes to light in the impotence that properly defines them. Even while these sorts of circumstances may be quite rare

and extraordinary, they are particularly helpful in reflecting on what's ultimately at stake in charitable love.

What is charity effectively *capable* of in such extreme circumstances? By this point, the answer should be relatively clear: all that it has the power to do is *patiently bear with* the fact that nothing – not even forgiveness – can help change things. In the contemporary world, charity is most often associated with gifts of money, time and resources to people in need, such as when aid workers are sent off to help those in countries ravaged by natural disasters and war. What this common understanding of charity makes possible is a handy (and morally comforting) measure of beneficent, compassionate action: the greater the reduction in emotional suffering and/or physical distress, the greater the power of the charitable deed. It is considerably more challenging to understand charity in instances where assistance proves to be powerless, or when there is no longer any way to measure the concrete, moral 'profit' of the charitable action. This nevertheless begs a pressing question: is there not, in charity, something *more* involved than the practice of longsuffering patience, something *beyond* the mere, resigned acceptance of charity's powerlessness to alter an irremediable situation? Is it really the case, to borrow a famous expression of Jacques Lacan's, that love is nothing more than 'a giving of what one doesn't have'?

From a secular viewpoint that directly equates charity and aid, the exercise of patience and longsuffering is liable to appear as the only possible recourse to irremediable suffering. Another perspective opens up, however, if we pause to reflect on prayer as a form of charitable action, a perspective that fails to come into view when charity is addressed exclusively in moral and ethical terms. A brief exploration of the nature of prayer should help us see how more is involved in charity than the tragic necessity of bearing with one's powerlessness to help those in need.

## III. PRAYER AS AN ACT OF CHARITY

Reflection on prayer allows us to highlight charity's metaphysical and spiritual core. In our daily lives and social interactions, we spontaneously work from the assumption that those we relate to in the world around us are open to the good, or animated by a yearning for wellbeing and wholeness. Similarly, we hold each other accountable for our actions as a matter of course, or as if it were second nature. We cannot hold ourselves back from praising and blaming the actions of others (let alone

our own actions) without running into conflict with our most basic, moral inclinations and habits of thought. Attitudes concerning guilt and personal responsibility are at the very core of our moral sensibility – indeed, without them, we have no way to understand what it even means to be a moral agent. For the most part, we don't pay any mind to this basic, *a priori* structure of our existence as moral creatures.

It is only in certain circumstances, when we come across someone who is no longer able to share in this basic, moral attitude, that we become aware of it as a background assumption responsible for giving shape to our moral lives. These circumstances are certainly not unfamiliar to us: when my neighbour grows distressingly numb to feelings of shame and pride, when my well-meaning advice falls on deaf ears, or when, to borrow an expression of Kierkegaard's, my words of consolation fail to penetrate the 'inclosing reserve'[7] of my neighbour's misery, my reactive attitudes suddenly lose their grip on the social relation binding me to my neighbour. In situations like these, we instinctively try to determine who it is that bears responsibility for the ruptured relation, or for the practical, moral failure. Who is to blame? Are my efforts simply not enough, or is the person I'm trying to help at fault in some way? As if by a sort of knee-jerk reaction, we not only struggle to determine who is responsible for what but what it is that could be done to overcome the apparent limitation on the powers of the good. Unfortunately, answers and helpful solutions are exceedingly difficult to come by in situations like these. *Either* we hold the other responsible for closing herself off from the good, and if need be, we admonish her to be more receptive to (and grateful for) our attempts to help. *Or* we blame ourselves for failing to be *more* forgiving or *more* compassionate. Ultimately, it's hard to swallow the fact that neither party bears responsibility. The immense staying power of our reactive attitudes doesn't allow us to abandon this tendency so easily, and as a result, we continually vacillate between laying the blame at our own feet, in which case we often compel ourselves to make even greater efforts, or we pass the lion's share of the guilt onto the other's shoulders and simply walk away.

We experience something of a moral shock when we bump up against these sorts of limits to helpful, benevolent action – or more broadly, to

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[7] Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 124.

the powers of the good. It is indeed a rather jarring discovery to find that goodness and well-meaning gestures have painfully definite limits. In encountering these limits, a fierce resistance from a moral attitude, which suddenly and inexplicably finds itself to be inoperative, cannot but bubble up to the surface. This violent resistance is part and parcel of ethics as such; it is a sort of unyielding, powerless rage that struggles against the limited powers of the good. Charity exhorts us to set this violence to rest and to adopt a seemingly impracticable attitude of patient longsuffering, an attitude situated uncomfortably in the no-man's-land between action and inaction, or between activity and passivity. In other words, we could say that charity radically *neutralizes* an essential aspect of our moral sensibility, or again, that it compels us to *move beyond the basic assumptions, attitudes and categories that give shape our moral lives.* Longsuffering patience occupies a space situated somewhere *in between* action and passion. Insofar as it struggles against the limits to the powers of the good, it fails to reduce to the level of mere indifference; and yet, at the same time, it also holds itself back from the violence that seeks to break through these limits. When our moral categories break down or fail to apply in the usual ways, what the charitable attitude brings to light is another who is *both* responsible *and* irresponsible. By putting ethics in suspension, charity proves itself to be more *generous*, lenient and liberal than ethics. And yet, at the same time, it also shows itself to be more *cruel* and demanding than ethics, for the patience it requires is ultimately grounded in an unsettling insight into the limitations of the good.

When charity exhorts us to neutralize and transcend the spontaneous inclinations of our moral sensibility, what exactly is there left for us to do? How are we to know what actions to take when our basic moral categories can no longer guide us? Do our moral practices teach us what we need/ought to do when we bump up against a radical limitation to moral action? Allow me to rephrase the question in different terms: while we have all been taught to forgive those who do us harm and to offer help to the needy, how are we to know what to do in situations when compassion is powerless to help and forgiveness fails to reconcile? Should we further bolster the strength and determination of our will (or blame the other when our renewed efforts come to grief)? Or should we rather abandon our charitable intentions/actions altogether and resign ourselves to our powerlessness? Are these really the only options left open: either to swallow a bitter pill and give up, or to persevere out of sheer tenacity?

The teaching of spirituality offers us a way out of this abortive alternative, namely *prayer*. Praying for others is an especially important form of charitable love, particularly insofar as the longsuffering patience that it demands is concerned. First and foremost, it allows us to come to terms with our powerlessness to help those in need, for it is precisely at the moment when there is no further recourse left open that we turn to prayer. Though ethics is silent when it comes to situations in which our benevolence, pity and forgiveness run up against a dead-end, prayer opens up a way to move forward – or the very least, it allows us to remain engaged in a situation that falls entirely outside our control. With prayer, we seek the help that we ourselves, as finite beings, are no longer able to offer – a help that must come from somewhere else, namely from God's own charitable love. Recognizing the insurmountability of our limitations, we pray for God to help those whom we ourselves are incapable of helping. Prayer therefore clearly involves something more than patiently bearing with the other's transcendence, for it brings us to act at the very moment when morally inspired action is no longer even a viable option. In the spiritual exercise of longsuffering patience, which charitable acts like prayer carry out, the three, foundational, Christian virtues – faith, love and inexhaustible hope – draw together and interlock.

# IN DEFENCE OF THE BELIEF-PLUS
# MODEL OF FAITH

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**Abstract.** I defend the claim that propositional religious faith that p implies belief that p. While this claim might seem trivial, it has been criticized by Alston, Pojman, Audi, and (more recently) McKaughan and Howard-Snyder. I begin by defending this view (call it the belief-plus model of faith) against four objections. In addition to criticizing the belief-plus model, each of the above philosophers have offered their own alternatives to the belief-plus model. I focus on McKaughan's (2013) recent accounts of faith: 'trusting acceptance' and 'hopeful affirmation'. I argue, following Howard-Snyder, that hopeful affirmation fails to give sufficient conditions for faith. I then argue that there is no reason to think that the token acceptances in faith as trusting acceptance are not instances of belief.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Religious faith that God exists requires belief that God exists. Although this claim might seem trivial, McKaughan (2013), along with a number of others, has argued that this view (call it the 'belief-plus model') is false. McKaughan goes on to claim that faith might be 'trusting acceptance' or 'hopeful affirmation', neither of which requires belief. I defend the belief-plus model of propositional religious faith. I limit myself to *propositional religious* faith because I am unsure whether faith in non-religious contexts (i.e. that the Cleveland Browns will win the Super Bowl) is of the same kind as faith that (e.g.) God exists, and I am unsure whether 'belief in' denotes a kind in the way that 'belief that' does. I begin by replying to four objections to the belief-plus model of faith. I then argue that McKaughan's 'hopeful affirmation' account of faith fails to give sufficient conditions for faith. Finally, I argue that McKaughan's 'trusting acceptance' account of faith tacitly involves a weak kind of belief.

## II. OBJECTIONS TO THE BELIEF-PLUS MODEL

In this section, I survey and reply to some common objections to the belief-plus model of propositional religious faith. First, McKaughan (along with Pojman 1986, Audi 1991, and Howard-Snyder 2013) all claim that while one can have faith that p while holding doubts that p, 'belief that p *is* at odds with being in doubt about it, not least because, if one is in doubt, one will lack tendencies that one has if one believes' (Howard-Snyder 2013: 361). Citing Luther, Calvin, and Plantinga, McKaughan claims that on the belief-plus model 'the intellectual content of faith, or part of it, is sometimes alleged to require and even to enjoy certification by high epistemic credentials. It has the status of knowledge [...] warranted by demonstration, direct perception, or the alleged infusion of grace' (McKaughan 2013: 106). Thus, on the belief-plus model, faith precludes significant doubt. However, many devout Christians have experienced doubt. McKaughan offers Mother Teresa as a paradigmatic example. Thus, faith is compatible with doubt 'in a way or to an extent that belief is not' (McKaughan 2013: 107). Call this the objection from doubt.

The objection from doubt saddles the belief-plus model with an account of belief according to which belief requires high credence. As it happens, a number of belief-plus theorists endorse this high credence for belief, especially for those beliefs that are partly constitutive of faith. It is true that Plantinga, Luther, and Calvin's conception of faith cannot accommodate serious religious doubt, but these theorists already think that serious doubt and faith are incompatible. These theorists will happily say that Mother Teresa experienced a lapse of faith when she doubted. Thus, the objection from doubt begs the question against them.

While some philosophers and theologians do want to preclude doubt from faith, I am sympathetic to the view that faith is compatible with at least some doubt. Notice that there is nothing in the belief-plus model itself that requires that faith that p implies knowledge that p (or certainty that p, or some high epistemic status that p). I can believe that my car is where I parked it while recognizing that it might have been stolen – thus entertaining doubts that it is where I parked it. Likewise, I can believe that God exists while entertaining doubts about God's existence. It is true that if I entertain doubts about a proposition, then I will be less likely to manifest some of the dispositions that Howard-Snyder (drawing from Alston) says are constitutive of belief. However, that I would be less likely

to manifest these dispositions, does not imply that I lack the belief, since these are mere tendencies.

Anticipating my objection, McKaughan says that 'there do seem to be some clear lower bounds' than certainty for belief, and those bounds will 'depend on what one takes belief to be' (2013: 107). While I agree that whether this objection succeeds or not depends on the nature of belief, the objector to the belief-plus model must frame the objection from doubt with some specific boundary to belief in mind, and there are conceptions of belief that can accommodate a good deal of doubt. McKaughan might reply that while faith and belief both allow for *some* degree of doubt, faith allows for a *greater* degree of doubt than belief. However, it is unclear why the belief-plus model advocate must accept this claim. In short, the objection from doubt either attacks a strawman in saddling the belief-plus model with a very high boundary for belief as a necessary condition for faith, or is question-begging against those who outright claim faith requires knowledge or certainty.

In a second objection, McKaughan, following Smith (1998a, 1998b), argues that the meaning of 'belief' has changed in the modern era. Today, belief 'refers to a state of mind [or] a disposition to assent to a set of propositions' (McKaughan 2013: 108). However, in Septuagint, Greek New Testament, and early church writings the Greek πιστις (lexical verb form πιστευω) and the Latin *credo* have a rather different meaning. McKaughan claims that πιστευω should almost always be translated as 'trust' or 'have faith'. '*Credo*' is a compound of '*cor*' or '*cordis*' ('heart') and '*do*' or '*dere*' ('to put'). Hence '*credo*' translates literally as 'I set my heart'. Smith argues that there is an affective component to the meaning of *credo*. McKaughan concludes that belief (as we understand it today) has little to do with faith. He calls this the problem of meaning drift.

As a preliminary note, it is important to recognize that belief comes to philosophy from our folk psychology, unlike (e.g.) validity or quantification: we should be cautious when moving from religious uses of the term to philosophical uses of the term. Here McKaughan and I are in agreement. We must exercise caution to avoid talking past one another.

In fact, a study of the Greek New Testament and Septuagint can only strengthen the case that belief is a component of faith. First, note that Greek has only one word (πιστις or πιστευω) for faith and belief whereas English has two. If word studies are supposed to illuminate the nature of faith and belief (as McKaughan assumes they do), this single Greek word

suggests that faith and belief are closely related. Some philosophers, such as Cohen, Alston, and Howard-Snyder, claim that belief that p implies a disposition to feel that p is true. Concerning our modern usage of 'belief', there are beliefs that are affective. For example, consider implicit beliefs. These beliefs are affective and sometimes at odds with what one would explicitly affirm. Perhaps McKaughan might claim that such implicit attitudes are not beliefs. I cannot offer a full analysis here, but if philosophers reject such implicit states from our concept of 'belief', then epistemologists study something distinct from the mental state that non-philosophers have in mind when speaking of belief that God exists. Such a dialectical move threatens to tear the metaphysics of belief from its common sense moorings. Our philosophical approach should be to study the mental state to which the term 'belief' refers;[1] we want to study belief, rather than 'belief-in-the-mouth-of-the-folk' or 'belief-in-the-mouth-of-the-philosopher'.

Although McKaughan only levels the above two objections, he might avail himself of two further objections to the belief-plus model of faith, which Howard-Snyder (2013) offers. Following Alston (1996), Howard-Snyder claims that if one believes that p, then one will tend to be surprised if it turns out that not-p. However, one can have faith that p while lacking a tendency to be surprised if it turns out that not-p. Thus, one can have faith without belief.

Importantly, it is not a problem for the belief-plus model that there are cases in which a subject has faith that p, but upon learning that p is false, is not surprised. This is because, according to Alston and Howard-Snyder, surprise upon learning that not-p is not a *necessary* condition on belief that p. Rather, belief that p implies that the subject will *tend* to be surprised upon learning that not-p. I might not be surprised to learn that I have only four, rather than five, subway tokens in my pocket (as I currently believe), since the tokens are small and easily lost. Howard-Snyder agrees to all of this. Thus, we should understand his argument as follows:

(1) For all cases where a subject believes that p, that subject is disposed to be surprised upon learning that not-p.

(2) There are cases where a subject has faith that p, but is not disposed to be surprised upon learning that not-p.

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[1] I am assuming an externalist account of reference.

Conclusion: Therefore, there are cases where a subject has faith that p, but does not believe that p.

Howard-Snyder's support for the second premise in this argument is utterly lacking. Let's suppose an account of dispositions according to which a disposition is a property that mediates between a stimulus and a manifestation (Bird 1998, Mumford 1998, Martin 2007, Heil 2003). A number of philosophers working on the nature of dispositions ground modality in dispositional properties (Heil 2003, Jacobs 2010, Martin 2007, Martin & Heil 1998, Pruss 2002). To put it a bit more precisely, it is possible that an object X if and only if that object possesses (or possessed) a disposition, the manifestation of which includes either 1) that object's possessing X or 2) a further disposition the manifestation of which includes that object's possessing X. Now, for any subject who has faith that p, it is possible that the subject who has faith that p will be surprised upon learning that not-p. Thus, on a dispositional account of modality, any subject who has faith that p either 1) possesses a disposition for surprise that not-p or 2) possesses a disposition for a disposition for surprise that not-p.

Now, one might object that this reply requires the subject to be disposed to be surprised, but also be disposed not to be surprised, but it makes no sense to say that a subject possesses dispositions of contradictory manifestations. I see no reason to think that subjects cannot possess dispositions for contradictory manifestations. Consider a car stopped on a hill. It is simultaneously disposed to roll down and move up. Which disposition manifests depends upon which stimulus conditions obtain: if the driver releases the brake while stepping on the gas, it will go up the hill, but if the driver releases the brake while failing to step on the gas, the car will roll down the hill. Furthermore, defenders of dispositional accounts of modality will happily agree that objects possess dispositions for incompatible manifestations, since modal claims are supposed to be grounded in dispositions.

Perhaps the chief rival of the above account of dispositions is a conditional analysis of dispositions (Lewis 1973, 1997), according to which dispositions are reducible to counterfactual conditionals, which are in turn analysed by relations between possible worlds. On this account, an object is disposed to X just in case if the stimulus conditions were to obtain, then X.[2] Conditional analysis likely renders premise 2 true, since there will be cases where a subject has faith that p, but the subject

is not surprised in the closest possible world where she learns that not-p. However, conditional analysis makes the surprise condition on belief too strong. I believe I have five (small) subway tokens in my pocket, but if I were to learn that I have only four, I am not surprised, since I lose them all the time. Thus, on conditional analysis, I lack the disposition to be surprised. The problem is that, on a conditional analysis of dispositions, we cannot draw a distinction between *being surprised* if it turns out that not-p as a necessary condition on belief that p, and being *disposed to be surprised* if it turns out that not-p being a necessary condition on belief that p. This should not be surprising, since dispositions are reduced to counterfactual conditionals on conditional analysis.

Thus, on the two dominant accounts of dispositions, Howard-Snyder's objection fails. On those accounts of dispositions that do not attempt to reduce dispositions to counterfactuals, premise 2 is false. On the other hand, while a conditional analysis of dispositions renders premise 2 true, it does so at the cost of making surprise upon learning that not-p into a necessary condition of believing that p.

In his final objection, Howard-Snyder asserts that one can have faith that p while believing that p is only likely and not believing that p. For example, a cancer patient might have faith that he will pull through, giving him courage 'even if he only believes that he will probably succeed' (Howard-Snyder 2013: 361). This final objection is question-begging, since Howard-Snyder asserts that the cancer patient lacks the belief that he will live, but has faith that he will live. What would be required for this objection to succeed is an independent reason for thinking that this patient lacks the putative belief. Indeed, I suspect even McKaughan would claim that Howard-Snyder goes too far, since he indicates that to have faith that p, one must not believe that not-p (McKaughan 2013: 116).

I conclude that these objections to the belief-plus model of faith fail. Since McKaughan sees the inadequacy of the belief-plus model as a reason for the need of novel accounts of faith, I have undercut the motivation for his novel accounts of faith. However, the opponent of the belief-plus model might point out that there exist sufficient accounts of

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² Things are more complicated, since dispositions can be finkish (the stimulus conditions are identical to conditions for loss of the disposition). Opponents of the conditional analysis of dispositions have argued from the existence of finkish dispositions to the falsity of the conditional analysis of dispositions. I suspect that the only way out for the defender of conditional analysis is to deny the existence of finkish dispositions, thereby allowing the above counterfactual to remain true (see McKitrick, 2003).

faith that do not involve belief. As such, the defender of the belief-plus model must either show that these novel accounts either fail to give sufficient conditions for faith, or do (tacitly) involve belief. In the next section, I argue that McKaughan's accounts fail in one of these two ways.

## III. ONE OR TWO NEW ACCOUNTS OF FAITH

McKaughan offers two alternatives to the belief-plus model of faith. First, faith might be 'trusting acceptance'. Roughly, to accept p is to adopt a policy of acting as though p were the case. Alston points out that there are two senses of acceptance. There is an action (deciding to treat p as true) and a resulting mental state from that action (premising p as true). When speaking of propositional faith as trusting acceptance, we should think of acceptance in the second sense, which characterizes faith as an enduring *mental state* rather than a one-time *action*.[3] A number of philosophers have claimed that acceptance and belief are distinct kinds of mental states (see Alston 1996, 2007; Cohen 1992; Frankish 2004; Stalnaker 1984). McKaughan draws most heavily from Alston and Cohen's accounts, and his trusting acceptance account of faith is remarkably similar to Alston's (1996) account of faith. According to Alston 'to accept [the central doctrines of the Christian faith] is to perform a voluntary act of committing oneself to them, to *resolve* to use them as a basis for one's thought, attitude, and behaviour. (And, of course, it involves being disposed to do so as a result of this voluntary acceptance)' (Alston 1996: 17). McKaughan uses Swinburne's (2005) account of trust, according to which, 'to trust someone is to act on the assumption that she will do for you what she knows that you want or need, when the evidence gives some reason for supposing that she may not and where there will be bad consequences if the assumption is false' (Swinburne 2005: 144). McKaughan, following Alston (1996), emphasizes the personal nature of trust: 'trust and the associated concepts of trustworthiness or faithfulness, in their primary usages, involve personal relations' (McKaughan 2013: 109). Thus, on the trusting acceptance account of faith, faith that God exists is acting (and possessing the relevant mental state as a result) as though there is a person (God) upon whom one can rely.[4]

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[3] In what follows, 'acceptance' refers to the mental state unless otherwise indicated.

[4] Similarly, Howard-Snyder claims that acceptance 'can stand in for the positive cognitive stance faith requires' instead of belief (2013: 362), though even accepting God's existence is not necessary for having faith, since one might merely *assume* that God exists

McKaughan offers a second account of faith, according to which faith is 'hopeful affirmation'. McKaughan explains, 'for any subject S and proposition p, to say that S hopes that p involves at least that (1) S desires that p and (2) S does not believe that p is impossible' (McKaughan 2013: 112). While one does not always act as though the object of one's hope is true, McKaughan claims that hope can be action-guiding. For example, a castaway might (wisely) build a fire hoping to signal a passing ship or plane, even if there is no evidence that a plane or ship is nearby (see Jordan 2006: 1). However, even if S hopes that she will win the lottery, S does not act as though she will win the lottery (McKaughan 2013: 4).

Howard-Snyder says that hopeful affirmation is merely a necessary condition on faith (2013: 362-363),[5] and even McKaughan admits this might be so. I cannot claim to have faith that p if faith that p does not affect my behaviour. That is, faith is action-guiding. On this point McKaughan and I agree (see McKaughan 2013: 114). Now consider McKaughan's example of non-action-guiding hope: S desires that she will win the lottery, and S believes it is possible. In this case, S does not have faith that she will win the lottery. However, S hopefully affirms she will win. Therefore, hopeful affirmation is not sufficient for faith.

McKaughan anticipates the objection that hopeful affirmation is not action-guiding on its own. In response, he suggests that if S did desire that p and believed that p was possible,[6] then there would be a difference in action, as in the castaway building a fire. McKaughan seems to add in a condition to his account: faith is 'action-guiding hopeful affirmation'. However, such actions on the part of the castaway constitute acceptance that there is a ship or plane nearby.

It should not be surprising that hope alone is not action-guiding, since desire alone is not action-guiding. Desire must be coupled with some belief-like state: my desire for beer combined with my belief that there is beer in the fridge causes me to open the fridge. Since faith is

(and assuming, Howard-Snyder claims, is distinct from belief and acceptance) (2013: 365-366). My argument against McKaughan's trusting-acceptance account in the next section can be equally levelled against Howard-Snyder's account of faith.

[5] Howard-Snyder claims that faith that p requires a positive evaluation of p, a positive conative orientation toward p, and a positive cognitive stance toward p. Hopeful affirmation fails to fulfil the last of these criteria, and as such, is not sufficient for being faith.

[6] Note that 'believed that p is possible' is stronger than what McKaughan claims is necessary for hope, namely, 'not believing that p is impossible'.

action-guiding, it must have some kind of belief-like state as a part of it. Thus, faith as 'action-guiding hopeful affirmation' falls back on using acceptance or some other belief-like state.

## IV. ACCEPTANCE, FAITH, AND BELIEF

Once a new mental kind, such as acceptance, is added to our ontology, it is natural to apply it elsewhere. However, it is important not to alter the concept when applying it, lest the argument for its distinctness be undercut. Thus, it will be helpful here to consider cases in which it is plausible to think that subjects accept a proposition without believing it. There are cases in which it is clear that subjects do not believe a proposition, but they do use that proposition in some way. For example, a lawyer who knows her client is guilty will accept that her client is innocent in the context of the courtroom. Similarly, an endurantist who believes that perdurantism is incoherent is able to engage in a conversation about how perdurantism fits with various views on the constitution relation. As the endurantist enters into a discussion of what would follow if perdurantism were true, what should we say of her stance toward the truth of perdurantism? Clearly she does not *believe* it to be true. Rather she is merely 'premising' the proposition that perdurantism is true. We may call this premising 'acceptance'. Acceptance of this sort is a very weak doxastic state. We might think of it as mere premising.[7] Clearly these instances of acceptance are not instances of belief, which is why acceptance should be added to our mental ontology. Arguably, acceptance has four properties that distinguish it from belief: 1) it can be formed in a direct basic way (i.e. in the same way that I can raise my hand (see Alston 1988: 263), 2) it is only held in a narrow domain, 3) it is responsive to pragmatic, but not evidential, considerations, and 4) subjects may lack a feeling of rightness when considering the proposition in question.

Presumably acceptance and belief are not mutually exclusive. One might believe a proposition is true while accepting that proposition as true. Since none of the above conditions are *necessary* conditions on acceptance, this is a possibility. As such, that faith might be trusting acceptance does not imply that faith need not involve belief, since all the instances of acceptance in faith might be instances of belief. McKaughan

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[7] Premising is similar to what Howard-Snyder calls 'entertaining'.

and Alston could reply by arguing that the acceptance involved in faith bears at least one property that belief lacks. Presumably McKaughan does not argue this way because he believes he has already established that faith does not always include belief, given his two objections to the belief-plus model. Alston (1996), on the other hand, seems to argue against the belief-plus model in exactly this way. He especially argues that one might have faith that God exists while lacking a feeling of rightness that God exists, and that one can voluntarily have faith that God exists, but cannot voluntarily form the belief that God exists.

In the remainder of this section, I will argue that the four properties outlined above fail to do the work that McKaughan and Alston need them to do. First, I argue that beliefs may lack a feeling of rightness. Thus, a subject's lacking a feeling of rightness that p does not imply that the subject does not believe that p. I then argue that the acceptance involved in genuine cases of faith fails to bear the properties that distinguish belief from acceptance.

### 4.1 Feeling of Rightness

Cohen claims that a subject believes that p if and only if she is disposed to feel that p when that subject considers p (Cohen 1992: 5). Acceptance, on the other hand, is to 'adopt a policy of deeming, positing, or postulating that p – i.e. of including that proposition or rule among one's premises for deciding what to do or think in a particular context, whether or not one feels it to be true that p' (Cohen 1992: 4). I take 'feeling that p is true' to be a metacognitive attitude which some have called a 'feeling of rightness' (or FOR) (see Thompson 2009, Stanovich, 2011). Others, such as Alston and Howard-Snyder, also take the disposition for a FOR as a necessary condition for belief, and use this condition as a way to distinguish belief from acceptance (Alston 1996: 3-4).

A disposition for a FOR is not a necessary condition on belief. It is possible for a subject to harbour implicitly racist attitudes while explicitly disavowing them (see Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami 2011). Many philosophers claim that these implicit attitudes are implicit beliefs (sometimes called 'aversive beliefs' because subjects are averse to their own attitudes). If these implicit attitudes are beliefs, and subjects are averse to them, then there are implicit beliefs for which subjects do not possess a FOR, since if those subjects were to consider the matter they would not *feel* as if the racist proposition is true.

Now, Alston and others might object that such implicit racists do have a FOR when considering racist propositions, but the implicit racists are unwilling to admit to possessing this FOR. While some individuals might deny their FOR for racist propositions, surely at least some individuals do not have a FOR for racist propositions, but implicitly believe racist propositions. It is for this reason that many subjects are surprised when their Implicit Association Test tells them that they strongly prefer white faces to black faces.

Even some explicit beliefs lack a FOR. Suppose I read an argument for the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics and I find the argument sound. As a consequence, I formulate the belief that Schrödinger's cat is both alive and dead. I have no FOR here. Indeed, for some, the counterintuitive nature of the theory is part of the appeal. Furthermore, when I come to believe a philosophical position, I often lack a FOR for that proposition (though the feeling might come over time). Further examples are provided by the heuristics and biases literature, where a FOR remains for a normatively incorrect response even after a subject comes to believe the correct response. In the famous Linda the bank-teller case, subjects are given a description of Linda that 'fits well' with her being a feminist, but not being a bank-teller (Tversky & Kahneman 1983). They are then asked which is more likely: A) Linda is a bank-teller, or B) Linda is a bank-teller and active in the feminist movement. Even after subjects understand that A is at least as likely as B, the FOR remains that B is more likely than A. That A is more likely than B does not *feel* correct, even though we know it is. Sloman claims that he 'can trace through the probability argument and concede its validity, while sensing that a state of affairs that [he] can imagine much more easily has a greater chance of obtaining' (1996: 12).[8] Thus, Cohen and Alston's requirement for belief is too stringent. Distinguishing acceptance and belief using FOR will not do.

One might suggest that Alston could weaken his claim by saying that a disposition for a FOR is typical, but not necessary, for belief. Suppose we grant Alston this claim. Would the resulting criterion be problematic for the belief-plus model? I think not. Consider the following argument:

(1) Typically, if S believes that p, then S is disposed for a FOR when considering p.

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[8] Sloman (1996) takes this to support the two-system hypothesis. However, see Keren and Schul (2009) and Mugg (2013).

(2) If S has faith that p, then S believes that p.

Conclusion: Therefore, typically, if S has faith that p, then S is disposed for a FOR when considering p.

There are two problems. First, this argument is invalid. The set of beliefs present in faith might be a subset of the set of beliefs lacking a disposition for a FOR. Second, it is not clear that the conclusion of this argument is problematic for the belief-plus model. While some religious people might lack a FOR when considering the central doctrines of their faith, it is not clear that this is typical. It seems plausible that many subjects do possess a FOR for the doctrines of their faith. I conclude that FOR is not a necessary condition on belief, and if FOR merely tends to correlate with belief, then it is no problem to the belief-plus model.

### 4.2 Pragmatic Reasoning

McKaughan argues that faith as trusting acceptance is responsive to pragmatic considerations. For this to be a problem for the belief-plus model, it would also need to be the case that faith is not responsive to evidence. However, it seems that faith is responsive to evidence. McKaughan admits that it is not possible to have faith that p while believing that not-p. According to McKaughan, one must, at the very least, be agnostic about p. However, a subject can accept that p while believing (or even knowing) that not-p. Again, a lawyer might accept her client's innocence, even though she *knows* them to be guilty. No evidence to the contrary will alter her acceptance; her acceptance is purely pragmatic. Evidence need not affect acceptance whatsoever, but it does affect faith to at least some degree. Thus, faith is responsive to evidential considerations in a way that acceptance is not. Therefore, that acceptance may be recalcitrant to evidence, while belief is not, is of no help to the opponent of the belief-plus model.

### 4.3 Context

For convenience, let's call acceptance that is bracketed to a small domain 'thin acceptance', and acceptance that is pervasive 'thick acceptance'.[9] Instances of thin acceptance are not instances of belief, since beliefs are

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[9] This distinction need not mark out cognitive kinds, and the distinction between the two likely admits border cases.

not bracketed to one domain. If a lawyer treats her client as innocent only in a legal context, this is grounds to say that she merely accepts that her client is innocent. Importantly, token thick acceptances are not necessarily belief tokens, since the token acceptance might lack necessary conditions of belief (i.e. the token acceptance might be directly and basically formed, or be responsive to pragmatic considerations but not evidential considerations).

Notice that the positive attitude in instances of religious faith is significantly stronger than thin acceptance. Alston (1996), in arguing that acceptance-faith need not be inferior to belief-faith, claims that the acceptance in faith cannot be 'thin'.

> The person who accepts the doctrines is not necessarily inferior to the believer in commitment to the Christian life, or in the seriousness, faithfulness, or intensity with which she pursues it. The accepter may pray just as faithfully, worship God just as regularly, strive as earnestly to follow the *way of life* enjoined on us by Christ, look as *pervasively on interpersonal relationships, vocation, and social issues through the lens of the Christian faith*. (Alston 1996: 17, emphasis mine)

Consider the faith of Mother Teresa. Her acceptance that God exists was action-guiding in all domains of her life, even though, as McKaughan points out, she frequently had doubts about the existence of God. On McKaughan's analysis, Mother Teresa merely accepted God's existence, rather than believing that God exists.[10] So Mother Teresa 'thickly accepted' that God exists. We cannot use thin acceptance as the doxastic state in religious faith because religious faith is not supposed to be bracketed to one domain. The nominal Christian who thinly accepts God's existence (e.g., only within the context of Sunday morning) does not have faith. Thin acceptance is contextual – but, in the case of faith, the context of the positive doxastic attitude regarding God's existence will be very large, perhaps encompassing all the domains of one's life. Thus, for acceptance to serve as a doxastic state in faith, it must be thick acceptance. I conclude that the contextual nature of acceptance does not imply that the acceptance in faith is not belief.

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[10] While McKaughan does not explicitly claim that Mother Teresa did not believe that God exists, it is implicit in his argument from doubt (see section 2). If McKaughan admits that Mother Teresa did believe that God exists, then her faith provides no counterexample to the belief-plus model.

### 4.4 Basic direct formation

Finally, I turn to the claim that acceptance can be formed in a basic and direct way (i.e. in the same way that I can lift my arm), while belief cannot. While I may accept a proposition as true at one time, I may come to believe that proposition at a later time *as a result of accepting that proposition*. My attitude toward that proposition has changed from merely *treating* it as true to treating it as true and *taking* it as true. I no longer merely *accept* the proposition; I believe it, and the fact that my initial positive cognitive stance toward that proposition was formed in a basic direct way does not imply that I do not believe it. Indeed, Alston himself says that acceptance may turn into belief 'as one gets deeper and deeper into the religion one has accepted' (1996: 18). However, then the defender of the belief-plus model can simply claim that acceptance without belief is a *means* to faith rather than partly *constitutive* of faith.

McKaughan could reply that at the moment that a subject comes to accept and trust that God exists, the subject has faith that God exists. However, at that moment, the subject does not yet believe that God exists. Thus, on the trusting acceptance account of faith, faith that God exists does not imply belief that God exists. However, it is unclear why the defender of the belief-plus model should agree that the subject possesses faith *at the moment that they first* accept and trust that God exists. The belief-plus advocate may say that the subject has formed a mental state (acceptance) that may lead to belief and faith, but at the moment, she still lacks faith. Thus, it would seem that the belief-plus model is compatible with non-voluntarism about belief. However, things are not so simple, since Alston has an argument for the claim that faith can be formed voluntarily.

Alston asks us to suppose that faith requires 'certain propositional beliefs, and these [beliefs] are not within our voluntary control, how can anyone require us to have faith, and how can any merit attach to our doing so?' (1996: 25). It would be odd to claim that you ought to have faith that God exists, but also hold that you have no control over part of what constitutes that faith. Alston does not claim that his argument is decisive, and points out that defenders of the belief-plus model do have nuanced solutions to it. However, he claims that a simpler explanation is available: faith only requires acceptance.

Alston argues that we do not have *direct* control over any of our beliefs. In Alston's taxonomy, direct control comes in two forms: basic

and non-basic (1996: 269). If a subject has basic direct control over a belief, she would be able to believe a specific proposition 'at will', in the same way that I can raise my hand 'at will'. In contrast, if a subject has non-basic direct control over a belief, she would be able to believe a specific proposition 'while uninterruptedly guided by the intention to do so' (Alston 1996: 277). I have non-basic direct control over turning on a light.

Alston contrasts direct control with 'long range control'. Long range control is 'the capacity to bring about a state of affairs, C, by doing something (usually a number of different things) repeatedly over a considerable period of time, interrupted by activity directed to other goals' (Alston 1996: 275). Alston agrees that we do have some long range control over our belief. He writes: 'devices employed include selective exposure to evidence, selective attention to supporting considerations, seeking the company of believers and avoiding non-believers, self-suggestion, and (possibly) more bizarre methods like hypnotism' (Alston 1996: 275), but such cases are few. I take the claim about control regarding the belief/acceptance distinction to be about *direct* control only.

I agree with Alston that belief is not under our control in a direct and basic way. However, belief need not be under our direct and basic control in order for it to be meritorious for someone to hold certain beliefs. We hold subjects responsible for racist beliefs, beliefs that climate change is not happening, and that the world is flat. Perhaps only indirect control is needed to hold subjects responsible for such beliefs – just as we can reasonably hold subjects responsible for their cholesterol levels, even though subjects do not have *direct* control over their cholesterol levels. To be sure, Alston claims that we do not have long range control over our beliefs, since subjects are probably not very likely to succeed in generating the desired belief (Alston 1988: 276).

I will argue that humans have non-basic direct control over some beliefs, which is sufficient for treating certain beliefs as meritorious. Alston is very clear on the conditions for the existence of non-basic direct control over belief: non-basic direct control of belief requires, 'that the search for evidence was undertaken with the intention of taking up a certain particular attitude toward a particular proposition' (Alston 1988: 271). I will argue that a subject's forming a specific belief can be uninterruptedly guided by an intention to form that specific belief. In situations in which it is not clear whether p or not-p, a subject may choose what kind of evidence she gathers. Suppose a subject hears that

there was a violent police intervention at an anti-war rally, and does not know whether this was a peaceful rally or not. Depending upon whether she wants to form the belief that 'the police were in the wrong' or 'the protestors were in the wrong', she can choose which news source to read. She can choose to read the *Fox News* webpage or *Counterpunch*. As Sartre (1946) points out, although we do not choose what advice we receive from our friends, we can choose which friend we ask for advice, knowing what kind of advice they will give. Since the belief would be acquired through an uninterrupted intention to form it, it would be directly formed.

Alston objects to these kinds of cases because all that the subject has control over is putting herself in a position to believe *some* proposition, rather than a *particular* proposition. As a subject investigates, sometimes she will find evidence for p, and other times for not-p. In the above example, even if the subject chooses a news source with a predictable bias, she does not control what that news source will say on a particular occasion. Although biased news sources will be more or less sympathetic to the protesters, there will be cases where even the most biased news source will admit to wrongdoing (on the part of the protesters or the police).

All this objection shows is that we do not always achieve what we intend. A subject might intend to form the belief that the protesters were at fault, but fail to do so, but this is no problem for the voluntarist. I might intend to turn on the light, but fail to do so. Perhaps I switch the fan instead of the light switch, or perhaps the connection from the switch to the light has been severed, but this is not a counterexample to the claim that I can voluntarily turn on a light.

One might further object to these cases by arguing that the subject only has *indirect* control over which specific proposition they come to believe. While I have direct control over what I eat, I only have indirect control over my cholesterol levels. Perhaps, but even indirect control seems sufficient to think that certain beliefs are meritorious, thereby undercutting Alston's argument.

### *4.5 Putting it all together*

My aim in this section was to undercut an argument – based on the claim that trusting acceptance is sufficient for faith – that the belief-plus model is false. I argued that subjects may lack a FOR for p even if they

believe that p. As such, it is not a problem for the belief-plus model that one might have faith that God exists without possessing a FOR that God exists. Next, I argued that faith is not recalcitrant to evidence in the way that acceptance is. Additionally, since faith is not supposed to be action-guiding in only a small domain (e.g. only during mass), the acceptance in faith cannot be distinguished from belief on grounds of context. Finally, I argued that the belief-plus advocate has no reason to think that faith can be voluntarily formed in the same way that I can raise my arm, but that we might have a weak sort of voluntary control over beliefs, such that there are some praiseworthy or blameworthy beliefs. Since the acceptance in faith lacks the properties that distinguish acceptance from belief, there is no reason to think that McKaughan's trusting acceptance account of faith or Alston's account of faith implies the falsity of the belief-plus model.

## V. CONCLUSION

McKaughan's hopeful affirmation account of faith fails to give sufficient conditions for faith. Following Howard-Snyder, I suggested that what is needed is some belief-like attitude toward the object of faith. McKaughan's trusting acceptance account offers just such a case. However, since the token acceptances in faith might be instances of belief, trusting acceptance being necessary and sufficient for faith does not imply the falsity of the belief-plus model. To be fair, McKaughan never claimed that it did. He argued that the belief-plus model is false because of the objection from doubt and meaning drift. However, I have argued that the objection from doubt either attacks a strawman or begs the question, and, assuming that McKaughan is right in thinking that word studies can illuminate the nature of faith, McKaughan's meaning drift objection actually bolsters the belief-plus model. I have argued that faith can meet the surprise condition that is necessary for belief, and that Howard-Snyder's objection that one can have faith that p while believing that not-p begs the question against the belief-plus model. I conclude that McKaughan has given us no reason to deny that religious propositional faith implies belief.

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# TRADITION AND CONCEPTUAL DYNAMICS ACCORDING TO AN INFERENTIALIST THEORY OF MEANING

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**Abstract.** In this article I develop a conceptual dynamical account from an inferentialist theory of meaning and content; thus illuminating the connection between conceptual dynamics and *tradition*. The inferentialist theory taken into account here is that of Robert Brandom. While expanding on Brandom's notion of *scorekeeping*, I claim that insufficiency, and sometimes even inability, to *differentiate* and *navigate* between past heritage and present discourse is of the essence of highly traditional discourses; creating a unique type of *conceptual dynamics* which is commonplace mainly within religious traditional discourses. This claim is supported by a case study from a Jewish traditional discourse.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to illuminate and develop the connection between *tradition* and *conceptual dynamics* from an inferentialist *theory of meaning*. The inferentialist theory taken into account here is that of Robert Brandom, and the *tradition* exemplified here is that of the Jewish tradition as expressed especially in the Babylonian Talmud. The paper focuses at first on the normative structure that lies beneath Brandom's *theory of meaning* through the notions of *inferentialism* and conceptual content. By articulating the normative structure we can make explicit the types of *conceptual dynamics* that are natural and justified within this normative structure. Given these dynamics, we are ready, in the second half of the paper, to articulate our general notion of *tradition*, including *religious tradition*. According to the inferentialist perspective there is a deep connection between *tradition* and *dynamics* and it is hard to talk of the former without understanding the latter. Although the

deep connection between *tradition* and *dynamics* is general and need not be limited to Jewish tradition, it is expressed in several ways in the Babylonian Talmud and is a unique contribution of it.

   In order to fully understand the tri-polar-connection between *theories of meaning, conceptual dynamics* and *tradition* let me say a few introductory words regarding the first two. Philosophies of natural language deal with a vast number of issues such as: formal grammar, syntax, proper names, anaphora, reference and meaning, to name only a few. Their span of interest ranges from the boundaries of linguistics, trying to understand the various linguistic mechanisms implicit in natural language, to the more general metaphysical exploration of the relation or lack thereof between language and reality. However, there is one thing one might expect in such an account but is generally lacking, and that is – *dynamics*. Many of these philosophies provide none or little account of the dynamics by which the language changes or evolves. To a great extent, current philosophical literature treats cultures of discourse as rigid, static frameworks, with little attention given to the modes of production and modification of these frameworks. Wittgenstein, for example, dealt mainly with characterizing the *language-game* and not with the coming into being of a *language-game* or the possibility of change and transformation from one *language-game* to another.[1] Even in the case of Putnam and Kripke who give some account of conceptual change over time and try to articulate what gives a concept its identity – e.g., what makes a concept at one point in time identical to itself at another point in time – they refer to it as a *problem* that has to be solved,[2] not as a *dynamical phenomenon* to be described and explained within a certain *normative* background.

   My first claim is that even though many philosophies of language do not deal *explicitly* with evolution and modification of the conceptual system, in many cases evolution and modification are *implicit* in these philosophies, and one can actually expose and reveal them. Thus, different philosophies support different accounts of dynamics of change. Not every form of evolution, modification and coming into being of

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[1] In a few places Wittgenstein deals with the possibility of change of a linguistic framework, but these are the exception. For example: *Investigations* 23, 60-61, 64, 115, 206, 492; *On Certainty* 63, 65, 92-99, 256, 262, 336, 652; Wittgenstein 1980: 15, (44), 48.

[2] See for example Putam's account on the identity of concepts (such as *temperature*) which is presented as an incommensurability and translation *problem* between speakers of different generations (Putnam 1981: 113-119).

a language or a conceptual system fits every philosophy of language. This is a linkage I want to stress between natural language *philosophy* and *dynamics*. More precisely, I think there is a link between one's *theory of meaning* – i.e., one's theory of conceptual *meaning*: how do concepts acquire their meaning and what is the normative structure that brings this about? – and the dynamics of change and modification that is natural to such a linguistic system.

One way of looking at it is as follows: A normative structure creates a web of commitments and constraints that bind the speaker who speaks from within it. The range of possibilities of modification and evolution of a conceptual system within the normative structure depends on this set of constraints and commitments that bind the speaker.[3] In order to expose the dynamical aspect underlying changes from an earlier conception to a later radically different one, this dependence has to be explicated; the effect that the commitments and constraints of the normative structure have on the evolutionary trajectory of a conception has to be articulated. The normative structures that interest us in this paper are normative structures that are implicit in *theories of meaning*. Thus I open with the question: what kinds of *conceptual dynamics* are natural to certain *theories of meaning*, and specifically to an *inferentialist theory of meaning*?

In the following section (section 2) I will make a brief sketch of Brandom's Pragmatism focusing on the ideas of *inferentialism*, conceptual content and meaning. Following these principles, I will investigate the dynamics of conceptual change that are natural to the Brandomian normative structure. Section 3 analyzes two dynamic sorts which are *embedded* in the Brandomian normative structure itself and can be considered defining features of it. In section 4 we are ready to tackle the issue of *tradition* and the dynamic that results from *traditional commitment* from an inferentialist Brandomian perspective. Usually we think of *tradition* as basically standing in opposition to *dynamics*; however, I will stress the essential role tradition can have in *creating* dynamics. Here I go beyond Brandom's account of *tradition*; in the core of Brandom's account the present speaker and his past heritage

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[3] It is important to maintain and be aware of the difference between conceptual change within a normative structure and a change of the normative structure itself (see Fisch & Benbaji 2011). This difference does not mean that one cannot in certain scenarios begin with a thoughtful change of a conceptual system *within* a normative structure which results in a change *of the normative structure itself*.

are well defined entities that can have various relationships which are expressed by the type of navigation between these distinct entities. In contrast, my main claim is that in traditional discourse the very ability to *differentiate* and *navigate* between these entities, namely the speaker and her past heritage, comes in question. This inability to *differentiate* and to *navigate* between past and present is of the essence of the traditional discourse, and it creates a special type of *conceptual dynamics* which is commonplace within such traditional discourses (named here: *tradition-type dynamics*). Section 5 is a concise exposition of a religious traditional discourse, that of the Jewish Babylonian Talmud, with a fairly detailed example of a *tradition-type dynamics*.

## II. BRANDOM'S *THEORY OF MEANING: INFERENTIALISM*

Three dimensions are involved in understanding what it means to grasp a concept: inferential, normative and social.[4] While they are all interconnected, the inferential dimension is a basic structural one; and indeed Brandom defines conceptual content through its inferential role: 'to be conceptually contentful in the most basic sense is to play a role as premise and conclusion in inferences' (Brandom 2002: 94). Although *inferentialism* defines a structure it is not solely a logical or syntactic one, but it involves also material rules of inference.[5] For example, the sentence 'Today is Wednesday' implies that 'Tomorrow will be Thursday'. These types of inferences are considered *material* inferences. In these inferences neither the premises nor the conclusions employ logical concepts; therefore it seems appropriate to distinguish them from inferences whose correctness depends only on logical form.[6]

A *word* becomes a *concept* only if it acquires a role in reasoning. Situating concepts in an inferential structure of premises and conclusions occurs naturally, according to Brandom, in the social framework of *making claims* and *giving and asking for reasons*. '[F]or a response to have *conceptual* content is just for it to play a role in the *inferential* game of making claims and giving and asking for reasons' (Brandom 2000: 48).

This approach results in the reversal of the traditional relationship between representational properties and inferential properties:

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[4] An account of the historical-conceptual evolution of these dimensions in Brandom 2002 (a brief analysis: ibid., pp. 21-32).

[5] Brandom 1994: 97 ff.

[6] Brandom 1994: 98.

The idea that one can first fix the meaning or content of premises and conclusions, and only then worry about inferential relations among them, is characteristic of traditional and twentieth-century empiricism. This implicit semantic commitment is questioned, however, by the rationalist tradition in semantics, which sees issues of what is a reason for what as essential to the identity and individuation of the conceptual contents that stand in those inferential relations (Brandom 2002: 4).[7]
These *inferentialists* seek to define representational properties in terms of inferential ones, which must accordingly be capable of being understood antecedently. They start with a notion of content as a matter of what is a reason for what and understand truth and representation as features of ideas that are not only manifested in, but conferred by their role in reasoning. This is the tradition that Sellars inherits and builds on by developing a notion of conceptual content that starts with inferential roles (Brandom 1994: 94).[8]

According to Brandom,[9] when one utters a sentence and thereby makes an assertion, one is committing oneself to defend that assertion against whatever objection or challenge might be raised by a hearer. The defence would take the form of giving *reasons* in support of that assertion, typically by inferring it from some other sentence (whose uttering might not be so readily open to challenge).[10] In making the assertion one also confers on oneself the *entitlement* to make further inferences from it. In this way one reveals the web[11] of material inferences that his assertions are imbedded in. This process of revelation through the social game of *giving and asking for reasons* is what Brandom calls *making it explicit*, i.e., making the implicit web of material inferences explicit.[12]

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[7] One should note that 'inference' is an expression that belongs to pragmatics, to the *use* of language; whereas 'inferential relation' belongs more to semantics (see Clausen 2004: 80).

[8] Objectivity is a central notion, which I do not go into in this context, related to truth and representation. One can find a detailed discussion on Brandom's account of 'objectivity' in Stout 2002 and Clausen 2004.

[9] Brandom 1994; 2000.

[10] MacFarlane 2003.

[11] The 'web' metaphor and its 'relatives' are used by many (Quine, Davidson and Hesse, to name only a few). Although Brandom scarcely uses it (e.g., Brandom 1994: 90) I find it a useful metaphor and will use it in what follows.

[12] What we are missing in Brandom's narrative is an account of why is '*giving and asking for reasons*' the *given* social practice. For some justification see Fisch & Benbaji's (2011) account of their fictitious 'Brandomian Doubter'.

Brandom's pragmatism is radical in the sense that *meaning* is a result of the position held by a concept or an assertion in the web of inferences. Concepts and assertions acquire their meaning solely by their role within the web of inferences. Thus one central consequence is that identical concepts or assertions can have different meanings in the mouths of different speakers, as one speaker's web of inferences is different from another. One way of explaining these differences is that they are created by the *collateral commitments* that serve in the speaker's background. For example, a speaker utters the sentence: 'you see the librarian; she is wearing a red sweater.' In making herself explicit and positioning the utterance in her web of inferences the speaker might say things like 'red is a colour', 'the librarian is not wearing a green sweater', etc. But let's assume for the moment that the speaker belongs to a religious group in which she is committed to certain views. In her *making it explicit* she might add inferences of a different sort, such as: 'she is wearing red; hence she is not modest'; or 'she is more vulnerable to the "evil-eye"'. A different set of background commitments usually means a different inferential web, constituting the subtext underlying meaning and entitling the speaker to continue in her tracks.

Brandom's philosophy does not limit the speaker to a fixed set of commitments and inferences; the only normative requirement is that the commitments and inferences the speaker holds constitute a *consistent* unit.[13] But how is this normative requirement achieved? It is achieved in practice mainly through the abovementioned social game of *giving and asking for reasons* (which is also termed *the Socratic Method*) and by making implicit inferential commitments explicit:

> Formulating as an explicit claim the inferential commitment implicit in the content brings it out into the open as liable to *challenges and demands for justification*, just as with any assertion. In this way explicit expression plays an elucidating role, *functioning to groom and improve* our inferential commitments, and so our conceptual contents ... (Brandom 2000: 71, my emphasis)

> Socratic method [as introduced by Sellars] is a way of bringing our practices under rational control by *expressing them explicitly in a form in which they can be confronted with objections and alternatives*, a form in which they can be exhibited as the conclusions of inferences seeking

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[13] A basic feature of this inferentialist account is a certain type of holism (See Brandom 2000: 15-16, 167; Brandom 1994: 89-91, 477-482, 587-588; Fodor & LePore 2001).

to justify them on the basis of premises advanced as reasons, and as premises in further inferences exploring the consequences of accepting them. (Brandom 2000: 56, my emphasis)

*Making it explicit* and *giving it and asking for reasons* is the process of finding out and elucidating one's inferential web. Beyond the straightforward challenge and demand for justification, the speaker wants to avoid inconsistencies; a situation in which some listener points out to her during the game of *giving and asking for reasons* that what she infers at one part of her inferential web contradicts an inference at a different part of the web. In other words, the speaker should be able to produce justifications – that is, give adequate reasons – for thinking that the sentence she utters is true, whenever her assertions are challenged. That includes not falling into inconsistent inferences she cannot defend and justify. Thus, the basic normative requirement is that the commitments and inferences the speaker holds constitute a *consistent* unit.

## III. STRIVING FOR A STANCE: BRANDOMIAN DYNAMICS

The norms constitutive of this practice of talking and asserting, as I have described them following Brandom, do not include an obligation to hold on to one's previous commitments or to agree with one's fellow speaker's commitments.[14] Following this, a speaker can definitely give up a commitment or modify one, or change her web of inferences either because of some deficiency in her web or just because she feels like giving up one commitment and choosing another. Our only linguistic normative requirement is that she be able to defend her current web of inferences and demonstrate its consistency.

At this point, I make explicit two types of *dynamics* which are implicit in Brandom's *Theory of Meaning*. It is helpful to define these dynamics in relation to the type and level of constraints the normative structure imposes on change and modification. The first kind of dynamic is as follows: a speaker can be challenged by a listener, as a result of making certain aspects of her web of inferences explicit, claiming that there is some inconsistency in her web. For example, from a certain set of commitments consequences arise that the speaker was not aware of, and now that they became explicit she is facing an inconsistency which she cannot justify; she is therefore forced to modify her web of inferences.

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[14] Stout 2007: 25-26.

In such a case the constraints regarding change and modification seem to be of *infinite* force, i.e., the speaker is executing a modification in which the need for it was *determined* already implicitly in the speaker's web of inferences and set of commitments. The speaker cannot ignore the *need* for change and modification. Although the results of the modification are not determined and there may well be many possible results that are faithful to one's set of commitments, the actual *need* for change is determined. The need for change and modification is a result of one's given articulation of her web of inferences and set of commitments. I will term this kind of dynamic: *determined-type dynamic.*

Let's imagine an ideal case in which a speaker's web of inferences is totally explicit and it has no shady parts to it. Brandom, of course, does not think this is possible, but he writes:

> Such a system is an idealization, because all of its concepts would already be out in the open; none remaining hidden, to be revealed only by drawing conclusions from premises that have never been conjoined before, following out unexplored lines of reasoning, drawing consequences one was not previously aware one would be entitled or committed to by some set of premises. In short, this would be a case where Socratic reflection, making implicit commitments explicit and examining their consequences and possible justifications, *would never motivate one to alter contents or commitments.* Such complete transparency of commitment and entitlement is in some sense an ideal projected by the sort of Socratic practice that finds current contents and commitments wanting by confronting them with one another, pointing out inferential features of each of which we were unaware (Brandom 2000: 72-73, my emphasis).

In a way the most basic aspiration of a Brandomian speaker is reaching this transparency, in reaching stability; to speak from within a stance. This *goal* is a static one. If the idealization described above was realized and all concepts would have been 'out in the open' with the inferential web totally explicit, there would have been no altering of contents or commitments of the dynamical type described above (*determined-type dynamic*). This idealization emphasizes Brandom's stable and static aspirations. It is interesting to note however that the *process* of achieving this static goal is a very dynamic one. Therefore the *idealized goal* stands in contrast to the actual *practice* of the Brandomian speaker which is very much anti-static; almost every utterance amongst speakers results

in re-organization of one's commitments and entitlements. The very act of *making* it explicit results frequently in the awareness of the need for justification which cannot be achieved by more explication and must be done in many cases by *change and modification*. This is the *determined-type dynamic* embedded in the Brandomian normative structure in which the constraints for performing change are *infinite*.

Since the Brandomian normative requirement is that a speaker will be able to defend her current web of inferences and demonstrate its consistency, it follows that a speaker can change her web of inferences just because she feels like giving up one commitment and choosing another, as long as she is able to still demonstrate its consistency. Here modification is a result of the speaker's free will and her choice of commitments which might be independent of her previous set of commitments. In this case, the previous web of inferences and set of commitments held by the speaker pose *no* constraint on the act of modification. The speaker abandons one web of inferences and set of commitments and chooses a different one; the constraints of the previous web of inferences and set of commitments are *zero*. Holding to the Brandomian normative structure based on his *theory of meaning* makes such a dynamic a possible continuation of such a structure. This is a *free-type dynamic* embedded in the Brandomian structure in which the constraints for performing change are *zero*. Of course one has many other constraints resulting from other normative spheres, as social and psychological ones; however in this paper the focus is solely on the normative structure that is at the basis of Brandom's *theory of meaning*.

One reason for analyzing the Brandomian case is that in virtue of Brandom's radical pragmatism it exemplifies nicely the two extremely opposing levels of constraint; *determined-type dynamic* with an *infinite* level of constraint, and *free-type dynamic* with a *zero* level of constraint. However, other philosophies of language and theories of meaning might exhibit midway levels of constraint. For example, a more semantic theory which doesn't hold like Brandom that 'semantics must answer [*only*] to pragmatics' would show a midway level of constraints, since the constraints for modification would mainly be a result of some sort of 'semantic kernel'.[15]

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[15] For such an approach see examples in Lycan 2000.

## IV. TRADITION AS A SOURCE OF MODIFICATION

On a very basic level *tradition* and *conceptual dynamics* are connected since they both allegedly deal with the relation between *past* and *present*. Brandom in his *Tales of the Mighty Dead* classifies several possible types of relations between a speaker and her past tradition.[16] However all of these types express ways of articulating the past *from within a stance*, from within the present speaker's *given* web of inferences and commitments. What Brandom is missing is an account of how the past tradition *affects* one's *given* web of inferences and commitments; not only how one's *given* web of inferences is *justified* through one's past tradition. What role might past tradition have in the dynamics of one's present (natural/religious) language? In order to approach this question let us look at the rather extreme case and ask: what does it mean for a speaker to be part of a highly *traditional* discursive culture? To answer this we must emphasize a central feature of traditional discourse by mentioning one more important Brandomian notion – the notion of *scorekeeping*.

In the process of *giving and asking for reasons* in which the speaker explicates her web of inferences, the listener '*keeps score*' of the speaker's commitments, entitlements and inferences. *Scorekeeping* includes comparing the speaker's web of commitments, entitlements and inferences to one's own, and being able to *navigate* from one perspective to another, from the speaker's perspective to one's own. *Scorekeeping* is an essential part of communicating with each other,[17] and language creates many techniques in order to make it possible (e.g., anaphora and pronouns).[18]

> The paradigm of communication as joint possession of some common thing is relinquished in favor of – or modified in the direction of – a paradigm of communication as a kind of cooperation in practice ... What is shared is a capacity to navigate and traverse differences in points of view, to specify contents from different points of view. (Brandom 1994: 485)

In this view *content* cannot be detached from *perspective*; therefore in

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[16] Brandom 2002, Introduction and pp. 94-118.

[17] Remember that in the Brandomian account same concepts or assertions can have different meanings in the mouths of different speakers, as one speaker's web of inferences is different from another. *Scorekeeping* assures communication in the face of this consequence.

[18] Brandom 1994: 486-488, 588-592. Rouse 2002: 202.

communication when content is exchanged it comes with an inferential perspective. This is done by constant navigation between the different perspectives and their contents, and *keeping score* of the perspectival content. Andrea Clausen elaborates:

> [C]ommunication is not based upon shared *sets of inferences*. The inferential significances which different interlocutors associate with a claiming need not have any inferences in common ... [T]he traditional model of communication as conveyance of information from a sender to a recipient can no longer be sustained. Brandom rather understands communication as navigation between different perspectives ... To say that content is common to different assertions is all right provided that this only means that it is *constituted* by different interlocutors, not that mastering content has to be *presupposed* in successful communication. (Clausen 2004: 94-95)

Keeping score and navigating between different perspectives is done in many cases by expressing a fellow-speaker's assertion with my own commitments inserted in it. In that way I know and express my own standpoint despite the fact that I'm conveying the fellow-speaker's claim. For example, Jason asserts the following: 'I believe *that* the receiver of the Ten Commandments from heaven invented a way of turning rock into water.' Now let's assume that I do not believe in the Ten Commandments being a heavenly creation, but I still want to present Jason's assertion. I could do that by inserting my own beliefs within Jason's assertion. And that is possible by differentiating between what we are talking *about* and what we are *asserting*.[19] Here Brandom uses the *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions for his own purposes and expresses this idea by showing how one converts a *de dicto* ascription into a *de re* ascription.[20] Jason's assertion in my mouth would sound something like: 'Jason believes *of* the *author* of the Ten Commandments *that he* invented a way of turning rock into water.'[21] In this way I could present Jason's assertion without committing myself to beliefs I do not hold. This is a kind of navigating method: I hold to my own beliefs (i.e., Moses is the *author* of the Ten Commandments and did not *receive* them from heaven) while trying to express my fellow speaker's assertion (i.e., Moses invented a way of

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[19] Brandom 1994: 499-508. Examples: Brandom 1994: 500-505, 588-589.

[20] Brandom 1994: 502.

[21] This is considered in Brandom's terms a *de re* ascription (Brandom 1994: 499-508, 588-589).

turning rock into water). Keeping track of this sort is of the essence of *scorekeeping*.[22]

Nevertheless, from a Brandomian perspective, *Scorekeeping* is not only an activity that could be carried out by speakers living and talking with each other; it could be carried out even by a speaker who is communicating, in a sense, with the past, with his past tradition.[23] Therefore, I could express someone else's claim even if he is a speaker from my past tradition, without accepting all his commitments and by inserting my own commitments within his assertions, in the same manner we just saw with present speakers (like in Jason's case).

Here I come to my main point. One of the essential aspects of *scorekeeping* is that different speakers represent separate identities; they stand *apart* from each other and one can *navigate* between these separate identities. Now, what happens when navigation between speakers is not fully expressed, i.e., when the differentiation between speakers is not clear and not fully realized? What is the meaning of *scorekeeping* when the differentiating wall between speakers falls? These are general questions about *scorekeeping* but their importance lies mainly with regard to *tradition*; such scenarios are commonplace in highly traditional discourses, since one of the essences of tradition is the collapsing of the walls differentiating between past and present speakers. Consequently, these scenarios can result in a unique dynamic, as we shall see below.

My account of one's interaction with past tradition is different than Brandom's. Brandom sees the present speaker and her tradition as two defined identities between which the present speaker can *navigate*. In his account these are two differentiated entities even in a case in which the present speaker's access to the past inferential web is partial because of her limited ability to play with the past the game of *giving and asking for reasons*.

To make my point clear let's look at a certain type of *scorekeeping* which is a reverse picture of the above example. In the same way I can express someone else's claim with my own commitments inserted in it (as in Jason's case), I can make *my own* assertion but with someone else's commitments *inserted* in it. This is done sometimes by adding the words 'so-called' before the fellow-speaker's expression or by adding 'scare-quotes' to that expression. For example:

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[22] Stout 2007: 24-25.

[23] For an analysis of different models of *scorekeeping* past heritage, see Brandom 2002.

– Speaker A says: 'David, the righteous king, wrote the book of Psalms'.
– Speaker B replies: 'That so-called 'righteous king' stole Bat-Sheva and sent her husband to his death'.

From B's perspective a king who steals a woman and sends her husband to die can hardly be called a righteous king. However, she is inserting speaker A's expression within her own assertion and she is supposedly using speaker A's commitment. The technique of differentiating between what the two speakers are committed to is by saying the words 'so-called' (or by adding the scare quotes). By doing so one underscores the commitments one *does not* agree with and *does not* take responsibility for. This can be considered *complementary* or *dual* to the *de re* ascription.[24]

I want to take this description further and claim that this structure is a good platform for a dynamic of change and evolution resulting from past expressions and commitments. Let's imagine a case in which A's expression is inserted within B's sentence (as appears above), but this time *without* a differentiating technique like the term 'so-called' or without the scare quotes. When does such an imaginary case happen? This can happen (and it is not imaginary at all) in a highly traditional discursive community in which parts of past expressions are embedded within current discourse without a differentiating technique. It is as if the 'so-called' phrase or the scare quotes fell at some point in the process of embedding past expressions into current discourse. In such a case we might say that B is not adopting A's commitment, although A's words appear without differentiation as part of B's expression. In the above example the result would look like this (in the mouth of speaker B): 'That righteous king stole Bat-Sheva and sent her husband to his death.' Now, the speaker's normative obligation is to make sense and embed this sentence within her web of inferences; trying to make sense of this sentence could introduce an interesting dynamic, with the end result being neither A's perspective nor B's perspective. This is an extreme example but the idea is clear; the speaker's task (B's task) is to take her sentence, containing also A's expression embedded in it without any technique differentiating between them, and make explicit its inferential web. *Making it explicit* might result in modification of the various concepts and commitments constituting this assertion (e.g., 'righteous', 'stole'), resulting in a new inferential web.

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[24] Brandom 1994: 545-547, 588-590.

In the light of this, I think it is useful to articulate one of the core characteristics of traditional discourse as *a discourse which embeds expressions from one's past heritage into one's present language with varying levels of commitment; however with no tools (or – with low level tools) differentiating between past and present speakers; with no real ability to navigate between perspectives of past and present speakers*. The moment the wall differentiating between speakers disappears and it stops being clear what belongs to A and what belongs to B, is a good starting point for innovation. This is the point where a speaker has to re-assess her commitments and put her web of inferences together again. Since this process is commonplace in highly traditional discourses we will term this process: *tradition-type dynamic*. This dynamic is highly useful in analyzing the evolutionary conceptual process occurring in discourses in which past heritage expressions play a central role in current language while past/present speaker identities are not fully differentiated.[25]

The deep connection between *tradition* and *dynamics* is apparent in highly traditional discourses. In the following section I focus on this inferentialist dynamic as it is expressed within the highly traditional discourse of the Babylonian Talmud, in which the interplay between *tradition* and *conceptual dynamics* has an essential part in its unique character.

## V. *TRADITION-TYPE DYNAMIC* WITHIN THE BABYLONIAN TALMUDIC DISCOURSE

A *tradition-type dynamic* is actually a spectrum of dynamics in which the level of identification with the commitments attached to a fellow-speaker's expression from the past can vary from case to case. The Jewish Babylonian Talmudic discourse can be considered a highly traditional one; its discourse is dialogical in nature spanning a period of more than 200 years (starting at about 200AD). The interlocutors are rabbinic sages of the Talmudic period called the amoraic rabbis. The Talmudic discussion

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[25] The *deep ambivalence* that is essential as the base for real normative transformation according to Fisch & Benbaji (2011) can be created not only by a close and reliable *critic* as they claim, but also by this complex relationship with tradition. I think that in certain cases tradition, especially in a religious context, goes much deeper into one's self-identity than even a trustworthy critic, since tradition has in certain cases a strong gripping power.

is centred around the canonical tannaitic text, called the Mishna, which is a redaction of Jewish oral traditions compiled at around 220AD. The typical Talmudic discussion starts with what seems to be a commentary on a certain Mishna deliberating on some Jewish law (*halakha*). From there onward the discussion branches and expands into a vast number of possible topics, mainly in Jewish law, but not only, also philosophical, exegetical, physical, mathematical and medical. During the process of deliberation the Talmudic interlocutors often refer to earlier texts from past heritage either from the tanaitic period or from the earlier biblical period.

The Talmudic speaker, in many cases, practically chooses[26] at every stage of the discourse the type and level of commitment towards the past heritage he wants to exhibit at *that* stage. He chooses whether he is committed to just using the same *words* that appeared earlier, or maybe to the *concepts* behind these words or maybe even to the earlier *conceptions* containing these concepts. This defines the framework in which the Talmudic speaker will conduct his argumentations at that stage.[27]

One type of Talmudic commitment towards the past is a commitment to rulings and cases from past heritage. As mentioned, this might be a commitment to the rules and cases themselves, to the concepts or conceptions behind them or just to the wording of these rules and cases. Being committed to past heritage expressions, sometimes just to snippets of it, mainly means that these expressions become part of the ongoing later discourse; but in what sense do they integrate into later discourse? How do they influence the discourse? The answer lies in the *tradition-type dynamic.* In many cases the wall differentiating between past and present identities collapses and there is no real *navigation* between present and past speakers. What starts in the Talmudic discourse as genuine *scorekeeping* with multi-dimensional and multi-generational navigational moves between present and past identities, deflates, many times, as a result of the traditional force into present assertions with past locutions embedded in them, nonetheless with no differentiating technique. Thus what we observe is that past heritage integrates into

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[26] I use the term 'choose' although it is not always clear whether it is an aware or non-aware choice.

[27] Moreover, it is interesting to note the Talmudic phenomenon of changing the *type of commitment* towards past heritage from one stage of the discussion to another. This seems to be explained best by holding on to a Brandomian *theory of meaning* with a *free-type dynamic.*

later thought in indirect and sometimes unexpected ways. E.g., the later generation (*amoraim*) are portrayed as employing an earlier generation's (*tannaitic*) term without adopting the earlier generation's (*tannaitic*) commitment that went along with it; nevertheless without employing a differentiating technique, resulting in a change in the inferential significance of the term and in a novel later generation (*amoraic*) perspective. The final result is neither an expression of the later speaker's set of commitments and web of inferences, nor is it an expression of the earlier layer. What results is a novel set of commitments and inferential web. The exact process depends of course on the initial commitment to the past, on the one hand, and on the other hand on the level of differentiation between past expressions and later assertions exhibited by later speakers and their ability to navigate between the different perspectives.[28]

As an example let's look at the following Talmudic issue, that of measurement and division; is it possible to measure two quantities and conclude that they are exactly the same size? Or is it possible to divide a quantity exactly into half? These possibilities are termed by the earlier tanaitic generations as '*half & half*' situations. It is important to point out that there are several rulings and cases in the tanaitic literature in which this is the underlying possibility. For example: 'The combination of pure [sheep's] wool and pure linen is forbidden under the law of *Mixtures of Diverse Species* ... If camel's hair and sheep's wool have been mixed together and the majority is from the camel it is permitted [to be mixed with linen]; if the majority is from the sheep's wool it is prohibited; if they are in equal parts ('*half and half*') – it is prohibited.' (Mishna, kilayim 9:1). Another example: 'If a young pigeon is found between two dovecots and is nearer to one, it belongs to the owner of this dovecot, and if nearer to the other it belongs to the other; and if it is at a like distance from either ('*half and half*') – they share it' (Mishna, Baba Batra 2:6). It seems that the tanaitic sages raise no problem regarding the possibility of '*half and half*'; it's a possibility like any other possibility which the sages have to deal with and give their ruling.

However, discontent with the possibility of '*half and half*' arises when we get to the later amoraic period. It starts as a vague disapproval of the '*half and half*' possibility and is developed through several stages of

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[28] This ability might be a result of the normative traditional constraints on the one hand or a matter of choice, on the other hand.

amoraic deliberation which I will omit in this context. The final stage culminates as a response to a certain Mishna[29] which discusses the case of 'first born' in which twin male sheep were born *simultaneously*, and their heads came out at exactly the same time. R. Yose from Galilee rules that both sheep are considered 'first born', and they both belong to the Priest in accordance to the rule of 'first born'. On the other hand, the Rabbis[30] in the mishna reply and say: 'that's impossible; hence one belongs to the priest and one stays with the Israelite owner.' The Talmud takes this disagreement to be an extension of the issue of '*half and half*', however with a slightly different angle which includes both *simultaneity* and *exact* measurement and division: is it possible to have *exact simultaneity* and is it possible to ascertain *exact precision* in measurement and division?[31]

The disagreement in the Mishna is situated within the context of a *natural random process*, namely that of giving birth. The Talmud continues the analysis and raises the question as to the possibility of simultaneity and '*half and half*' situations within a different context – that of *human action* in which *human intention* is involved in making something simultaneous and precise and it is not just a result of a natural random process. Regarding the Rabbis' perspective, the Talmud performs a *scorekeeping* move and states the following: 'The Rabbis hold that it is [ontologically] *impossible* to ascertain exact precision and simultaneity in *natural processes*.' This perspective is inferred from what the Rabbis said in the above Mishna, from the words 'that's impossible' – that it is impossible that the two sheep were born exactly at the same time. This conclusion has been generalized to mean an *ontological impossibility* although the tanaitic Rabbis have most probably just meant it as a *technical impossibility*.

In this move real perspectival *scorekeeping* seems to be deflated, as the words from the Mishna are used and taken to express the later Talmudic perspective and not the earlier tanaitic perspective. However, the apparent *scorekeeping* effort goes on and the Talmud asks regarding

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[29] In Babylonian Talmud, tractate Bechorot 17a.

[30] The 'Rabbis' in this Mishna are an anonymous collective group; however they denote a viewpoint, which will be referred to henceforth with capital R ('Rabbis').

[31] Note that the Talmud extends the idea of simultaneity to any attempt to carry out an exact measurement, especially with regard to the cases termed 'half & half'. According to the Talmud, the ability (or inability) to measure or create a situation of simultaneous events is the same ability (or inability) to measure or create an exact 'half & half' situation. This is an interesting extension equating space and time.

the Rabbis of the Mishna: 'What is their view with regard to human [intentional] actions?' As the Talmud inferred above, it is ontologically impossible to ascertain exact precision and simultaneity in *natural processes* according to the Rabbis of the Mishna; however is it possible to ascertain exact precision when measurement and division are conducted by means of *human intention,* according to them?

The Talmud in this deliberative process exhibits commitment to earlier tanaitic rulings and cases and tries to deduce from them an answer to the question *the Talmud is interested in* of human ability to create an exact 'half & half' situation. At this point the Talmud holds on to the so called 'Rabbis' view' (deduced from the Rabbis' *words* as part of the Talmud's commitment to their past heritage), that in a natural random process 'half & half' never occurs.

After going through a few earlier tanaitic sources trying to prove one way or the other regarding 'half & half' by means of *human intention*, the final proof is particularly revealing. An earlier tanaitic source is presented, one that deals with the case of a slain body found outside of a city and it is not known who the slayer is. According to biblical law the elders of the city *closest* to the body (together with priests) perform a certain ceremony that includes breaking a heifer's neck as part of a forgiveness ritual for the people of the *closest* city that such a dreadful thing happened under their very noses. However, the tanaitic source introduces a case in which 'a slain body is *found at exactly the same distance* between two cities.'[32]

Now, let's embed this tanaitic expression *as quoted* within the Talmudic web of inferences (which is constructed by holding on to the so called Rabbis' view) and make the following analysis. It is clear that the *position* of the body falls under the category of unintentional random process, even though the situation results from human action (slaying). Within the abovementioned Talmudic web of inferences it is ontologically impossible for a *natural unintentional random process* to result in a 'half & half' state-of-affairs, therefore the body cannot be exactly between the two cities. Now what would that imply of any human measurement that does find the body to be *exactly* between the two cities? Clearly it would imply that this measurement was faulty, eliminating the possibility of human beings to create an exact 'half & half' situation.

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[32] This case arises regarding the question what city should perform the required ceremony? In such a case we cannot define a 'closest city'.

This is the very situation the Talmud finds itself in when the tanaitic expression becomes part of the Talmud's web of inference. Taking the tanaitic words ('a slain body is found at exactly the same distance between two cities ...') as empirically implying a given situation, leads the Talmud, who view 'half & half' as an impossibility in natural random processes, to the conclusion that 'half & half' is impossible also in human intentional measurement and activity. This completes the Talmud's relevant web of inferences: *'half & half' is an ontological impossibility both in natural unintentional situations and in human intentional situations.*

Beyond the deep philosophical implications of such a view, the important point is that this perspective is not a reflection of the Talmud's stance, since there was no Talmudic stance regarding human endeavour, and it is not a reflection of any tanaitic opinion, since they saw no problem with the whole issue of 'half & half'. This perspective is solely a result of the Talmud employing a tanaitic *expression*, employing a tanaitic fictitious case, *without adopting the tanaitic commitment*. This tanaitic expression detached from any context and from any earlier commitment placed in the web of inferences holding to the assumption that in *random unintentional* contexts there can be no 'half & half' – results in a final novel Talmudic perspective. This *traditional* mechanism of inserting commitments from past heritage within one's own assertions, without carefully differentiating between the different perspectives, i.e., with deflated *scorekeeping*, could 'throw' the speaker into a novel perspective, with the trajectory and the end result not always being evident at the starting point.

## VI. SUMMARY

In this paper I tried to explicate the various connections between a *theory of meaning*, *conceptual dynamics* and *tradition* from an inferentialist perspective, taking Brandom as a faithful representative. Holding on to a Brandomian *theory of meaning* based on his *inferentialism* I first articulated the types of dynamics that are natural and justified within such a normative structure underlying his *theory of meaning*. We came up with a *determined-type dynamic* and a *free-type dynamic,* both embedded in the normative structure as defining features of it. Brandom's radical pragmatism exemplifies two extremely opposing levels of constraint which result in these two dynamics; *determined-type dynamic* with

an *infinite* level of constraint, and *free-type dynamic* with *zero* level of constraint.

The second part of the paper proposed a dynamic which results from *tradition* as an expression of the close relationship between *tradition* and *conceptual dynamics*. Usually we think of *tradition* as basically standing in opposition to *conceptual dynamics*, however, I stress the essential role tradition can have in *creating* such dynamics. One's *traditional* stance is defined by one's commitments towards past heritage and the degree in which that heritage is embedded within current language.[33] Of course, *tradition* embodies a spectrum of possibilities from a slight commitment towards the past to a highly *traditional* discursive culture in which the past plays a constitutive role in the speaker's present. In order to explain the dynamic resulting from *tradition* I utilized Brandom's notion of *scorekeeping* and *navigation* between speakers and perspectives; concluding that a basic characteristic of *tradition* in highly traditional discourses is a lack of differentiation between past and present speakers, leading to an inability of true *scorekeeping* and *navigation*. This characteristic results in a unique type of dynamic – the *tradition-type dynamic*.

The *tradition-type dynamic* fits naturally into the Brandomian structure and is supported by and compatible with Brandomian normativity, though my notion of *tradition* is very different from that of Brandom's. Brandom's notion of tradition as if one's past heritage stands as a differentiated and defined entity in which a present speaker just navigates and approaches it seems to miss the point.

My notion of *tradition* and the *dynamic* that follows from this notion is manifested in highly traditional discourses. *Religious* traditional discourses such as the Talmud have an additional level of religious commitments which partake in one's web of commitments towards one's past. This level of religious commitment can add to the lack of differentiating one's self identity from past heritage, and to the inability to navigate between past and present. Since *tradition* and *conceptual dynamics* are strong features of the Talmud, one of the unique contributions of the Talmud to the philosophy of language is the way it connects between them. In this way the Talmud adds a dimension that is very much lacking in the philosophy of language, that is – the dimension of *tradition*; in what way does *tradition* play a role in forming our

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[33] Compare: William James 1907: 82-85.

language and concepts? The inferentialist perspective fits naturally with the Talmudic discourse, although as I show elsewhere this perspective does not cover the full range of phenomena expressed in the Talmudic discourse. However, by reconstructing this Talmudic *tradition-type dynamic* from within a Brandomian normative stance I propose that it is not only a description of dynamics within tradition but a *rational justification* of it.

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