The Nature of God's Goodness

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In memory of my grandparents

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Short Abstract

Contemporary expositions of God's goodness err either (1) by subjecting God to moral norms, which is to question His sovereignty and aseity, or (2) by failing to establish that God will always act in accordance with moral norms, which removes the theist's ability to appeal to God's goodness in response to problems of evil.

In this thesis, I aim to construct a better account of God's goodness. I do this by claiming that God's ability to create is best explained in terms of God's self-love. I argue that the only end that could have moved God to create is Himself. For if creation is the final end of God's act – if something other than God is the final end of God's act – it would indicate a want or desire in God that could only be fulfilled by creation. This would suggest a dependency of God on creation, and thus present a challenge to God's self-sufficiency. I argue that for God to create with Himself as His own end is for God to create out of love of Himself. Thus, given that God has created, it can be concluded that God loves Himself. I further argue that God's love of Himself entails that He loves all things, since by loving Himself, God loves the pre-existent ideas of everything that will come to exist, and by extension the things themselves. This, I argue, allows us to have confidence that God will act in accordance with moral norms, but without subjecting Him to them.

To arrive at my conclusion, my thesis will proceed in the following manner. First, I defend three important metaphysical commitments on which my thesis hinges. These are (1) a divine conceptualist understanding of essentialism, which is required to establish the pre-existent divine ideas that I argue God loves, (2) the privation position on the nature of evil, which is required to avoid a potential problem of God loving evil ideas, and (3) an Anselmian theology which argues God has all of His attributes to their maximal possible extent, to ensure that I establish that God is maximally loving towards the ideas He loves. Second, I will lay out various positions on the nature of God's goodness which I will proceed to reject. Third, I will set out my own theory of God's goodness, mentioned above. I conclude by addressing potential objections that might be raised against my position.

Long Abstract

The Psalmist calls us to ‘Taste and see that the Lord is good’. That God is good is an essential claim of theism. In my thesis, I address two common, contemporary expositions of God’s goodness.

On the one hand, there are those who take the claim that ‘God is good’ to indicate that God is a perfect moral agent. On this account, God is good because He is well behaved; He follows His moral obligations, and goes further to do the supererogatory. This is the position of Richard Swinburne. I will contend that his view is not satisfactory. I argue that such a position is erroneous because it brings into question God’s sovereignty and aseity by suggesting that there exist norms over and above Him to which He is subject and on which He is dependent, instead of them being dependent upon Him.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that God’s goodness should not be interpreted in terms of moral goodness. Proponents of this position argue that God is not the kind of being that can be subject to or has reason to follow moral norms. This is the position taken by Brian Davies and Mark Murphy (albeit in slightly different ways). Instead, these authors argue that to call God good is fundamentally just to claim that He is metaphysically perfect. I maintain that conceptions of God’s goodness in which God does not necessarily act in accordance with moral norms by seeking to promote our welfare are problematic. A deep-seated practice of orthodox Christianity is the seeking of solace in the goodness of God during times of suffering and hardship. This practice of trusting in God when suffering from adversity is only fully intelligible, I argue, if we take God’s goodness to be somewhat similar to human goodness; otherwise, it remains a possibility that, when faced with creaturely hardship, it could be concluded that God is morally indifferent to the theist’s welfare, or worse, is acting with evil intent.

A desideratum, therefore, for what I will consider a successful theory of God’s goodness is that God’s goodness is a goodness that manifests itself in a way that is recognisably similar to human

moral goodness – which I take to mean that God will aim to promote, without perpetrating evil, creaturely welfare.

William Alston has argued that because of his metaphysical perfection, God will necessarily act in accordance with moral norms and is therefore morally good, even if, properly speaking, God is not a moral agent in the sense of being subject to and bound by moral norms as we are. While Alston's position avoids the two problems of above, I find his position wanting, mainly because he relies upon brute fact to establish why God's nature is this way. Nevertheless, I do believe that construing God's nature such that He can be counted on to act in accordance with moral norms, while not being subject to them, is the right approach. I will, therefore, attempt to offer a similar account according to which God's nature is the reason why He acts in accordance with morality.

Unlike Alston's, my position attempts to offer an explanation as to why God's nature is such that He will act in accordance with moral norms (while not being obligated by them). I do this by claiming that God's ability to create is best explained in terms of God's self-love. I argue that the only end that could have moved God to create is Himself. For if creation, viz., something other than God, is the final end of God's act, it would indicate a want or desire in God that could only be fulfilled by creation and, therefore, a dependency on it, and thus present a challenge to God's self-sufficiency. I argue that for God to create with Himself as His own end is for God to create out of love of Himself. Thus, given that God has created, it can be concluded that God loves Himself. I further argue that God's love of Himself entails that He loves all things, since by loving Himself, God loves the pre-existent ideas of everything that will come to exist, and by extension the things themselves. This, I argue, allows us to have confidence that God will act in accordance with moral norms, but without subjecting Him to them.

When I say that God is loving in this thesis, I do not mean to say that emotions are to be attributed to Him; it is my contention that God cannot have emotions, at least in the way that we have them. Love, therefore, will not be defined as an emotion in this thesis; instead, love will be

defined as a desire to promote the good of the beloved, based upon seeing the beloved as valuable for his own sake (and not just a means to an end), and, where possible, to be in unity with the beloved. So, if I can establish that God is loving in this way, I have established that He is good – given the desideratum just stipulated above.

The journey of my thesis will be as follows. The thesis will be divided into three parts. The first part will be split into three chapters and will define important metaphysical preliminaries. Space will prevent me from defending each of them in a fully comprehensive manner. Nevertheless, at the very least I hope to demonstrate that these metaphysical frameworks are defensible against common objections, showing that each framework deserves serious philosophical consideration.

In the first chapter, I will argue that for God to be an Anselmian being entails that He have each of His attributes to their maximal extent. This is to say that if God has the attribute of being powerful, then He will be maximally powerful; and if God is knowledgeable, then He will be maximally so, etc. I will reject the 'combination approach' to Anselmianism. The combination approach argues that the Anselmian being need not have each of His attributes to their maximal extent, but only that each be had to an extent that allows for the greatest compatible combination of great making properties.

It is important I defend a conception of Anselmianism that posits that God has His attributes to their maximum so as to establish that God's love is to such an extent that it can be relied and trusted upon by a theist during times of trouble, by allowing me to conclude from establishing that God is loving that He is maximally loving. On a combination approach, this move is not possible, as God's goodness could be truncated to secure its compatibility with other great making properties, which would mean it is not extensive enough to cover every trouble a theist might face.

In the second chapter, I will defend essentialism, which is the position that everything that exists has an essence that defines what it is for that thing to be what it is and what it takes for that thing to flourish. I will affirm divine conceptualism: this is to say that these essences exist in the mind of

God as His ideas – the 'blueprints' of creation. Divine conceptualism is key to the argument of my thesis, which rests upon the premiss that in loving Himself God loves the ideas, the 'blueprints' of everything that will come to exist. I will argue that for God simply to love the 'thoughts' of things, similar to my thoughts of certain things, is not enough. Only if God loves the very essence of a thing will it be guaranteed that God will aim to promote its welfare.

In the third chapter, I will defend the Privation Theory of evil. According to the Privation Theory, evil is a privation of due good, having no real independent existence in and of itself. I will draw upon the work of David Oderberg to help defend my position. The Privation Theory of evil is essential to my thesis to avoid an objection that could be raised: since I will argue that God loving Himself and therefore the divine ideas of things within His own mind entails He loves all things, it could be argued that this would entail that God loves evil, for the concepts of evil would exist within the mind of God. The privation theory avoids the possibility of this move since it postulates that evil has no real existence, but is only a lack or privation of that which is good. Since evil, then, does not have real existence, it does not have an idea in the mind of God that God then would love.

In the second part of the thesis, I will look at some current conceptions of God's goodness and give reason for why they are to be rejected. Each of these three chapters in this part will examine in-depth the position of an interlocutor. This part will also be split in three chapters.

The first chapter of this part will examine the moral agent theory of God's goodness as proposed by Swinburne. I will argue that Swinburne's account fails because it subjects God to moral norms, which threatens His aseity and sovereignty. I also address a position forwarded by Alston, who argues that while God is not subject to moral obligations, He nevertheless does what it is moral to do by choosing to act in accordance with moral norms. Alston further argues that God Himself is the standard of morality. This position, in contrast to Swinburne's, avoids objections to God's sovereignty and aseity. However, I also find Alston's position unsatisfactory. As indicated above, Alston's argument relies on an appeal to brute fact to explain why God's nature is such that it entails

He will act in accordance with moral norms. I think that an appeal to brute fact is not very satisfactory. For not only is an appeal to brute fact metaphysically unsatisfying, it also has a negative pastoral implication: namely, in the face of evil and hardship, it may be that without strong reason for why God acts in accordance with moral norms, an appeal to just brute fact is not enough for the theist to have confidence that God aims to promote our welfare. My own argument is advantageous in that it provides a prior reason to believe that God acts to promote our welfare, that is, a reason grounded in the mere fact of God having created, which helps outweigh the a posteriori reasons not to believe so.

The second chapter of this part will examine the position of Brian Davies. Davies argues that to ascribe moral goodness to God would be a category mistake, since moral goodness can only be attributed to human agents, who can be said to have moral obligations, work to acquire virtues and remove vices, and fight against injustice, etc. Such things, argues Davies, cannot be ascribed to God. God is a rule giver, not a rule follower. Neither can God have virtues, for virtues are dispositions that one acquires in order to flourish as a human. Nor would it be right to speak of God as working to acquire virtue and overcome vice – as if He is a limited creature like we are or has weaknesses to overcome. For Davies, God should be called good because He is metaphysically perfect and the source of the existence of all other things. Moreover, on Davies' view, given God is 'wholly other' relative to anything in creation, it would be erroneous to draw any conclusions as to what this metaphysical perfection might entail, including any statement of God's nature being such that He will act in accordance with moral norms. Amongst other reasons, I reject Davies' position for giving rise to what I call a 'pastoral problem of evil', which poses a challenge to the trust that a theist should be able to have in God during times of trouble, and threatens his confidence that God is not indifferent to the welfare of His creatures.

The third chapter will address Mark Murphy's account of goodness. Murphy, like Davies, denies that God is compelled under standard morality or by the nature of His metaphysical perfection and

goodness to promote the welfare of His creatures. The reason for Murphy is not because God is 'wholly other' in the sense of Davies' position, such that it would be wrong to draw any conclusions about what God's perfection might entail with regard to God's action in the world. Murphy argues that due to His status as the Anselmian being, God does not share the necessitating reasons that we have to act in accordance with the norms of morality; rather, Murphy argues that God only has what he calls justifying reasons to act in accordance with moral norms – this to say that God *does* have reasons to act in accordance with moral norms and promote our welfare, but not under pain of irrationality or immorality if He chooses not to, whereas, we humans, by contrast, would be acting irrationally and immorally if we did not act in accordance with the norms of morality. I also reject Murphy's position for giving rise to a pastoral problem of evil, among other reasons.

The third part of my thesis will be focused on my own theory of God's goodness. This part will be split into two chapters. The first chapter of this part will establish my own position – that, having created, God is necessarily and maximally loving to all things through loving Himself. The second chapter of this part will address anticipated objections to my position.

Introduction

0.1 The Goodness of God

The Psalmist calls us to 'Taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps 34.8). That God is good is an essential claim of Christianity. Indeed, theologians have traditionally been keen to describe God not only as just good but as supremely good: hence St Augustine writes, 'The highest good, than which there is no higher, is God, and consequently He is unchangeably good.'[1] St Anselm writes that God as creator of all good things and as the most perfect being must be the 'Supreme Good' (the Summum Bonum).[2] And Aquinas says, 'it [goodness] must be in Him in a most excellent way; and therefore He is called the Supreme Good.'[3] And this is just to mention a few of the many saints and theologians that could be called upon that speak of God's goodness as perfect and supreme.

It goes without saying that 'goodness' is the attribute that is thought of and contemplated upon the most in worship of God. And it is this attribute of His that is the most appealing to worshippers and those seeking God. For many, God's goodness is seen to be an essential comfort, especially in times of distress, hence why our previously quoted Psalmist goes on to say, after exhorting us to taste and see the goodness of God, 'blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' (Ps 34.8) For it is the goodness of God in which the theistic worshipper places his trust.

This said, for others, the goodness of God poses the greatest threat to theism; more particularly, what poses the difficulty is the idea that goodness can properly be an attribute of an omnipotent and omniscient God given the existence of evil in the world. Undoubtedly, there exists a great amount of

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[1] St Augustine, 'On the Nature of Good', trans. A. H. Newman, in P. Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* first series, vol 4, Buffalo, New York, Christian Literature Publishing Co. 1887, revised and edited for New Advent by K. Knight, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1407.htm, (accessed January 2024), ch. 1.

[2] St Anselm, 'Monologion', in J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (trans. & eds), *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, Minneapolis, The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000, https://www.jasper-hopkins.info/ monologion.pdf, (accessed March 2024), ch. 1.

[3] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (*ST*), I. q.6. a.2. I have used the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, second and revised edition, Christian Classics, 1920. This is now a standard translation in scholarly work. All further references from the *ST* will be taken from this translation. Their translation can be found at http://www.newadvent.org/summa/, (accessed September 2024).

evil: disease, disaster, moral atrocities and wanton cruelty are common occurrences. And even if one is lucky enough to escape extreme calamity, such as life crippling disease or major disaster, there still exists suffering that everyone experiences day to day. One stubs one's toe, or catches a cold, or becomes distressed by losing one's favourite coin and so on. Of course, these are relatively trivial compared to life changing disease and major disaster; nevertheless, badness is badness, whether slight or horrendous. The medieval theologians who saw evil as all-pervasive had one word for it in all of its forms – *malum,* which can be translated as evil or badness.[4] It goes without saying that the world is terribly bleak, despite the luxuries that life can afford to us. Thus, the muse expresses in Paradise Lost:

> O miserable Mankind, to what fall
> Degraded, to what wretched state reserv'd?
> Better end heer unborn. Why is life giv'n
> To be thus wrested from us? rather why
> Obtruded on us thus? who if we knew
> What we receive, would either not accept
> Life offer'd, or soon beg to lay it down,
> Glad to be so dismist in peace.[5]

Yet, if God is maximally good, 'The Summum Bonum', 'The highest good, for which there is no higher', who is omnipotent and omniscient and governs the world through His providence, then, it is asked, why does He not end all the evil that exists in the world? After all, a quick survey of those

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[4] B. Davies, 'Evil and Late Medieval Thought' in A. P. Chignell (ed.), *Evil: A History,* Oxford, University Press, 2019, pp. 225-226. The Medievals were able to distinguish between mild and terrible suffering, but they did not subscribe to the good/evil distinction that allowed for 'bad' to come somewhere in-between good and evil.

[5] J. Milton, *Paradise Lost,* DjVu EBook, http://triggs.djvu.org/djvu-editions.com/MILTON/LOST/Download.pdf, (accessed September 2024), bk. x, 497-504.

in history that we take to be good people suggests that a good person is one who, as far as he can, aims to help others: Mother Teresa helped others in Calcutta; William Wilberforce fought to end slavery; and the Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, funded and built orphanages. Thus, if God's goodness is anything like the goodness of good people, then He too would aim to help others and to alleviate suffering. And since God is omnipotent and omniscient, it is reasonable to conclude that this would result in the complete elimination of evil. But given that God has evidently not eliminated evil, some argue that this demonstrates that an omnipotent, all good God cannot be said to exist: either God does not want to eliminate evil and therefore is not good, or God does desire to eliminate evil and cannot and thus is impotent; both of these options are inconsistent with traditional theism.

We hence arrive at what is called the 'Problem of Evil.' In the philosophical literature, the Problem of Evil is taken as a philosophical challenge to the existence of God (or at the very least an all good God) – does the existence of evil show that there is certainly no, or there is probably no, God? Philosophers have answered both ways. Those who say 'yes' have attempted to demonstrate that the existence of evil either is logically incompatible with, or makes extremely improbable, the existence of a good God.[6] On the other hand, those who say 'no' have attempted to demonstrate that the existence of evil is not logically incompatible with the existence of an all good God and does not provide sufficient evidence to suggest that such a God is improbable, with some going as far as to attempt to provide the reason for why a good God would allow evil; these proposed reasons are called theodicies.[7]

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[6] See for example: D. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* (1779), in J. Bennett (ed.), https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/hume1779.pdf, (accessed September 2024); J. Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind,* vol. 64, no. 254, 1955, pp. 200-12; and, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God*, Oxford, University Press, 1983; W. Rowe, *God and the Problem of Evil,* Oxford, John Wiley and Sons, 2002; P. Draper, 'Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists', *Noûs,* vol. 23, no. 3, 1989, pp. 331-350.

[7] See R. G. Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, Oxford, University Press, 1998; A. Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil,* Michigan, Eerdmans, 1974.

Does, then, evil provide evidence of the non-existence of God? Well, this partly depends on how the nature of God's goodness is defined. If God's goodness is similar to our goodness, this is to say, moral goodness, then, as indicated above, we would expect Him to act in a way that is similar to good humans – Mother Teresa, William Wilberforce, Charles Spurgeon, those who seek to help others, etc. On the other hand, some argue that God's goodness is not moral goodness. For instance, Brian Davies argues that God's goodness is not like human goodness; God is not good because He is a good person or does good things but because He is metaphysically good – perfect, simple, unchanging, etc. Davies thus maintains that the Problem of Evil does not pose a challenge to the existence of God because we should not expect God to eliminate evil in the way that we would expect a good person to eliminate evil.[8]

This thesis examines the nature of God's goodness. My approach is not directly a response to the Problem of Evil, although it will be touched upon later (8.11). I mention the Problem of Evil here to illustrate just one of the wider implications of an account of the nature of God's goodness. The Problem of Evil appeals to God's omnipotence and moral goodness to make an argument for what God can and should be willing to do. While, as we have seen, some theists offer theodicies to defend God against the Problem of Evil challenge, another method is to offer a reformulation or reinterpretation of the divine attributes assumed by the Problem of Evil which generate the problem – for example, clarifying what it means to call God good as Davies does.

Davies believes that it is erroneous to identify or see as similar, as the Problem of Evil does, human goodness with divine goodness, since to do so would be to commit a category mistake – for Davies, God as the cause of the world's beginning and source of its continuing existence has to be completely other and separate from any sort of creature: to say that God's goodness is like or similar to human goodness would be to wrongly categorise God as creature instead of creator. I will say more about Davies' position in Chapter 5. This said, his position is not to say that God is not

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[8] B. Davies, *The Reality of God And The Problem Of Evil,* London, Continuum Press, 2006, ch. 4, 5, & 6.

good. Davies argues that we should predicate goodness of God, but that God's goodness is metaphysical goodness and that which He has in virtue of being the source and sustainer of all things. Thus, there are two main reasons, in Davies' thought, why goodness is to be ascribed to God. (1) Because He is perfect, viz. He is not improvable, and (2) because creation, in so far as it has being, is good, and this is reflective of its cause, namely God.[9] This, he argues, is as far as we can go in describing God's goodness. To be clear, Davies is not arguing that God does not act in a way that we would expect a morally good human to act but, rather, that we cannot say that it follows from God's nature as good that He will act in this way, or that acting in this way is somehow constitutive of His essential goodness.

Davies is not alone in thinking that we ought to conceive of God's goodness as being different to moral goodness. Mark Murphy, like Davies, denies that God is required under standard morality or by the nature of His goodness to promote the welfare of His creatures, as the Problem of Evil supposes. Murphy argues that God does not share the requiring reasons that we have to act in accordance with the norms of morality. Instead, he says, God only has what he calls justifying reasons to act in accordance with moral norms – this to say that God *does* have reason to act in accordance with moral norms and promote our welfare, but not under pain of irrationality or immorality if He chooses not to; whereas, we humans would be acting irrationally and immorally if we did not act in accordance with the norms of morality.[10]

Like Davies, Murphy's position is not to deny God's goodness. Murphy believes that God is intrinsically and essentially good but that this is a metaphysical goodness that is rooted in the Anselmian conception that 'God is that than which nothing greater can be thought'.[11] For Murphy,

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[9] Davies, *The Reality of God,*, p. 202ff.

[10] M. C. Murphy, *God's Own Ethics: Norms of Divine Agency and The Argument From Evil,* Oxford, University Press, 2017.

[11] St Anselm, 'Proslogion', in J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (trans. & eds), *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, Minneapolis, The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000, https://www.jasper-hopkins.info/ monologion.pdf, (accessed March 2024) ch. 2. See also M. Murphy, 'Is an Absolutely Perfect Being Morally Perfect', in P. Draper (ed.), *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Religion,* 1st edn., 2019, p. 96.

God being the Anselmian being entails that His goodness consists of having what He calls the uncontroversial divine perfections, and that He is the source of goodness for all other things (for, Murphy argues, that which is the source of goodness of all things is greater than a being that is not).[12] Murphy argues that for God to have the uncontroversial divine perfections means for Him to be *perfectly powerful, perfectly knowledgeable, perfectly rational,* and *perfectly free.* However, as I will examine in more detail later, Murphy does not think that this entails God must be *morally perfect* – in the sense that He must follow all the norms of morality. Murphy argues that the reason for this is that the differences between God and man, resulting from the forementioned divine perfections, entail that God is not bound by moral norms as we are. Indeed, Murphy believes that even if God's actions are harmful to us (without the justification provided by a greater good), or are not orientated towards our welfare by seeking to promote our interests and prevent harm, it is not detrimental to His goodness, granted that God does not have evil amongst the success conditions of His actions.

Murphy compares God's goodness to the 'goodness' we might see in a mountain, lion or hurricane – which inspire feelings of awe, amazement, and impressiveness, despite being potentially dangerous to humans. Murphy writes:

> To put it blandly, we think of these things in positive terms, as good in a distinctive way, as being worthy of admiration. Because they are worthy of admiration, it makes sense that persons like us, who are capable of recognising value and responding to it, are drawn to them… Put negatively, we think that folks are missing something, not registering matters properly, if they respond to the mountain in the same way that they respond to a nondescript trash-littered vacant lot, or to the storm as to any random segment of the atmosphere, or to the lion the same way as to the common moth… Notice now, that all of these things can be *very* dangerous to human

[12] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* pp. 76-77.

beings. The mountain that is attractive to people can kill them – can cause their death through falls, or exposure, or rockslides. The hurricane that is awesome and impressive can be, obviously, a source of great human misery and destruction. A human who gets too close to a lion may end up dead very fast. My first claim was that lions and mountain ranges and hurricanes exhibit a distinctive sort of wonderful and attractive goodness, which humans are correct to identify and respond to. My second point is that, nevertheless, these things are all extremely dangerous to human beings, and encountering them can in fact be very bad for us.

My third claim concerns the relationship between these things' having their wonderful, attractive goodness and their being threatening to human interests. The claim is that these things being dangerous to human beings does not in any way count against their exhibiting that wonderful and attractive goodness. My point is not simply that the danger of these things does not entirely eliminate or cancel the distinctive amazing goodness; it is that their dangerousness does not affect at all, *not one iota*, this distinctive amazing goodness that they have.[13]

Murphy admits that there are some things whose goodness is diminished by being harmful – baby formula, for instance. But this is because their goodness is *human-centred*; this is to say, tied to human needs and interests. This is what Murphy calls *human-centred* goodness. Goodness exhibited by mountains, the hurricane, and the lion is called, by Murphy, 'goodness as excellence.'[14] God, argues Murphy, is good by excellence, His goodness is not determined by humans or human centred.

Similar to Davies' articulation of God's goodness, Murphy's account also attempts to provide a solution to the Problem of Evil by giving a different account of the divine attribute of goodness

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[13] M. C. Murphy, 'The Perfect Goodness of God in the Hebrew Scriptures', in M. L. Peterson & R. J. Vanarragon (eds), *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford, Wiley & Sons, 2019, p. 230.

[14] Murphy, 'The Perfect Goodness', p. 231.

from the one which generates the problem and is assumed by the Problem of Evil, viz. that God as good aims to promote the welfare of creatures and prevent their setbacks.

I will contend in this thesis that to claim God does not necessarily act in accordance with moral norms is problematic; when one says that God is good, it should be a claim that gives confidence, something which allows one to say in the face of suffering and hardship that despite the evil being suffered, one knows God cares for him. God's goodness should give one the confidence to draw near to Him in the midst of suffering knowing that He desires one's good. I will argue that one loses this confidence if God's goodness is not necessarily moral goodness. John Stuart Mill correctly highlights the philosophical problem with predicating a too disanalogous conception of goodness to God: 'To say that God's goodness may be different in kind from man's goodness, what is it but saying with a slight change of phraseology that God may possibly not be good?'[15] This is to say that to claim God's goodness is not necessarily similar to our human goodness is to open up the consideration that, possibly, God may be acting in a way which we would consider morally evil or morally indifferent, especially when faced with hardship and suffering.

While strictly and intellectually speaking, defining God's goodness just as metaphysical, non-moral goodness avoids an immediate contradiction between the existence of God and the existence of evil, there is still a pastoral concern that remains. Typically, theists have appealed to the goodness of God as a reason for why He must promote the good of creation and cannot permit gratuitous evil. It has been a deep seated traditional Christian spiritual practice to seek God's support and solace in times of trouble. Such practice finds warrant from the Scriptures, which says in Nahum 1.7, 'The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.' Verses like this give the theist confidence to seek God as refuge in times of trouble and when in a difficult circumstance. But this confidence is lost if God is not necessarily morally good, for the possibility then exists that God might actually not be 'good' in the sense that the existence of evil suggests He

[15] J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy,* London, Longmans, 1878, p. 128.

is not. This is the crux of Mill's criticism. Hence, while Davies' and Murphy's account avoids an intellectual problem of evil, their position creates a new, pastoral problem of evil, namely a position that runs contrary to the Scriptures and a deep seated Christian tradition which appeals to the goodness of God as a source of hope and solace in times of trouble.

Given what I have said above, one might be led to think that one is instead to understand God as a moral being whose goodness is, fundamentally, the same as that of a morally good human. This is the view of Richard Swinburne, who writes:

> In claiming that God is by nature perfectly morally good, I suggest that the theist be interpreted as claiming that God is so constituted that he always does the morally best action (where there is one) and no morally bad action… Perfect moral goodness includes doing both the obligatory and supererogatory and doing nothing wrong or bad in other ways… Perfect moral goodness surely involves fulfilling one's moral obligations… I suggest that in our sense of 'moral' all theists hold that God is perfectly good, and that this is a central claim of theism.[16]

While Swinburne's position is appealing in that it avoids construing God's goodness in a way that is far removed from human goodness, there is a problem with the conception of God's goodness that conceives Him to be a moral agent in the way that Swinburne has done. This is that it brings into question His sovereignty. This is because a moral agent, on Swinburne's account, is one that is subject to moral obligations and the norms of morality. But this suggests that there are norms over and above God that He is required to subject Himself to. God would be bound and dependent upon these norms instead of them being bound by and dependent upon Him – a point I expand upon later (4.2).

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[16] R. G. Swinburne, *Coherence of Theism*, revd. edn., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 184-87. I cite here an earlier version of this work as Swinburne expresses this particular point in clearer terms than he does in his 2016 edition. His position there is the same as it is here.

I intend in this thesis to supply an intermediate position between the Davies/Murphy approach and Swinburne's approach, which says that because of the metaphysical perfection of God, He will necessarily act in accordance with moral norms and is therefore morally good, while also not being subject to and bound by moral norms, as we are. I will also assess an account by William Alston which attempts to do something similar but which I find wanting (4.3).[17] I will argue my own account is superior. I will have more to say regarding Davies', Murphy's, Swinburne's, and Alston's accounts later in the thesis, where I will lay out and discuss in greater detail their positions.

0.2 Desiderata

In establishing a successful theory of the goodness of God, I have the following desiderata. The first desideratum for a theory of the goodness of God is that it is consistent with and positively supported by an orthodox understanding and a reasonable exegesis of the Scriptures. While some theories of the goodness of God may be philosophically sophisticated, they are untethered from the Scriptures and so ought to be rejected by Christian philosophers.

The second desideratum for a theory of the goodness of God is that it keeps in line with the practical and pastoral commitments of Christian orthodoxy, and avoids falling into a 'pastoral' problem of evil, which removes the theist's trust in God that he should be able to have during times of trouble and difficulty; specifically, this means that the concept of God's goodness that I seek to defend in this project is a goodness that manifests itself in a way that is recognisably similar to how goodness manifests itself in man when he is said to be morally good.[18] While there are differing views on what it means for man to be morally good, a common idea amongst all of them is that for a man to be morally good requires minimally that he not perpetrate evils against others, with those

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[17] W. Alston, 'Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theory', in M. Beaty (ed.), *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, Indiana, Norte Dame Press, 1990, pp. 304-18.

[18] I say 'similar to' as I need not say that God's goodness is identical to human goodness, but only that it is recognisably similar to it.

who are the most good being those who also seek (as far as one reasonably can) to promote what is best and good for others.

The third desideratum for a theory of the goodness of God is that God should not only be good in the sense just delineated, but necessarily so and to such an extent that He can be relied upon to care for our welfare and all our troubles. If it is possible that God is maximally loving or good (something for which I will argue), then my desideratum is that God's goodness meets this maximal requirement, that is, that God is maximally loving. Thus, it will not suffice to conclude that God is only somewhat good but could possibly be much greater in His goodness, or that He is contingently good. If one says God is only contingently good towards His creation or that He is only somewhat good, one runs into a similar pastoral problem of evil that faces accounts which deny God's moral goodness all together: the possibility is open that His goodness might not extend to cover all of the troubles and concerns that one might face. When going through a particularly difficult time, the theist might ask if God's goodness is expansive enough to cover his particular trouble such that God will do what He can to aid him and promote his welfare and reduce his suffering. On accounts where God is necessarily maximally good, the theist has the full confidence that God does care for this or that particular trouble and that He will be seeking to promote his welfare and reduce his suffering. On the other hand, on accounts where God is only somewhat good or contingently good, the theist could legitimately question whether God's goodness extends to having concern for him, and if it does, that it is such that God will be concerned with all of the theist's troubles. God's goodness, therefore, must be taken to be maximally good or good to a very great extent. This intense love and concern that God has is testified to by the Scriptures, which tell us that God cares for us so much that the hairs on our head are numbered (Lk 12.7) and that God loved the world so much that He sent His own Son to lay down His life for us, than which there is no greater love (Jn 15.13).

0.3 God and Love

I have so far said that the object of this thesis is to demonstrate that God is necessarily and maximally good. Further, I have said that this must be moral goodness which entails that God desires to promote the welfare of His creatures. The way that my argument intends to do this is by showing that, having created, God is necessarily and maximally loving to all things. To say God is loving does not mean that emotions and feelings are to be attributed to him; I do not think that God can have emotion or feelings, at least in the way that we have them. Love, therefore, will not be defined as an emotion in this thesis. Instead, love will be defined as a desire to promote the good of the beloved, based upon seeing the beloved as valuable for his own sake (and not because he is a means to an end). I will argue, following Aquinas, that for God to see us as valuable in this way means that He will desire what is best for us.[19] So, if I can establish that God is loving in this way, I have established that He is good. It should be noted that it has been common to define love not only as a desire to promote the good of the beloved but also as a desire for union with the beloved.[20] Since I will be arguing that God loves all things, there will be certain things that God loves which He cannot desire union with. Does this mean that God never desires union with His beloved? No. It just means that a desire for union is not an absolute necessary requirement for love. Nonetheless, it might be necessary where union is possible – but the argument of my thesis does not hinge on whether this is true or not.

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[19] See *ST* I−II. q.28. a.4., where Aquinas explains the zeal or intensity of love in terms of the strength of a lover's desire for the good of the beloved. It is beyond this thesis to defend this account of love here against all other accounts. Nevertheless, other theories normally state that to love someone is to desire good for that person. And this is true of all love, whether that desire is sparked by the love of eros, or the love of storge, or the love of God - agape. So for the sake of this thesis, I will accept how love is defined by Aquinas.

[20] See E. Stump, *Wandering in the Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of* Suffering, Oxford, University Press, 2010, pp. 85-107.

0.4 The Argument of this Thesis

My argument for why God is necessarily and maximally loving towards His creation is as follows. I argue that the only end (reason) that could have moved God to create is Himself. For if creation (something other than God) is the final end of God's act, it would indicate a want or desire in God that could only be fulfilled by creation and, therefore, His dependency on it, and thus present a challenge to God's self-sufficiency. I argue that for God to create with Himself as His own end is for God to create out of love of Himself. Thus, given that God has created, it can be concluded that God loves Himself. I further argue that God's love of Himself entails that He loves all things, since by loving Himself, God loves the pre-existent ideas of everything that will come to exist, and by extension the things themselves which are the instantiations of these ideas. This, I argue, allows us to have confidence that God will act in accordance with moral norms, but without subjecting Him to them.

0.5 The Journey of this Thesis

The road that I will take to my argument is as follows. The thesis will be split into three parts. The first part will establish metaphysical preliminaries and will be split into three chapters. The first chapter will establish an 'omniGod thesis' approach to Anselmianism, namely the position that God has each of His attributes to their maximal extent; this is in contrast to a combination thesis approach, which is the position that God has the greatest possible combination of great-making attributes, but not necessarily each to their maximal extent. I will also address the argument that from understanding God as an Anselmian being, one can derive that God is worthy of worship which entails that He is morally good, since only a morally good being is worthy of worship. I argue that this argument fails. The second chapter will offer a defence of essentialism, which is the position that everything that exists has an essence that defines what it is for that thing to be what it is and what it takes for that thing to flourish. I will affirm divine conceptualism; this is to say that

these essences exist in the mind of God as His ideas. The third chapter will defend the privation position on evil; this is the position that evil has no positive existence but rather is a privation of due goodness. Given that whole books can be and have been written defending these three metaphysical positions, space will prevent me from defending each of them in a watertight manner. Nevertheless, at the very least, I hope to demonstrate that these metaphysical frameworks are defensible against common objections that might be raised against them, showing that they are frameworks that ought to be given serious philosophical consideration.

The second part will look in greater detail at the models of God's goodness presented by Swinburne, Alston, Davies, and Murphy. I will make a case for why their positions ought to be rejected. There are three chapters in this part. In the first chapter, I will begin by examining Swinburne's position: that to say 'God is good' is to say that He is a perfect moral agent who is subject to moral norms and perfectly follows them. I will also address Alston's position. In the second chapter, I will address Davies' account: that to say God is good is to say that He is metaphysically perfect, and that to say God's goodness is moral goodness similar to human goodness would be to commit a category error. In the third chapter, I will address Murphy's account: that to say God is good is to say that He is metaphysically good, but not that He is morally good; Murphy thinks that due to God holding the uncontroversial divine perfections, God is neither bound by nor has the same requiring reasons to act morally as we do.

In the third part, I will develop my own argument for a theory of God's goodness. There are two chapters in this part. In the first chapter, I will argue that God's self-love entails that He loves all things, since by loving Himself, God loves the pre-existent ideas of everything that will come to exist, and by extension the things themselves which are the instantiations of these ideas. This, I argue, allows us to have confidence that God will act in accordance with moral norms, but without subjecting Him to them. In the second chapter, I will address objections to my argument.

0.6 The Importance of Anselmianism

Establishing an omniGod approach to Anselmianism is important to my thesis for the following reasons. First, as stated, the third desideratum for a theory of God's goodness is that God should be good to an extent whereby he can be relied upon to care for our welfare and all our troubles. If the omniGod approach to Anselmianism is not true, then it may be the case that God's love does not hold to an extent whereby He can be relied and trusted upon. One who takes the combination approach, for instance, may truncate the goodness of God so as to make this attribute compatible with other attributes that it would seemingly be incompatible with when taken at its maximal extent. By arguing for an omniGod approach to Anselmianism, by establishing that God is loving, I can conclude that God is maximally loving, and thus that His love holds to such an extent that it can be trusted and relied upon.

0.7 The Importance of Essentialism

Essentialism, or more particularly Divine Conceptualism, is key for my argument because my argument rests upon the premiss that in loving Himself God loves the ideas of everything that exists, and it is in loving these ideas that God loves the things themselves which are the instantiation of these ideas. It might be wondered why one needs to commit to Divine Conceptualism and regard God's ideas as determinative of the essences of the things that they are ideas of. After all, I have many ideas of things, some of which I might love, but these ideas do not define the very things they are ideas of, as divine ideas do in essentialism. My thought of a cat, or a tree, and so on do not determine or define what these things are. Could it not be argued that God's love of His ideas of things is similar, without detriment to my argument? The reason why divine conceptualism is required, and why it is not sufficient to argue that God just loves the ideas of things without these ideas being determinative of their definition, is as follows.

Unless there is a strong connection between God's ideas and that which corresponds to these ideas, then it will not follow that in loving the ideas God will love that which corresponds to them. I can love my memories, which contain many ideas, but I do not love all the things these ideas correspond to. Equally, I have the idea of a dung beetle, the idea of the blobfish, the idea of a sycamore tree, and so on. However, I do not necessarily love the things which these ideas correspond to, even if it can be said that I love the knowledge that I have, which includes these ideas.

However, if the idea which I love is the very ideal of a thing, that which defines what all things which relate to that idea are, the very standard of perfection of that thing, then I am not merely loving a mere idea without a strong connection to the thing which corresponds to it. One can think of this with the following analogy. Consider the difference between loving a painting or sketching of a house and loving the plans or blueprints of the house. There are many reasons why one might love a painting of a house. Perhaps the artist has painted it in a particularly artistic way, or put a unique spin on it, or perhaps the colours are vibrant etc. One of the powers of an artist is that he can turn a usually drab object into something of interest. As such, one's interest in a painting is not necessarily connected to the object that it depicts apart from how it is represented within that artwork. This is in contrast with a blueprint, however, where there is a strong connection between the blueprint and what it represents. Rarely does one like a blueprint because of its artistic qualities. A blueprint stands to define what the house should be. Therefore, to like the blueprint is to like that which matches that representation. Thus, for the inference to be drawn from God loving His own ideas to God loving all things, God's ideas have to not be mere thoughts of the things they represent without a strong connection to them but rather to stand as divine blueprints which determine and define the things.

Additionally, divine conceptualism is required to motivate the claim that for God to love His ideas entails not simply that He loves the things that correspond to the idea but will love what is

good and perfect for the thing. If I love the blueprints of a house, then I will love the design of the house as it is meant to be, etc. I will seek to improve or fix the house when it falls short of the blueprints to match what it should be. But if I *just* love a basic idea of a house, then I might love any house that loosely corresponds to this idea despite its imperfections and without a desire to seek to improve it or remove them.

Finally, another reason divine conceptualism is key to my thesis is that it is a necessary commitment for another key metaphysical position my argument relies on, viz. the privation theory of evil. This is because God's ideas, 'blueprints' of the things that exist, serve as objective definitions of what it takes for those things to flourish and be complete. Thus, we can say, for example, that a healthy, flourishing cat is one with four legs instead of three because the divine idea of a cat determines that it should have four legs. It is this that allows the privation theory to claim that a cat which has lost its leg is suffering a privation of the due good of having four legs.

0.8 The Importance of the Privation Theory of Evil

The privation theory of evil is essential to my thesis to avoid the following objection that could be raised. Given that I argue that it is from His loving the divine ideas through loving Himself that God loves all things, a potential objection to my theory is that this would entail that God loves evil too, for the concepts of evil things would also exist within the mind of God. The privation theory avoids this objection since it postulates that evil has no real existence, but is only a lack or privation of that which is good. This is not to say that evil is *non-existent* but only that it has no real independent existence, for its existence always exists in relation to something that is good. To give an analogy: suppose that my sock has a hole in it. The hole in this sock is bad; it is a deprivation of what is good about the sock; it makes it uncomfortable, and means that it no longer keeps my feet warm, etc. It would be wrong to say the hole does not exist. But it would be equally wrong to say it has independent existence separate from the sock. The hole only exists in so far as the sock does, and in

so far as that sock is defective. Since evil, then, does not have real existence, it does not correspond to an ‘idea’ in the mind of God, which defines what it is and which God then would love.

Part I. Metaphysical Preliminaries

In this part I will establish some important metaphysical preliminaries required for the argument of my thesis. There are three chapters in this part. The first chapter will establish an ‘omniGod’ approach to Anselmianism. The second chapter will offer a defence of essentialism and divine conceptualism. The third chapter will defend the privation position of evil.

1. Anselmianism

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish a conception of Anselmianism. As stated in my introduction, the conception of Anselmianism that I wish to establish is an 'omniGod' conception; this is to say that God has each of His great making attributes to their greatest possible extent. I contrast this with a 'combination' conception of Anselmianism, which is the position that God has the greatest possible combination of great-making attributes, but not necessarily each to their maximal extent.Establishing an omniGod approach to Anselmianism is important to the argument of my thesis as it is required to meet the third desideratum needed for a successful theory of God's goodness, namely, that God's love holds to such an extent that it can be relied and trusted upon by a theist during times of trouble, thus avoiding a pastoral problem of evil. Establishing an omniGod approach to Anselmianism allows me to conclude from the claim that God is loving that He is maximally loving. On a combination conception, this move is not possible: the door is left open to the possibility that God's goodness could be truncated to make it seem compatible with other great making properties which it would be seemingly incompatible with when taken maximally, which is unacceptable for the purposes of this thesis.

1.2 The Anselmian Being

I take God to be the Anselmian being, and by this I mean that God is the greatest possible being, that than which nothing greater can be thought.[21] As indicated, there are two ways in which one can understand what it means for God to be an Anselmian being.[22] On the one hand, an Anselmian being can be understood to be a being who has every great-making attribute (that is, every attribute that contributes to the greatness of a being, one that it is better to have than not to have, other things

[21] Anselm, 'Proslogion', ch. 2.

[22] Henceforth, I will use 'Anselmian being' and 'God' interchangeably.

being equal) to its intrinsic maximum, and no lesser-making attributes (an attribute that contributes to the non-greatness of a being). Hence, if God is powerful, then He is maximally powerful. I call this approach the omniGod approach (because it takes God to have the omni-attributes: omnipotence, omniscience, etc.).[23]

Alternatively, an Anselmian being can be understood to be a being that has every great-making attribute to an extent that allows for the greatest possible combination of great-making attributes, without supposing that each individual attribute is to be taken at its maximum where there is a maximum.[24] I call this approach the combination approach. What motivates this second position is that it avoids objections to the coherence of the omniGod approach. There are generally three ways in which one might find a contradiction with the omniGod approach. One might:

(1) Find an internal contradiction with an omniattribute: for instance, regarding omnipotence, the stone paradox:

> Can God create a stone so heavy He cannot lift it? If He can, and cannot lift it, then He is not omnipotent. If He cannot, He is equally not omnipotent, for then there is something He cannot create.

This paradox allegedly shows an incoherence within the maximal attribute of omnipotence. God thus cannot be omnipotent, therefore demonstrating omniGod Anselmianism to be false.

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[23] This, of course, does not mean that we must say of the Anselmian being that He has the property of omnipotence to such an extent that He is not even subject to the laws of logic. But this is because when we claim God cannot go against the laws of logic, we are really stating that God cannot do a non-action. When we ask questions such as 'Can God make 2 + 2 = 5?' or 'Can God cause Himself not to exist?' The problem with these questions are not with God's omnipotence but with our language. For these questions are not referring to some *thing* that God cannot do; therefore, they make as much sense as the statement, 'Can God frog a cat?' Hence, these are not actions that God cannot do but are rather non-actions.

[24] See Y. Nagasawa, *Maximal God: A New Defence of Anselmian Theism,* Oxford, University Press, 2017.

(2) Find that two maximal attributes are mutually inconsistent. A common argument that takes this line maintains that there is a contradiction between God's omnipotence, His power to do all things, and His omnibenevolence, His inability to sin (if God's goodness is taken in the moral sense). Since I can perform immoral and sinful acts, murder, theft, etc. one should think God, if He is omnipotent, should be able to also. But if God is omnibenevolent, and if omnibenevolence precludes being able to sin, then God should be unable to sin. God thus cannot be both omnipotent and omnibenevolent. Therefore, the omniGod approach is false.

(3) Find a contradiction with some maximal attribute and a contingent fact about the world. For example, as seen, God's combined omnibenevolence and omnipotence is argued to contradict the contingent fact that there is evil in the world, generating what is commonly called the problem of evil. If God is both omnibenevolent and omnipotent, then why does He not remove evil? As Epicurus states (supposedly), either He is incapable and thus not omnipotent, or He is not willing, and thus not omnibenevolent. Anselmianism is thus false.

By adopting the combination variation of Anselmianism which does not commit one to an omniGod thesis, one can avoid these objections by truncating the divine attributes, and argue that while God is extremely powerful, knowledgeable, and benevolent, He need not be omniperfect or have all these attributes to their maximal extent, thus avoiding the contradictions the maximal attributes supposedly entail. Purporters of the combination approach to Anselmianism argue that the combination approach is acceptable because there is no compelling reason for why Anselmianism should entail the omniGod thesis. For example, Yujin Nagasawa writes concerning those who think that Anselmianism entails the omniGod thesis:

> …as far as I know, there is no compelling philosophical argument to support the entailment. Both proponents and opponents of Anselmian theism have generally taken it for granted without troubling to argue for it. Secondly, the entailment lacks support from the religious canon. The Bible talks about the significant extent of God's knowledge, power and benevolence, but it says nowhere that God is omniperfect.[25]

The combination approach is thus advantageous in that it allows one to resolve supposed tensions and contradictions that arise with maximal attributes. Nevertheless, I do not think the combination approach should be adopted, for there are good arguments for why one should take all of God's attributes to be at their maximal extent; nor do I think the supposed contradictions of the omniGod thesis are insurmountable. I will address a form of the second and third types of contradiction in Chapter 8. (8.9, and 8.11)

For a start, as I have stated, a desideratum for a theory concerning the goodness of God is that God is good to an extent that He can be relied upon to care for our welfare in the face of all our troubles. I believe it is part of a deep seated traditional Christian spiritual practice that one can put their full trust in the goodness of God, believing that God is concerned for any trouble he might be facing no matter how minor. God's goodness is so expansive that His care extends to all of our concerns. Thus, it will not suffice to conclude that God is only somewhat good (and could possibly be much greater in His goodness) as an answer to a seeming contradiction between maximal goodness and another maximal attribute or some contingent fact, such as the amount of evil in the world. If God's lack of goodness was used to explain the existence of some of the evil in the world, then the theist would lose confidence in God during certain trials as it could possibly be the case that God's goodness does not extend to cover the particular trial the theist is experiencing. The theist could legitimately ask if God's goodness is expansive enough to cover his particular trouble

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[25] Nagasawa, *Maximal God,* p. 89.

such that God seek to aid him and promote his welfare and reduce his suffering. On accounts where God is maximally good, the theist can have full confidence that God cares for every particular trouble and that He will be seeking to promote his welfare and reduce his suffering. To hold to a maximal account of God's goodness is thus required to meet my desideratum for a theory of the goodness of God and cohere with the deep seated Christian practice of being able to trust in God for all troubles.

Further, I disagree with Nagasawa that there is no philosophical or scriptural support for the omniGod thesis. The Scriptures say that God is perfect (Matt. 5.48). This excludes any idea that God may be imperfect in some ways. Perfect (τέλειος), as understood in the Scriptures, means completeness or that which is opposed to what is partial or incomplete.[26] So, when the Scriptures speak of God being perfect, this is not consistent with His having some great making quality that admits to a very high but nonmaximal standard; rather, it means there is no lack at all. God is complete. On the combination approach, God is not complete, there is a lack within Him. On the omniGod approach, God cannot be more complete. And even if it were to be possible for God to be more powerful, or good, etc. this would not contribute to any more completeness in God.[27]

Regarding the goodness of God in this respect, the Scriptures state that there is no unrighteousness in Him (Ps 92.15). God is fully good. There is no lack of righteousness or goodness. Regarding the omnipotence of God, the Scriptures argue that God can do all things (Job 42.2) and that nothing is impossible with Him (Lk 1.37). This seems to exclude any limitation on the power of God and His ability. For nothing to be impossible with God suggests nothing short of maximal omnipotence. Of course, one could try and deny that God is perfect, but this would contradict the Scriptures cited above, which would be too high a cost. The purpose of this thesis is

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[26] R. A., Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding,* Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1982, pp. 233-36.

[27] This might be comparable to a glass of water. Once full, there can be more water but it overflows and surrounds the cup and does not contribute to its completeness.

to keep in accordance with basic orthodoxy – most Christians would not accept a philosophical theory that committed one to denying the Scriptures, which is to go against my first desideratum for a theory of God's goodness, nor would they be willing to accept the metaphysical implications of God not being perfect.

There are also philosophical reasons why one ought to be sceptical of the combination approach. For a start, the combination approach to Anselmianism is incompatible with the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS). The two main claims of the doctrine of divine simplicity are as follows. First, that each of God's attributes are identical with each other. And second, that God is identical with His own attributes. What this means is that, according to DDS, God is not a being that has the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, etc. but instead God is His power and is His knowledge, etc. Defenders of DDS would appeal to the first epistle of John (4.8) in support of this claim, which tells us not that God is just loving, or just has the attribute of love, but that He *is* love. God is both loving and love itself.[28]

Now, if a given *x*, say an attribute, can be said to be absolutely essential to a being, then that being cannot be said to lack in *x*. This can be illustrated further through the following example. Consider what it means to be a human. To be human is to have the essence of humanity, which is to say to *be essentially* human. But there is no way one can fail to be less human – a human is a human in so far as he has the essence of humanity, and he possesses this essence in so far as he exists as a human. He can fail to be a *perfect* human (for perfection is not essential to humanity), say, through disease, but this does not make him less human, this being absurd; we do not say of the diseased man that he is lacking in his humanity. Indeed, ethics itself might throw up some interesting

[28] There are varying formulations of DDS. Nevertheless, Stump has summarised the following points which are common amongst different formations of DDS: (1) It is impossible that God has any spatial and/or temporal parts that can be distinguished from one another. (2) The distinction between a particular entity's essential and accidental intrinsic properties cannot apply to God, because it is impossible for God to have any intrinsic accidental properties. (3) It is impossible for there to be a real metaphysical distinction between one essential characteristic and another in God's being. (4) God's essence is not different from His existence, that is, God is His own being. (E. Stump, 'Dante's Hell, Aquinas' Moral Theory, and the Love of God', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* vol. 16, no. 2, 1986, p. 185.)

questions if this was the case, the diseased lacking the moral worth afforded to healthy humans. We can say the same about other creatures. A spider is no less a spider even if defective and has had all his legs pulled off, or dog no less a canine without a tail than a canine with a tail, or a tree no less a tree without branches than with branches, etc. In other words, a thing cannot possess its essence in a limited degree – a dog cannot be less than fully dog, etc. This is because a thing's essence is absolutely essential to it. Now, if God can be said to be identical to all of His intrinsic attributes, and these with His very being and essence, He cannot be said to lack in them. On DSS, God just is His essence, with no distinction of properties or attributes. Hence God is fully God, fully powerful, fully good, etc, in rather the way that a human being is fully human, and dog fully canine, etc.

From what I have just said, another interesting defect of the combination approach can be seen. If an attribute is not essential to God, then we can raise a causal question about how God has the attribute, given it is not absolutely essential to Him. It must be derivative. But on the doctrine of divine simplicity, no divine attribute can be derivative, as that would be to introduce a distinction between attributes in God (some attributes will be derivative and some not). It would also imply that there is potentiality in God; thus, God would not be pure act. The combination thesis, therefore, is not compatible with DDS and ought to be rejected if DDS and its assumptions are to be accepted.

Now I do understand that DDS is terribly controversial and many defenders of the combination approach will be willing to jettison DDS to salvage the combination approach. Nevertheless, the fact that the combination approach is incompatible with DDS will for some be too high a metaphysical cost. This offers some reason to favour the omniGod thesis over the combination thesis. If two philosophical theories present themselves, one in which DDS had to be rejected and one in which it did not, the one that is coherent with DDS should be given greater weight for consideration, given that DDS is a widely held orthodox (although, as mentioned, not uncontroversial) belief and doctrine. For one's conception of God should be as great as it can possibly be and consistent with as general and broad a range of orthodox Christian beliefs unless

reason dictates otherwise. (This also gives prima facie reason to accept the omniGod approach over the combination approach, given that it has been more orthodox to think of God to have maximal attributes over very great attributes lesser than maximal.) We thus have greater reason to accept an omniGod thesis over a combination approach.

Nevertheless, should DDS be rejected, I offer further philosophical argumentation for why the omniGod approach to Anselmianism should be favoured over that of the combination approach. I will draw heavily upon the criticisms offered by Mark Murphy here.[29] I will offer two criticisms he puts forward against the combination approach. These are: first, a worry concerning an explanation of the Anselmian being's perfection; second, a worry concerning the value of the features exhibited by the Anselmian being.

On the combination approach, instead of taking each of God's attributes to their maximal extent, one instead comes to settle on a particular combination of attributes each at varying degrees of perfection, which, in combination with other attributes set at their own particular degree of perfection, bears the greatest overall value in comparison with other less valuable combinations. But this raises the question: why does the Anselmian being have these great making features at the particular level at which the greatest value is maximised. As noted by Murphy, to retort that 'It is trivial – this is just the levels which constitute the Anselmian being' is to confuse the de re\de dicto distinction. Murphy says:

> Of course construed de dicto, it is silly to ask why troglodytes live in caves, but construed de re —why do these people, these troglodytes—live in caves, the question is perfectly meaningful. And this is what we may ask about God here.
>
> This question, posed to the revisionary Anselmian, [The combination approach to Anselmianism] seems impossible to answer. If all of the properties are realized in the precise

[29] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* ch. 1.

> combination and to the precise degree that greatness of that being is maximized, what could explain that convergence? That it is posited to be a de re necessity does not seem to me to be sufficient to cast aside the mystery; when some combination of facts obtaining looks a marvelous coincidence, adding that the presence of that combination is necessary increases rather than decreases the mystery.[30]

As Murphy further notes, it seems difficult to see how such an explanation could be forthcoming which itself does not run into further difficulties. It would be against the sovereignty and aseity of God to suggest that a source from outside of God tinkers with the levels of great-making properties to ensure the maximal level of value is reached. It cannot be God Himself that serves as the explanation, given that such a being's existence is not logically prior to the properties He instantiates. And it could not be that any of the properties individually serve as explanation, for what is needed is explanation of the *coordination* of such properties that are exhibited in God: why each is at the exact level it is at; this is especially so if it is accepted that there are multiple different coordinations that can reach maximal value, for why then would one particular coordination obtain and not another?[31]

On the combination approach, great making properties must be traded off against each other. Murphy shows that this leads to three possible options for the combination approach. (a) There is a unique greatest being achieved with a single coordination of properties; (b) there are multiple greatest beings, which are equally great; or (c) there are multiple incommensurably great beings. As shown by Murphy, if (b) or (c) are true (which is likely, as it is doubtful there is a unique trade-off of great-making properties to arrive at single unique coordination of properties which is the only coordination to reach the criterion of Anselmian greatness) then an Anselmian being's meeting the

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[30] ibid., p. 14. *Brackets mine.*

[31] ibid.

combination-Anselmianist's criterion for greatness would not be entailed just from the fact that the Anselmian being is maximally great; on the contrary, there would have to be an explanation why any being that meets this criterion exhibits the particular combination of properties that he does. Thus, there would be something logically prior to the existence of the Anselmian being which would explain its existence. To quote Murphy, 'One could not explain why one of these chart-topping combinations of perfections is realized rather than some other.'[32]

The same problem, however, does not arise for the omniGod thesis approach to Anselmianism. For no explanation is demanded for why the properties of God are at the particular level that they are at. Each perfection, this is to say great-making property, is just at its intrinsic maximal extent. To take a point of Swinburne used by Murphy, 'one who accepts the distributive assumption [read as the omniGod approach] needs no explanation how it could be limited in the value of particular perfections, for none of these are so limited'[33] In this sense, then, the omniGod-approach is superior to the combination approach, the combination approach being logically weaker than the omniGod-approach, for the combination approach raises the question of what explanation could be had for why the Anselmian being has the particular coordination of properties that He does.

The other concern with the combination approach noted by Murphy is the seemingly arbitrary setting of what is sufficiently great to meet the combination approach's criteria for an Anselmian being. Murphy appeals to Jeff Speaks to forward the following objection against the combination approach.[34] Suppose that our reflections on great-making properties and modality led to the shocking conclusion that, to use Speaks' example, Michael Jordan (the American basketball player) is the greatest possible being – Michael Jordan is as great as a being can get. Speaks argues that this should not lead us to conclude that Michael Jordan is the Anselmian being. Rather, one should

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[32] ibid., p. 15.

[33] R. G. Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd edition, Oxford, University Press, 2004, pp. 96-7, quoted in Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 14.

[34] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 16. cf. J. Speaks, 'Permissible Tinkering with the Concept of God', *Topoi,* vol. 36, 2016, pp. 587-597.

conclude that there is no Anselmian being, the simple reason being that Michael Jordan is not sufficiently great to count as an Anselmian being. It is not enough just to be the greatest possible being to be the Anselmian being. One must be sufficiently great.[35]

What Murphy and Speaks argue is that it should not be a matter of indifference for Anselmianism what the metaphysical possibility of the Anselmian being's greatness involves, providing that the Anselmian being is the greatest. A being must reach a minimum threshold of greatness, if he is to count as the Anselmian being. To take the great-making property of powerfulness, for instance: it would not be sufficient to say that the Anselmian being's maximum power is limited to the lifting of a small stone or bringing into existence only one small particle, without jeopardising His position as the Anselmian being. One expects the Anselmian being to be greater than this – at the very least great enough create the world *ex nihilo*. Thus, Murphy says, 'it is not enough for a being to be absolutely perfect that that being has the good-making properties to their metaphysically necessary limits, where it is a matter of indifference what those limits are.'[36] There is an implicit assumption in Anselmianism, argues Murphy: it is not just that the Anselmian being is the greatest possible being but that He is a being whose great-making properties are sufficiently great.

This raises the question, what counts as sufficiently great? And how is this level set? One might think it suffices to leave this as ambiguous. However, it is important to get clear about what would count as sufficiently great; otherwise the concept of greatness could become arbitrary. It might be thought that a level of acceptable greatness can be found by appealing to God's worship worthiness. Murphy notes, however, that this would be to introduce a relational notion into what constitutes the greatness of God – God must be worthy of worship by *creatures*.[37] Why must God's greatness be such that He be worthy of worship? The omniGod thesis avoids these concerns. Rather than having

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[35] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 16. cf. Speaks, 'Permissible Tinkering', pp. 593-594.

[36] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, p. 17.

[37] ibid., pp. 17-18.

an arbitrary setting of what counts as sufficiently great for the Anselmian being, or some relational notion of divine goodness, the omni approach just takes it that God has all of His properties to their maximal extent.

1.3 Worship Worthiness & Maximal Greatness

Sticking with the theme of God's worship worthiness, I digress to address a connection that has been made by some between the fact that God is an Anselmian being, 'a being than which none greater can be conceived', and the fact that God is a being who is *worthy of worship,* the latter entailing the former. Some argue that this connection entails that God is morally good. Thus, it might be thought that one can have a satisfactory theory of God's goodness by appealing to God's worship worthiness. I am afraid I do not think that this move works. This section explains why.

It is said, to worship God is no other than to recognise Him as the being than which there is none greater. Thus, Hartshorne argues that:

> But what is the meaning (of the term 'God')? Anselm replied with great simplicity: to be God is to be, such that 'none greater could be conceived'. And if you ask about the import of 'greater', the reply is, *x* is greater than y in so far as *x* is, and *y* is not, something 'which it is better to be than not to be'. Greater thus means superior, more excellent, more worthy of admiration and respect. Why does our Saint choose this definition? I suppose because he takes it for granted that by 'God' is meant the universal object of worship, and if God could have a superior, then only the ignorant or superstitious could worship Him – not all creatures, nor any reasonable creatures. They might fear or admire Him, but not rightly love Him in the unstained way which is worship.[38]

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[38] C. Hartsthorne, *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence Argument*, Illinois, Open Court Publishing Company, 1991, p. 26.

Thus, if God is not 'a being than which a greater cannot be conceived', then God is not worthy of worship. For only a being that is maximally great can properly be the object of worship. Similarly, Murphy argues that for God to be worthy of worship, He is required to be absolutely perfect. It would be strange, Murphy says, to worship God while thinking, *'but you could have been better' or 'there could have been a being greater than you'.*

Given this connection between being worthy of worship and being maximally great, some have argued that God's worthiness of worship entails that God is morally good. This is the argument made by Paul K Moser,[39] William Lane Craig,[40] and William Rowe,[41] among others. For instance, Rowe argues that:

> The idea that God must be perfectly good is connected to the view that God is a being who deserves unconditional gratitude, praise, and worship. For if a being were to fall short of perfect goodness, it would not be worthy of unreserved praise and worship... Are we saying that God is perfectly good by definition? Yes... the definition of God as perfectly good is connected to, if not grounded in, the religious requirement that God be an object of unconditional praise and worship.[42]

William Lane Craig makes a similar argument:

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[39] P. K. Moser, 'Evidence of a Morally Perfect God', in W. L. Craig & C. Meister (eds), *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing In God Is Reasonable And Responsible*, Illinois, Inter-Varsity Press, 2009.

[40] W. L. Craig, 'On the Goodness of God', *Question of the Week. Q. 295,* in Reasonable Faith, https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/on-the-goodness-of-god, (accessed June 2022).

[41] W. L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 4th edn, Boston, Cengage Learning, 2006.

[42] ibid., p. 9.

> …goodness belongs to the very concept of God, just as being unmarried belongs to the concept of a bachelor. For (i) by definition God is a being worthy of worship, and only a being which is perfectly good would be worthy of worship; and (ii) as the greatest conceivable being God must be morally perfect, since it is better to be morally perfect than morally flawed.[43]

Paul K. Moser argues that if God exists, then by definition He must be worthy of worship. He further argues that a being is worthy of worship if and only if 'that being, having inherent moral perfection, merits worship as unqualified adoration, love, trust, and obedience.' Of course, Moser argues, humans can mistakenly worship a morally defective powerful being (who is similar to God) out of fear or delusion, but such a being would not be worthy of worship. Worthiness of worship requires 'inherent (or self-contained) moral perfection, including perfect moral righteousness, and such perfection in an agent demands, in turn, a perfectly loving character.' This, argues Moser, allows us to exclude most claimants to the title of 'God' on the basis of moral deficiency: 'Moral defects bar a candidate from the status of God automatically and divisively.' Thus Moser concludes,

> Many academic writers on theism, "mere theism," deism, atheism, agnosticism and related philosophical positions inquire about the existence of such a creator, whatever the creator's moral character may be. The creator in question may turn out to be an evil tyrant or at least a morally indifferent slouch. Such inquiry, however earnest and rigorous in its search for a creator, may rest on a misleading bias regarding God's character and would thus be significantly different from inquiry about the existence of a God who is worthy of worship, who is morally perfect, including being perfectly loving toward all persons.[44]

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[43] Craig, 'On the Goodness of God'.

[44] Moser, 'Evidence of a Morally Perfect God', p. 51.

The argument of these authors can be put in syllogistical form as follows:

1. God is worthy of worship.
2. Only a being that is morally perfect is worthy of worship.
3. Therefore, God is morally perfect.

It is important to note here that the emphasis is on the fact that God is *worthy* of worship; as noted above, any being might receive worship, but this does not entail that he is entitled to or worthy of that worship. This distinction answers an initial prima facie objection that some have put to this argument: that (like the objection made by Murphy in 1.2) it makes God's greatness and perfection dependent upon the likes and desires of His creatures; this, of course, would threaten His aseity. It also answers a second prima facie objection: that it would entail an evil god in a world with many Pol-Pots and Stalins, all of whom see evil god as very admirable and praiseworthy and whom they all aspire to imitate in their evilness, because such a god in that world would be receiving worship. Since it is the attribute of being *worthy* of worship which matters, these two objections can be answered in the following way. In response to the first, it can be said that all God requires in order to be counted as perfect is the attribute of being *worthy* of worship, whether or not He receives worship; thus, even if no creatures existed to offer God worship, even if there were no creatures whose likes and interests were such that they desired to offer God worship, God would still be perfect because He would still be *worthy* of worship, that is, entitled to worship. To set things out clearly, the defender of this position is arguing thus: '*x* properly holds the title of God, if and only if, for any being other than *x* capable of worshipping, *x* is worthy of that being's worship, even if for some reason that being does not worship *x*'. Regarding the second objection, the defender of this position only needs to claim that only a being who acts in accordance with morality is *worthy* of worship. As said above, a being might be worshipped who is evil, but such a being, on this position,

would not be *worthy of worship.* Thus, what matters is the *worthiness of* worship and not the *reception of* worship.

So, does this argument work and prove that God is a morally perfect being given that He is worthy of worship? I do not think so. Here is why. The argument is premised on the idea that, intuitively, any being worthy of worship must also be morally good. But this is by no means a clear intuition. The intuition is that the type of worship that rightly belongs to God is praise and gratitude for His moral goodness, as displayed in His moral actions; yet, it seems equally intuitive to think, for example, that it would be greater for God to be completely free, such that He can do as He pleases, irrespective of whether His actions merit worship of moral praise and gratitude, and thus be admired and worshipped not because of His moral goodness but because of His greatness or sovereignty. Granted, in the minds of many, worship belongs to one who is morally superior;[45] yet, others have instead emphasised God's power or sovereignty in worship: on some Calvinistic conceptions of God, for example, His power and sovereignty are emphasised over His mercy and love.[46] Thus, from prima facie intuition alone, it cannot be inferred that God is morally good from His worship worthiness.

It might be objected that this is just to deny that God is worthy of worship, since surely it is not possible to be worthy of creatures' worship if said being is not morally good towards those creatures. But this does not follow. As seen, there are other conceptions of worship than just moral praise and gratitude, just recognising God's power for instance. Murphy has argued that *x* is worthy

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[45] T. Bayne & Y. Nagasawa, 'The Grounds of Worship', *Religious Studies,* vol. 42, no. 3, 2006, p. 300.

[46] Note, this it is not to say that the Calvinist denies that God is love. Rather, I am pointing to an interpretation of the doctrine of predestination that some Calvinists have which would deny that God loves or shows mercy to those beyond His elect chosen by His sovereign will. See, for instance, A. W. Pink, who says:

> The only reason God loves any is found in His own sovereign will… God Himself is sovereign, under obligations to none, a law unto Himself, acting always according to His own imperial pleasure. Since God be sovereign, and since He be love, it necessarily follows that His love is sovereign. Because God is God, He does as He pleases; because God is love, He loves whom He pleases. Such is His own express affirmation: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." (Rom. 9:19) (A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God,* Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1975, p. 101.)

of worship from a creature when there exists a great inequality between the worshipper and the one being worshipped, such that the worshipper recognises the one being worshipped as so great that he can be said to not even be 'playing the same game, not rightly placed on a common scale' with the worshipper.[47] To offer an illustration, the difference of greatness between the worshipped and the worshipper would not be akin to the difference between a casual chess player and a grandmaster, but a squirrel and a grandmaster. Murphy argues that this inequality obtains when God is conceived to be metaphysically perfect, regardless of whether he acts in accordance with human moral values or not.

Peter Geach makes a similar argument. Geach argues that human virtues cannot be properly ascribed to God. For instance, it would not make sense to say that God has the virtues of chastity or courage.[48] Geach asks if because of this should God not be loved? In the context of Geach's discussion, 'loved' can be read as 'worshipped'. The answer for Geach is that God is still to be worshipped for His great glory, for (unlike men) being metaphysically perfect, and because He is all truth and beauty. Geach concludes with the following pithy remark: 'The protest that one ought not so love and admire him if he does not share the moral perfections proper to his creatures is a mere impertinence.'[49] For Geach, our standard of whether God is loveable and admirable should not be the same as when deciding whether man is loveable and admirable. God is to be submitted to purely because He is the best regardless of moral status.

Some have suggested that worship is expressing gratitude to one's creator, our 'ultimate benefactor.'[50] Thus, one is worthy of worship from creatures when they are their ultimate creator; and this would hold even if the worshipped is not morally good, but say morally indifferent –

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[47] Murphy, God's Own Ethics, p. 131.

[48] P. Geach, *Providence and Evil,* Cambridge, University Press, 1977, p. 78.

[49] Geach, *Providence of Evil,* p. 79.

[50] Bayne and Nagasawa, in their work on the grounds of worship, point to the various positions regarding as to why God is to be worshiped, some of which argue this worship worthiness is grounded in the fact that God is our creator. See Bayne & Nagasawa, 'The Grounds of Worship', pp. 304ff. See also R. Swinburne, *Coherence of Theism,* 2nd edn, Oxford, University Press, 2016, p. 284ff. R. Swinburne, *Faith and Reason,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981, p. 126.

although, if this being created creatures for evil purposes, being worthy of gratitude from created creatures might not follow.

Some have rejected the greatness and creator/ultimate benefactor account of worship worthiness altogether. For instance, Mark Wynn argues that the creation/benefactor and greatness account of worship worthiness 'fails to accord sufficient weight to the difference between our relationship to God and our relationship to creatures.'[51] Wynn believes that the type of worship offered to God has to be something that is uniquely offered to Him and 'has no real parallel in our relations with created things.'[52] Instead, Wynn argues that worshipping God is appropriate because God pre-eminently instantiates all the perfections found in creation:

> In worship, I suggest, the believer does not take herself fundamentally to be giving thanks to a benefactor, or praising the remarkable greatness of a particular individual. Rather, in worship the believer relates herself to the marvel of existence, by placing herself in wonder and adoration before the one in whom all existence is contained.[53]

What the foregoing analysis shows is that it is not immediately clear that moral goodness is a necessary condition of worship worthiness. But, it might be objected, surely to properly worship a being, one must show loyalty to the worshipped and an alignment with the aims of the worshipped. This, argues the objector, can only be done if the worshipped is morally good. However, as shown by Murphy, such an argument conflates worship worthiness and allegiance worthiness.[54] Murphy argues that it is possible for a being to be worthy of worship, to be worthy of creatures' respect and awe, because of the worshipped's greatness, without necessarily being worthy of devotion and

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[51] M. Wynn, *God and Goodness: A Natural Theological Perspective*, Routledge, Oxford, 1999, p. 146.

[52] ibid., pp. 144-5.

[53] ibid., p. 151.

[54] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* ch. 7.

loyalty from creatures, and their aligning of their aims with His aims. etc. Perhaps this is because there are reasons why one should not show allegiance to the worshipped, say because it may be the case that by showing allegiance to the worshipped one cannot show commitment to the welfare of one's fellow creatures and follow one's moral obligations towards them. In this case, Murphy says it would not be right to ally oneself with the worshipped. Murphy writes:

> Rational creatures and the Anselmian being may have very different sets of reasons for action, such that the Anselmian being could, without error, treat the good of those rational creatures as of very little account in terms of what the Anselmian being has chosen for creation. In such circumstances it seems that while God's worthiness to be worshipped by those creatures may be in no way diminished, it may be inappropriate for those rational creatures to perform acts of worship. For it may constitute inadequate solidarity with one's fellow rational creatures for one to devote him or herself to the worship of the Anselmian being: for, after all, one may owe the concern of familiar welfare-oriented moral goodness to one's fellow creatures, though the Anselmian being may have nothing even in the ballpark of such concern.[55]

In other words, while a creature might have respect and feel awe for the worshipped being because of that being's greatness, it would be wrong for that creature to perform acts of worship which constitute aligning himself with the worshipped because the worshipped does not share his aims or concerns for the welfare of fellow creatures. Murphy gives the following analogue to make his point clear. He asks us to imagine that a friend owns a company which is being run out of business by a superior and more business-savvy competitor. Now, Murphy argues, it might be right to admire the competitor, to recognise him as greater, but it might also be appropriate to show no allegiance to him in honour of your friend to whom you owe loyalty. Doing so would exhibit a sort of wrongful

[55] ibid., p. 133.

disloyalty, a lack of solidarity with the friend.[56] Of course, Murphy argues that a being that is necessarily worthy of worship can do acts which make Him worthy of allegiance, but that such a being will be worthy of worship whether or not he performs such acts.[57]

If Murphy is right, as I think he is, then God's being worthy of worship, that is, worthy of awe and respect from creatures on account of His greatness or for some other reason, does not necessarily entail that He is also worthy of allegiance and as such morally good. This seems right, for surely what is at stake when the question is asked whether God is worthy of worship is whether God's greatness is worthy of awe and respect from creatures – namely, when one says that God is worthy of worship from creatures, one is highlighting the vast difference between man and God and that this vast difference in greatness means that God is worthy of respect. It should not be significant to God's worship worthiness if He is not worthy of allegiance – a great king might show little concern for his subjects (it, perhaps, even being greater that he does not – since his subjects are beneath him) but still command a certain level of respect and appreciation because of his greatness. And all that allegiance worthiness would mean is that it is beneficial *to creatures* to show allegiance to God or that some moral imperative requires it, not necessarily that God is greater for it.

Further, phenomenologically, this separation between worthiness of worship and allegiance worthiness seems to apply with regard to the attitude of worshippers. This is made clear by Nelson Pike in his book *God and Timelessness*.[58] Pike argues that when a worshipper worships a being, there are certain belief conditions that must obtain regarding the object worshipped. For instance, the worshipper will take it that the object worshipped is conscious – the worshipper will offer prayers, sacrifices, praises, etc. to the object worshipped. Of course, sometimes the object of worship might not be actually conscious. But the point is that the worshipper believes that the

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[56] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 133; See also M. Murphy, 'God Beyond Justice' in M. Bergmann, M. J. Murray, and M. C. Rea (eds), *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of Abraham,* Oxford, University Press, 2011, pp. 166-7.

[57] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 144ff.

[58] N. Pike, *God and Timelessness,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.

object is conscious, even if the object of worship is not actually conscious. This would be similar to how one might fear an object as dangerous when in reality it is harmless – as when one fears generic house spiders, etc.[59]

Pike argues that given phenomenologically worshippers take the worshipped to be conscious, it follows that for an object to be a *worthy* and *proper* object of worship it must be conscious. Thus, Pike forwards the following argument, which I quote below:

(1) To worship *x* is to act as if one believes *x* to be conscious or aware.

(2) If *x* is not conscious or aware, then to act toward *x* as if one believes *x* to be conscious or aware is to act in a way that is inappropriate and unfitting to *x*'s nature.

(3) Therefore: If *x* is not conscious and aware, to worship *x* is to act toward *x* in a way that is inappropriate and unfitting to *x*'s nature.

(4) If to worship *x* is to act in a way that is inappropriate and unfitting to *x*'s nature, then *x* is not an appropriate or fitting object of worship. (This premise follows from the fact that if *x* is an appropriate or fitting object of worship, then to worship *x* is to act toward *x* in a way that is appropriate and fitting to *x*'s nature.)

(5) Therefore: If *x* is not conscious and aware, *x* is not an appropriate object of worship. '*x* is worthy of worship' entails '*x* is conscious and aware'.[60]

Pike argues that the above test can be used to demonstrate that God must have omniscience, omnipotence, etc. – the usual divine attributes ascribed to God. However, he argues that this cannot be used to demonstrate that God is benevolent (morally good). For if this was so, to worship *x* would have to entail that one believes *x* to be benevolent. But this is evidently not true. Otherwise,

[59] ibid., p. 151.

[60] ibid., pp. 152-153.

devil worship would not be possible, or the worship of the Hindus, who worship both their good and evil deities.[61] To deny that this is genuine worship would be to beg the question and artificially restrict the nature of worship.

Now, it might be pointed out that one *ought not* to worship the devil. But, argues Pike, just because one *ought not* worship an object does not mean that the object is not worthy of worship or an appropriate object of worship. Pike gives the following analogy to illustrate his point:

> If I were to propose marriage to the Mona Lisa, I would be acting inappropriately with respect to this object. The Mona Lisa is not (what might be called) a logically appropriate object of the emotions and appetites expressed by this action. The action would reveal that I had made a factual mistake about the features of the Mona Lisa or that I was suffering from a pathological condition akin to phobia. But now let's suppose that I propose marriage to Mrs. Jones who is happily married to Mr. Jones. Here, my action would not be logically inappropriate, though it might be morally or socially improper. Mrs. Jones would be a logically appropriate, though not a morally appropriate object of my romantic affections.[62]

Similarly, one might argue that it can be logically appropriate to offer worship to a being even if morally, it is inappropriate. Now, it might be argued that only the greatest possible being is a logically appropriate object of worship and the greatest possible being is morally good. But the argument here is not about whether or not any actual being worthy of worship is morally good or not but whether, even if just conceptually, a being could be worthy of worship and not morally

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[61] F. De. Ward (*India and the Hindoos: Being a Popular View of The Geography, History, Government, Manners, Customs, Literature and Religion of that Ancient People,* New York, James Miller Publisher, 1877) reports that though sanguinary and malevolent, the Hindu deity Kaléé is one of the favourite deities amongst the Hindus. p. 274.

[62] N. Pike, *God and Timelessness,* pp. 155-156.

good, thus debarring the move from being necessarily worthy of worship to being necessarily morally good. I have demonstrated that such a move is not possible.

1.4 Conclusion

In sum, I began this chapter by offering a defence of the omniGod thesis. While what I have said regarding the omniGod thesis is not absolutely conclusive, it adds weight to the claim that an omni-approach is to be preferred to a combination approach. Since the supposed contradictions that face the omniGod thesis are not insurmountable or unanswerable (cf. 8.9 and 8.11) or pose a serious threat or challenge to the omniGod account, so I have argued, the omniGod thesis should be preferred unless it can be shown that the omniGod thesis is contradictory. Given what I have argued in this chapter, God will be taken in this thesis to be omni-great, meaning He is to be taken to be omniscient, omnipotent, and maximally good (in a sense that has yet to be established – the purpose of this thesis being to determine what is meant by God's goodness), and any other attribute God may essentially have is to be taken to be had to at its intrinsic maximum. Thus, in this thesis I will defend not only the idea that God is necessarily good towards His creation, but that He is maximally so. I will argue that because God's love is maximal, He really is a fortress in times of trouble, and His love and goodness can be unconditionally relied upon, so that during times of trouble, the theist can turn to God, trusting that God does care and love him and will therefore help him through his suffering.

I have also rejected a possible move that one might be try to make by arguing from the fact that God is an Anselmian being, this is to say maximally great, and therefore worthy of worship, to Him being morally good, because only a morally good being is worthy of worship. I have argued that this move does not work because (1) it relies upon the intuition that any being worthy of worship must also be morally good – but this is by no means a clear intuition, as Calvinistic conceptions show, (2) there are other more plausible accounts of what is required for worship worthiness, such

as being the worshipper's creator, for instance, and (3) it conflates allegiance worthiness with worship worthiness.

2. God's Blueprints

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I aim to defend essentialism, specifically a divine conceptualist understanding of essentialism. I define essentialism for the purposes of this thesis as the theory that certain things have an essence or nature which determines that thing's definition, characteristics, properties, and attributes. Additionally, essentialism holds that a thing's essence is real and unchanging, quite independent from (1) any language that might be used to refer to the thing, (2) human convention, or (3) human minds. Taking a divine conceptualist position, it is my contention that these essences are the 'blueprints' of creation which God used to create the world, and that these 'blueprints' exist in the mind of God as His ideas.

Divine conceptualism is important to my thesis since it is my argument that through loving Himself and by extension the divine ideas, God loves the things which are an instantiation of those ideas. As said in the introduction (0.7), unless there is a strong connection between God's ideas and the things which these ideas correspond to, it does not follow that in loving the ideas God will love that which corresponds to them. The strong connection that is required is one of an essence/ particular relationship in which an idea stands as the very ideal of a thing, that which defines what all things which relate to that idea are.

Before I begin, it should be noted that in this chapter, I will draw upon the work of various Thomist and Aristotelian essentialists to establish my position. In doing so, I am making no claim of agreement with everything said by these authors, nor am I necessarily committing myself to an Aristotelian/Thomist position on essentialism. Whether there is a sense in which essences inhere in their individual instantiations and only exist in the mind of God as abstract ideas, a more Thomistic or Aristotelian conception, or whether essences bear a more Platonic relation as a concrete form of their individual instantiations is inconsequential to the conclusions of my thesis.

It should also be noted that I only seek to defend a weak version of divine conceptualism. I am not committed to a divine conceptualist position as the basis for a realist conception of universals and abstract objects, such as mathematical entities or abstract properties, *being powerful etc.* As such, my position is not subject to some of the objections that have been laid against Divine Conceptualism in the recent literature.[63] Instead, my weak conceptualism only accounts for the existence of divine ideas as the essences of natural *concrete* things – concrete here is opposed to abstract and can include both the physical and spiritual.

To call something natural is to say that its characteristics and tendencies are intrinsic to it. A non-natural thing, that is an artificial thing, by contrast, is something which does not have such intrinsic characteristics but is rather made of natural things which do. Aristotle defines the distinction between a natural thing and an artificial thing as follows:

> Some things exist by nature, others are due to other causes. Natural objects include animals and their parts, plants and simple bodies like earth, fire, air and water... The obvious difference between all these things and things which are not natural is that each of the natural ones contains within itself a source of change and of stability, in respect of either movement or increase and decrease or alteration. On the other hand, something like a bed or a cloak has no intrinsic impulse for change at least, they do not under that particular description and to the extent that they are a result of human skill, but they do in so far as and to the extent that they are coincidentally made out of stone or earth or some combination of the two.
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> The nature of a thing, then, is a certain principle and cause of change and stability in the thing, and it is directly present in it - which is to say that it is present in its own right and not coincidentally.[64]

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[63] See W. L. Craig, *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism,* Oxford, University Press, 2016, chs. 4-5 for a criticism of a stronger version of divine conceptualism.

[64] Aristotle, *Physics,* trans. R. Waterfield, Oxford, University Press, 1996, Book ii, part. i, p. 33.

Feser illustrates this difference well with an example concerning a liana vine, which I paraphrase as follows.[65] Feser asks us to consider two things: (1) A liana vine of the sort Tarzan might swing on, and (2) a hammock that Tarzan might construct from living liana vines. Feser says that (1) is a natural object whereas (2) is an artefact. This is because the parts of the liana vine taken together have inherent characteristics and tendencies to function as a liana vine – show certain growth patterns, take in water and nutrients, etc. The hammock, by contrast, does not – its parts have no inherent tendency to function together as a hammock. Rather, they are arranged by Tarzan to be hammock like. And if the hammock is not pruned and rearranged by Tarzan, its parts will grow according to their natural tendencies, which would impede their performance as a hammock. To quote Feser,

> Their natural tendency is to be liana-like and not hammock-like; the hammock-like function they perform after Tarzan ties them together is extrinsic or imposed from outside, while the liana-like functions are intrinsic to them.[66]

Note, even if the hammock formed naturally in the jungle through no artifice of man, it would still not be a natural thing for it would have no intrinsic principle that makes it grow to be or act as a hammock. The fact that this particular arrangement of vines managed to arrange itself into a hammock arrangement does not make it natural, for it has no built in tendency to be a hammock. Similarly, just because something is manmade does not necessarily make it unnatural. Chemicals or

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[65] E. Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, New Jersey, Transaction Books, 2014, p. 182.

[66] Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, p. 182.

synthetic elements made in a lab have an intrinsic tendency and characteristic – such as water synthesised out of hydrogen and oxygen in a laboratory, etc.[67]

What has been said of the hammock is true of all non-natural things – cars, hammers, aeroplanes, knives, etc. None of these things are natural because their tendencies are not intrinsic to them but rather their operations are due to the intrinsic things they are made of. Thus, Aquinas says, 'a knife has in itself a principle of downward motion, not insofar as it is a knife, but insofar as it is iron.'[68] Similarly, a clock has an intrinsic principle to tell the time, but this is something that is imposed upon it extrinsically by the designers arranging its natural parts in a certain way. A natural thing by contrast has its tendencies and characteristics intrinsic to it. A cat has the intrinsic tendency to grow four legs and miaow; a tree has an intrinsic tendency to grow roots, leaves, etc. A vine has an intrinsic tendency to take in water and nutrients, and so on.[69]

As seen above, for some things, the definition of a thing is determined by convention. What makes something a can-opener, a hammer, a tool, etc. is determined by the purposes for which one makes such artefacts. And should there be no human minds to designate a purpose to these tools, then such things would have no independent existence as tools. The hammer only exists as a hammer so far as that specific combination of iron and wood is designated by us as a hammer. According to essentialism, natural objects have a nature which is not a product of convention. So, whereas some 'essences' are wholly dependent upon convention – there is no hammer beyond the humans that designate this combination of wood and metal as having that purpose – there are also essences of humans, cats, plants, etc. which are independent from such convention.

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[67] Stump has suggested Styrofoam as an example of a synthetic material that has its own intrinsic tendency and characteristics. See E. Stump, *Aquinas,* London, Routledge, 2003, p. 44.

[68] Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics,* trans. R. J. Blackwell, R. J. Spath, and W. E. Thirkel, Norte Dame, Indiana, Dumb Ox Books, 1999, p. 75.

[69] For more see Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics,* pp. 181ff

A thing's essence, following in this case Aquinas, can be understood as that which determines it as a certain kind of being.[70] Everything that exists exists in a certain type of way. This is to say, nothing can *be* without it *being* a something.[71] This is demonstrated, as noted by McCabe, by the fact that when considering the following statements 'Fluffy is a purple cow' and 'James is a human being', whereas one can split the phrase Fluffy is a purple cow into 'Fluffy is a cow' and 'Fluffy is purple', the same cannot be said for 'James is a human being.' It would be erroneous to say that 'James is a human' and 'James is a being.' For the question remains: 'being a what?' It makes no sense to say '*x* is *being*' – the sentence is incomplete; in what way is *x* being? Further information is needed: '*x* is being… a human… a horse… etc.' Things can only *be* or *be thought of* in so far as they are being a something.[72]

Note, it would be erroneous to think things be in a particular way as opposed to not-be. This is to say, exist in a certain way as opposed to not exist. A certain *x* cannot not-be as opposed to be. Rather, things *be* in a certain way instead of *be* in another way. To say *x,* a thing, is currently not-being makes no sense. This is to say it makes no sense to say that *x,* a thing, is currently not existing. To clarify, this is not to deny that we can say there are things that lack existence, or that we cannot say that '*x* does not exist'. But in order to say that '*x* does not exist', we have to understand what *x* is – what it is that does not exist. When one says horses do not exist, to give an example, one is not entertaining the concept of a horse as non-existent in the same sense as one would entertain a horse as an animal. This is because existence claims are about concepts and not things: to say that

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[70] St Aquinas, 'On Being and Essence', trans. J. Kenny (ed.), https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/DeEnte&Essentia.htm, (accessed September 2024), 6.

[71] In the Thomist tradition held by McCabe, it is claimed that God is 'absolute being' or 'pure being'. The meaning here is that God's essence is identical to His existence. Some, Davies (for instance), have taken this as a piece of negative theology. To say that God is pure being is to say that God is not the sort of thing who is capable of non-existence like contingent things. It is not to say something about *being*. If it is saying anything positive, I would take this doctrine to say not that God is pure being without nature, but rather that, uniquely for God, His nature and being are identical such that there is no conceptual way of separating the two. This said, the theory of essentialism essential to my thesis does not require one to subscribe to a particular position on God's being.

[72] H. McCabe, *God and Evil in the Theology of Aquinas Aquinas,* London, Continuum, 2010*,* p. 19.

horses do not exist is to say that the concept of horses has no instances. Thus, things are distinguished by the way they are *being* a particular way, which is not opposed to not-being but opposed to being another way; a horse is distinguished as being a horse against being another kind of animal, say, a human being. I argue that what determines something as being a particular way is its essence.[73] Thus, being a human is distinguished via its essence of humanity, being a horse by its essence of equidae-ness, and so on.

It might be thought that one can distinguish between the different things without reference to the way in which they are being. But as noted by McCabe, if we embark on said project, we will soon find that 'while we can readily distinguish being human from, say, being a horse without explicit recourse to the notion of being, as soon as it occurs to us to distinguish being human from, for example, being upside down, or being heavy, certain complications set in.'[74] To be a human, or a horse, is quite different from being heavy or upside down. Clearly, heaviness or upside-downness is not what makes a human or a horse, whereas, as we shall further elaborate on, the essence (that which determines how a thing bes) of a horse or human does.

2.2 Essences

I have defined an essence as that which determines something as being one kind of thing over being another kind of thing. According to the scholastics, the essence of a thing is grasped when one identifies a thing's *genus* and *specific difference (species)*. For instance, take the classical definition of a man as a rational animal (whether this definition is correct is not relevant for the purposes of this thesis). In this case, *animal* is the *genus* under which man falls, and *rational* the *species*, this is to say that which specifies man in distinction from all other animals. The *species* is what uniquely

[73] ibid., p. 20.

[74] ibid., p. 21.

identifies man out from the genus under which it falls.[75] Thus, by understanding the essence of something, one can distinguish it as being one thing over against it being another thing. For *x* to be a rational animal is for it to be a human *being* rather than a horse or a dog; it is what defines the thing in question as that kind of thing. To say *x* is a man is to say that *x* is a rational animal, or to be thought of as one.

So, from above, what I have said is that anything that exists exists as something. However, there are some things it is improper to say things exist as, since something only exists according to its essence. McCabe points out that working with what I have said above, strictly speaking, it would be improper to say 'Englishmen exist' but not improper to say 'human beings exist'. McCabe writes

> This sounds a somewhat startling doctrine at first, but it must be recognised that it does not mean that we are mistaken in supposing that there are Englishmen, or that men who become naturalised Englishmen suddenly vanish. Neither does it mean that we ought never to say 'Englishmen exist.' All that it means is that whereas human beings exist precisely because they are human beings, we cannot say that Englishmen exist precisely because they are Englishmen… The doctrine that 'Human beings exist' is a proper sentence, while 'Englishmen exists' is not, is parallel to the assertion that 'Communists believe in Marxism' is a proper sentence, whereas 'Texans believe in Marxism' is not; and this latter assertion would be true even if all Texans in fact believed in Marxism.'[76]

To elucidate this somewhat perplexing view, imagine telling someone that '*x* is being'. Naturally, the sentence is incomplete. Being a what? Now, it would not tell us in what way or how *x* is being to reply that he is being sunburnt, for example. Of course, while existence, that is to say *to be*, is

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[75] Which means, of course, that if another rational animal was found, it would show that the essence of man was not quite found.

[76] McCabe, *God and Evil,* p. 23.

required for any *x* to be sunburnt, it does not tell us how *x* is being. To be sunburnt is dependent upon a primary sense of being; it is accidental to being. If a being ceases to be sunburnt, it does not cease to exist. Equally, a thing does not come into being by becoming sunburnt; nor does saying *x* is sunburnt tell us what *x* is. If James is a man and he ceases to be a man, then he ceases to exist. If James is a sunburnt man and he ceases to be sunburnt, then he just ceases to be sunburnt. James can cease to be sunburnt but not cease to be a man. The reason is that the sunburnt man exists not because he is sunburnt but because he is a man. To say James is sunburnt is not to say he exists but that he exists sunburntly. To say that James is a man is to say that he exists.[77] He exists as a man.

This is because being sunburnt, or an Englishman, etc. is not an essence. For an essence is that which differentiates a species from a genus – why a thing is being (read as existing) in this particular way as opposed to another particular way. Now, it might be argued that being English or being sunburnt is to specify a differentia from the genus man. But this is not the case, for being sunburnt, or being English, is not a differentia of man but accidental to it. To say someone is sunburnt or English is not to say how he is a man – as noted by McCabe, there is no way of saying how anything is a man because all men are meant in the same way, it being a species and not a genus.[78] To say something is a rational animal, however, (the definition of man) is to say in what way the thing in question is an animal. To quote McCabe

> Having been told that something is an animal one waits for the account to be completed. Genus words, such as 'animal', are incomplete in their meaning. One needs to be told whether the animality in question is rational animality, or animality in some other sense. The genus does not fully determine what it is for the thing to be.[79]

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[77] ibid., pp. 25, 35.

[78] ibid., p. 23.

[79] ibid., p. 24.

So far, I have stipulated that the essence of a thing is that which specifies it from its genus. This is to say, what something essentially is. I have not yet claimed anything further; the account is still somewhat incomplete. What I have said until now is that to say man is a rational animal is only to say that he might be sane or insane and that rational animality is essential to man, such that man could not exist without it. Indeed, as shown, there is something essential to man – a man does not cease to be a human by being sunburnt rather than not sunburnt, but he does if there is no capacity whatsoever for rationality.[80] Thus, there are properties that are absolutely essential to a human being. This said, there are also properties that while not absolutely essential to a thing are nevertheless determinative and characteristic to the thing in question. To illustrate what I mean, let us return to the example of a man; not only is it essential to man to be a rational animal, but it is characteristic of man that he has two legs and two arms, functioning organs, the potential to communicate, and so on, even though some of these can be lost without calling into question the fact that the person is a human being.

Therefore, the essence of a thing, then, includes not only that which is absolutely essential, but also is responsible for characteristics which by matter of definition are common to a thing, but which are not strictly necessary. It might be thought that this is logically inconsistent. But as shown by McCabe, while it is commonly supposed that if it is true that some *x* is not *y*, then it is possible that no *x* is *y* – for if some *x* is not *y*, then it is not necessary that all *x* is *y* – it can be shown that in some cases, although some *x* is not *y*, and thus it is not necessary that all *x* is *y*, nevertheless it is necessary that most *x should be y*.[81] To understand this, consider the following illustration that I have adapted from McCabe and Wittgenstein.[82] It is possible that some card-players cheat, but it is a logical presupposition of the game that most card players do not cheat; this is to say, it is a logical

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[80] Note here the important point is *capacity* for rationally – a man still has the capacity for rationality even if currently not sane.

[81] ibid., p. 36.

[82] ibid., p. 37.

necessity that *it should* be the case that most card-players do not cheat, the reason being that in a world in which it is not thought that most card players did not cheat, there could not be any games of cards and the phrase 'card-player' would lose its meaning. This is not to say the phrase card-player would lose its meaning because there were no games of cards in the world; rather, that it would lose its meaning because there could not be any games of cards, which would be the case if it was not supposed that most card-players did not cheat.[83] The definition or essence of a thing, then, determines not only what is absolutely essential regarding a given thing but its common characteristics and properties, which are not absolutely necessary to a thing, but are nevertheless part of its definition such that they are not merely accidental but should be expected in a given thing, so that an explanation is called for when such common characteristics and properties are absent.

Strictly speaking, the scholastic tradition has denied that an essence of a thing is a set of all *absolutely essential* and *essential, although not strictly so,* properties of a thing. The scholastics argued that the essence of a thing is that which is absolutely essential to the thing in question for its definition, a rational animal for man (for instance), and that in virtue of which it displays its necessary, although not strictly so, common properties and characteristics, these flowing from the thing's essence.[84] (This is the view that I myself am inclined to take. Nevertheless, it would not be too consequential for the conclusions of my thesis if I am wrong on this point.)

Now, to say that a characteristic of a given *x* is not just accidental to the thing but fundamental, this is to say necessary to it, a property that it should have in virtue of its essence, is to say that to have that characteristic is to be a more perfect approximation to the ideal of the said thing. The properties of a dog, which flow from its essence, are those which make it a more perfect approximation to the ideal of a dog; the more it has said properties, the greater the approximation to

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[83] ibid., p. 37.

[84] See Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics,* p. 255.

the ideal, and thus the more perfect it is as a dog. Thus, to say that *x* is an essential property of a dog is to say that to have the property *x* is to approximate the perfect ideal of a canine; thus, if to have a tail is an essential property of a dog, to have a tail is to approximate the perfect ideal of a canine. From here, it can be said that a perfect *x* has all of its properties that should flow from its essence. An imperfect *x* lacks properties that should flow from its essence. Thus, a thing is more perfect to the extent that it conforms to the ideal defined by the essence of the kind it belongs to. So, an animal that has lost its tail due to injury or defect is not as good an animal that still has its tail. Note, an imperfect animal, say a dog, is no less an animal, or in the case of a dog, a canine, for being imperfect. As discussed (1.2), the essence of a thing does not admit degrees. What the dog lacks is *perfection*, given this is not absolutely essential to a dog.

2.3 Arguments for Essentialism

The past section has given a brief overview of the essentialist position. The position I have laid out characterised philosophy from the time of Aristotle to the times of early modern philosophy in the 1700s. While some have seen the decline in essentialist thinking from then onwards as a sign that real essentialism has since been debunked, this could not be further from the truth, as I hope to demonstrate. I now turn to lay out two reasons why this position should be held.

The first reason is that essentialism explains the unity that we experience in the world.[85] It is obvious that the world contains both unity and plurality. On a general level, all things are unified in nature just by being. However, on a more specified level, things are unified with things of the same kind in a way that they are not unified with things of other kinds; my cat, Miaow, my friend's cat Louis, and the moggy cat across the street are unified with each other in a way that they are not unified with dogs, dolphins, rocks, and Oxford dons. These cats are unified in that they fall under the kind, the essence, of felinity; they are not unified with dogs, which are instead unified with each

[85] D. S. Oderberg, *Real Essentialism,* Oxford, Routledge, 2007, p. 44.

other under the kind of being canine. Similarly, the same can be said concerning non-biological things: one piece of copper is unified with another piece of copper in a way they are not unified with a piece of iron – which itself is unified with other pieces of iron.

What should be clear is that the different kinds all express similar characteristics and behaviours amongst their groupings: dogs all bark, grow fur, fetch sticks; humans all grow four limbs and hair; all pieces of copper attract electricity, etc., as if their characteristics and behaviour were determined by a unifying essence. In addition to explaining the unity amongst kinds, essences also explain the unity that is expressed over time by particulars. The maple tree (for example) will always express the characteristics of a maple tree: to grow red leaves, branches, and produce syrup, etc., as if it was conforming to a standard that determines its characteristics and behaviour.

This unity across things would be a miracle if their grouping together was just a matter of human convention – as those who deny the existence of essences would argue. As Feser says, 'these groups of things manifest common causal powers and other properties in just the way we would expect if there was a common real essence or nature they all instantiated.'[86] David Oderberg also notes, 'It is no coincidence' that we see this sort of unity amongst all kinds; it is no coincidence all gold is malleable and reflects light while other metals do not; it is no coincidence that all trees grow trunks, leaves, etc. and so on.[87] Essentialism, then, provides an explanation for the unity experienced in the world and can account for the existence of objects that display unified behaviours and characteristics. Things of various kinds are not just bundles of randomly assembled properties which just happen to all share similar characteristics and behaviours both with other members of their own kind and with themselves over time.

The second reason, closely related to the first, is that essences are presupposed by modern science. There are two ways in which science presupposes essentialism.

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[86] Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, p. 236.

[87] Oderberg, *Real Essentialism,* p. 46.

The first way is that rather than seeking to establish the regularity and unity found in the behaviour and characteristics of things through repeated experimentation, as the non-essentialist argues, science instead presupposes this regularity and unity. For example, a single observation is often enough to establish how a thing will repeatedly behave and act. This is not consistent with the Humean 'post-essence' understanding of science which seeks to establish laws of nature on the basis of observed regularity, but it is with the view that science's goal is to uncover the essence of a thing: once the essence of a thing is observed and understood, one can infer how it will continue to behave.[88] To use an example by the philosopher of science, Nancy Cartwright, it can be shown that physicists do not embrace a law of regularity only after many trials but rather draw conclusions from a few highly specified experiments. For instance, it takes just one successful measurement to measure the charge of an electron, and it is assumed that one then knows what the charge is; one does not need to keep on measuring thousands more. Cartwright argues that:

> In so doing we are making what looks to be a kind of essentialist assumption: the charge or mass of a fundamental particle is not a variable quantity but is characteristic of the particle so long as it continues to be the particle it is.[89]

Moreover, science often does not even observe, even once, the regularity or unity that occurs in the world outside of the laboratory. Very often, physicists will work with idealisations; for instance (to again steal an example from Cartwright), Coulomb's law of electrostatic attraction and repulsion says the force between two objects of charge $q1$ and $q2$ is equal to $q1q2/4\pi e0r2$. But this is never the force the bodies experience; they are subject to gravity. To give another example, physicists treat

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[88] See N. Cartwright, 'Aristotelian Natures and the Modern Experimental Method', in J. Earman (ed.), I*nference, Explanation, and Other Frustrations: Essays in the Philosophy of Science,* Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1992; And: *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science,* Cambridge, University Press, 1999, ch. 4.

[89] Cartwright, 'Aristotelian Natures', p. 85.

a section of the Earth's surface as flat, rather than curved, when computing trajectories,[90] or (to give a further example) choose to assume a frictionless surface when calculating the velocity of an object.[91] Again, none of this is consistent with a non-essentialist position that science's goal is to observe regularities, but it is consistent with the idea that science's goal is to uncover the essence of a thing; what a scientist looks for is how an object would behave in isolated conditions, and then infers that how that object behaves is universal and characteristic to the thing in question.[92]

What makes idealisations in a laboratory or in an experiment 'ideal' is that under these circumstances, the thing under study can operate so that its nature is revealed without hindrance or impediment. Thus, in an experiment one manipulates 'circumstances that will allow these natures either to act unimpeded or to suffer only impediments that can have a stable and predictable effect.'[93] When one has such a situation, one can 'generalise from even a single case.'[94] The point of experimentation, then, is to learn what the nature of a thing is qua the thing itself – that is, the natural behaviour of the thing apart from other influences. The interesting information is not how the thing acts in these ideal circumstances but rather the nature of the thing inferred from how it behaves in these circumstances. Once the nature of a thing is learnt, then one can understand how it will behave where very different circumstances obtain; this is done, argues Cartwright, not by 'constructing regularity claims using super-abstract concepts but rather by learning the nature of the pieces from which the new situations are built.'[95] Thus, Cartwright concludes:

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[90] P. Maddy, *Naturalism in Mathematics,* Oxford, University Press, 1997, p. 143.

[91] A. Hüttenmann, 'Idealizations in Physics' in M. Ferrari and I-O. Stamatescu (eds), *Symbol and Physical Knowledge,* Berlin, Springer, 2002. p. 177.

[92] See Cartwright, *The Dappled World*, p. 102.

[93] Cartwright, Aristotelian Natures', p. 89.

[94] ibid.

[95] ibid. p. 90.

> Modern experimental physics looks at the world under precisely controlled or highly contrived circumstances; and in the best of cases, one look is enough. That, I claim, is just how one looks for natures and not how one looks for information about what things do.[96]

Science, then, presupposes not a non-essentialist worldview but an essentialist one. Science seeks not to establish laws of nature on the basis of observation of many examples but rather seeks to uncover the natures, this is to say the essences, of things.

The second reason why science presupposes essentialism is shown by Brian Ellis, who notes that essentialism is necessary to ground the *real* demarcations found between the different chemical substances of the natural order. Ellis writes:

> Every distinct type of chemical substance would appear to be an example of a natural kind, since the known kinds of chemical substances all exist independently of human knowledge and understanding, and the distinctions between them are all real and absolute. Of course, we could not have discovered the differences between the kinds of chemical substances without much scientific investigation. But these differences were not invented by us, or chosen pragmatically to impose order on an otherwise amorphous mass of data. There is no continuous spectrum of chemical variety that we had somehow to categorize. The chemical world is just not like that. On the contrary, it gives every appearance of being a world made up of substances of chemically discrete kinds, each with its own distinctive chemical properties. To suppose otherwise is to make nonsense of the whole history of chemistry since Antoine Lavoisier.[97]

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[96] ibid. p. 102.

[97] B. Ellis, *The Metaphysics of Scientific Realism,* Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, p. 59.

This said, I do not make the claim that it is easy to categorise *all things* into kinds. When it is unclear what of kind a thing is, further investigation may be needed to determine whether it falls into kind *a* or kind *b*, or even whether it belongs to a third kind *c*.[98] Of course, some investigations will be hard and our result may remain highly provisional and subject to revision in the light of new information.

Additionally, I am not claiming, as Karl Popper accused Aristotle and Plato of claiming, that 'we possess a faculty, intellectual intuition, by which we can visualize essences and find out which definition is the correct one' and this faculty was 'unerringly and indubitably true'[99] Given that there are obvious conflicts of intuition, Popper argued that the essentialist position should be rejected as incoherent.[100] However, the essentialist position does not require one to appeal to intellectual intuition. As Feser puts it:

> To know the essence of water, or stone, or a tree, or a dog, or a human being, you have to study the… properties of these things, which can only be known empirically. To know them in detail requires scientific investigation. Naturally such investigation is fallible and its results are thus subject, in good Popperian fashion, to criticism and revision. There is, again, simply no appeal to the "unerringly and indubitably true" deliverances of a special "faculty" of "intellectual intuition."[101]

There is, of course, a lot more that can be said about essences, but space prevents me from examining the subject any further here. Nevertheless, from what we have said, it should be clear that there is at least a prima facie case to be made for the essentialist position and that this position ought not to be disregarded out of hand.

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[98] Oderberg, *Real Essentialism*, pp. 230-34

[99] K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies,* vol. 2, New York, Harper and Row, 1962, pp. 15, 292.

[100] Popper, *The Open Society,* p. 292.

[101] Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics,* p. 243.

2.4 Divine Conceptualism

The essentialist position I take is a divine conceptualist one. By this I mean that the reason an essence defines the particular it relates to is because it exists, in some sense, in the mind of God as an idea, serving as a 'blueprint' of what the thing ought to be. These ideas, I claim, are the 'blueprints' according to which God created the world. Thus, just as there are ideas or blueprints in the mind of a human builder or architect according to which he builds and designs his work, so too are there ideas in the mind of God according to which He creates the world.

The idea that the world is ordered and created according to divine ideas is not one that is novel to Christian or philosophical thought. Plato believed that the world stands in relation to ideas, although he believed that these subsisted in an abstract realm apart from a divine mind. Christian theologians and philosophers, however, soon adapted and incorporated Platonic ideas and relocated them in the mind of God. Thus, Augustine argued that 'everything which can come into being and pass away and everything which does come into being and pass away is said to be formed in accord with these ideas.'[102] Divine conceptualism is also found in other Church Fathers, including Justin Martyr (d. 165), Irenaeus (d. 202), Tertullian (d. 240), Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), and Augustine (d. 430).[103] It is also found in the mediaeval scholastics, such as Aquinas.[104]

The Church Fathers located the divine ideas within the divine Logos, the second person of the Trinity, through whom all things were made (Jn 1.3), and who is Biblically identified with the Wisdom of God. One of the earliest formulations of this doctrine is found in Athenagoras:

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[102] St Augustine, 'Eighty-three Different Questions', q. 46, (2), trans. D. L. Mosher, in H. Dressler et al (eds), *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation,* vol. 70, Washington, Catholic University of America Press, 1982, p. 80.

[103] See H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers,* i, *Faith, Trinity, and Incarnation,* 3rd edn rev, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1970, ch. 13. for a discussion of texts from Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Augustine.

[104] 'The form of the thing to be produced exists as something intelligible – as the form of a yet to be built house exists in the minds of builders. We can call this 'the idea of the house' because builders intend to make houses conforming to forms that they have conceived in their minds. Now since the world is not made by chance, but by God causing through his understanding, God's mind must contain a form to the likeness of which he makes the world. That is what an idea in God's mind amounts to.' *ST* I. q.15, a.1.

> Our doctrine acknowledges one God, the Maker of the universe, who is Himself uncreated… but has made all things by the Logos which is from Him… The patterns after which all created things are made are to be found in the Logos, who is the mind of the Father.[105]

Later, Origen, a contemporary of the fathers, and influenced by neo-Platonic thought, writes:

> God the Father always existed and… he always had an only begotten Son, who at the same time… is called Wisdom. This is that Wisdom in whom God delighted when the world was finished… In this Wisdom, therefore, who ever existed with the Father, the Creation was always present in form and outline, and there was never a time when the pre-figuration of those things which hereafter were to be did not exist in Wisdom.[106]

Origen further writes that the genera and species of all things have pre-existed in the mind of God (1.2.2-3, 1.4.5). Origen clearly argues that these divine ideas stand as 'blueprints' according to which God creates the world.

> For I consider that as a house or a ship is built and fashioned in accordance with the sketches of the builder or designer, the house or the ship having their beginning (*archē)* in the sketches and reckonings in his mind, so all things came into being in accordance with the designs of what was to be, clearly laid down by God in Wisdom. And we should add that having created, so to

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[105] Athenagoras, *Plea for the Christians,* 4, 8. trans. B. P. Pratten, in A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. C. Coxe (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, Buffalo, New York, Christian Literature Publishing, 1885, revised and edited for New Advent by K. Knight, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0205.htm (accessed September 2024).

[106] Origen, *On First Principals,* trans. F. Crombie, 1.4.4, in A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. C. Coxe (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol 4, Buffalo, New York, Christian Literature Publishing, 1885, revised and edited for New Advent by K. Knight, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0205.htm (accessed September 2024).

> speak, ensouled Wisdom, he left her to hand over, from the types which in her, to things existing and to matter, the actual emergence of them, their moulding and their forms.[107]

By conceiving essences to be divine ideas that exist in the mind of God rather than as Platonic essences in an abstract realm, two disadvantages with Platonism are avoided. The first is the challenge to God's aseity and His status as that on whom all things depend by positing an intelligible realm of forms that eternally exist alongside God. God does not depend on an intelligible medium, an Ikea of abstract objects that He consults to discover what sort of things He might make; rather, God is the origin of the material of the world and the intelligible structure which the material world exemplifies.[108] They depend on God, not God on them.[109]

The second disadvantage arises from the fact that Platonic Forms cannot have any influence or causal power over the material objects they resemble. For if the Forms are just abstract objects, then they are causally inert. As such, it becomes difficult to see how they could act as explanations for the unity expressed across particulars and over time by particulars, as argued above (2.3). An architect/builder can cause a house to have the shape and design it has by designing it to a particular blueprint, say in baroque style; but in this case, there exists an efficient cause – the architect. A blueprint that exists on its own, however, lacks any ability to cause anything. Similarly, a Form is just an abstract ‘blueprint’. Without an ‘architect’ which can act as an efficient cause, it is causally

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[107] Origen, *Commentary on Gospel of John*, 1.22, trans. A. Menzies, in A. Menzies (ed.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* Buffalo, vol 9, New York, Christian Literature Publishing, 1896, revised and edited for New Advent by K. Knight, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1015.htm (accessed, September 2024).

[108] T. M. Ward, *Divine Ideas*, Cambridge, University Press, 2020, p. 8.

[109] God is said to self-exist. This attribute of God’s is called aseity, which derives the Latin *a se,* which means from itself or of itself. Thus, to say God has the attribute of aseity is to say that He is purely self-existent – He exists entirely independently of anything else. Traditionally, aseity has been seen as an incommunicable attribute of God; this is to say, God *alone* is self-subsistent whereas everything that exists other than God depends upon Him for their existence. God is the sole ultimate reality. See Craig, *God Over All,* p. 1 and l ch 2.

inert. In divine conceptualism, God acts as the ‘architect’; He is the efficient cause which brings things into existence and conforms them to their ‘blueprint’.

God, then, is the architect/builder that brings into being all things and fashions them according to their blueprint. This is why there is a finality seen within creation, an objective end of what something should be, by which it is defined, and a standard by which it is judged according to its conformity to said standard. This can be illustrated with an analogy; consider the design of a clock; the design of the clock is such that it should have two hands, tick, and tell the time accurately, etc. This is the purpose that is given to it by human designers and it is this that determines and defines what a clock is and *what it should be*. There is *finality* to the clock – a goal or end for what it should be that is imposed upon it by its human designers. Thus, if I come across a clock that does not work, if it does not tick nor do the hands of the clock move etc., given the design of the clock and what the design tells us the clock should be, it is evident that this clock is broken and defective. It would be silly to ask, ‘Why should the clock tick or have its hands move around clockwise in time?’, for clocks *should* tick and *should* correctly keep time. Now, in a similar way to how human minds determine what it is to be a clock, it is God’s ideas that determine the essences of things; and, unlike the design of a clock, which is not eternal and depends upon human minds, God’s ideas are eternal and exist within the divine mind, giving these ideas objectivity. Thus, unlike human artefacts, natural kinds have a finality given by God which is inherent in the thing itself such that the thing aims towards that end naturally. This explains the unity and directionality observed in natural kinds – a maple tree has a finality towards growing branches and leaves, etc. There is a blueprint which determines its perfection and which it strives towards as God made the thing with the blueprint serving as its end. Thus, Augustine writes:

> Now what person… would, nonetheless, dare to deny… that the universal soundness of things and the very order whereby those things which change do repeat with a certain regularity their journeys through time are fixed and governed by the laws of the most high God?[110]

It might be objected that one could appeal to a form of Absolute Creationism as an alternative to the Divine Conceptualism I have offered above. Absolute Creationism in this context is the position that God creates not in accordance with uncreated divine ideas, which stand, in some sense, as the essence of a created thing, but rather creates 'absolutely', which is to say without any preconceived idea which determines how He will create. A thing's essence is created by God just as much as the thing which stands in relation to it is. In this way, God's relation as creator to things can be said to be 'absolute'. There are two ways in which Absolute Creationism might be offered as an alternative. First, it might be suggested that God does not create according to divine ideas but just creates essences that subsist solely in the concrete individual things which instantiate the essences. This was the position of Aristotle. Hugh McCann defends a view like Aristotle. McCann argues that essences solely exist in the concrete world and are created by God in creating concrete objects.[111] These essences explain the unity that is found in creation without the need to appeal to divine ideas. McCann argues that essences are only abstracted conceptually in thought posterior to creation.[112] Second, it might be suggested that God creates an abstract realm of abstract ideas outside from Himself, and then creates in accordance to this abstract realm, making sure that the things in the concrete realm which stands in relation to these essences exhibit uniformity in accordance with them.

I believe there are good reasons to reject both of these lines of thought. On both of these models, God would be creating with no preconceived idea of what He will create; whether that is concrete

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[110] St Augustine, 'Eighty-three Different Questions', q. 46, (2), p. 80.

[111] H. J. McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God,* Bloomington, Indiana, University Press, 2012, pp. 201-2.

[112] ibid. p. 201.

objects with essences inhering in them or an abstract realm of ideas outside of Himself which He uses to then create the concrete realm. This is problematic. It is not problematic because it would make creation irrational or without reason, as Ward argues.[113] God could still have a reason for creating, even if He has no pre-conceived idea of what He would create. For instance, one reason could be to express His attributes of creative power – roughly, the idea is that God wishes to glorify Himself by exercising His omnipotence and creativity. I return to examine this thought later in (7.2).

God creating without a preconceived idea of what He would create is problematic because it would lead to an arbitrary creation and act in which God would be acting without knowing what He is doing. God would not know what He is creating when He acts to create. He would not be creating with any particular object in mind, nor would God be able to give an explanation for why He made one particular thing in a certain way instead of making it in another way; it would not be clear why in choosing to create, He creates lions with four legs instead of three, for example, or chooses to create the essence of a lion to have four legs. As noted by Ward, if one were to ask why God, say, created trees, one would not be able to provide an answer. It cannot be said that He wanted to, or that He liked the beauty of trees, or that omniscience compelled Him to, or angelic artists implored God or the like, for God would not have an idea of what any of these things are.[114] Such an act of creation fails to honour the conception of God that fits in with orthodox Christianity. When God said ‘Let there be light’, He did not wait in anticipation to see what would come to be; God knew what He was making; He is not surprised by some result which prior to creating was unknown to Him.[115]

Arbitrary creation would also lead to an additional theological issue. It is generally accepted that man is a special creation made by God and has a unique plan and place within wider creation. If God is surprised by creation, then it is difficult to see how God could have planned not only human

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[113] Ward, *Divine Ideas,* p. 18.

[114] ibid., p. 20.

[115] ibid., p. 5.

beings in a special way but also creation in such a way that man has a unique role and place within it. God would be limited to working with whatever comes to be after He has created. For these reasons, I think the theist should reject theories of Absolute Creationism.

I thus hold that essences exist within the divine mind as divine ideas. There is a concern with such a position, which has been indicated by Brian Leftow; Leftow says that if it is true that the necessity of necessary truths, such as the truth that humans are rational animals, cats have four legs, water is H20, etc. are the result of some aspect or feature about God, divine ideas or such, then the necessity of these truths will supervene upon the nature of God – they are the way they are by necessity because God is the way He is. This can be stated as a Modus Ponens – P implies Q, P, therefore Q: the existence of God's nature implies that cats have four legs, God's nature obtains, therefore cats have four legs. By extension, this means by Modus Tollens that if it is not the case that cats have four legs, or water is H20, etc, then God does not exist – P implies Q, not Q, therefore not P. Leftow finds this troubling. His concern is not that these necessary truths might be proved wrong and God would not cease to exist as an implication of Modus Tollens; rather, Leftow's concern is that it would entail that the existence of God, or some aspect of God's nature, His divine ideas, etc., would therefore in some way depend upon these necessary truths.

Leftow postulates that one should instead hold to what he calls secular truths.[116] For Leftow, a secular truth refers to a necessary truth whose necessity does not supervene upon God's nature. This is to say, a truth whose necessity, why it is the way that it is, while dependent upon God is not directly related to Him such that it is tied up with God's necessary way of thinking or His nature. On the contrary, a secular truth relies only upon God's creative and contingent thinking; Leftow argues that an example of such a truth is 'water is H20'.

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[116] B. Leftow, *God and Necessity,* Oxford, University Press, 2012, pp. 248-9.

I am afraid I reject Leftow's notion of secular truths. This is because all things are in some way expressive of the nature of God; for all things are an expression of God's divine ideas. This includes the truth that 'water is H20'. Ward puts the point like this:

> Water is pretty important in Christian theology. Baptism requires water. Water flowed with blood from the side of the crucified Christ. And "there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High (Ps 46:4)." On my view, water is expressive of what God is. Everything is expressive of what God is.[117]

It might seem difficult to see how everything is connected and expressive of God, from the measly dung beetle to the blue whale; but, as Ward writes, 'our poor ability to access the distinctive divine expression of all creatures is no knock against the God who is the origin of each creature.'[118] With this I agree.

In recent literature, there has been discussion as to where exactly God gets His ideas from. Ward in his book on divine ideas identifies four possibilities. (1) From nowhere; it is a brute fact that God has the ideas that He has. (2) By making them up. (3) Knowing the ways in which He can be imitated. (4) Just by knowing Himself. It is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss in depth the merits of each position here, or to defend one in particular. I will briefly say I am inclined to disagree with (2) for the very same reason why I argued above that God could not just have made creation without first having some divine idea of what He was making, namely that it would introduce an act of creation that does not honour a proper conception of God.[119]

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[117] Ward, *Divine Ideas,* p. 62.

[118] ibid.

[119] It might be argued that there are ideas prior to these ideas which inform God regarding the ideas He makes;the problem with this is that it leads to an infinite regress.

I do not believe it makes significant difference to my thesis whether (1), (3), or (4) is accepted. It is thus for the reader to decide which he finds most convincing. If (3) is accepted, then the divine ideas are derived from God knowing the various ways in which His own attributes are imitated – the idea of a lion is derived from knowing how His power is imitated, for example; that of a man from knowing how His knowledge is imitated, and so on. If (4) is accepted, then God through knowing Himself can rationally think of different aspects of Himself and from this derives the various divine ideas. Unlike (3), this position is not that God knows ways in which His attributes are imitated. Rather, the position is that the divine ideas really are just ideas of God's different aspects: there is a leonine aspect of God, a human aspect of God, etc. And knowing these different aspects forms the archetypes and blueprints of their instantiations. Ward, who holds to this position, explains it as follows:

> First, God's leonine aspect is the archetype or model or original of the lion's. This seems clear enough. Second, the lion's leonine aspect resembles God's leonine aspect. This seems clear enough, too. Third, God's leonine aspect resembles the lion's… I really am saying that God is the archetypal lion, the archetypal eagle, the archetypal human, and that he is these things because there is included in what it is to be God the ultimate reality of being a lion, being an eagle, being a human…I affirm that, because God is the Lion, the Eagle, and the Human, any lion, eagle, or human we find among creatures bears resemblance to God – God insofar as he is the Lion, the Eagle, and the Human… So when we consider God – God as he is in his essence, to speak loosely – we find there the origin of all the ways of being, hidden away for all eternity. But it is in God's self-thinking that these ways of being are thought by God and so are mobilized [as divine ideas] for possible deployment in some act of creation.[120]

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[120] Ward, *Divine Ideas,* p. 47. *Parentheses mine*

To turn to address a final criticism against the theory of divine ideas, Paul M. Gould[121] and Hugh J. McCann[122] have objected that if God does not freely and spontaneously create, without relying on divine ideas, then God is not creative to the level that is required for a divine creator – for, on the theory of divine ideas that I have defended above, God would be constrained in what He could create, it is argued, by the stock of divine ideas that He has. I am unconvinced by this argument. As indicated above, for God not to be 'constrained' by the divine ideas would not give God more freedom in creation given that without a preconceived idea of what He is creating, God would not be able to exercise any choice in choosing what He is creating in His act of creation. God would be creating blind, not knowing what He has created until after the act. On the theory of divine ideas, God is not creating blind. Thus, God is more free when creating with a preconceived idea of what He is creating as He can exercise discretion in what He will create given that He knows what He is creating.

2.5 Conclusion

What I have said so far in this chapter will suffice for the purposes of this thesis. So, to briefly summarise, I have shown (1) that there are good reasons to believe in the existence of real objective essences for all natural things, which determine that thing's definition, attributes, and characteristics and (2) that these essences exist within the mind of God as divine ideas.

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[121] See P. M. Gould, 'In Defence of God Making Stuff Up: a Reply to Ward', *Religious Studies,* vol. 60, no. 2, 2024, pp. 313-327.

[122] McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God,* p. 201.

3. The Privation Theory of Evil

3.1 Introduction

As established in the introduction, an important component to my thesis is the Privation Theory of evil. The aim of this chapter will thus be to offer a defence of this theory. As stated, one reason why I need to offer a defence of the privation position is to preempt and prevent a potential objection to my thesis which argues that in loving Himself, God loves not only the divine ideas of that which is good but also of that which is evil, which would be a problem. Nevertheless, my defence of the privation account of evil is not ad hoc; I have independent reasons to suppose that it is the best account of evil. Further, I take it to be implied by, if not a necessary outflowing of, the metaphysics of the previous chapter.

The privation account claims that evil, in and of itself, is not something real and positive, it is not a substance – a thing or component of the world; there is no such thing as pure evil that can be said to exist independently nor is there an evil essence. Rather, evil can only be analysed as a lack of due goodness in a thing. Something is said to lack due goodness when it is not living up to its nature as defined and determined by its essence. Thus, since the essence of a dog determines it to have four legs, bark, and have a tail that wags, a dog that falls short of this – say, by having three legs – is deprived of a due good and is therefore suffering an evil. It is important to understand here the difference between a privation and an absence. Something is only suffering a privation if it lacks a *due* good. An absent good that is not due in a thing cannot be counted as a privation, but only as an absence. So, to give an example from Aquinas, it is not an evil that stones do not have the power of sight and that man cannot fly, for while seeing is good, it is not a due good that stones have by nature, and while flying is good, it is not within the nature of man to fly.[123] It is only evil for *x* to not have, resemble, or approximate *f* if it is part of *x*'s nature to have, resemble, or approximate *f*, and it

[123] *ST*, I. q.48. a.1.; and Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans., J. A. Oesterle & J. T. Oesterle, Notre Dame, Indiana, University Press, 1995, question 1, article 4, reply to 10.

is currently failing to do so. By evil here I only speak metaphysically; I am not making a judgment on the moral character of the thing – although, as I will demonstrate, on the privation account both moral evil and metaphysical evil are to be analysed as privations.

Understanding privation as a lack of *due* good allows me to avoid an implication that all things besides God are evil because everything, except God, lacks some good that would have improved the thing if it had that good. Such an implication would misinterpret the distinction between a real privation and an absence. Everything besides God has an absence of some good and thus lacks metaphysical perfection, but this does not entail that everything besides God is evil; something is only evil when there is a lack of a *due* good. Thus, Augustine says, 'are you right to condemn something that is as it ought to be? I think not: you should condemn only what is not as it ought to be'.[124] I further clarify that the privation account of evil is not to say that evil is non-existent and illusionary, as argued for by Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science movement, in her *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures* (1875). Evil is not trivialised on the privationist position. The realness of evil can be demonstrated on the privation account of evil by analogy to a sock that has a hole in it, previously mentioned in the introduction (0.8). Such a sock is a bad sock: it is uncomfortable, fails to provide good warmth, and makes a very bad sartorial statement. The hole, however, has no independent being – it can only be defined in relation to the sock as a lack of something the sock should have; nevertheless, it would be wrong and absurd to assert that the hole is illusionary and non-existent.[125] If holes in socks were illusory, there would never be any need for one's grandma to buy one a new pair every Christmas!

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[124] St Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will,* trans. T. Williams, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, p. 100.

[125] The privation theory of evil, therefore, is not a solution to the problem of evil or a means by which to explain away evil. In other words, the privation position attempts to offer an explanation *of* evil but not *for* evil.

3.2 Why the Privationist Account of Evil is to be Accepted

I will give three reasons for why one should hold to the privation position on evil.

First, the privation account of evil flows naturally from the metaphysical framework that I have set out above. If it is true that all things can be defined by their essence or blueprint, then there is a standard by which all things can be judged; as such, things that fail to live up to this standard can properly be said to fall short. If it is within the essence, the blueprint, of an oak tree to have branches, roots, leaves, etc., then one should expect the tree to have these things. Consider again a clock. As said before, the reason a clock that does not tick or is missing hands is seen as a bad clock is because the design of the clock dictates that it should have hands and tick. These are *due* goods within the clock, such that it can be correctly said that when these due goods are lacking the object is deficient. Think also of a house: if a builder is building a house according to a blueprint, he will judge the areas of the house that do not live up to the blueprint as defective; the blueprint defines what the house *should* be and therefore when it is failing to live up to this standard, which allows us to identify failings or badness in it.

I said in the previous chapter that there is a finality that seems to be imbued in things. (2.3) There is a directionality towards what each thing should be: the tree is directed towards being a healthy tree with leaves; thus, a tree that is lacking its leaves and is unhealthy is failing in some way – defective, bad. It failed to achieve the task of what it should be.

To see this, suppose I set out on a mission to go on a long walk, say I decide to climb Ben Nevis in Scotland. Further suppose that I do not make it to the top – the wind stops me, my legs get tired, etc, maybe I get lost. On this scenario, it can be said that I have failed at what I set out to achieve. The reason why is because there was a set standard which determined the objectives that I needed to achieve in order to succeed; namely, arriving at the top of the mountain. By not achieving this, it can be truly said that I have failed. Similarly, given the finality of things in this world, there is a sense in which they can be said to have directionality towards a set of objectives similar to my

objective to climb Ben Nevis. Thus, when these objectives are not met, there is a sense in which a thing can be said to have failed in its task. And in this way, the thing is defective – it is not what it ought to be.

Second, another reason why the privation position should be accepted is that it is the account which can offer a coherent and unified means by which one can identify evil. The privationist argues that evil exists when something is not conforming properly to its essence, such as a man missing his leg, or a cat missing its tail, and so on. Thus, once the nature or essence of a thing has been discovered, it can be known when the nature of that said thing is not being lived up to. If, on observation, one discovers that it is within the nature of a dog to have four legs, bark, a tail that wags, and so on, then one can see that a dog with three legs is defective.

Note, an excess can also be considered evil if it acts as a deprivation of the ability to achieve a thing's final end or some essential function; a wart on the foot might inhibit a dog's ability to walk, etc., thus depriving the dog of its ability to walk as determined by its nature. Similarly, consider the state of affairs of a creature having a parasite within its system; this, like the wart, is a positive state but can also count as a deprivation. As Oderberg notes, that would depend upon whether the parasite thwarts the natural organic function of the thing in question.[126] The addition of something is only evil in so far as it interrupts the normal functioning of a thing.

Further, not only does the privation account of evil provide a means by which to identify physical evils, it further allows for the identification of moral evils. It goes beyond this thesis to give a full analysis of moral evil, but I will propose two ways in which moral evil is privative; the first is that evil can be a privation of a duty of act that is due. I maintain that part of the end of mankind, as a rational creature, is to adhere to certain ends – to live in good society, preserve the species, to follow the law of God, etc.[127] It is thus a due good that one act in accordance with the

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[126] D. S., Oderberg, *The Metaphysics of Good and Evil,* London, Routledge, 2019*,* p. 128.

[127] Aquinas held a similar view. See *ST* I-II q.94. a.2.

duties that this end places upon one. Thus, when faced with the immediate choice of whether to save a drowning child or not while taking a walk in the local park, without any overriding considerations, there is the *due* act and duty to save the child – which derives from our nature and the law of God. Thus, to fail to save the drowning child is for there to be a privation with respect to an act that is due, in the sense that it ought to be performed from duty.

The second sense in which moral evil can be accounted for in terms of privation is to see moral evil as a privation of due virtue. There are those virtues which are a due good and proper to mankind; a bad person is one who lacks and is deprived of these. A man who is loud and boorish lacks the virtue of temperance. A man who is cowardly and fails to do the heroic act lacks the virtue of courage, and so on. He should have these due virtues.

Thus, an advantage of the privation position is that it offers a unified account of evil across both what is called natural/metaphysical evil and what is called moral evil. Evil just is the privation of a due good, whether that be a missing leg in a dog, or lack of proper walking function due to a wart on a foot, or whether it be a privation of a due act or duty.

There is an important thing to note. Regarding my account of moral evil, it might be objected that I have so far only identified a privation in the person performing the act: a lack of duty or action on his behalf. However, it is objected, surely not only is the person who performs the act or has the vice evil but also the act or vice itself; the torture or malice are evil per se, and not just the man, the torturer, who performs such acts. A similar objection made is that malice is not a privation. Calder says:

> The malicious torturer is not just not as good as she might be. She is not simply withholding gestures of kindness which a morally decent person would bestow; her actions are positively

bad and these actions are constituted by attributes she possesses, i.e., desires for other people's pain for pleasure, and not by attributes she lacks.[128]

So, can one say that malicious torture itself is bad because it is a privation of good? I believe so. The reason is that malicious torture, or any kind of malice, is a pleasure that is directed at an object that it should not be directed at. The evil of malice is thus that it is a pleasure deprived of a proper object, being instead directed towards another person's pain or suffering.[129]

Oderberg has noted that this response might lead to it becoming difficult to distinguish between other neighbouring immoral attitudes or feelings: callousness, contempt, hatred etc. For how could one distinguish between say hatred, callousness, and contempt if they are all just privations of a proper object? But as Oderberg rightly notes, this should not be a worry; just as one can distinguish between physical privations using empirical data to see where they differ (cancer would be the privation of proper cell reproduction; heart disease of proper cardiac function, and so on), one should be able to distinguish between malice and hatred (for example) by identifying ways in which they differ. So, for example, malice is a *pleasure* without a proper object, hatred (of the immoral type) is a *negative attitude* without a proper object – a negative attitude towards *x* which is not deserving of a negative attitude. The difference between malice and hatred is that one has a pleasure component whereas another has a negative attitude component. Similarly, an attitude like contempt (again, in cases where it is wrong) might be seen as a privation of a proper object of respect (where the object of contempt is deserving of respect), in contrast to malice which is improper object of pleasure. The contemptuous person does not hold in respect the merits of a person as they should. This should indicate some of the ways in which one can distinguish between the different attitudes.

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[128] T. C. Calder, 'Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead?', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2007, p. 373.

[129] Oderberg, *Metaphysics of Good and Evil,* p. 137.

What is important is that there is a unifying means by which all evils can be identified on the privationist account. This is where the privationist account is at an advantage, for it is difficult to see how one can offer a unified account by which one is able to identify evil on the non-privationist position. What exactly is the property of evil? On the one hand, the non-privationist will want to say that some evil has positive being – pain for instance. Howbeit, evil cannot be reduced to just pain, for there are other evils besides just pain: the man who is deprived of a leg is experiencing an evil, even if he feels no physical or mental pain. Nor can it be some other positive property, as the legless man has not gained anything in losing a leg, but only suffers a lack. It seems that the only explanation for why this man is undergoing evil is that he is deprived of something he should have. The non-privationist is forced to conclude that evil has two kinds of ontological status: some evils are privative and some have positive being. But now the non-privationist has to explain what unites these two ontological kinds of evil – the privative evil and positive-being evil. He cannot say that they are united by some property that both types of evil instantiate, as privative evils lack being and cannot therefore instantiate properties. This leaves him with two options: (1) He can bite the bullet and deny the existence of privative evils, so that all evil is positive evil; but then he needs to find an explanation for evils that clearly seem to be privative. (2) He could argue that it is a metaphysical mystery how the two types of evil relate. The privationist, however, has an advantage in that he has a single explanation that allows him to unite all types of evil. Furthermore, the non-privationist has to explain what connects the physical evils and moral evils. On this view, it is unclear why both of these are bad other than that they both are one of the many different kinds of evil with positive being. The privationist, however, has a general underlying theory which metaphysically unifies all evil.

The third advantage of the privationist account over the non-privationist account is that the privationist account better accords with DDS than a non-privationist account. For those who accept DDS, the non-privationist account is problematic. This is because given God's thoughts are the

standard for all things, as established in Chapter 2, if evil exists, then God's thoughts must be the standard for evil; but since there clearly exist good things, the divine thoughts must be the standard for goodness too. However, given simplicity, one would have to say that God is identical with those thoughts that represent good as well as those that represent evil, and that these thoughts are identical with each other. Yet, this creates a contradiction. God would have the blueprint of say a dog and the blueprint of the evil that is a corruption of the original blueprint of the dog and somehow these two thoughts would need to be identical to each other.

3.3 Objections to the Privation Theory

I will now deal with three common criticisms of the privation position.

(1) **Obj.** While it is true that evil can be analysed as a privation of good, we can reverse this and analyse good as a privation of evil. Since both of these analyses are equally viable, 'both are likely to be equally mistaken.'[130]

This criticism is raised by Todd Calder, who says:

> We can just as easily say that goodness is the absence of evil as we can that evil is the absence of goodness. For instance, health is just as much an absence of disease as disease is an absence of health, and justice is just as much an absence of injustice as injustice is an absence of justice. So perhaps all created being is evil and goodness is the absence of evil…[131]

[130] Calder, 'Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead?', p. 376.

[131] ibid., p. 375.

Ans. There are three things that can be said in response to this criticism. The first response is that if essentialism is true, then evil cannot be the privation of goodness. What would it mean on this framework to say that good is a privation of evil? Is goodness an absence of an evil that is due? Where? In the nature of the thing itself? According to what criterion? As Feser says:

> If it is of the essence of the visual apparatus – eyes, optic nerves, relevant areas of the brain, and so forth – that it serves the function of enabling an organism to see, then obviously blindness is a defect and it would be silly to suggest that perhaps it is sight that is the defect insofar as it involves the absence of blindness.[132]

The second way we could answer this criticism is to show, as Oderberg does, that there are simply some goods that cannot be analysed in terms of a privation of evil. Take, for example, one's love for one's children. It is not the case that one's love for one's children can be regarded as the mere privation of hatred, as one could also be indifferent to their children. But it can also not be characterised purely in terms of privation of indifference, since indifference can be avoided either by love or by hatred.[133] It might be thought that parental love could be understood as a lack of an improper object. Yet, this does not seem right. How can parental love have an object other than towards children for whom the parents have parental responsibility? Perhaps the parents could be mistaken in who they are showing love to; for instance, they might be showing it to another child rather than their own. But it seems strange to think that to fully understand parental love one must first understand all the ways in which parental love could be wrongly ordered. One can tell that parental love is good without having to understand the ways it might be wrongly ordered, or even

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[132] E. Feser, 'Law's "evil-god challenge"', *Edward Feser's Blog* [web blog], 19 October 2010, http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2010/10/laws-evil-god-challenge.html, (accessed February 2020), para. 9.

[133] Oderberg, *Metaphysics of Good and Evil,* p. 126.

different possible attitudes such as hatred or malice. Therefore, it is not quite right that parental love can be understood as a lack of wrong order.

The third response to this criticism is that goodness is in most cases conceptually prior to evil whereas evil is always conceptually posterior to goodness. This is clear in the case of animals and diseases: we must first understand what it takes for a given animal to be healthy before we can know if it is diseased or not. To quote Oderberg: 'It is impossible to grasp what disease is without first grasping what it does, which is interfere with, or otherwise exclude or obstruct an organism's natural functions, the ones that are constitutive of its being in a healthy state.'[134] Evil, therefore, can only be understood in relation to goodness. But this relation is not symmetrical. We can understand what it is to be healthy, that is good, without reference to the evil of disease.[135] Calder disagrees that this relation is not symmetrical. He says:

> On reflection, it is not clear that we can conceive of health without at the same time conceiving of disease. Health implies a lack of deficiency or disease, otherwise there is no distinction between the concept of a healthy body and the concept of a living body.[136]

However, Calder is mistaken. Health can be defined just as proper functioning. Yet, we can tell if something is properly functioning before knowing if it is *even possible* that it can fail to properly function or not. So, we can conceive of a species of angel and understand what it is for this being to

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[134] ibid. p. 127.

[135] Even if there were some goods that could only be analysed in terms of lacking evil, this would apply only to some, and not all, goods; whereas, all cases of evil must be analysed in terms of a lack of good. So, Feser, in responding to an assertion by Stephen Law that peace is the lack of war, states that even if this is so, war in turn will have to be analysed in terms of lacking some good, say a privation of giving others their due by using force to take from them what they have a right to – their lives, property, security of their borders, etc., which in turn cannot be analysed by an appeal to further evil. Feser thus says, 'the bottom level of the analysis of good and evil will include only goods, even if there will also be some goods appearing at higher levels of the analysis.' (Feser, 'Law's "evil-god challenge" ', para. 10.)

[136] Calder, *'Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead?'*, p. 376.

properly function without needing to know if it can face disease. While Calder is right that health implies a lack of disease, it does not mean that the concept of health just is the concept of lack of disease. To quote Oderberg again: 'it does not follow from health's metaphysically entailing lack of disease that health is identical to lack of disease.'[137]

(2) **Obj.** The evil of pain is clearly not a privation, but has real positive existence; evil, therefore, cannot be completely privative.

This objection is raised by Calder, who says, 'pain is not simply the absence of feeling or best characterized as an absence of health or pleasure, it is positively bad sensation or feeling.'[138] Calder further adds: 'The absence of feeling or pleasure is numbness or experiential paralysis; it is akin to the way a body part feels under local anaesthetic. Pain, on the other hand, is a felt quality, one that we typically try to avoid'[139] John Crosby, on this point, says:

> …take the piercing pain of a patient suffering from bone cancer. It is practically impossible to interpret such pain as a mere lack of the feeling of wellness that a healthy person should have. The pain is obviously something more than any such lack; it is something in its own right. The pain seems clearly to be the contrary of the feeling of wellness and not just the lack of it.[140]

Ans. It might be thought that one could answer this objection by drawing attention to the fact that pain often deprives one of proper functioning, and then claim that herein lies the evil of pain. However, Stanley Kane demonstrates why this move cannot be made:

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[137] Oderberg, *Metaphysics of Evil,* p. 127.

[138] Calder, *'*Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead?*',* p. 373.

[139] ibid.

[140] J. F. Crosby, 'Is Evil Really Only Privation', *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association,* vol. 75, 2001, p. 200.

> Consider two cases both involving the index finger, and think of the finger in one case as paralyzed and in the other as throbbing with pain. A finger that is paralyzed lacks both normal feeling and normal function. A man could not feel the lines of his lover's face with it, a musician could not pluck the strings of a guitar with it… A finger that is throbbing with pain may similarly lack both normal feeling and normal function. The pain may be so intense that a person cannot feel the lines of a lover's face or pluck the strings of a guitar… The two cases, then, may be very nearly equal with respect to their lack of normal feeling and function. And let us suppose that other factors (such as their duration) are also equal. Nevertheless, the two conditions are not equally evil… Pain, then, cannot consist solely in the lack of ordinary feeling and functioning.[141]

A better response is Oderberg's solution, which is to deny that all experiences of pain are evil. Oderberg argues that it would be too glib a response to claim all pain is good because it acts as a warning sign of bodily and mental illness.[142] There are of course pains which do not do this: psychosomatic pains, for instance. It is well documented that amputees experience what is called phantom limbs – the feeling that the amputated limb is still attached. Sometimes, in addition to experiencing a phantom limb, an amputee can experience phantom pain – the feeling of pain in the phantom limb. Note, this is not pain indicating that the limb is missing or amputated; the pain is experienced as if the amputated limb is still attached and can range from a minor pain such as an itch all the way to major pain. In this case, there is no damage or anything else being indicated.

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[141] G. S. Kane, 'Evil and Privation', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1980, pp. 50-51.

[142] The 'useful pain' response is common amongst defenders of the privation account. See Oderberg, *Metaphysics of Evil,* p. 129; P. Lee, 'The Goodness of Creation, Evil, and Christian Teaching', *The Thomist,* vol. 64, no. 2, 2000, pp. 257-60.; and, 'Evil as Such is a Privation: a Reply to John Cosby', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly,* vol. 81, no. 3, 2007, pp. 474-479; B. Anglin & S. Goetz, 'Evil is a Privation', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* vol. 13, no. 1, 1982, p. 6.

Oderberg points out that eating a lot of chillies can cause pain in the mouth – a burning sensation, etc., yet, chillies do not seem to cause any type of bodily or tissue damage.[143] Again, some pains – aches, throbs, etc. – last long after all damage has passed. The seeming badness of pain, then, as Oderberg says, cannot be glibly dismissed out of hand.

Nevertheless, the approach of denying that all pain is evil and that some pain is good is on the right track, albeit a few things should be clarified. The function of pain certainly is to identify damage either mental or physical to the body. It is correct to say pain is good when doing this. But this can only be said when pain is functioning correctly, that is, identifying proper bodily or mental damage. However, if pain is failing to do this, or if it is wrongly indicating damage not there, then pain is not functioning as it should be and thus it can be said that it is evil, for it would be a privation of proper functioning. This 'useless pain', argues Oderberg, would be doing what it is supposed to do – making the subject think there is damage with body or mind, but without achieving its objective, since there is nothing wrong.[144] When pain is correctly functioning and achieving what it is supposed to be achieving, then it would be irrational to not want the pain there.[145] Functioning pain is good in that it warns and makes one aware that damage to the body is present; it would be irresponsible, dangerous even, to not want to know when the body is damaged.[146] Such pain is unpleasant, but it cannot be called an evil.

Now, it might be argued that certainly it would be much preferable had man developed such that he could tell there was bodily damage without the need of pain; perhaps it could have been the case that instead of feeling pain when the body is damaged, a red warning light appears in the corner of an eye; perhaps some holographic image of a body appears in one's field of vision highlighting

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[143] Oderberg, *Metaphysics of Good and Evil,* p. 129.

[144] ibid., p. 133.

[145] ibid., p. 129.

[146] We cannot, contra Anglin and Goetz, 'Evil Is Privation' p. 5, say that pain is intrinsically neutral, at least not on the metaphysics that we have established in this paper; either something is functioning properly or it is not - there is no neutral position.

where the damage is. Such scenarios are fun to imagine; indeed, there are many 'improvements' one might imagine can be made to the body: eyes at the back of one's head, wings, tougher and impenetrable skin, etc. Yet, in the case of pain, it is hard to see how these offered alternatives – red light in corner of eye, etc. – can be counted as an improvement. For pain has two functions, not one. The first is to warn and identify damage to the body – a thorn in the foot, a bruise on the arm, etc. The second function is that it serves as an impetus and imperative to do something about the damage the pain is indicating. Pain, unpleasant as it is, is a good motivator to lead one to put an end to what is causing the pain or avoid actions that would cause further damage. If I have badly damaged my leg, say, by breaking a bone, then the pain stops me exerting pressure on the leg or attempting to walk on it, thus preventing further damage. Additionally, it motivates me to attend to the leg, go and see a doctor, etc. Or consider if I have a toothache – the pain strongly motivates me to go and see a dentist to have the bad tooth looked at. Indeed, a bad toothache is difficult to ignore and can distract one from all other things until it is attended to. It is difficult to imagine how anything other than pain could serve the function.

This said, even if a painless system of warning and imperative could be imagined, it would not entail that pain itself is bad when it is properly functioning – for it would be good in virtue of doing what it is made to do. And this would be true even if a preferable arrangement – from a human psychological perspective – could be imagined. One could imagine a better set of eyes that allowed for night vision. This might be seen as preferable to the current abilities of normal functioning human eyes; it certainly would have advantages that go beyond removing the mere inconvenience of not being able to locate some needed item in the dark. There would be safety and survival benefits and would have allowed for man to detect predators in the dark, avoid trip hazards, etc. Nevertheless, even though it would have been preferable to have night vision, it is not evil that our normal eyes do not provide it – even considering the disadvantages. Similarly, pain is good in so far

as it functions properly; and this would be true even if an alternative way in which that function could performed could be imagined.

Thus, pain when functioning properly, that is, when making one aware of actual damage to mind or body and serving as an imperative to do something about it, can be called good. However, if it is not functioning properly, if it is doing what it is meant to be doing (telling the subject that there is either mental or bodily damage), but failing to achieve what it is meant to do, that is correctly identify damage, then it is evil. Thus, when I step on a LEGO brick and hurt my foot, pain is functioning correctly; the pain tells me to quickly lift my foot from the LEGO brick, warns me to check my foot for damage, and makes sure I clear the floor and remove the brick to avoid further hazards. In this case, the pain has acted as it should. It has achieved its purpose and thus cannot be counted as an evil. If on the other hand after a dentist appointment I still have a tooth ache after the problem has been fixed, then while the pain in this case is doing what it is meant to do in so far as it is telling me there is damage in the tooth, it is not achieving its purpose of correctly identifying damage.

Now, it might be objected that there are still cases where pain seems to be both *doing* and *achieving* what it is supposed to do and yet in which it is still evil: for instance, in the scenario of being tortured for information. In this case, pain is both doing what it is meant to be doing and is achieving what it is meant to be doing by correctly identifying damage.

However, pain is evil in this case as it has been manipulated so that it is not functioning as a means to warn me and move me out of danger but rather as a means to extract information and cause me to be uncomfortable, which deprives pain of its proper order and function. In such a scenario, pain can be considered evil.[147]

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[147] There are similar ways in which things that are good can be prevented from achieving their proper function that then results in them being considered evil. Thus, consuming cake is considered to be good because it provides nourishment. Too much, however, and it causes one to become fat, which makes consumption of cake in this case evil.

Another objection that might be raised is that pain is always bad because it leads to a loss of the good of mental equilibrium. However, this is not a problem, when pain is functioning as it is supposed to function. Then there is a loss of mental equilibrium; but this is not a privation but only a mere absence. Recall, a privation only occurs when there is an absence of a *due* good. However, when pain is functioning correctly, mental equilibrium is not a *due* good. It is not supposed to be there, so that one is moved to action. And thus pain is only an absence and not a privation.

(3) **Obj.** The privation theory cannot account for the evil of total annihilation.

This is a criticism forwarded by John Crosby, who says, 'Consider this example: a large meteor or asteroid strikes the earth, exploding it and destroying all life on it.'[148] Crosby then asks,

> Life on earth is not just wounded or harmed, as in the case of a smaller meteor hit, but is altogether destroyed. If you say that the evil is only a matter of privation, then where is the subject of the privation, the being that is wounded?[149]

He concludes: 'This is an evil, then, which falls outside of the explanatory reach of the privation theory, which can, therefore, not be a universal theory of evil.'[150]

Ans. There is a simple solution to this objection, which Crosby appeared to overlook, namely that death is simultaneous with privation. The very act of destroying a person is an act of depriving them of existence. In the meteor case, the subjects of privation are the persons whose lives lost in the meteor strike. The privation is the life that was due to those persons. To quote Oderberg: 'Yet

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[148] Crosby, 'Is Evil Really Only Privation', p. 198.

[149] ibid., p. 199.

[150] ibid.

nothing can become dead that is not alive, so if the privation consists in becoming dead – the *loss of life* – then its subject is surely the living being.'[151]

3.4 Conclusion

To conclude, I have shown that there is a plausible case for the privation theory of evil. I have rejected common misunderstandings such as the claim that the privationist is attempting to represent evil as illusionary, and various other serious objections. Of course, there is a lot more that can be said on the privationist account; nevertheless, what should be clear is that the privation theory is not a now debunked theory that ought to be forgotten; on the contrary, it can still be considered a serious contemporary position.

It might be thought that by showing that there is a plausible case for the privation theory of evil, I have demonstrated that God must be necessarily and maximally good, as God necessarily has no good that He lacks that is due to Him, due to being the Anselmian being. However, this would be to equivocate on the type of goodness that we are attempting to demonstrate belongs to God necessarily. If the privation theory is correct, then all that it demonstrates in relation to God's goodness is that He is necessarily non-defective; this is to say, that He lacks no good that is due to Him or that His essence determines that He should have. It does not, however, tell us that God must act in a way that is recognisably similar to how we would expect a morally good human to behave, since so far we have not seen a good reason to think that a non-defective, metaphysically perfect, God would not act in a way that we would expect a morally evil man to act or treat creatures with indifference. Nevertheless, as I have said (0.8), the fact that evil cannot be said to have a positive existence, and thus its own essence, will be important in establishing the argument of this thesis.

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[151] Oderberg, *Metaphysics of Good and Evil,* p. 129.

Part II. Conceptions of God's Goodness

In this part I will examine three conceptions of God's goodness. Each conception will form a chapter. In the first chapter, I will address a moral agent conception of God's goodness. On this conception, to say that God is good is to say that He is a moral agent who adheres to the norms of morality perfectly. This is a conception endorsed by Swinburne. I will argue that Swinburne's position errs in that it subjects God to moral norms, which infringes upon His sovereignty. I will next consider an alternative position to Swinburne's account: namely, to argue that God acts in accordance with the norms of morality not because He is obligated to, but because it is His character to always behave in accordance with them. I will appeal to Alston as an advocate of such a position. Upon examination, I will conclude that Alston's position is inadequate because it takes God's character in this regard to be a brute fact. I will argue that a more satisfactory account would provide a reason for why God's character is such that He will act in accordance with morality. My own position, which I argue for later, will attempt to produce such a reason. Finally, I will examine whether a 'Guise of the Good' type argument could be forwarded to demonstrate that God will act in accordance with the norms of morality. A Guise of the Good type argument appeals to Plato's dictum that all things act towards what they see to be good and argues that given it is good to act in accordance with morality, God would, therefore, act in accordance with morality. I will argue that this argument fails by trading on an ambiguity in the word 'good'.

In the second chapter, I will address an account of God's goodness that has been espoused by Davies. Davies, who sees himself to be following a Thomist tradition of what it means to call God good, argues that to call God good is to say that He is metaphysically good. However, because of the 'wholly other' character of God, this does not allow us to infer that God is morally good or that He will necessarily act in accordance with moral norms. I will argue that Davies' position fails to satisfy my desideratum that we should be able to rely on God's goodness during times of trouble. By failing to meet this desideratum, Davies' position gives rise to a pastoral problem of evil.

In the third chapter, I will address a position by Murphy. Like Davies, Murphy argues that to call God good is to say that God is metaphysically good. Similar to Davies, Murphy argues that God's goodness does not entail that He acts in accordance with the norms of morality. However, unlike Davies, Murphy does not argue that this entailment does not follow because of the 'wholly otherness' of God, but instead because God, because of His status as the Anselmian being, lacks requiring reasons to act (reasons one must act upon on pain of irrationality) in accordance with morality. Murphy instead says that God only has justifying reasons (a reason one can fail to act on without being irrational) to act in accordance with morality. I will argue that, similar to Davies' view, Murphy's position fails to satisfy my desideratum that God's goodness should be such as can be relied upon during times of trouble.

4. Conceptions of God's Goodness I (Moral Agent Goodness)

4.1 Moral Agent Goodness

Swinburne argues that to say that God is good is to claim that He is a moral agent who adheres perfectly to the norms of morality, always doing, as far as He can, what is morally good and avoiding what is morally bad, even going beyond to do the supererogatory. To remind the reader of Swinburne's view, I will again quote Swinburne's own summary, as cited in the introduction:

> In claiming that God is by nature perfectly morally good, I suggest that the theist be interpreted as claiming that God is so constituted that he always does the morally best action (where there is one) and no morally bad action... Perfect moral goodness includes doing both the obligatory and supererogatory and doing nothing wrong or bad in other ways… Perfect moral goodness surely involves fulfilling one's moral obligations… I suggest that in our sense of 'moral', all theists hold that God is perfectly good, and that this is a central claim of theism.[152]

From the above passage, it is clear to see that Swinburne takes God to be a moral agent. Swinburne understands this to mean that God always does what He ought to do. Note how this implies that God has obligations and duties. In addition to doing what He ought to do, Swinburne holds that God's goodness also consists in Him avoiding evil, and going beyond the call of duty to do the supererogatory.[153] Given his adherence to Anselmianism, Swinburne believes God fulfils these requirements perfectly.

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[152] Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism,* pp. 184-87.

[153] A supererogatory act is an act that it is morally good to do but not an obligation of the agent. To steal an example from William Alston, it might be a good thing that some children in a remote Serbian village have the opportunity to take piano lessons. Nevertheless, few would say that one has a moral obligation, in usual circumstances, to pay and provide these children with piano lessons; one is not morally blameworthy for not doing it. See W. P. Alston, 'Some Suggestions', p. 312.

4.2 Moral Obligations and God's Sovereignty

If God is to be a moral agent who can be said to fulfil his obligations and do what is required of Him, then there must exist a moral standard that will judge the ways in which God could choose to act to be either morally good or morally defective. (God, on Swinburne's position, always does what is morally good.) For Swinburne, this moral standard consists of analytically necessary moral truths.[154] Swinburne takes this position to entail that moral norms hold whether or not God exists; they are not something that God is over and above, as He might be were they under His control and dependent upon Him in some way, for instance, on His commands.[155]

So, Swinburne argues that God's goodness consists in Him scrupulously obeying the requirements of morality. To put it another way, God's goodness is taken to mean that He is extremely well behaved.[156]

This theory is advantageous because it allows one to recognise the kind of goodness that belongs to God – namely a familiar type of goodness that is similar to human goodness. This would meet my second desideratum and allow one to trust God during times of trouble, for, if God and man inhabit the same moral framework, then God and man will share many of the same obligations. Although some of God's obligations will be different in virtue of Him being divine, there will be many that are the same; this is especially the case given that those who hold to this position, as said, take the norms of morality to be analytical truths, for this entails there will be certain things that are necessarily wrong or necessarily right for moral beings, e.g. it being wrong to commit genocide.

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[154] Swinburne, *Coherence of Theism,* 2016, pp. 204-18.

[155] Swinburne admits that there are obligations that we have which are dependent upon the commands of God. However, these commands cannot contravene the more basic necessary moral truths. So, for instance, God might command James to help Lucy, in which case it would be James' moral obligation to help her whereas before it might have been a supererogatory act. But what God could not command, according to Swinburne, is for James to kill Lucy just for fun since it is a necessary truth that so acting is morally prohibited. (ibid., p. 223.)

[156] See also S. T. Davies, *Logic and the Nature of God,* Macmillan, London, 1983, p. 86, who also holds this position. He writes: God is 'good' means 'God never does what is morally wrong; all his intentions and actions are morally right.' If it is always morally wrong, say, needlessly to break a promise, this is something God never does. If it is always morally wrong to cause needless suffering, this too is something God never does.

However, in spite of this advantage, there is a major concern: that this account undermines God's sovereignty and His position as the being upon whom all things depend. If Swinburne is right, then not only is God's sovereignty infringed upon (on the grounds that God is not the one who determines what right and wrong are, that is to say, God is not sovereign over the deontological realm) but also His aseity, as He becomes dependent upon these moral norms that exist independently from Him for His essential goodness.[157] God is bound to and dependent upon the norms of morality instead of them being bound to and dependent upon Him, which means, to quote Timothy Mawson, 'He could no longer be thought of as that on which all other things depend.'[158] A key aspect of God being the Anselmian being is that all things depend upon Him, that He alone is self-sufficient.[159] Anything less than this is not becoming of a maximally great being. Swinburne's position undermines this essential self-sufficiency by postulating moral truths which exist independently from God that He is dependent on.

Swinburne is in effect taking one of the two horns of the Euthyphro dilemma.[160] This dilemma asks whether moral facts and duties depend on God's commands or else whether God's commands depends on moral facts and duties. Swinburne affirms the latter. The reason this has posed a 'dilemma' for theists since Socrates first challenged Euthyphro with it is that we have an intuition that God should not be simply relaying moral facts and duties to us that He Himself is dependent upon and subject to, but should play a determining role in what these facts and duties are.

Proponents of the moral agent approach have argued that to take the second horn of the dilemma is not problematic. Swinburne argues that to posit that God is subject to moral norms and that He is

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[157] See D. M. MacKinnon and H. Meynell, 'The Euthyphro Dilemma,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume, 1972, p. 224.

[158] T. J. Mawson, 'God's Creation of Morality', *Religious Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2002, p. 2.

[159] See M. C. Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, pp. 71-72; and M. C. Murphy, *God and Moral Law: On the Theistic Explanation of Morality,* Oxford, University Press, 2011, pp. 61-68.

[160] Originally phrased as 'Is the pious (τὸ ὅσιον) loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?' Plato, *Euthyphro*, trans. C. Woods & R. Pack, https://philosophyintrocourse.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/plato-euthyphro.pdf (accessed September 2024), 10a, p. 8.

not their source should not be an issue for the theist. This is because, he argues, moral truths, since they are analytically necessary truths, pose no more difficulty for God's sovereignty or aseity than do logically necessary truths, which He is also subject to.[161]

However, there is a fundamental difference between the laws of logic and moral norms. The laws of logic are descriptive; they tell us what it is in principle possible to do. Moral norms, by contrast, prescribe (out of the things it is in principle possible to do) what ought to be done. So, the laws of logic do not impose any real constraint on God: they just indicate the limits of what it is coherent to suppose might be done. By contrast, moral norms do seem to introduce a constraint; they indicate what ought to be done. To give an example, the laws of logic tell us that in principle it is impossible to create a 'square circle', that such a figure is not even *something* that God could create. The moral law may instruct me to help my parents with the washing up instead of watching television, despite both being in principle possible to do. Of course, Swinburne would argue that God could not possibly disobey what the moral law prescribes, but this is not because it is in principle impossible for Him to act contrary to the moral law as it is in principle impossible for Him to act contrary to the laws of logic, but because Swinburne's God, as a morally perfect agent, must act according to the requirements and imperatives of the moral law. But for a moral norm to serve as an imperative for God and tell Him how He ought is for His sovereignty to be infringed.

4.3 An Alternative Model: Goodness without Obligation

Swinburne's account thus falls short. However, there is a possible revision to Swinburne's position which would avoid the problem of challenging God's sovereignty and aseity. On this position, God is morally good because He acts in accordance with the norms of morality, but this is not because He is obligated by them but rather because His character is such that He chooses to act in

[161] R. G. Swinburne, 'Duty and the Will of God', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1974, pp. 217f.

accordance with those norms, because so acting is in keeping with the divine character. This is a position held by Alston.[162]

Alston argues that one can draw a distinction between an act being a morally good thing for an agent to do and an act being morally obligated of that agent, such that he is morally blameworthy in cases where he fails to do it. To prove this point, Alston appeals to the widely accepted idea of supererogation, namely, that one can go beyond the call of duty. Given this distinction between obligatory and supererogatory acts, Alston argues that it is clear that that 'S morally ought to do A' adds something to 'It would be a morally good thing for S to do A' – the latter is a condition for the former, the purpose of the 'ought' being to lay a requirement upon one to do something that it is morally good to do.[163]

Given this distinction, Alston argues that 'the morally good things that we are obligated to do can perfectly well have the status for God of morally good things to do, even though he is not *obliged* to do them.'[164] Thus, 'it can be morally good, both for God and humans, to act with loving concern for others, but only we have the privilege of being morally obliged to act in this way.'[165] Voila! The challenge to God's sovereignty is thus removed. God is no longer obligated by moral norms that stand over and above Him. Rather, God is morally good because He chooses to act in accordance with moral norms. As I said in my note above,[166] Alston has said I can be morally good by choosing to provide piano lessons to children in Serbia, even though I am not obligated to. Similarly, God is morally good by choosing to act in accordance the norms of morality, even though

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[162] Alston, 'Some Suggestions'.

[163] Alston, 'Some Suggestions', p. 312.

[164] Alston, 'Some Suggestions', p. 317.

[165] ibid. See also T. Morris, 'Duty and Divine Goodness', *American Philosophical Quarterly,* vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 265-68, for a detailed discussion on what it means for God to be morally good and to act in accordance with moral laws versus Him being a moral agent subject to and bound by moral norms.

[166] See footnote 152.

He is not obligated by them.[167] Alston therefore can say that we can think of 'God as perfectly good, morally as well as otherwise, even if that moral goodness does not consist in the perfect satisfaction of obligations.'[168]

But how can we trust that God will do what is morally good? Alston argues that given God's essential goodness, God will do that which it is morally right to do. God acts morally by the necessity of His nature. Alston writes, 'If God is essentially perfectly good, then it is metaphysically impossible that God should do anything that is less than supremely good and this includes the moral good as well as other modes of goodness.'[169]

It might be objected that the very existence of moral norms entails that God is obligated to act in accordance with them. The objection might run like this: if *x* is a morally good thing to do, and *y* is a moral being with the power to do *x,* then *y* is morally obligated to do *x.* Thus, given that there exist morally good things for God to do, and God has the power to do them, God is obliged to act on the norms of morality. Alston, however, rejects this line of reasoning, arguing that one can only be under an obligation if there is some possibility that one will disobey:

> The intuitive idea here is that it can be said that agents ought to do something, or that they can have duties or obligations, only where there is the possibility of an opposition to what these duties require. Obligations *bind* us, *constrain* us to act in ways we otherwise might not act. They *govern* or *regulate* our behaviour, *inhibit* some of our tendencies and *reinforce* others. We can

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[167] But does not the fact that God makes promises in the Bible demonstrate that God has a duty to keep promises? Alston gives two responses. On the one hand, it can be said that references in the Scriptures to God making a promise are speaking analogically or metaphorically of God's inviolable intention, God's intentions having the reliability that we might ascribe to a human promise. On the other hand, one could argue that duty and obligation are only contingent properties of a promise, which apply only when the agent making the promise could possibly fail. (Alston, 'Some Suggestions', pp. 315-16.) See also Morris, 'Duty and Divine Goodness', pp. 262-3, and B. Leftow, 'Necessary Moral Perfection', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 3, 1989, p. 245.

[168] Alston, 'Some Suggestions', p. 316.

[169] Alston, 'Some Suggestions', pp. 307-308.

> say that a person ought to do *A* only where there is, or could be, some resistance on her part to doing *A*.[170]

Since God by necessity is perfectly good, He cannot but do what any duty would require. Therefore, He cannot be under obligation.[171] Thus, if Alston is right regarding the application of moral imperatives in the divine case, then the above objection will not hold force. Alston has admitted he cannot defend this position in a watertight manner but notes that the very fact that supererogatory acts exist, and that it is in principle possible for an act to be morally good without it being obligatory for a moral agent to do it, adds weight to the position. I am inclined to agree with Alston on this point.

Assuming that Alston is correct that moral imperatives have no application in the divine case, we have seen that His position avoids the problem that faced Swinburne's account, which is that it subjects God to norms of morality that sit over and above Him and tell Him what to do, which is to infringe His sovereignty. However, there is a problem that remains to be addressed, and this is the existence of moral norms that are separate from and independent of God. The existence of independent moral norms that God relies on for His goodness is just as problematic as His being obligated by moral norms that stand over and above Him. For in the former case, there still exist

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[170] To further support this position Alston draws on a legal analogy: 'It is my legal duty to do A only if there is a law in force in my society that, applied to my case, lays on me a requirement to do A. And laws are in force only if there is at least a possibility that they will be disobeyed; otherwise they have no governing or constraining work to do, i.e., no work to do.' (ibid. p. 314.) Of course, Immanuel Kant also held a similar thesis. See I. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. L.W Beck, New York, Liberal Arts Press, 1959.

[171] Leftow has objected that to claim that God is not under obligation is counterintuitive. He argues that there appears to be an implicit assumption that God ought to behave in certain ways, which becomes evident in various problems of evil. Leftow writes, 'Could the problem of evil have quite the force it does have if such claims as "God ought to refrain from creating worlds containing pointless suffering" were necessarily false?' However, the objection is weak; Leftow admits as much as he answers his own objection in a footnote. For on Alston's position, it still can be claimed that even though God has no obligations, He acts as He does. Thus, the problem of evil still has bite since an all good and all powerful God *would* not create a world with pointless suffering and evil because He is perfectly good. The problem of evil can still challenge the existence of a God, therefore, who acts in accordance with moral duty but not from duty or moral obligation. (Leftow, 'Necessary Moral Perfection*',* p. 245, fn 21.)

moral norms that are not dependent upon Him, so calling into question His status as the being on whom all things depend, as well as His aseity by implying that He relies on something besides Himself for His goodness. Alston puts this point as follows:

> It makes the goodness of states of affairs independent of the divine will, thereby subjecting God to valuational facts that are what they are independent of Him. It thereby contradicts the absolute sovereignty of God; it implies that there are realities other than Himself that do not owe their being to His creative activity. If it is true, independently of God's will, that loving communion is a supreme good, and that forgiveness is better than resentment, then God is subject to these truths. He must conform Himself to them and so is not absolutely sovereign.[172]

Alston suggests that one can avoid the above problem by making God Himself the standard of morality. God's sovereignty, therefore, is not infringed as He is not conforming to moral norms independent from Him, nor do there exist state of affairs that do not owe their being to God's creative activity. There are two ways in which to understand this claim that God is the standard of morality: a 'Platonic' sense and a 'particularist' sense. To take the particularist sense, which is the sense Alston takes, means that God, as an individual being, just is the standard of morality. As Alston puts it: 'God plays the role in evaluation that is more usually assigned, by objectivists about value, to Platonic Ideas or principles.'[173] Thus, 'Goodness supervenes on every feature of God, not because some general principles are true but just because they are features of God.'[174] Thus, on this position, 'lovingness' is a good attribute because God Himself is loving; God is to goodness what the yardstick is to anything that is a yard long.

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[172] Alston, 'Some Suggestions', p. 319.

[173] ibid., p. 319.

[174] ibid., p. 319.

Alternatively, however, one can take God being the standard of morality in a Platonic sense. The 'Platonic' sense denies that something is good just because it is a feature of God but rather says that God acts in conformity with an objective standard of goodness located within His intellect.[175] Perhaps the good exists as a Platonic idea within the divine mind.

By making God Himself the standard of goodness, challenges to God's aseity and sovereignty that would be posed by the existence of moral norms that are not creatively dependent upon Him are removed. God acts as He does just because it is in His good character to do so, and in so doing sets the standard of morality. Does, then, Alston's position provide a satisfactory account of God's goodness? I am afraid not, for there is a problem with his account. This is that it takes the fact that God's nature is such that He will act in accordance with the norms of morality as simply a brute fact. Before I turn to critique this aspect of Alston's position, I will briefly look at a popular criticism against Alston raised by Jeremy Koons.

Koons argues that Alston's account is self-contradictory.[176] Alston says that 'God is good by virtue of being loving, kind, merciful, etc.'[177] However, Alston, has also said that 'By virtue of what are these features of God good-making features?' The answer given by this view is: 'By virtue of being features of God.'[178] Koons argues that Alston is arguing both that God is good because He is loving, kind, and merciful, etc., these traits being what constitute moral goodness, and yet also arguing that these traits are only constitutive of moral goodness because they are instantiated by God, the supreme paradigm of goodness. But this is circular. Alston, according to Koons, has made the traits that are constitutive of moral goodness (such as being loving) both prior to God's

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[175] E. Stump & N. Kretzmann, 'Being and Goodness', in S. MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1991; see also Stump and Kretzmann, 'Absolute Simplicity', *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers,* vol. 2, no. 4, 1965, pp. 353-382; and see J. A. Aertsen, 'Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good', in *Being and Goodness, op.cit.,* pp. 56-73.

[176] J. Koons, 'Can God's Goodness Save The Divine Command Theory From Euthyphro?', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* vol. 4, no. 1, 2012, pp. 182-183.

[177] Alston, 'Some Suggestions', p. 319.

[178] ibid., p. 320.

goodness, being what makes God good, and posterior to God's goodness, His goodness serving as an explanation for their goodness and why they are good-making. If Koons's analysis is correct, then I am afraid Alston's position will not quite work as it is.

This said, it is likely that Koons has misunderstood Alston. Instead, when Alston says that 'God is good by virtue of being loving, kind, merciful, etc.', we should not take him to be giving an explanation for why God is good but only take him to be providing some description of that wherein goodness consists.[179] To use a distinction drawn by Koons himself, one can distinguish between 'explanations-why' and 'explanations-what'.[180] To say that God is good because He is loving, kind, merciful, etc. would be an 'explanation-why'. To give an 'explanation-what' is to explain what God's goodness consists in without explaining why it is good for God to have these properties beyond the fact that they are properties of God. In other words, Alston is giving a descriptive account rather than an explanatory one. If this account of Alston's position is correct, then his argument is not incoherently circular: God is not loving, kind, merciful, etc. because these traits are good; rather, God just is this way and no reason can be given as to why, and this explains why these traits are good.

Nothing in this thesis hinges on whether or not Koons' objection fails. For if Koons' objection is incorrect, Alston's position would still be subject to a disadvantage. For to evade Koons' charge of circularity, Alston would have to take the fact that God's character is such that He will act in accordance with moral norms to be a brute fact. To ask why God is good is equivalent to asking why a yardstick is one yard – it just is! Indeed, Alston argues that in answer to such questions as to what makes something good, there will be an appeal to something else by reference to which we determine if the object in question is good or not. If we ask what is good about *x*, we might appeal

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[179] See, for example, William Lane Craig's discussion with Kevin Harris on the Euthyphro Dilemma, in his Reasonable Faith Podcast: 'The Euthyphro Dilemma Once Again', https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/reasonable-faith-podcast/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again, (accessed 5 April 2023).

[180] Koons, 'Can God's Goodness', p. 191.

to some good-making characteristics, for example. And if we ask why goodness supervenes on those characteristics, we might cite other good making characteristics; but, says Alston, sooner or later one will have to appeal to a general principle or individual paradigm. When we reach this, it is the end of the line.[181] Thus if reference to God marks the end of the chain of explanations for why anything is good, then it can be claimed that it is just a brute fact that God is good.

However, I am unsatisfied with brute fact explanations when it comes to the moral goodness of God, as it is akin to arguing that there is no reason why God behaves morally. Not only is this, for many, metaphysically unsatisfying, it also has a negative pastoral implication in that it weakens the theist's confidence that God is actually morally good and thus his ability to find solace in the divine goodness during times of distress and hardship. Here is why: the existence of evil suggests to many that God is not morally good. The Scriptures also can be used to suggest the view that God allows harm to befall His creatures for the sake of a bet (see the book of Job) or that God is indifferent to at least some of His creation (Rom. 9:13). This hardly paints a picture of a God who seeks to promote the good of all of His creatures. Given this bleak picture, it may be that the theist will need to have a positive reason for supposing that God acts in accordance with moral norms, rather than just supposing that God is morally good as a matter of brute fact, if they are to have confidence that God is morally good in the face of evil and hardship. The argument I develop later in the thesis will have the advantage of providing a reason as to why God acts in accordance with moral norms beyond appealing to just brute fact.

Now, would it help to read the claim that God is the standard of goodness in what I earlier called a Platonist sense rather than particularist sense? To endorse the claim in this sense would be to suppose that the norms of morality are grounded within the thoughts of God as His ideas. Given God's thoughts are not separate or independent of Him, the moral norms grounded in them cannot

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[181] Alston, 'Some Suggestions', p. 321.

be said to infringe upon His aseity or sovereignty. I do not think it would help to adopt a Platonic reading of what it means for God to be the standard of morality. Here is why.

Even if the norms of morality are grounded in the divine intellect, it is not clear that these norms are applicable to God Himself, thus failing to guarantee that God would act in accordance with the moral norms that are established by His ideas. It seems implausible that there are actions that are good for a being to do irrespective of the kind of being that does said actions. If an action is good (under normal circumstances) for *x* to do, it is because it is good for the type of being *x* is. One, therefore, cannot jump from the conclusion that moral norms exist, whether in the intellect of God or not, to the conclusion that God is the kind of being to which such norms apply, so that He will act in accordance with them. Further argumentation is required. Platonists cannot assume that from the mere existence of moral obligations that they would apply to God.

It might be thought that the norms of morality would obviously apply to God; moral norms, after all, are universal and thus apply equally to all things, whether they be angels, martians, or humans, etc. The difficulty with this approach, as pointed out by Murphy, is that while it is a platitudinous feature of morality that it is universal, the parameters of the 'universality' are not clear.[182] This is evident, argues Murphy, from the variety found in normative ethical theories concerning the applicability of morality. The majority of normative theories do not universally apply to all beings but rather are specific to a particular type of being:

> Hume's ethics are ethics for rational beings of a certain kind, those with a certain emotional makeup. Hobbes's ethics are ethics for rational beings of a certain kind, those who are vulnerable to each other. Aristotle's ethics are ethics for rational beings of a certain kind, those who share our common human nature. Scotus's ethics are ethics for rational beings of a certain kind, those who are rational creatures—that is, created rather than uncreated rational agents.

[182] M. C. Murphy, *Divine Holiness and Divine Action,* Oxford, University Press, 2021, p. 88.

> None of these views even aspires to give an account of the moral in terms that would apply to rational beings of every possible kind. So it would be premature to invoke the universality of the moral to support an argument of the following sort: We humans morally ought to ϕ; morality is universal; therefore, the absolutely perfect being morally ought to ϕ.[183]

If such an appeal to the universality of morality was possible then, as noted by Murphy, it would be extremely easy to refute most of the above moral theories – i.e, they could easily be shown not to be as exclusive as they claim to be. But as it happens, these theories are not easy to refute. Moreover, if any of these normative ethical theories are true, then we have reason to think that morality is not applicable to God, as the particularities that define the parameters of the universality of morality in these normative ethical theories do not readily transfer to the divine case.[184]

One might say in response: but of course the perfect being would follow the norms of morality; in fact, he has decisive reasons to act morally; and this is because the perfect being does what is morally good just because it is morally good to do. However, this is not obvious; if it were, it would again make it easy to refute the majority of normative theories. This is because the majority of normative theories do not argue that that one should act morally just because the act is morally good, but rather that there is good reason to act morally – reason that goes beyond the act just being morally required, whether that be because if we did not we would be vulnerable to each other, as Hobbes argues, or because doing so accords with our emotional make up, as Hume argues, or because it best accords with the *arete* of our nature, as Aristotle argues. Each of these reasons go beyond the act just being morally required.

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[183] ibid.

[184] ibid., p. 88.

4.4 Guise of the Good

Some have argued that an appeal to Plato's Guise of the Good thesis can demonstrate that God would act in accordance with the norms of morality just because said norms are good.[185] This is an argument developed by Charles Daniels.[186] I, however, do not think that such an argument works, for reasons I shall present in this section.

The Guise of the Good thesis says that a rational agent acts on the basis of what he sees as good; this is to say, whenever an agent acts rationally, he perceives the end of that action to be good and believes the action is the best means by which to achieve that end. To clarify, this is not to say that everyone aims for what they perceive to benefit themselves, but only that whatever is aimed for, the agent sees it as being in some sense good, whether it benefits him or not. An objector might argue that it is plainly false that an agent always acts towards that which he perceives to be good. After all, people smoke in excess, and drink in excess, commit adultery, and so on, despite knowing these things to be bad. However, such facts do not disprove this principle; while those who commit these vices might agree that doing these things over a long time is bad, what they do not judge as bad is the pleasure gained from doing these actions. For example, a smoker may not intend to smoke for a long period of time, but rather only to have a smoke in the here and now; he judges that this one smoke will be good and just what is needed, and won't have too drastic consequences; and even if a smoker does intend to smoke for the rest of his life, it would be absurd to suppose that he judges this to be completely bad. On the contrary, while he may think there are bad consequences to long-term excessive smoking, he will also judge that there are good consequences that come from it, e.g. pleasure; and this good of pleasure will be thought to outweigh the bad effects of smoking in that instance.[187] A similar analysis can be given for the other vices that we have mentioned.

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[185] Plato develops his guise of the good thesis in his *Gorgias*, 466e-468d and *Meno* 77c-78b.

[186] C. Daniels, 'God, demon, good, evil', *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1997.

[187] Of course, a smoker may have a second order desire no longer to desire the effects of tobacco, say if he is struggling with a vice, but it is undeniable that at the moment of choosing to smoke, the smoker will have a first order desire for its effects, and see it as something worth having then and there.

Daniels believes that, drawing from the thesis that all agents aim for what they perceive to be good, one can demonstrate that God will also act towards what is good and thus what is morally good.[188] He begins by laying out the following premisses:

(1) Everyone aims for what they perceive to be good.

and its corollary,

(2) Everyone wants most to avoid what is bad.

Which together entail,

(3) No one can do bad knowingly.[189]

Daniels argues that given these premisses, one can conclude that one only does what is bad out of ignorance or due to some weakness that prevents him from doing what is good. Given that God is omniscient, he argues God will therefore know what is good and how to achieve this while avoiding what is bad.[190] Further, given His omnipotence, God will be able to achieve what is good without being hindered by some weakness.

However, Daniels' argument falls short; for he trades on an ambiguity in his use of the word 'good'. It is true that when I act I judge the intended end of that action as good. Yet, this is only true in a very thin sense of the term 'good'. 'Good' here need mean no more than being desirable and worth acting towards.[191] And while it may be true that if a human being were to lack ignorance, or to be fully informed, they would never do an evil act, since they would know that the good they desire is better achieved by doing what is morally good, this does not mean that the same applies to God. All one means when one says that God aims for what He perceives to be good is that

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[188] C. Daniels, 'God, demon, good, evil', *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1997.

[189] ibid., pp. 179-180.

[190] ibid., p. 180.

[191] See S. Law, 'The evil-god challenge', *Religious Studies*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2010, p. 371.

whenever God acts, He perceives that the end of that action is good; yet, this does not entail, without further argumentation, that the good will be moral goodness, or a goodness that entails He will act in a moral way. For what might be seen as bad for us could be seen by God as good for Him. Further argumentation would be needed to prove otherwise.

4.5 Conclusion

In sum, this chapter has done the following: first, it has shown that to argue that God is necessarily good because He is a perfect moral agent under moral obligations is problematic and mistaken, as it subjects God to moral norms, which infringes upon His sovereignty and aseity. Second, this chapter has shown that an alternative view proposed by Alston – which could be thought to avoid this problem by claiming that God acts in accordance with moral norms simply because of His character, and not because He is morally obliged to act so – also fails, for it leaves unexplained why moral norms are applicable to God and treats the fact that He chooses to act in accordance with the norms of morality as a brute fact, which is unsatisfactory because it weakens the prior trust a theist should have in God's goodness. Third, it has shown that guise of the good approaches, such as that taken by Daniels, also fall short, as they equivocate on the sense of the word 'good'; without further argument, they fail to demonstrate that the good God desires is moral goodness. The approaches taken in this chapter thus cannot provide a satisfactory theory of the goodness of God.

5. Conceptions of God's Goodness II (Davies' Position)

5.1 Davies' Position

The second conception of God's goodness I will examine is that of Davies. Davies sees himself to be taking a Thomist conception of God's goodness. Davies interprets Aquinas's position to be that to call God good is not to say that He is morally good, this being a category mistake, but rather that He is metaphysically perfect, which is to say, without defect, immutable, timeless, simple, etc., and all the other attributes ascribed to God by classical theism.

Davies argues that to ascribe moral goodness to God would be a mistake, since moral goodness can only be attributed to *human beings*, who can be said to have moral obligations, work to acquire virtues and remove vices, and fight against injustice, etc. Such things, argues Davies, cannot be ascribed to God. As I stipulated in the previous chapter, it would be wrong-headed to say that God is subject to obligations, as we are, and to suggest such is to threaten His aseity and sovereignty. Agreeing with this assessment, Davies has argued it would equally be wrong to suggest that God could grow in virtue, for virtues, he argues, properly speaking, are dispositions and habits that one adopts and acquires in order to flourish as a *human; g*iven God is not human, it cannot be said that the virtues we need to acquire to flourish are what God needs to have to flourish; nor would it be right to speak of God as working to get virtues and overcome vice, as if He is a limited creature like we are. To suggest any of these things, argues Davies, would be to commit a category error. It would be to suggest that God is a *creature*, or just as a thing that exists amongst many other things who is subject to obligations and has weaknesses to overcome; but, argues Davies, God is neither a *creature* nor a *thing* that exists.[192]

Since God cannot be said to be subject to obligations nor said to grow in virtue, Davies concludes that God is not a moral agent and thus not morally good. Instead, Davies argues that to

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[192] Davies, *The Reality of God,* p. 93.

call God good means two things. First, it is to say that He is metaphysically good; this is to say, He is perfect and without defect. Davies writes:

> If someone should say that God is good because, like morally good people, he manages to conform to moral standards... I think that such a person would be wrong... Why ascribe goodness to God? One reason for doing so lies in the traditional teaching that God is perfect…[193]

For Davies, following Aquinas, what it means for *x* to be perfect will depend upon the type of thing that *x* is. Nevertheless, common to all perfect things is that they cannot be improved upon. Davies writes, 'A perfect *x* is an *x* which cannot be improved upon as an *x*. A perfect *x* is a wholly realised *x*, one which cannot have anything added to it to make it better.'[194] By contrast, Davies says *x* is imperfect when *x*, a potentially perfect thing, is actually imperfect.[195] God must be perfect since He is, according to classical theist thought, in no way potential; He can in no way be improved upon. Thus, 'God is perfect and therefore Good.'[196]

Now, one might think that God's perfection entails that He is morally good/perfect, or that He will act in a certain way. But this is a conclusion which, Davies' contends, we cannot draw. For Davies, given God is a being like no other, and given His complete otherness, it would be erroneous to infer from God's perfection any conclusions as to what this perfection might amount to. God is 'wholly other' than any conception that we might have of Him. Thus, for Davies, in calling God perfect, one is engaging in negative theology – when one says God is good, one is saying what God

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[193] ibid., p. 202.

[194] ibid.

[195] ibid., p. 203.

[196] ibid.

is not, viz. imperfect, rather than what He is; and one does this without committing to the claim that God is a moral agent or acts in accordance with moral norms.[197] Davies thus writes:

> We are seriously in the dark when it comes to what it is for God to exist, or to be perfect, or to be good, or to be loving… in the sense that I know what it is for a human to exist, I cannot know what it is for God to exist. In the sense that I know what is is for a circle to be a perfect one, I cannot know what it is for God to be perfect… for a Strawberry to be good… cannot know God to be good… Fred to be loving… cannot know God to be loving.[198]

The second way in which Davies avers we can call God good is to acknowledge Him as the maker of creaturely goodness.[199] Davies is careful to note that this is not to say that God is good because He makes good things, for this would not support the idea that God is essentially good whether He creates or not. Further, it would not philosophically make sense; as Davies points out, the fact that God makes good things does not show that he is good just as the fact that God makes wooden things does not show that He is wooden.[200] Rather, what Davies intends when he says that God is good because he is the maker of creaturely goodness is that God is good because He is desirable as the first and ultimate cause of all things. In saying this, Davies is again echoing the position of Aquinas, who explains what it means to be good by being desirable. He writes,

> To be good belongs pre-eminently to God. For a thing is good according to its desirableness. Now everything seeks after its own perfection; and the perfection and form of an effect consist in a certain likeness to the agent, since every agent makes its like; and hence the agent itself is

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[197] ibid., pp. 203-4.

[198] ibid., p. 228

[199] ibid., pp. 204-8.

[200] ibid. p. 204.

> desirable and has the nature of good. For the very thing which is desirable in it is the participation of its likeness. Therefore, since God is the first effective cause of all things, it is manifest that the aspect of good and of desirableness belong to Him; and hence Dionysius (Div. Nom. iv) attributes good to God as to the first efficient cause, saying that, God is called good "as by Whom all things subsist."[201]

This statement is tricky to understand, so let us unpack it. When Aquinas (and Davies) says that something is good according to its desirableness, he is echoing Aristotle's claim that goodness is to be equated with attractiveness or desirability, a claim also made, as we have seen, by Plato (4.4). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that goodness is that which is desirable, that at 'which all things aim'.[202] He argues it makes no sense to say that something is good without at the same time seeing it as attractive or desirable. If I say that a particular car is good, it means that I see that car as attractive or desirable, presumably because it allows me to travel to my destination in a safe and timely fashion.[203] Similarly, Aquinas wants to say that God is good because He is attractive. But how is God attractive and desirable? The way Aquinas attempts to answer this question can be found in the words of the above quotation:

> Now everything seeks after its own perfection; and the perfection and form of an effect consist in a certain likeness to the agent, since every agent makes its like... Therefore, since God is the first effective cause of all things, it is manifest that the aspect of good and of desirableness belong to Him.

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[201] *ST* I. q.6. a.1.

[202] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, Kitchener, Batoche Books, 1999, Bk 1, ch. 1, p. 3.

[203] Of course, Aristotle realises that at times we are attracted to things that are bad for us, such as drugs, etc. Aristotle would say that this is not because we desire the badness or the bad effects of these drugs, but rather it is that we desire the good of the pleasure that the drugs will provide.

When Aquinas says that all things desire their perfection, he is drawing on the scholastic idea that all things strive to achieve that perfection as defined by their essence. That this is the case is evident from our experience: the acorn strives to grow into a strong, healthy oak; the cat strives to remain healthy and well nourished, etc. Aquinas argued that humans are no different. Like the oak tree and non-rational animals, we seek to fulfil that perfection defined by our essence. Since a thing's perfection resembles in some way its cause, and God is the cause of all things, the good that creatures are drawn to can be said to resemble God; and in this way God can be said to be good/ desirable.

When Aquinas says that the perfection and form of effect resemble its agent, viz. cause, Aquinas is appealing to the scholastic principle of 'Proportionate Causality.' This principle states that 'effects must needs be proportionate to their causes and principles',[204] such that 'whatever perfection exists in an effect must be found in the effective cause.'[205] Or to put it simply, whatever the perfection of an effect must be in its cause. Note, Aquinas is not attempting to defend some heirloom view of causality whereby properties are passed down from causes to effects, as if the only way for the bully to give the boy a black-eye is for him to have a black-eye himself. While sometimes the effect exists in the cause in the same way that it exists in the effect, as when fire generates fire or man generates man, Aquinas is not committed to the view that this is the only way that effects pre-exist in their causes; rather, he is attempting to defend the idea that for any cause-effect relation, the nature of the cause will explain its effect, and this is precisely because the perfection of the effect exists within the cause in some way.

To use scholastic jargon, there are three ways that the perfection of an effect can pre-exist in its cause. The first way is for it to exist 'formally' in its cause, that is, when it exists in its cause in the same mode of being, as with fire causing fire.[206] The second way is when the perfection of an effect

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[204] *ST* I-II. q.63. a.3.

[205] *ST* I. q.4. a.2.

[206] Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. J. P. Rowan, Notre Dame, Indiana, Dumb Ox Books, 1995, vii.8.1444. (References are by book, lesson number, and paragraph number.)

exists 'eminently', that is, more perfectly in its cause, as when heat exists more perfectly in the sun than in the bushfire that it causes.[207] The third is for the perfection of an effect to exist 'virtually' in its cause; this is when the effect exists in a manner that is 'neither of the same mode of being, nor in substance of the same kind.' For example, such as when the form of a house exists within the mind of an architect.[208] In all of these cases, the effect tells us something about the cause.

Thus, the reason why God being the cause of all things entails, for Davies and Aquinas, that we can call God good is as follows. Since all things are created by God, they can be counted as an effect of His – God being their cause. According to the Principle of Proportionate Causality, the perfection of an effect can be found in its cause. Thus, the perfection of all created things can be found in God. And since all created things see their perfection as good and desirable, God will be seen as good and desirable since the perfection of all created things can be found in Him. Davies notes that this would be true whether or not God creates. Davies demonstrates this with an example: if Jane and John choose to have a child, the child might reflect who they are, even though they may have chosen not to have a child. By the same token, so one may argue, the actual world reflects what God is apart from creation and what God is like regardless of His choice to have created.

Nevertheless, despite what is said above, Davies says that this does not allow us to have 'scientia' (knowledge) which allows us to say 'Now we can see why God has produced these particular effects.'[209] As such, Davies maintains that we cannot have any 'picture or image' of God's goodness; this is to say, calling God good does not provide an explanation for why he did *x*, such as create this world, or create this world with this particular amount of evil instead of a lesser amount of evil or a greater amount of evil. God is not some thing which we can have knowledge of which will allow us to see why He has the effects that He does – for to claim so would, Davies argues, categorise God as a creature.[210] We can only say that 'since all effects are ultimately God's effects,

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[207] *ST* I. q.6. a.2.

[208] Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle*, vii.8.1445-9.

[209] Davies, *The Reality of God,* p. 207.

[210] ibid.

and since these include creatures who are attracted to what is good, God can be called "good" as the source of all that is attractive.'[211] We can go no further than this.

To summarise what I have just said above, Davies has argued that it would be wrong to speak of God's goodness as moral goodness. This is because moral goodness applies to human moral agents who have obligations, grow in virtue, and work to overcome vice. Given God is not in any way, according to Davies, like a human moral agent, it would be a category error to suggest that God's goodness is moral goodness. It would be categorising Him as a creature, a thing amongst any things, rather than as God.

Davies says that when we say that God is good, what is meant is that he is metaphysically good – immutable, simple, etc. We also say that God is good because He is the source and maker of creatures, and thus, according to the Principle of Proportional Causality, that the goodness of creatures can be found in God. However, Davies argues that given God is 'wholly other' to any conception that we might have of Him and unlike any created thing, it cannot be inferred from His metaphysical goodness or goodness as creator that He will act in a certain way, in accordance with moral norms (for example). I will now turn to address some problems with Davies' account.

5.2 Trust in God and the Scriptures

Davies' position is problematic for the following reasons: first, Davies' position disaccords too much with what we intuitively believe to be entailed by the notion of goodness. As mentioned (0.1),

[211] ibid., p. 208.

when we consider a person[212] to be good, we expect them to behave in a certain way, namely to promote the welfare of others and to prevent evil as one reasonably can; Mother Teresa is considered to be good because she aided those in need in Calcutta; William Wilberforce is considered to be good because he fought to liberate slaves, etc. On Davies' approach, God is not good in this way. And to deny that God is good in this way is to say, to again quote Mill, 'With a slight change of phraseology that God may possibly not be good'.[213] This is to say, if we cannot assert that God is essentially good towards His creation such that He would necessarily act in the kind of way that we would expect a morally good human to act, to promote the good of others, etc., then the possibility remains that God could be evil or indifferent towards His creation.[214] Typically, Christians have appealed to the goodness of God as a reason for why He must promote the good of creation and cannot permit gratuitous evil. This gives the theist confidence to seek God in times of trouble. However, we lose this confidence if God is not necessarily morally good towards His

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[212] That God is a person, or more precisely three persons, is an essential piece of Christian orthodoxy. The Athanasian Creed speaks of God being three persons. Aquinas concurs, calling God a person in a more excellent way. (*ST* I. q.29. a.3.) Davies argues that when God was called a person by theologians, they did not mean to speak of God as three individual centres of consciousness, or God as a person as we typically understand persons. Davies does not expand precisely what 'person' means when the concept is used in reference to God. The most Davies says is that in calling God three persons, the writers of the creed only meant 'that, though God is one and undivided, there has to be distinction within him (even if we cannot understand how), since the Father is not the Son and since the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.'

But this, it seems, would make little sense of the creeds or the historical tradition. It is beyond this thesis to get into the historical context of what it means to call God a person, but there is an argument that can be made that from subsequent to the Fifth century to modern times all theologians took the Trinity to mean that God is constituted by three persons, in Boethius's sense of person as 'an individual substance of a rational nature. See R. G. Swinburne, 'The Social Theory of the Trinity', *Religious Studies,* vol. 54, no. 3, 2018, pp. 419-428 who makes a convincing historical argument for this view. Note, one does not have to accept a social trinitarian position to conceive of the persons of the Trinity in this way. One can take a Latin theory too. See B. Leftow, 'A Latin Trinity', *Faith and Philosophy,* vol. 21, no. 3, 2004, pp. 304-333.

[213] Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, p. 128.

[214] I do not intend to suggest that the content of human and divine morality are exactly the same. I am merely making the point that at the very least we would expect a morally good person to seek to some extent the good of others, especially if it comes at no cost or effort, and therefore should expect a good God, who is omnipotent, to also promote the good of others if the term 'good' is to have any proper import when used in reference to God.

creation, for then the possibility exists that God might not be ‘good’ in the sense that the existence of evil suggests He is not.

The problem presented above is a variant of the Problem of Evil. Davies argues that the Problem of Evil is dissolved on his understanding of God, since, as we have seen him state, it is not to be expected that God will always act to promote the best for others, or act in accordance with morality, etc. Thus, evidence that God is not acting so is not a challenge to His existence. However, as I have said (0.1), while strictly speaking Davies’ account of God's goodness avoids a logical contradiction between the existence of evil or gratuitous evil, and thus philosophical challenges from Problems of Evil, Davies’ account is still open to challenge from a pastoral Problem of Evil. For the majority of theists, God is someone to whom one can turn in times of trouble, someone who gives confidence to the theist, and allows him to say in the face of suffering and hardship, that despite the evil being suffered, he knows God cares for him and that the evil in the world is not the result of some malevolent god or due to God being indifferent; yet this confidence is lost if God is not necessarily good towards His creation. This is the crux of Mill’s criticism – that to say God's goodness is not necessarily similar to our moral goodness is to open up the consideration that God may be acting in a way which we would consider morally evil or morally indifferent, especially when we are faced with hardship and suffering.

An additional difficulty for Davies’ position is that it is contrary to the Scriptures. The Scriptures present an account of God's goodness which allows the theist to place their full trust in God. This trust in God is exemplified in the story of Abraham found in the 22nd chapter of Genesis. Here, we find Abraham instructed by God to kill his son Issac. Nonetheless, because of His unwavering trust in God's goodness, Abraham believes God’s promise that he would become the father of many nations through Issac, and thus understood that God would provide another sacrifice, or at the very least that his son Issac would be raised from the dead.

The Psalmist is also clear that it is because of the goodness of God that we can trust in Him; he writes 'Taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' (Ps 34.8) We are told also that God is good, and *doest good*. 'Thou art good, and doest good…' (Ps 119.68) Thus, at least for the Psalmist, the goodness of God entails He *does* good things, which means acting in accordance with moral norms. This further leads the Psalmist to write, 'teach me thy statutes.' (Ps 119.68) Clearly, the goodness of God gives the Psalmist confidence that God's statutes are to be learnt and followed, which suggests His goodness is something akin to moral goodness. The Psalmist also writes, 'The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.' (Ps 145.9) The understanding here is that the goodness of God is somewhat connected to His mercy and leads Him to be merciful to all.

In response to the argument from the Scriptures I have just made above, Davies points to the many places where the Scriptures suggest that God is not a moral agent and does not act in accordance with morality.[215] For instance, he points to God smiting those who tried to protect and stabilise His ark when it was falling off a wagon (2 Sam. 6.7); he points to how God slew the firstborns of Egypt to free the Israelites (Ex. 11.4ff; Ex.14.21ff), and how God killed the Canaanites to clear out the Promised Land (Deut. 7.1-2; 20.16-18). Moreover, Davies points to God allowing Job to be afflicted with sores and his servants smitten, despite the fact that Job was blameless (Job 1-2). Davies also points to how King David was blessed, despite being a second hand murderer (1 Sam. 7. 5-16). Furthermore, Davies also appeals to Isaiah 45.7, which states that 'He [God] makes weal and he makes woe.'[216] The places in which God is said to be good and trustworthy, Davies argues, are only applicable originally within the context of God's covenant with Israel and then with His elect who put their trust in Christ.[217]

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[215] B Davies, 'How is God Love?', in L Gormally (ed.), *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe,* Dublin, Four Courts Press, p. 101.

[216] NRSV translation used here to match translation used by Davies.

[217] B Davies, 'How is God Love?', p. 101.

However, these passages cited by Davies do not contradict the position that God acts in accordance with morality. Given the holy nature of the Ark of the Covenant, and the clear instructions given by God not only to avoid touching the ark but on how it is to be transported (Ex. 25. 13-14), it is not apparently egregious relative to the norms of morality for God to inflict punishment when the Ark was touched and these warnings were overlooked. The story of Job admittedly is a more difficult case; but it is worth noting that not only did God not directly inflict harm on Job, but He rewarded Job greatly at the end of the story, giving him more than he had at the start of the story (Job 42.12). Further, given the moral development that results from Job's torments, there can be some reason given for why God allowed Job to suffer as he did that fits with traditional theodicy, such as the soul making theodicy.

With regard to the case of King David, while it is true God chose to bless David, David also did not go without punishment for the murder of Uriah. The Scriptures tell us that David was rebuked by Nathan the prophet and punished. David's punishments are as follows. First, God tells David that the sword shall never depart from his house (1 Sam. 12.10). Second, God tells David that his wives will be taken away from him and given to his neighbour (1 Sam. 12.11). Third, David is told that his son will 'surely die'. (1 Sam. 12.14) Given that David was punished for his sin, the fact that God continued to bless David is not in disaccord to how one might expect a morally good person to act any more than a parent continuing to bless their child after he is punished for some naughty crime is in disaccord to how one might expect a morally good parent to act. Later on in the thesis, I will examine the Problem of Evil (a key theme of the story of Job) and theodicy further. (8.11)

Perhaps the most difficult case would be God's killing of firstborns and the wiping out of the Canaanites. There are a few things we should note in these two cases. With regard to God's killing of the Egyptians firstborns, first, this was an action taken by God after nine warnings from God to Pharaoh – this was not the first course of action taken by God; second, the Egyptians certainly were not innocent – they had captured the Israelites and were holding them in captivity and slavery.

Given these two points, God's killing of the firstborn Egyptians may have been a justifiable last resort course of action to ensure the release of the Israelites. Additionally, given God's omniscience, it may be the case that God foresaw that had he not acted to free the Israelites through the killing of the Egyptian firstborns, some greater evil would have occurred. Indeed, making such choices is not foreign to moral thinking in human contexts: during war, it may be the case that civilian populations have to be bombed to ensure future peace. For instance, the bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan resulted in the deaths of many, including women and children, and yet may be seen as justifiable for the greater good of ending the Second World War. This is not to say that such actions are uncontroversial. Nevertheless, this example should demonstrate that it is not completely beyond the realm of possibility that God might have a morally justifiable reason for the killing of the Egyptian firstborns.

Regarding the clearing of the Canaanites from the promised land, similar things can be said to what I have said above. It should, however, be additionally noted, that contrary to popular belief, a close reading of the Scriptures shows that God's command to the Israelites was not to commit genocide or even wipe out the Canaanites, but rather *to drive them out of the land.* (Ex. 34.11; cf. Deut. 11.23) The Canaanites were to be destroyed as a nation state and not as a people. The Scriptures tell us that the Canaanites had become extremely immoral (Lev. 18). God was thus punishing them by divesting them of their land and giving it over to Israel. Had the Canaanite people simply fled, they would have been unharmed and no one killed at all. Thus, the clearing of the Canaanites is not evidence that God was acting in a way that would be seen as immoral.

Concerning Isaiah 45.7, 'He [God] makes weal and he makes woe', the 'woe' spoken of here should not equated with moral evil – indeed, to do so would be to contradict the clear Bible passage that state God cannot sin (Jam. 1.13). Woe, as the translators of the NSRV have translated ' רָע ', best refers to a bad state of affairs. It should be noted that only the AV version of the Bible translates the Hebrew word " רָע " as 'evil'. Other translations have chosen to translate it as 'calamity' (ESV),

'disaster' (NIV), 'bad times' (NLT), etc. Indeed, Bible commentators have said that a reference to moral evil is foreign to the context of said passages.[218] Now, it is uncontroversial that a bad state of affairs can be brought about without impugning the character of the person who brings it about, such as the king who proclaims a just war leading to the deaths of many. War is always a bad state of affairs, but sometimes it is justified. This is the kind of badness God brings about in Isaiah 45.7. The bad state of affairs God brings about, such as famine, hurricanes, earthquakes, etc. can be said to have a morally justifying reason.

It should also be noted that in the case of all of these passages, God is preparing the way for the ultimate event in history – The Incarnation and Atonement. God's blessing of David, for instance, was necessary so that his line could give birth to Christ. (Matt. 1.1) The clearing out of the Canaanites was so a people could be established from whom a messiah would come, etc. Thus, these events when viewed through a Christocentric lens become a lot less horrific.

5.3 Evil and Indifference

To avoid the charge that on his position the possibility is open that God creates evil, Davies argues that God cannot be said to create evil. One reason that motivates Davies to hold this view is his commitment to the privation account of evil; appealing to Aquinas, Davies argues that:

> God cannot effect (bring about) anything bad, since for God to create is for him to bring about what is real, and therefore (at least to some extent) good. For Aquinas, it is not intelligible to conceive of God as producing (and therefore as willing) evil.[219]

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[218] J. Goldingay & D. Payne, *Isaiah, The International Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,* G. I Davies et al (eds), London, T&T Clark International, 2000, p. 27.

[219] Davies, *The Reality of Evil,* p. 102.

In other words, God cannot bring about evil since God cannot create 'evil', given evil is a privation. However, this response does not help Davies avoid the charge that his position leads to a God who would be considered evil, even if strictly speaking, on Davies' view of God, He could not be categorised as being either morally good or morally evil. And for God to be considered evil is to give rise to a pastoral problem of evil.

As I discussed in the chapter on privation, evil has not been done away with on the privation position; there is still a sense in which we can say things are bad. And it does not seem inconceivable that God could create a man missing an arm, or with a tumour on the eye causing him to be blind, etc. So, even though God, strictly speaking, only creates what is good, this response does not answer the questions that are at the heart of the Problem of Evil: Can we be confident that God does not take pleasure in the torture of children? Can we be confident that God wishes the best for us and seeks to promote our welfare? Is God really loving if He only creates the good of one arm but not the other? Even if strictly and intellectually it can be said that God does not create evil and therefore properly speaking does not create evil, a pastoral problem still remains.

Davies also argues that God could not be 'evil' in the sense that He takes pleasure in the torture of children or other similar evils; again appealing to Aquinas, Davies says that God could not command us to torture children (for example) because, in effect, 'that would involve him [God] in contradicting Himself, or going against His nature as the source of creaturely goodness.'[220] (Davies is quick to add that 'And this, of course, is not to suggest that God's goodness consists in Him acting in accordance with moral norms to which he responds in any sense.'[221]) In other words, Davies argues that God cannot be both, at the same time, the source of a creature's goodness, by giving it being and sustaining it in being, and also against it.

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[220] ibid., pp. 102-103.

[221] ibid. p. 103.

However, this argument is unconvincing, for such a contradiction does not exist. There seems to be no contradiction in the idea of God creating something and sustaining its goodness for the reason of having pleasure in destroying it or being evil towards it. Perhaps God is like the young boy who takes as much pleasure in knocking down a structure made from LEGO bricks as in building it; and there does not seem to be anything inherently unfitting or irrational about the boy's action here if this was his plan from the start.

Davies would question the idea of God having a reason like the boy with his LEGO bricks. This is because Davies argues that God does not have reasons; that for God to have a reason would for him to have a lack or a want, which would compromise His perfection and categorise him as a creature rather than God. Davies believes all reasons supervene on wants and needs: if I have a reason to brush my teeth, then I have a want and need to keep my teeth clean, etc. Since God has no wants or needs, He cannot be said to act for reasons. Again, I am unconvinced and will address Davies' position that God cannot have reasons later on in the thesis (7.2). But even if Davies is correct that God does not act for reasons, his claim that it would be contradictory for God to be both the source of a creature's existence and against it would not hold – in fact, it would make little sense. For if God does not act for reasons, then God could be said to just create and destroy that which He has created for no reason at all! God could not be said to be acting irrationally (or rationally), as *only* things that can act according to reasons act rationally or irrationally.

Moreover, even if we grant that God does not directly cause evil, it can still be argued that by failing to prevent evil and promote the goodness of creatures, God is somehow wrongly allowing evil. An argument made by Herbert McCabe, who takes a similar position to Davies, attempts to mitigate this concern. McCabe argues that although God could prevent sin from occurring without any interference with human freedom, he does not commit an evil if He permits evil to occur.[222] McCabe avers that while it is clear that *to do evil* and to *not to do evil* are contradictory opposites –

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[222] McCabe, *God and Evil*, pp. 125-126.

this is to say that the denial of one means the affirmation of the other – it is not the case that '*x* wishes evil to be done' is the contradictory opposite of '*x* wishes evil not to be done', since both are affirmations.[223] Hence, the denial of the latter does not entail affirmation of the former; all it entails, argues McCabe, is that '*x* does *not* wish evil *not* to be done.' And this, argues McCabe, is just permitting evil. McCabe pushes this further; he comments that since evil is a privation of some good, an action in which *evil is not done* is the same as an action in which good is done; and since good is not a privation of evil, an action in which good is not done is not one in which evil is done.[224] This means, for McCabe, 'God does not wish evil not to be done' translates to 'God does not wish a certain good to be done', which is not the same as to wish that evil should be done. As McCabe notes, to not wish that a certain good is done is in no sense evil. McCabe argues that if God had chosen to create four more sparrows, there would have been more good, but that it was no evil in choosing to refrain from allowing that this good be done. Like Davies, McCabe says that God is not a creature, and therefore not a moral agent, and thus He is not morally obliged to maximise any good.[225]

The problem with McCabe's analysis is that while it is true that God is not required to create more 'good', in the sense of creating more things, God can still be said to be permitting evil without good reason. Thus, it is still the case that the theist is left without the fundamental trust He should have in times of trouble. And given that one expects a good person (unless said person has good moral reason to proceed otherwise) to prevent evil, intend it not occur, and work towards its obliteration, especially if at no cost to that person, one would expect the same of God, otherwise Mill's criticism has force. For the theist trusts not only that God is not directly causing evil but that God is not gratuitously allowing evil to befall Him. It does not help either to say, as McCabe has done, that in permitting evil God is simply not wishing a certain good to be done, any more than it

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[223] ibid., p. 126.

[224] ibid., p. 127.

[225] ibid.

would restore trust in the moral character of a doctor who failed to sew back on a lost limb if we learned that he simply did not wish for a certain good to be done.

Thus, if one is going to be able to have trust in God that He is not gratuitously permitting evil, it is not enough to say that God is just permitting some good not to be done; rather, the theist needs to be able to say that God is permitting this evil for some greater good (even if he cannot know the reason why it is permitted). But McCabe argues that it is a mystery why God permits evil; there is no account that can be offered, on his view, that allows one to say, 'Now it is clear to me why there is evil in the world; now I have the explanation.'[226] This is because, he argues, God is a mystery: 'when we speak of God we do not clear up a puzzle; we draw attention to a mystery.'[227] The only thing one can be confident in, he argues, is that God is not a creature, and therefore not a moral agent. As I have shown, like McCabe, Davies also emphasises the mysterious element of God's character. To quote Davies:

> Notice that I am not here merely trying vaguely to say that God is mysterious… my point… is that, if I am right in what I think that we have to say about God, these are precise reasons why we lack an understanding of what He is.[228]

This means, for Davies, (to repeat the following quote again)

> When it comes to what it is for God to exist, or to be perfect, or to be good, or to be loving… in the sense that I know what it is for a human being to exist, I cannot know what it is for God to exist. In the sense that I know what it is for a circle to be a perfect one, I cannot know what it is

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[226] ibid., p. 128.

[227] ibid., p. 129.

[228] Davies, *The Reality of God,* p. 227.

> for God to be perfect… for a strawberry to be good… cannot know what it is for God to be good… Fred to be loving… cannot know what it is for God to be loving.[229]

Further, given that God cannot be said to act for reasons on Davies' position, it makes no sense, according to Davies, to ask what 'reasons' God might have for allowing any particular kind of evil.

The above position is deeply problematic. For if God's goodness is not the sort that allows us to affirm God is with us; that He does not want evil to occur to us and that He wishes the best for us, then why ascribe goodness to God? It is no good to say that for God to be good means He is metaphysically perfect if we can not explain what this perfection entails. It is clear what it means when we say that a man is perfect. But, on Davies view, what does it mean to say God is perfect? If we cannot really say anything about God when we call Him good, we have obliterated the divine attribute of goodness altogether. The same can be said for God's attribute of love. If we cannot know what it means for God to be loving, then why should the theist set any store by the idea that God is love? If we cannot know what either God's goodness or love entails, then it cannot be something that engenders trust in God from the theist. Thus the charge that God could be considered evil (even if strictly on a philosophical level He is not) is left open.

In addition to the charge that Davies' position leaves open the possibility that God might be appear to be evil (even if in a technical sense He cannot be), Davies' account also has the problem that God could be completely indifferent to His creation beyond creating and sustaining it. If God is indifferent, then God cannot be said to love and care for His creation, wishing the best for it and desiring to promote its good, even if that should be at no cost to Himself or some greater cause. For God to be indifferent, as mentioned, is also problematic, leading to a pastoral problem of evil, since God could be indifferent to the troubles and concerns of a theist.

Davies admits that there is a way in which, on his view, God is morally indifferent; but, he clarifies, this is only in the sense that God cannot be taken to be a moral person who is anxious to

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[229] ibid., p. 228.

do the right thing and do what He ought to, or taken to be passionately fighting against evil and vice. What we cannot say, however, according to Davies, is that God is 'positively morally indifferent' in the same way that we condemn people for being morally indifferent. A morally indifferent person is, argues Davies, someone who is, wrongly, indifferent to his moral obligations and duties. Davies further argues that it would be wrong to say that God is morally indifferent because He is not focused on the good, for, at least in one sense, He is focused on willing the good of creatures by bringing them into existence. Thus, argues Davies, it is not morally indifferent for God to fail to act as moral people act; to think along these lines would be a category error by suggesting He exists within a moral framework. It would, argues Davies, be similar to arguing that an opera singer is blameworthy for being scientifically indifferent since she does not break off from her arias to give us a lecture on quantum physics.[230]

However, this analogy will only work if God is not expected to act morally in the same way that one does not expect the opera singer to act scientifically. But, as I have argued, one does expect God to act in a certain moral way, this being foundational to orthodox Christian belief. Thus, given that one does expect God to act morally, to promote one's welfare, to care for one during times of trouble, for God to fail to do these things would be for Him to be indifferent to values to which one expects him to be responsive..

5.4 God, Love, Incarnation

Davies admits that the picture of God's goodness he has presented will not cut it for the majority of theists.[231] To respond to this concern, Davies argues that while philosophical arguments may not support a satisfactory doctrine of divine love, an appeal to revelation allows us to have a picture of God's love that matches better the expectations people have:

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[230] ibid., p. 253.

[231] Davies, 'How is God Love?', p. 108.

> In short, it is by virtue of the Incarnation that we are finally entitled to preach the Good News of God's love for us… That is why we do not deny that God is love (in the Christian sense) by saying that we find it hard to believe that he is an agent whose goodness consists in his virtues, or in his practical acknowledgment of duties and obligations… Christians can say that God is love because he has come among us and called us to himself as one who gives himself to us as, so he says, the Father gives himself to the Son… But this declaration that God loves us as the Father loves the Son is a matter of revelation. It is way beyond anything to be proved by philosophers of religion.[232]

However, while it is true that the Incarnation is an example of God's love – even the prime example of His love towards us – we also wish to go further. God is not loving *just* because He has chosen to become incarnate, but because He is in His very essence love, and because of His very nature he seeks the best for His creation; otherwise, it could be argued that God's love extends no further than the Incarnation. Indeed, Davies admits that the Incarnation does not mean we have 'acquired a periscope by means of which we can gaze into the life of "him on high"'.[233] This is to say, for Davies, the Incarnation does not allow us to understand anything substantive about God as He is His divine nature. Instead, God can, to quote Davies, 'Only be understood by us as a human being'.[234] But if we can only understand the love of God as is revealed in the human person of Christ, then the possibility remains that we do not understand how God will act towards us independently of the Incarnation, which could lead one to wonder whether the love of God is limited to the Incarnation – this is to say, God's loving act of becoming Incarnate might be His only act of love towards us.

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[232] ibid., p. 109.

[233] ibid. p. 110.

[234] ibid.

Additionally, if we can show philosophically that God is maximally loving towards his creation, this will have the benefit of making revelation and the Incarnation more plausible. On my account, given the background information that God is maximally and necessarily loving towards His creation, we will be able to give additional credence to the idea of the Incarnation. However, since on Davies' account it is not evident philosophically that God is maximally and necessarily loving towards His creation, the Incarnation becomes less plausible. If God seeks the best for us, then surely He would wish to do all that is possible in order to save us, and this gives us at least an initial reason for supposing that He will become incarnate. But on Davies' account, God does not necessarily wish the best for us, and thus the prior probability of the Incarnation is lower. In this respect, Davies' account is thus at an apologetic disadvantage relative to accounts in which God can philosophically be proved to be maximally loving.

Davies argues that there is a sense in which prior to the Incarnation God can be said to love creation in virtue of being its creator and sustaining its being. Davies writes: 'We can say that if God does good to people (and other things), then he can be thought of as loving them. We can then note that since, as Creator, God clearly does bring about what is good for people (and other things), he can be thought of as loving.'[235] Davies here is again following Aquinas, who says:

> God loves all existing things. For all existing things, in so far as they exist, are good, since the existence of a thing is itself a good; and likewise, whatever perfection it possesses. Now it has been shown above (I:19:4) that God's will is the cause of all things. It must needs be, therefore, that a thing has existence, or any kind of good, only inasmuch as it is willed by God. To every existing thing, then, God wills some good. Hence, since to love anything is nothing else than to will good to that thing, it is manifest that God loves everything that exists.[236]

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[235] Davies, *The Reality of God,* pp. 210-11.

[236] *ST* I. q.20. a.2.

However, once again, this is not a love that leads us to conclude that God desires the best for creation and thus a love that meets the desideratum set out in the introduction – for, all that is being said here is that God loves us by willing the good that we have. But this would be true even if God willed little good to us beyond mere existence. Indeed, Davies says God is to be considered loving in this sense just as much for willing the good of the man in hospital as He is for willing the good of the Olympic Athlete.[237] Thus, given the objectives of this thesis, it will not suffice to appeal to this type of love.

Davies says, that independently of reference to the Incarnation, our talk of God's love must be confined to His role as the source of our existence. One especially cannot speak of God 'giving Himself in love' to us.[238] Davies argues that for God to love us in this way is impossible due to the inequality that exists between God and man – on account of the vast difference between creature and creator. Quoting McCabe, Davies writes, 'It is evident that whatever relationship there may be between God and creatures it cannot be one of love. The relationship here is just as unequal as it is possible to be… there cannot be a relationship of love between creator and creature.'[239] Davies adds,

> To speak of God "giving himself in love" to a creature is like speaking of me as "giving himself in love" to a cat or a spider. I may be kind to my cat (or my spider). I might even be fond of it. What I cannot seriously be thought of as doing, however, is loving it as mature adults can love each other.[240]

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[237] Davies, Reality of God, p. 211.

[238] Davies, Reality of God, p. 210-211.

[239] H. McCabe, *God Matters,* Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987, p. 17f.

[240] Davies, *Reality of God,* p. 210.

Nevertheless, Davies concludes that 'The Good News is that we, who are not God's equals and, therefore, cannot be loved by him, are, in fact, loved by him since he has made us his equals by virtue of the Incarnation.'[241] For Davies, it is only because of the Incarnation that God can be said to love us beyond merely willing the good of our existence and sustaining us.

Davies, however, is mistaken; the inequality between man and God does not exclude a relationship of love. It is true that there exists an inequality between man and God – but this is an inequality of power, intelligence, and perfection. And as Davies himself admits, the equality required in a relationship is *not* one of intelligence, power, or perfection. Rather, Davies has argued that the equality required in a relationship is for the two parties to be able to 'see themselves in each other as they do themselves. It involves a mutual giving and sharing'.[242] And it is this that is made, according to Davies, impossible by the inequality between man and God. Davies writes: 'It seems ludicrous to suppose that God can love creatures in this sense. For creatures are not God's equal. They are totally dependent on him and vastly different from him.'[243] But this is where Davies is mistaken: man was created by God for the purpose of relationship and friendship, and was made in God's image for this purpose.[244] It is because man is made in the image of God (the *Imago Dei*), in His own likeness, that in some sense God can 'See Himself in man' in a way that allows for a relationship. The Incarnation was not necessary because otherwise God could not love us. Rather, it was because sin had separated man from God through The Fall such that man could not love Him. Thus, instead of the Incarnation being something which allows God to love us, it was because God loved us that He became incarnate so we could love Him. The Incarnation thus demonstrates, contrary to Davies, that God's love for us is logically prior to His becoming Incarnate. This is what the Scriptures testify to: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that

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[241] Davies, 'How is God Love?', p. 110.

[242] Davies, *Reality of God,* p. 210.

[243] ibid., p. 210.

[244] 'As Creator, God imparts goodness to creation and draws from that creation human beings in God's own image, for friendship with himself and one another.' - L. Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love,* London/New York, T&T Clark, 2004, p. 35.

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'(Jn 3.16); and again it is written: 'But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' (Rom. 5.8.) Of course, one might choose to disregard the Scriptures. However, this is not an option available for this thesis. As I have said, for this discussion, it is a desideratum for a theory of God's goodness that it accord with the Scriptures. (0.2)

5.5 Moral Perfection as a Reflection of God

There is a move that could be made by Davies, one that is hinted at in his own book, although Davies does not follow through on it. As seen, Davies has said that humans are created by God. He has also said, here appealing to the Principle of Proportionate Causality, that the perfection of an effect exists in some way in its cause. Therefore, Davies holds that the perfection of humans can be said to exist in God. Now, given that part of a human's perfection is moral perfection, moral perfection can be said to exist in God and thus to be somewhat reflective of who He is, even if God is not properly speaking a moral agent. Indeed, Davies says:

> My argument does not rule out seeing human goodness as a reflection of God, for what I am saying is that human moral goodness reflects God and shows us something of what God is. So I have no problem in agreeing that human moral goodness reflects what God is. But that is not the same as saying that the goodness of God is, quite simply, moral goodness (a matter of being well behaved).[245]

Could this allow one to conclude that God will seek to act in accordance with morality? I do not think so. Here is why. For God is not the cause of just our nature, but the cause of all things; and that it is not only the perfection of our nature that is reflective of the divine nature, but also the perfection of the natures of everything that exists. So, the perfection of the tree is reflective of God's

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[245] Davies, *Reality of God,* p. 208.

nature, and so is the perfection of the cat, and the perfection of the crocodile. Now if it is the case that we can infer that God's nature is such that He will act in accordance with moral norms, from the fact that our perfection is in part to act in accordance with moral norms, then logically we can similarly infer that since it is the perfection of the crocodile to be deceptive, so that she may catch her prey, God must also be deceptive. Yet, of course, we know that God is not deceptive (Num. 23.19). Moreover, this would contradict God's nature as being reflective of our moral nature. Davies himself sees this, for he writes:

> But we have no picture of that goodness [the divine goodness]. If the goodness of every created thing is a reflection of what God is, there can be no such picture since the goodness of every created thing does not amount to anything we can sensibly think of as a picture.[246]

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that God's goodness is more expansive than just metaphysical goodness. I have argued that Davies' position falls foul of Mill's criticism, namely, that not including moral goodness in an account of God's goodness is tantamount to claiming that God is not good at all, which gives rise to a pastoral problem of evil. I have suggested that Davies' account is not only contrary to the Scriptures, which suggest that God's goodness is moral goodness, but also that his account leads to a position on which God could at worst intend evil, and at the very least be morally indifferent. I have also concluded that Davies is incorrect to think that the inequality between God and man creates a barrier that prevents God from having a relationship of love with man; on the contrary, man was created to have a relationship with God. This relationship became impaired not because of God's inability to love us but because of our inability to love Him due to the effects of sin. The Incarnation was the result of God's love for us; it was not something that made it possible for God to love us. The Incarnation thus coheres well with accounts, such as

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[246] ibid., p. 226.

mine, where God is said to be maximally loving or morally good, on philosophical grounds. Finally, I have rejected a move that could have been made on Davies' behalf, according to which, as the perfection of all things reflects God, including human perfection, which is to be morally good, God must be morally good too. I rejected this position because on this account, not only would human goodness be a reflection of God, but the goodness of all things, including those things whose perfection is incompatible with moral goodness.[247]

[247] My own argument takes God to love all things because he loves Himself. Davies similarly thinks that God loves Himself, since as omniscient, God knows Himself to be perfect, and therefore loves Himself as perfect. However, Davies does not seek to make a connection between the divine self-love and God's love of creatures. (Davies, *The Reality of God,* p. 212.)

6. Conceptions of God's Goodness III (Murphy's Position)

6.1 Murphy's Position

The third conception of God's goodness I wish to examine is that given by Murphy.[248] Murphy's position has elements in common with that of Davies, in that he does not think God's goodness entails that He necessarily adheres to the norms of morality that humans are subject to. Like Davies, Murphy believes that God should be called good not because He is morally good but because He is metaphysically good. Specifically, Murphy believes that our understanding of God's goodness should be rooted in an Anselmian conception of God's metaphysical perfection. He takes God being the Anselmian being to entail that He has the uncontroversial divine perfections – *perfectly powerful, perfectly knowledgeable, perfectly rational,* and *perfectly free,* etc. – and that He is the source of goodness of all other things, for, as mentioned in the introduction (0.1), Murphy argues that which is the source of goodness of all things is greater than a being that is not.[249] Murphy does not think that this entails God must be *morally perfect* – in the sense that He necessarily follows all the norms of morality.

Murphy's view is distinct from Davies' position because he does not endorse Davies' thesis that God is 'wholly other' to such an extent that even to ascribe reasons, let alone moral reasons, to God would be inappropriate and to categorise Him as a creature. Murphy's argument is that due to the difference between God and man resulting from the aforementioned divine perfections, while we have what Murphy calls requiring reasons to act in accordance with morality, God only has what he calls justifying reasons to act in accordance with morality.[250] Murphy defines requiring and justifying reasons as follows:

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[248] See Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*.

[249] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* pp. 76-77.

[250] Murphy takes this distinction between justifying and requiring reasons from Joshua Gert: J. Gert, *Brute Rationality,* Cambridge, University Press, 2004, pp. 19-39; see also S. Kagan, *The Limits of Morality,* Oxford, University Press, 1989, pp. 378–81 on 'insistent' and 'noninsistent' reasons; Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* pp. 58-59.

1) Requiring Reason df. = A requiring reason is a reason that one is required to act upon on pain of irrationality. Thus, if I have a requiring reason to do *x*, but fail to do *x*, then I am acting irrationally.

2) Justifying Reason df. = A justifying reason is a reason that one is not required to act upon on pain of irrationality, but which nonetheless would be rational to do. Thus, if I have a justifying reason to do *x*, but fail to do *x*, then I am not acting irrationally, even if I have no reason not to act on it.[251]

Thus Murphy argues that whereas we human beings have to follow the norms of morality under pain of being irrational, God could fail to act on the norms of morality without being irrational. Thus, God's perfection, which includes His being perfectly rational, does not entail that He necessarily acts in accordance with the norms of morality. Indeed, as I will show, Murphy believes that God need not promote the welfare of His creatures and could have goals that are even harmful or detrimental to the promotion of the welfare of His creatures, so long as He does not have evil amongst the success conditions of His goals.

Thus Murphy argues that moral goodness is not properly ascribable to God not because He is wholly other and unknowable, but because God's perfection entails that He does not have requiring reasons to act morally, as we do. Murphy writes, 'The standard divine perfections either establish moral perfection as a divine perfection, or they rule it out. There is a strong case that they rule it out.'[252] I will now turn to examine Murphy's account in further detail.

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[251] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 58.

[252] ibid., p. 86.

Suppose that I come across a button which, if pressed, would remove all disease and suffering from the face of the Earth; and further suppose that the button is well labelled such that I know what the button would do. The majority of moralists would argue that I should press this button, absent strong reasons for why I should otherwise act. But suppose that I decided not to press the button, and suppose that my argument for proceeding this way was that I did not really have any reason to concern myself with the diseases of the world, not even for the brief moment it takes to press the button. It would not be surprising if I was called callous or oblivious to the strong reasons for why I should eradicate disease. And I certainly would not be considered perfect or good – as discussed already, humanly speaking, a good person is one who seeks where they can to promote the welfare of others.

Yet the above scenario is what appears to be the case with God. God is omnipotent; He thus should have the power to remove disease. Yet He does not. For many, this poses a problem. After all, if God has resolved to maximise the welfare of His creatures, then the presence of evil poses a problem. As I showed in the introduction, this has led to what has been called the 'Problem of Evil'. Many try to solve this problem by offering various defences and theodicies, which attempt to demonstrate that evil is not incompatible with God's desire to promote the welfare of creatures: God may be allowing evil for the sake of the good of human freedom or some other greater good for which evil is an unfortunate but necessary means to achieve, etc.

Bucking this trend, Murphy argues that God is no less perfect for allowing evil, even in the absence of a reason to allow it for some greater good. This is because, he argues, a perfect being does not have any requiring reason to concern Himself with creaturely well being. God is thus under no obligation to promote the welfare of creatures. Therefore Murphy claims that it is not appropriate to call God morally good. Moreover, given that there are no reasons requiring God to concern himself with creaturely well being, God's perfection is not compromised if His actions are contrary or harmful to the welfare of His creatures. Murphy makes one exception to this: God must

not be motivated by evil, a point I will return to shortly. Murphy thus states that God's goodness is not compromised if He causes harm to the welfare of creatures in the same way that a lion or mountain is no less magnificent or excellent for being dangerous or harmful. Murphy writes:

> To say that the goodness of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures is compromised [by being dangerous]… is akin to saying that the mountain is less excellent because a rockslide from it killed some people, or that the hurricane is less sublime because of the death and destruction that it caused, or that a lion is less excellent because some safari-goer got too close to it and was mauled by it.[253]

Murphy admits that there are some things whose goodness is diminished by being harmful – baby formula, for instance. But this is because their goodness is *human-centred,* which is to say tied to human needs and interests. This is what Murphy calls *human-centred* goodness. Goodness exhibited by mountains, the hurricane, and the lion is called, by Murphy, 'goodness as excellence.'[254] God, argues Murphy, is good by excellence, His goodness is not determined by human interests or is human centred.

To grasp Murphy's argument, one needs to understand what he has in mind when referring to moral goodness and his account of the nature of moral motivation. There are two points that should be noted.

First, Murphy avers that 'to be morally good is for one's agency (one's desires, one's deliberation, one's action) to be fittingly responsive to values of the sorts that are at stake in morality.'[255] What exactly this looks like depends on the normative ethics one holds to. So, for example, Utilitarians see morality as responding to the value of human well being, and Kantians to

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[253] Murphy, 'The Perfect Goodness of God', p. 232. *parenthesis mine*

[254] Murphy, 'The Perfect Goodness of God', p. 231.

[255] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 24.

the value of persons considered not as means but as ends in themselves, and so on. Murphy further says that to be morally good is to be welfare oriented – to seek to prevent setbacks to the welfare of rational and sentient creatures and to promote their good. Thus, for Murphy, if God is to be morally good, He must be responsive to values that are relevantly connected to promoting the welfare of rational and sentient creatures. Murphy writes, 'An agent is morally good in this familiar sense only if that being treats setbacks to the well-being of rational and other sentient beings as to-be-prevented.' And only does otherwise when 'there is some greater good at stake'[256] i.e, when preventing set backs to a creature's welfare would result in a worse evil and so forth.

Second, Murphy holds to a rationalist thesis of morality, viz. that to act morally is to act rationally and vice versa, and a failure to act morally is a failure to act rationally. To establish the rationalist thesis, Murphy makes three arguments. I am inclined to agree with Murphy regarding the rationalist position of morality so think that the three following arguments are cogent.

(1) Murphy points out how it is difficult to assign blame to an agent when they violate a norm of morality for a *good reason*. If I violate a norm of morality, but show that I had *good* reason to do so, then it becomes hard to see why I should be blamed for violating it. Suppose that I steal a loaf of bread from the local store; prima facie, it appears that I am committing some violation. But now allow that I have some good reason for acting so, perhaps to feed the poor, or because I am extremely hungry, etc. Murphy argues that in this case it would not make sense to criticise me for violating this moral norm. Murphy writes:

> The violation of moral norms is something for which agents are typically properly blamed; but if such agents had adequate reason for violating those norms, it is hard to see why such blame is appropriate. ("I know you had perfectly adequate reasons to do that, but ... how dare you?" The question answers itself. You dared because you had good enough reason to dare.)… So given

[256] ibid., p. 24.

> that the violation of moral norms is something for which agents, in the absence of rational incapacitation, are rightly blamed, it must be the case that agents, in the absence of rational incapacitation, have decisive reasons to act in accordance with those norms.[257]

(2) Murphy argues that the rationalist thesis of morality is evident from the fact that those who act immorally often believe they are doing so for good reasons. When one remonstrates with one who is acting immorally, one attempts to show him that he should not be acting in that way because to act that way is to act irrationally; this is to say, his reasons for acting that way are not sufficient.

(3) Murphy argues that another reason to subscribe to the rationalist thesis of morality is because it would make no sense for moral norms to have the status of demands if they were not rational. Demands, argues Murphy, hold force because they are rationally grounded requirements. A demand would hold no force if it was irrational. To say to someone, 'you must do *x,* but *x* is an irrational thing to do' would certainly raise the question, 'why?' For it is supposed that if one must do *x,* then there must be a reason to do *x*. Additionally, one can hardly be faulted for not acting on a principle or instruction that is irrational. It seems strange to think you can rebuke someone by saying, 'you should have done *x,* but doing *x* is irrational and there is no reason why you should have done it.'[258]

Given Murphy's views seen above regarding the nature of moral motivations and what it means to be morally good, on his position, for God to exhibit familiar welfare oriented goodness, it must be the case that God has 'requiring' reasons to promote the welfare of creatures. Murphy writes:

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[257] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 26.

[258] ibid.

> It follows that the Anselmian being exhibits familiar welfare-oriented moral goodness only if the well-being of humans and other sentient animals gives that being decisive reasons to prevent setbacks to it, at least in the absence of reasons of the right sort to the contrary.[259]

Having established this, Murphy proceeds to argue that God *lacks* requiring reasons to concern Himself with creaturely well being, from which it follows that it would not be irrational for God to fail to promote the welfare of creatures. Before turning to examine why Murphy thinks that God does not have requiring reasons to concern Himself with creaturely well being, I will briefly examine an alternative position on divine morality that Murphy rejects. In this way, I hope to elucidate Murphy's position and set this alternative position aside as a possible basis for rejecting Murphy's rationality thesis.

According to this alternative position, instead of adopting the rationalist view of morality, whereby to act morally is to act rationally and vice versa, one should instead hold that to be perfectly moral and perfectly rational are to be considered as two separate attributes of God, with perfect morality being a subset of rationality – it being just one way in which God can act rationally.[260] The idea here is that divine rationality is a thinner and more inclusive notion; acting in accordance with moral goodness is just one, not rationally required but rationally available, option for divine action. On this account, considered as a morally good being, God will necessarily act on moral reasons, even if those reasons are not requiring for a being that is motivated simply by reason.

However, Murphy argues that this alternative is not viable. Another key concern for Murphy is that God should be considered to act freely – after all, He is the Anselmian being, and it is greater to act freely than to be constrained. And to act freely, argues Murphy, means to be guided solely by the

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[259] ibid., p. 28.

[260] ibid., p. 63ff.

reasons one has: 'If one is a perfectly rational and perfectly free agent, then one's action is guided solely by the reasons that one has'.[261] Thus, Murphy says, if a reason for action is requiring for me, while being only a justifying reason from the vantage point of reason alone, then I cannot be said to be perfectly free. Therefore, if God is motivated to act by reasons that are requiring for Him on account of his moral goodness, but not requiring for Him considered simply as rational, then God cannot be said to be perfectly free. Murphy says, 'it looks, on this alternative view, that the Anselmian being is not fully free, for the Anselmian being's choices are constrained in certain ways that are independent of what there is good reason for the Anselmian being to do':[262] It would result in a situation whereby the Anselmian being, God, might see that there are undefeated reasons to act in a way that is incompatible with perfect moral goodness, but nevertheless be unable to bring these reasons into consideration, because acting on them would be inconsistent with being morally good. This, for Murphy, is unfreedom. He writes:

> If there are proposals for action that seem otherwise possible but upon which an agent is unable to act simply because he or she cannot take that proposal seriously in deliberation, no matter that there are good, undefeated reasons in favor of it, then that does seem like unfreedom…it is as if the Anselmian being cannot take seriously the prospect of acting a certain way, even if there would be adequately good reasons for that being to do so.[263]

Additionally, and again returning to his previous point above, Murphy argues that one could not be faulted for not acting morally if one was acting non-morally but rationally, which could be the case if morality is just one option amongst other rational choices. Murphy's argument is that since we humans can be faulted for not acting morally, then moral reasons must be identified with reasons

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[261] ibid., p. 28.

[262] ibid., p. 63.

[263] ibid., p. 64.

generally, and not be a distinct set. I agree with Murphy's rejection of this alternative position and therefore do not see it as a viable basis for a rejection of the rationality thesis.

Returning to Murphy's argument for why God *lacks* requiring reasons to concern Himself with creaturely well being, Murphy begins his case by rejecting two considerations that might be taken to show that God has a requiring reason to promote the welfare of creatures. The first consideration appeals purely to what the welfare of creatures rationally demands of God. The second consideration appeals to reasons that go beyond what is purely rationally required by the value of creatures. Exploring this second approach, Murphy considers the possibility that love could be a generator of reasons.[264] That is, on this view, God is rationally necessitated to respond in a certain way to the value of creatures on account of God having love for those creatures. Murphy notes that this is not the view that God treats reasons to promote the welfare of creatures as overriding when they are in fact not, but rather the view that love does indeed give reasons. Murphy argues that neither of these two lines of reflection succeeds in showing that God has requiring reasons to promote the welfare of creatures.

I now turn to examine these two considerations. I will agree with Murphy regarding his rejection of the idea that the welfare of creatures of itself generates requiring reasons for God to act. Thus the case that I am about to make in 6.2 also rules out a possible alternative account of why God acts according to moral norms to the one that I favour in this thesis. I will, however, disagree with Murphy's claim that love is not a generator of reasons for why God should promote creaturely welfare. My own position, which I develop in Chapter 7, will maintain that God's love of Himself gives Him reason to promote creaturely welfare.

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[264] To distinguish love from moral goodness, Murphy supposes that love is a motivator, that is, it provides reasons to act that go beyond what is given by creaturely value considered in itself. On this view, love must exist as its own divine perfection. (ibid., p. 29)

6.2 Reasons Generated by Creaturely Welfare

Murphy rejects the first consideration, according to which the welfare of creatures of itself generates requiring reasons for God to act to promote the welfare of creatures, which would entail that God can be said to be essentially and necessarily morally good in the 'familiar welfare-oriented sense'.[265] Murphy explains why as follows.

Murphy points out that the fact that *x* is bad for a creature does not necessarily provide a reason for why anyone should prevent *x*. Similarly, just because some *x* is good for some creature does not necessarily give reason for why anyone should promote *x.* Murphy says that if one considers the two following propositions:

1) *x* is fundamentally good (bad) for *a.*

2) *x* is a reason for anyone to promote (prevent) *x.*

Murphy argues that it is clear that there is a gap between (1) and (2). This is to say, clarifies Murphy, that (1) does not entail (2) as a matter of analytical necessity. If (1) is to entail (2), then there must be some explanation that bridges this gap.[266] Murphy notes that the vast majority of philosophers have given reasons to bridge this gap that align with the main normative ethical theories.[267] Therefore, if the main normative ethical theories do not give reason to God to promote the welfare of humans, then there is unlikely to be a further reason for why He should do so. And, as mentioned in 4.3, Murphy argues that the main normative ethical theories that are said to give reasons for us to act morally and bridge the gap in our case are not applicable in the divine case,

[265] ibid., p. 46.

[266] ibid. p. 49.

[267] Murphy, 'The Perfect Goodness of God', p. 234.

since they are human-specific.[268] Murphy rejects the idea that any of what he sees as the five main normative ethical theories can be applied to the divine case. These theories are as follows.

First, Murphy considers whether a Kantian anti-arbitrariness argument can be made. Here it is argued that it would be arbitrary and thus irrational to value oneself and one's welfare without showing consideration for other rational beings and their welfare. On this basis, one might argue that, since God is perfectly rational, it would be arbitrary for Him not to value other rational beings. This argument does not work, argues Murphy, because of the vast ontological inequality that exists between God and His creatures such as to negate any argument that it would be inconsistent for God to respect His own welfare and not that of creatures. Murphy writes:

> Isn't it plain that the massiveness of the gulf between the Anselmian being and finite rational creatures—that the Anselmian being exists independently, necessarily, of itself, needs nothing distinct from itself, and so forth—is enough to block the charge that the Anselmian being would be arbitrary to fail to treat the wills of finite rational beings as reason-giving in a way such that the Anselmian being would be governed by familiar norms of moral goodness?[269]

Second, Murphy considers whether a Hobbesian or Lockean social contract ethics could be applicable in the divine case. Murphy argues that social contract ethics are founded upon shared mutual vulnerability between rational beings of a certain type. God does not share this mutual vulnerability, and thus the relevant reasons for Him to prevent setbacks to the welfare of creatures are not generated.[270]

Third, Murphy considers whether Humean ethics would provide reasons to promote creaturely welfare in the divine case. Murphy, however, argues that a Humean ethics only gives reasons to

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[268] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 49.

[269] ibid., p. 57.

[270] Murphy, 'The Perfect Goodness of God', p. 234; Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* pp. 49-50.

those who have a specifically human kind of emotional make up, there being no reason why all rational beings, including God, should have a similar emotional make up. Murphy notes that contemporary accounts of Humeanism fail for a similar reason. For instance, Mark Schroder argues that we all have reason to act in accordance with the norms of morality as acting so is the best way to fulfil our common desires.[271] However, again, Murphy does not think that this line of reasoning is applicable in the divine case. Murphy writes:

> But we do not have a basis to think that it must be true that the Anselmian being's failing to act in accordance with such norms in any way lowers the probability of its realizing the objects of any of its desires. This would be so only if the Anselmian being were limited in power… The idea that failing to act in accordance with the norms of familiar welfare-governed morality must lower the probability of the Anselmian being's getting something that that being wants—and for any desire-set that the Anselmian being might have—is very hard to believe.[272]

Fourth, Murphy considers whether Aristotelian virtue ethics is applicable in the divine case. Murphy argues Aristotelian virtue ethics are also unable to be reason generating for God. Aristotelian ethics are based upon natural kinds; man has reason to act morally because acting so is good for the kind of thing that He is. Thus, 'Aristotle rejects the notion that 'the gods,' who do not share our kind, would share our virtues, and indeed says that any praise that "concerns actions appears trivial and unworthy of the gods"'.[273] Contemporary Aristotelians also affirm this

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[271] M. Schroder, *Slaves of the Passion,* Oxford, University Press, 2007.

[272] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 51.

[273] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 54. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. x, ch. 8, p. 175.

distinction and argue for the close connection between the kind to which human beings belong and the natural law that binds them.[274]

Fifth, Murphy denies that a divine command normative ethic would provide reasons for God to promote the welfare of creatures. Murphy avers that divine commands hold binding power over humans because God is rightfully and naturally authoritative over human beings and because God has issued commands to direct us as humans to live in a certain way. However, Murphy argues that:

> A commander's commands do not as such bind the commander, and one cannot generally deduce from the fact that a commander's directives have a specific content that the commander is under any similar requirements. So if we take the divine command story of moral requirements to be the correct one, then we would not expect the moral norms that apply to us also to apply to… God.[275]

It should be clear, Murphy concludes, that the account provided by the main normative ethical theories of why we human beings have requiring reasons to promote the welfare of other human beings does not extend to the divine case.[276]

Murphy considers one final case for the idea that the welfare of creatures rationally necessitates that God promote it. It might be argued that creatures have intrinsic value and this gives God reason for God to promote their welfare, it being irrational for God to not promote it. Note that by intrinsic value, Murphy means that creaturely value is independent of any relation they bear to other things; he does not mean intrinsic in the looser sense, according to which intrinsic value is 'final, non-instrumental value'.[277]

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[274] See A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues,* Open Court, 1999, P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Oxford, University Press, 2001; and M. Thompson, *Life and Action,* Harvard, University Press, 2007.

[275] Murphy, 'The Perfect Goodness of God', p. 236.

[276] Murphy, 'The Perfect Goodness of God', p. 237; cf. Murphy, *Divine Holiness and Divine Action,* p. 96.

[277] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 69.

The problem with this position, argues Murphy, is that for creation to be intrinsically valuable, it needs to hold its value no matter how it stands in relation to other things. Yet, he argues, this is not true of anything in creation. This is because there is no standard of value that exists independently from God. If something has value, then it has received this value from God – the thing is valuable because it is made by God, or bears some purpose for God's plan, etc. To deny this is to infringe upon God's status as the being upon whom all things completely depend. Murphy holds that if a being is perfect, then He will be the source of all goodness for all other beings.[278] Creation, thus, cannot be said to be intrinsically valuable. As said by Murphy, 'For something's value to be explained by something external to it rules out that value's being *intrinsic value*.'[279]

Murphy considers next the possibility whether non-intrinsic value can generate reasons to promote creaturely welfare, here granting that God is the source of creaturely value.[280] Creatures are valuable because they resemble God or because they are made in His image or participate in God. This position avoids the difficulties inherent in ascribing intrinsic value to creatures. It would then be claimed that this value, derivative from God, gives God reason to promote creaturely welfare and act in accordance with moral norms.[281]

Murphy responds that while this does avoid the difficulties of ascribing intrinsic value to creatures, there is a further problem. This is that an assumption has to be made that this non-intrinsic value will give not only some rational beings, but a divine, perfectly rational being a requiring reason to promote the value. Yet, argues Murphy, it is not evident that this value would give God reason to promote it, given the vast ontological gap between Him and creatures. Murphy argues that this is a problem both in the case where the value is intrinsic and when it is non-

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[278] Murphy, *Divine Holiness and Divine Action,* p. 94.

[279] ibid., p. 95.

[280] ibid. p. 95. See R. M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics,* Oxford, University Press, 1999 pp. 34-6 who defends this position.

[281] ibid.

intrinsic.[282] However, this gap is worse if the creature's value is non-intrinsic. This is because, argues Murphy,

> There is not only an infinite value gap between God and creature, but the creaturely value being conceived as resemblance—entirely derivative of, and as likeness to, the agent in question—makes it seem to me even less plausible that God would be subject to requiring reasons to promote that value.[283]

This vast difference between God and creatures thus raises the need for an explanation for why this value would give God a requiring reason to promote it. Murphy argues that the position on which it is just posited that non-intrinsic value gives requiring reason to God to promote creaturely welfare is 'deeply unexplanatory'. It makes sense why this value might give us reason to promote the welfare of each other, but, Murphy says:

> God stands in a different relationship to creaturely goods than creatures do: God stands in relation to them as the being from whom they derive any goodness that they have, whereas creatures do not stand in that relation to each other.[284]

It is because of this difference in ontological status between God and creatures that some further argument is required to show that God has a requiring reason to promote creaturely welfare. A simple appeal to intrinsic or non-intrinsic value, therefore, cannot be said to provide such as reason.

Given that one cannot appeal to the main normative ethical theories to explain why God has requiring reasons to promote creaturely welfare, and given that appeal to the intrinsic or non-

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[282] ibid.

[283] ibid.

[284] ibid. p. 96.

intrinsic value of creatures is no more successful in this regard, Murphy concludes that God cannot be said to have requiring reasons to promote the welfare of creatures. I think Murphy's conclusions in this section are correct. Accordingly, I do not think that such appeals can be used to construct a satisfactory conception of God's goodness in which He acts in accordance with the norms of morality.

6.3 Love Motivations

In this section I will examine Murphy's case for supposing that love cannot be a generator of reasons for God to promote creaturely welfare. Murphy considers whether love could be the source of reasons to promote creaturely welfare that go beyond what is provided simply by the value of creatures. On this view, God is rationally necessitated to respond in a certain way to the value of creatures, where this is a consequence of God being loving: God is loving and it is this that gives Him reason to promote the welfare of creatures and act in accordance with the norms of morality. To again note, this is not the view that God treats reasons to promote the welfare of creatures as overriding when they are in fact not, but rather the view that love does indeed give reasons.

Murphy considers two accounts on which God's love can be said to be a generator of reasons to promote creaturely welfare: a reasons-prior account and a reasons-posterior account. On the posterior account, God's love for creatures, why He acts beyond what is purely rationally necessitated by the welfare of creatures, is 'explanatorily posterior to God being loving.'[285] God just is perfectly loving, and this generates reason to love creatures. On the reasons-prior account, God's loving creatures is due to some reason, such as the value of creatures or some relationship relationship that God bears to creatures.

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[285] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 34.

Murphy does not think that the reasons-posterior account is tenable. Murphy rejects that love can be a generator of reasons for acting in love towards the beloved: rather, he argues, love must be based upon reasons to love the beloved.

Murphy considers a challenge to this proposal: one might appeal to the love that a parent has for his child as an example of love that generates reasons; this is to say, that a parent has reason to promote the welfare and look after his child that goes beyond the reasons to do this qua helpless child, and these reasons are due to the love that the parent has for his child.

Murphy dismisses this example as mistaken. He argues it is not the love the parent has for the child that is relevant in this scenario but the relationship that the parent bears to the child, that is, being the child's parent.[286] Here, the relationship between the parent and child is what explains the parent loving the child. This reason generates the love. Detach these relationship features from the fact of the parent loving the child, and the reason to love and thus promote the welfare of the child is removed, claims Murphy. Having a parent-child relationship gives *reason* to love the child, which in turn, then gives reason to promote the child's wellbeing. And these reasons do not extend beyond what is normally rationally required. In sum, the value one has in virtue of being a child of said parent generates the parent's reason to love and promote the child's welfare. Thus, love in this case does not of itself generate a reason to promote the interests of the child, but rather the parent-child relation is what gives reason to love and thereby to promote the interests of the child.[287]

I am inclined to agree with Murphy regarding love being a generator of reasons. Thus, even if it could be proved that God is essentially loving, this would not of itself generate reasons for God to promote the welfare of creatures. Therefore, a simple appeal to God's love, without further augmentation for why there is reason for God to love creatures, will not suffice for a satisfactory

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[286] For discussion on this position see N. Kolodny, 'Love as Valuing a Relationship', *Philosophical Review,* vol. 112, no. 2, pp. 135-189; and also A. Pruss, *One Body: An Essay in Christian Sexual Ethics,* University of Notre Dame Press, 2012, p. 16.

[287] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 31.

conception of God's goodness. I now turn to examine Murphy's rejection of the reasons-prior account of why love generates reason to promote creaturely welfare.[288]

Murphy has argued that love does not generate reasons but rather is based upon reasons, e.g. the parent-child relationship a parent has with their child. Now, there is a similar relationship that God has in relation to us – the *creator of* relation. Perhaps, then, considers Murphy, this could be a reason for God to love us and promote our welfare, which He would not have if this relation did not exist. The question, then, is whether the *creation of* relationship necessitates God to love and have reasons to promote the welfare of creatures. Murphy argues that it does not and that the parent-child relationship cannot serve as an analogue for the relationship between God and us. This is because there exists an equality and relational aspect to the relationship between parent and child that does not exist in the relationship between God and man. The relationship between a parent and child is a human to human relationship. Thus, what does the explanatory work when we consider the reasons a parent has to love their child is their being a *human creator of another human.* It is this that is relevant and which brings with it certain duties and gives reason to love. By contrast, the *creator of* relation alone does not necessitate that God love what He has created. This can be illustrated with the following two examples. The first one belongs to Murphy.

Suppose that an artist creates a work of art and puts it in a museum. Unfortunately, the museum catches fire. The artist realises that he has time to save only one artwork in the museum, and can choose whether to save his own or another artist's artwork. Murphy notes that the story where the artist saves his own work over another's work, and the story where he decides to save another's work over his own are equally impressive; one does not seem to be mandated more than the other, supposing that artworks are equal in value, viz. they are of the same artistic quality. There does not

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[288] Murphy also considers whether God just is loving and He loves without reason. However, Murphy dismisses this out of hand on the basis that it entails that God acts irrationally and thereby, non-freely. As mentioned, Murphy believes that God must act freely and this means rationally. To be moved by non-rational considerations is to contradict the perfect sovereignty and freedom of God. (ibid., p. 29) – I agree with Murphy's point here.

seem to be any imperative or pressing reason for the artist to save his own work from the mere fact that he stands in a *creator of* relation to it.[289]

The second illustration is one that we touched on earlier (5.3). It is not irrational to act 'evilly' towards one's creation. Suppose a boy builds a tower out of LEGO bricks for the sheer joy of knocking it down with his toy bulldozer. The boy's action here does not seem to be any more irrational than that of a boy who cherishes everything he builds out of LEGO bricks such that he does all he can to try and preserve his buildings as long as possible.

Of course, there is a disanalogy between these two cases and God's creation of us, but the point is that a parent's love for their children is not necessitated by the creator relationship *alone*. So, God's creator relationship to us alone does not rationally necessitate that He love us. I think Murphy is right regarding God's creator of relation alone not necessitating God promoting our welfare.

Someone might argue that the fact that both God and man are rational necessitates that God love the human beings He has created. However, this is just another example of the Kantian anti-arbitrariness principle rejected above (6.2). While it is true that both God and man are rational, it is also true that He is perfectly rational, self-subsisting, and uncreated. This vast ontological difference between God and man is not insignificant; this gulf that exists between God and finite beings is such that it blocks the charge that it would be irrational for God to love Himself and not love others; after all, God could value Himself due to His *perfect* rationality and not just because He is a rational being.

Murphy thus concludes that love cannot be said to generate reasons as to why God ought to promote the welfare of creatures. I disagree with Murphy. I think that God's love is a generator of reasons for why He seeks to promote the welfare of creatures. However, the reason for this love is not anything suggested above, such as God's creator of relationship with creatures, or because the

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[289] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 33.

value of creatures requires God to love them. Rather, as I have indicated, I will argue that it is God's love of Himself that generates reason for Him to love creatures. (Chapter 7)

I now turn to address Murphy's conception of God's goodness, according to which God is said to have not requiring but only justifying reasons to promote the welfare of creatures. I will argue that Murphy's conception of God's goodness in this regard is unsatisfactory.

6.4 Justifying and Requiring Reasons in Respect to Creaturely Welfare

Murphy has concluded that God lacks a binding reason to promote the welfare of creatures, and, therefore, that He would not be irrational if He did not promote their welfare, contrary to human morality. It might, therefore, be thought, that God could intend harm to creatures or be indifferent to creaturely welfare. Howbeit, Murphy does not think it possible that God would intend harm to creatures. Nor does he think that God is indifferent to the welfare of creatures – rather, he believes that God has chosen to promote creatures' welfare, despite not being necessitated to do so. To establish this argument, Murphy introduces two important positions: the first, already introduced (6.1) and which I state again here, between requiring and justifying reasons:

1) Requiring Reason df. = A requiring reason is a reason that one is required to act upon on pain of irrationality. Thus, if I have a requiring reason to do *x*, but fail to do *x*, then I am acting irrationally.

2) Justifying Reason df. = A justifying reason is a reason that one is not required to act upon on pain of irrationality, but which nonetheless would be rational to do. Thus, if I have a justifying reason to do *x*, but fail to do *x*, then I am not acting irrationally, even if I have no reason not to act on it.

The second distinction is between acting so as to 'respect' *x* and acting so as to 'promote' *x*. Murphy defines these terms as follows:

> Respect df. = To respect something is simply to not wish it harm or destruction, to avoid unnecessarily destroying or harming the thing; for instance, I might respect the grass of my college quad by not walking across it.
>
> Promote df. = To promote something is to aim to promote its welfare. Thus, if I were to promote my college quad, I might go out and water it.[290]

Murphy's thesis is that God only has requiring reasons to respect rational creatures: this is to say, He must of rational necessity not intend harm or destruction to creatures. The reason being, argues Murphy, is that if God were to intend harm, He would have evil amongst the success conditions of His agency, which is unbefitting of the agency of an Anselmian being. What God does not have are requiring reasons to promote the welfare of rational creatures; since as we have seen, the usual reasons one has to promote the welfare of others are not applicable in the divine case. However, God does have justifying reasons to promote the welfare of creatures. Murphy summarises his case as follows:

> Here, then, is the argument that the Anselmian being has requiring reasons not to intend evil. The Anselmian being has decisive requiring reasons not to exhibit agency worse than that being might exhibit. In the absence of considerations that would justify it, one's agency is made worse by having evils among the success conditions for one's action. But by intending evil, either as an end or as a means, evil's [sic] become part of the success conditions for one's action: one's

[290] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* pp. 58-59.

> agency is made successful by evils coming to obtain as a result of one's action. The Anselmian being must, then, have decisive requiring reasons not to intend evil in the absence of considerations that would justify so intending. But if one has decisive requiring reasons not to intend evil in the absence of considerations that would justify so intending, then one has requiring reasons not to intend evil. For to have a requiring reason to perform some action is to have a reason that would be decisive in favor of that action in the absence of relevant counter-considerations.[291]

Murphy further writes that for God, there are no 'considerations that would justify having evil amongst its success conditions' and that 'the intending of evil is incompatible with the absolute perfection of the Anselmian being and that no creaturely good could justify it.'[292] Murphy writes:

> It seems to me that there is a strong case simply in terms of the absolute perfection of the agency of the Anselmian being that the Anselmian being must have decisive reason not to intend evil… it seems to me that any being who goes for evil—any being who commits to the bringing about of evil, whether as an end or as a means, so that that being's success as an agent is constituted by privation and loss—has introduced a limitation into its agency, and thus would not count as an absolutely perfect being.[293]

Murphy argues that while intending evil for a greater good might be justifiable for non-Anselmian beings, it would be unfitting for the Anselmian being to intend evil, even for 'justifiable' reasons for promoting the greater good. Murphy claims this is similar to the traditional view that it is justifiable

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[291] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 98.

[292] ibid., p. 99.

[293] ibid., p. 99.

for some to go to war but unfitting for clerics and priests to do so. Relatedly it would be unfitting for God to intend evil as a means or an end even if justifiable for some creatures.[294]

Murphy also argues that God cannot be said to aim at evil because God would not create human beings just for the sake of inflicting pain or some other evil on them, as such would be a pointless action and thus irrational. Given God is perfectly rational, He does not actively aim at evil. Murphy writes:

> For one thing, creating all those people simply to make them suffer would be pointless, and God does not act pointlessly. While I think that God is not subject to moral evaluation, God is a rational agent, and rational agents act for good reasons; and to create beings simply to have them suffer is to act for no good reason at all. That there are no moral constraints on divine action does not mean that there are no ways that a perfect being might be unwilling to act.[295]

Murphy's argument to establish that God has justifying reasons to promote the welfare of creatures is as follows. We know that God does act to promote creaturely welfare. We know this from the Scriptures and the fact that it is at least possible that God could have provided a lesser level of creaturely welfare than He currently has. This means that God must have at least a justifying reason to do so because as a rational being He never does something without a reason.[296]

6.5 Statement of Disagreement

As said, I do not accept the above account of the nature of God's goodness. In this section, I lay out my criticisms of it. The first problem with Murphy's account is that if God only has justifying reasons to promote creaturely welfare, then the theist cannot have full confidence that God is

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[294] ibid., p. 100.

[295] Murphy, 'The Perfect Goodness of God', p. 241.

[296] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, p. 69.

aiming to promote his welfare in the face of any type of difficulty or suffering he might encounter; he cannot say in the face of suffering and hardship that despite the evil being suffered, he knows God cares for him and that God is not indifferent to it. Even if the Scriptures are appealed to to demonstrate that God has chosen or deliberated to be loving, confidence that God would care for *every* type of suffering that the theist might suffer is diminished; perhaps this particular circumstance that the theist is facing is one that God has justifying reasons to care about, but has elected even so not to care about. Thus, on Murphy's account, one is faced with the terribly frightening possibility that God might be indifferent to some of the concerns of His creatures. This weakens the confidence that theists can have in God during times of suffering. It was for this reason that I introduced as two desiderata for a theory of the divine goodness that God's goodness be moral goodness, and that God be necessarily and maximally good towards His creatures in this sense (0.2).

Murphy, as I have shown, argues that philosophically, one can only show that God has justifying reasons to promote the welfare of creatures – which is to say that He cannot be guaranteed to promote the welfare of creatures. Murphy argues that God has committed Himself to promoting the welfare of His creatures to a certain extent, such that God cannot be said to be completely indifferent to the welfare and cares of His creatures, and so that it makes rational sense to align oneself with God for the achievement of one's fulfilment and well being.[297] However, Murphy argues that God's love for mankind does not entail that God wishes to maximise the welfare of His creatures or is concerned with every setback that might be faced by a creature. Murphy writes: 'God could fail to prevent setbacks to our well-being, without having reason to',[298] so that the extent to which God shows divine love to us is a matter of discretion, something 'God settles by free choice.'[299]

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[297] ibid., p. 197

[298] ibid.

[299] ibid.

Thus, on Murphy's account, while a theist might have a general apprehension that God loves him, he can never be certain (excluding the case where he is told by direct revelation) that for any particular trouble he is facing that God cares about it. And thus, the hope and confidence that the theist might have is weakened. One can very well imagine the theist thinking that perhaps God does not care about him that much, or everything is hopeless as God's love may not extend to cover all his troubles, etc.

This suggestion that, on Murphy's account, the theist is justified in feeling uncertainty over any particular trouble he might face is confirmed by Murphy's response to Draper's evidential problem of evil. I turn to examine Murphy's response to Draper now, and show how his account generates an inadequate reply to it.

Unlike logical problems of evil, which attempt to demonstrate a logical inconsistency between the existence of evil and God, evidential problems of evil proceed by trying to demonstrate that the existence of evil makes the existence of God less likely, either because the probability that a justification exists for why God would allow evil is low or because a rival thesis to the God-exists thesis is much more likely given the existence of evil. The latter type of the Evidential Problem of Evil is the one propounded by Draper.

Draper considers two rival hypotheses. The first is that there exists a divine omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good creator of the universe. The second is that 'neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by a nonhuman person.'[300] Draper asks one to compare the two hypotheses and consider which would be more likely when observing the amount of biological useful pain and pleasure (P) in the world (O1) experienced by moral beings. Draper believes that the hypothesis of indifference (HI), the second hypothesis, is more likely than the theistic hypothesis when this comparison is made. Draper explains below why he thinks this is the case:

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[300] Draper, P., 'Pain and Pleasure', p. 332.

> HI entails that, if pain and pleasure exist, then they are not the result of malevolent or benevolent actions performed by nonhuman persons. So on HI, the moral difference between pain and pleasure and other parts of organic systems gives us no antecedent reason to believe that pain and pleasure will not play the same biological role that other parts of organic systems play. Indeed, a biological explanation of pain and pleasure is just the sort of explanation that one would expect on HI. But theism entails that God is responsible for the existence of any pain and pleasure in the world. Since God is morally perfect, He would have good moral reasons for producing pleasure even if it is never biologically useful, and He would not permit pain unless He had not just a biological reason, but also a morally sufficient reason to do so. And since God is omnipotent and omniscient, He could create goal-directed organic systems (including humans) without biologically useful pain and pleasure. So theism entails both that God does not need biologically useful pain and pleasure to produce human goal-directed systems and that, if human pain and pleasure exist, then God had good moral reasons for producing them, reasons that for all we know antecedently, might very well be inconsistent with pain and pleasure systematically contributing to the biological goals of human organisms. Therefore, we would have much less reason on theism than on HI to be surprised if it turned out that human pain and pleasure differed from other parts of organic systems by not systematically contributing to the biological goals of those systems. Hence, since O1 reports that the pain and pleasure experienced by humans (who are moral agents) do contribute in this way, P(O1/HI) is much greater than P(O1/theism).[301]

Draper further thinks that it would be more unlikely on the theistic hypothesis than on HI that there would be pain experienced by non-sentient/non-moral beings. God would have extra reason to

[301] ibid., pp. 336-37.

exclude pain in non-sentient beings, for pain cannot even serve a moral function in these cases. And even more unlikely on theism than HI would be non-moral pains and pains that do not serve a useful biological purpose. Thus, when one observes the facts regarding pain and pleasure in the world, and sees that there are 'useless' pains with no biological or moral purpose, one finds that these facts are much more probable, argues Draper, on HI than on theism.[302]

Murphy, however, argues that his model of God's goodness is not vulnerable to Draper's attack on theism. For a start, as seen, Murphy believes that (contrary to Draper's assumption) God is not by nature perfectly morally good or maximally loving towards his creatures. Even the ethics ascribed to God by Murphy do not fall foul of Draper's criticism. This is because Draper thinks that God would have requiring reasons to eliminate intrinsic badness. Thus, for Draper, the presence of intrinsic badness, in the absence of clear reasons why God might allow it, counts against theism. HI, however, does not have these commitments. But Murphy's account shares with the HI the denial that there is a being with the power to do something about pain and pleasure who has *requiring reasons* to do something about it. Thus, Murphy can say, 'Any manoeuvre that Draper makes to hold that the hypothesis of indifference has an easier time with the distribution of pain that relies on the requiring-reason giving character of pain is going to be unsuccessful.'[303] But does not the fact that that God has justifying reasons to promote the welfare of His creatures raises the probability on theism that God would do something about pain and suffering and enable Draper to revive his argument? Murphy does not think so. He reasons:

> It does not allow Draper to maintain the form of his earlier conclusion, which is that the observed distribution of pleasure and pain is *much more probable* on the hypothesis of indifference than on the Anselmian thesis… For it seems to me that the probability of this

[302] ibid., p. 337.

[303] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 109.

> distribution of pains is just *inscrutable* given my account of the Anselmian's being's ethics. Given that whether to act on these reasons is, by hypothesis, not required by rationality, and nothing in the Anselmian's being's nature disposes that being to act on that reason or not, we have no basis at all for making an assessment on the extent to which the Anselmian will take the pleasures and pains of creatures as reasons to promote their obtaining or their not obtaining.[304]

The key point here is that if God only has justifying reasons to prevent setbacks to creaturely well being, then there is no fact of the matter about how likely it is that God would permit a certain distribution of pain and suffering. Thus, the probability that God would prevent pain in the world is unknowable. Murphy writes:

> My claim is not simply that we have no basis to affirm any particular probability that some evil would exist given the Anselmian being's existence, though there may be some such probability to detect. It claims, rather, that there is no such probability to detect. As the features of the created world are a matter of divine discretion, there are no such reasons that so much as dispose, however mildly, the Anselmian being to create one way or another.[305]

I find this conclusion to be shocking. And I think every theist should reject this conclusion because it would lead to a radical loss of confidence in God for the theist. What these claims amount to is the idea that for any particular trouble the theist might be facing, he can have no more confidence that this trouble will be resolved than he would have if he held to the truth of H1. Murphy's claims are tantamount to saying that the theist can have no confidence in God, for any pain experienced or

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[304] ibid.

[305] ibid., p. 109.

pleasure lacked might be a pain or pleasure that God in His discretion has chosen not to be concerned with.

My disagreement with Murphy, however, goes further than just my concern that it removes confidence for the theist. There are Scriptural and philosophical reasons to question Murphy's thesis. I will address both my Scriptural and philosophical qualms now.

Concerning the Scriptures, it might be thought that they demonstrate that God is essentially loving and thus that He essentially promotes the welfare of His creatures. The Scriptures, after all, are clear that God is love (1 Jn 4.8). Murphy imagines that an objector might well argue that one cannot arrive at the divine perfections through philosophical reflection alone, and that one, rather, needs to rely on revealed truth found in the Scriptures; and given that the Scriptures claim God is love, one should accept love as a divine perfection. Murphy replies that the Scriptures' claim that God is love, loving, etc. does not commit one to the view that God is metaphysically *necessarily* loving, only that God is loving, leaving open the view that God might only be contingently loving. Murphy says that while the Scriptures suggest that being loving is a salient feature of God, which might lead one to believe that being loving must be part of the divine essence, the Scriptures also suggest that God's status as creator is a central and salient feature; yet, few argue that God is *necessarily* a creator and that being a creator is an essential part of the divine essence; God creates contingently. Murphy observes:

> From our point of view as creatures, God's being creator looms large (!), though it is not necessary that God creates. Similarly, from our point of view as creatures beloved by God, God's being loving may similarly loom large, even if it is not necessary that God is loving. It thus seems implausible to me to hold that just because some feature is prominently displayed in

> Scripture as a central, salient feature of God, that feature must be a necessary feature of God and hence a divine perfection.[306]

I disagree with Murphy's claim that the Scriptures do not commit one to the position that God is necessarily and essentially loving towards His creation. For the Scriptures suggests not just that God is loving but that God is love itself (1 Jn 4.8). God is identified with love, such that it is part of who He is, part of His very being. As seen, Murphy has argued that God being a creator is just as salient a feature of God in the Scriptures as God being loving, and since the majority of theologians take it that God is not necessarily a creator, then the fact that it is a salient feature in the Scriptures that God is love and loving does not entail that God is necessarily loving. However, Murphy's comparison is mistaken. While being a creator certainly is a salient aspect of God in the Scriptures, the Scriptures do not identify God with 'creatorness' as they do with love or lovingness. Contrary to Murphy, then, I do not think a parallel can be drawn between God as creator, which is something God is in virtue of His voluntarily act of creation, and God as love, which is essential to His very being such that He is to be identified with love itself.

It might be asked how God can be loving when God's act of creating is voluntary, for to love, an objector might aver, is for there to be something additional to God for Him to love; thus, if God creates voluntarily, then He must only love voluntarily, love not being essential to Him. However, while it is true that there has to be an object of love, it has traditionally been held that God is essentially loving within the confines of the intra-Trinitarian relationship – this is to say that each of the persons of the Trinity are involved in a relationship of *maximal* love which are essential to them. Thus, God still loves sans creation. Murphy himself recognises this, but consigns such a recognition to a footnote in which he writes,

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[306] ibid., p. 44.

> It is important to note that a reading of the identification of God with love that has been central to Christian thought is just that God is a Trinity of persons, necessarily mutually loving. This mutual love *is* maximal, in that these Persons are fully loveable and their good complete, so that their love must consist in appreciating and endorsing each other's compete goodness. But this does not, without further premises, entail anything about the Trinity's relation of love to creatures.[307]

When I lay out my own position in Chapter 7 I will establish these further premisses that entail God's love towards His creatures, showing that this essential love of God is not confined to God's intra-Trinitarian love but extends to all of His creatures.

Regarding Murphy's philosophical arguments, I disagree with him in the following ways. First, I am not convinced that Murphy's distinction between requiring and justifying reasons can hold. Alternative theories exist and Murphy does not give much of a defence of this thesis. A better defence is needed, especially since Murphy's model is rivalled by a more popular understanding in which reasons are characterised by degrees of strength, with rationality requiring one to perform the action favoured by the strongest set of reasons.[308]

Second, it is unclear how Murphy's account can draw a fine distinction between God not intending evil as an end and God being indifferent to creatures by failing to promote their welfare. Murphy has argued that it is contradictory to the holiness of God for Him to have evil as an end for His actions and this is why God has a requiring reason to 'respect' His creatures by not directly acting so as to cause them harm or do evil towards them. But it is unclear why it would not *also* be

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[307] ibid., p. 44, fn 28.

[308] For a critical review in defence of the 'traditional idea that reasons have only one primitive normative force' (p. 489) against J. Gert's distinction between requiring and justifying reasons, see J. Suikkanen, 'Normativity of Reasons: A Critical Notice of Joshua Gert's Brute Rationality', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies,* vol. 12, no. 4, 2012, pp. 480-493. See also T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other,* Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 50; and, J. Dancy, *Practical Reality,* Oxford, University Press, 2002, ch. 1.

contradictory to the holiness of God for Him to fail to intend to promote the welfare of His creatures. After all, when surveying figures one considers to be holy, say, Mother Teresa, one takes into account not only the fact that they did not intend evil, but also that they made an active effort to prevent harm and evil. Had Mother Teresa done no good but remained at home completely passive, then it is doubtful she would be ascribed the holiness that people attribute to her.

Moreover, given God's omniscience, God would not only not be doing good, but He would be actively observing evil and not doing anything about it. Now, we would say that a human person who looks on indifferently at an evil act and does nothing to help would be evil and not good. Now, it is true that man is uncontroversially morally bound to act whereas it is controversial that God is bound to act, but nevertheless it is hard to see why God watching impassively and unmoved should not be seen as evil. Indeed, the Scriptures are clear that God is grieved and moved by evil. (Gen. 6.5-7; Prov. 6.16-19; Ps 5.4-5; Ps 11.5; Zech. 8.17, etc.)

Part of the reason why Murphy thinks one can draw a line between God not intending evil and His acting with indifference to the welfare of His creatures is because of the distinction he makes between evil intended and evil merely foreseen. Murphy argues that it is possible to intend to do an action without intending the foreseen evil that will result from that action. For example, Smith intends to deliver an oratorial speech to bring honour to his family, despite suffering from a stutter. He foresees that if he attempts this speech, he will stutter his way through. Howbeit, it would be odd, argues Murphy, to think that Smith intends to stutter.[309]

Murphy notes that this distinction can be seen in that intention and foresight are different mental states and thus conceptually distinct. Foresight is a kind of belief, namely, 'If I do *p*, then *x* will occur', whereas intention is a desire, namely, 'I wish for *x* to occur'. Murphy notes that belief and desire have different 'directions of fit.' With belief, one changes their belief to fit with the facts of the world. If I believe *q*, and I learn that not *q*, but rather *p*, then I am, if I am to be rational, required

[309] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 88.

to change my belief to *p* and reject *q*. Intention is different. With intention, one seeks to make the world fit with their desire. If I desire *p*, but not-*p* is the case, I will deliberate and act to revise the world so that *p*. A good test, argues Murphy, to see if a consequence *p* of an action *x* is merely foreseen or whether it is intended is to run a counterfactual test and ask whether one would would still do *x* if *p* did not occur. If one would not do *x* if *p* would not occur, then *p* is an intended outcome; if one would do *x* if *p* would not occur, then it is merely foreseen.[310] Murphy thinks it is unbefitting for God to intend evil either as a means or as an end of an action. Murphy does not, however, think it is unbefitting or detrimental to the holiness of God if he performs an action for which there is foreseen evil.

But I struggle to see how one's holiness can make one averse to evil such that one would not aim at it, but not be moved to also eliminate evil, or be indifferent to foreseen evils resulting from one's actions. One would think that God would not only act so that no end aimed at is evil, but also seek to eliminate evil through his actions. Murphy argues that God not intending to promote the welfare of creatures concerns His sovereignty – God is free not to promote the welfare of His creatures; whereas, not intending evil has to do with His holiness: it is unbefitting for God to intend evil.[311] Murphy writes: 'It is commonly accepted that there is something extra shady about intending evil as an end.'[312] To quote Murphy again:

> The reason for not intending evil is the absolute goodness of the Anselmian being—we might think of this as the holiness of the Anselmian being, that it is to remain untouched by anything evil.[313]

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[310] ibid., p. 88.

[311] ibid., p. 102.

[312] ibid., p. 96.

[313] ibid., p. 100.

In further support of his evil intended and evil merely foreseen distinction, Murphy cites Thomas Nagel:

> The difference [between intending evil and acting with mere foresight of evil] is that action intentionally aimed at a goal is guided by that goal. Whether the goal is an end in itself or only a means, action aimed at it must follow it and be prepared to adjust its pursuit if detected by altered circumstances—whereas an act that merely produces an act does not follow it, is not guided by it, even if the act is foreseen .... But the essence of evil is that it should repel us. If something is evil, our actions should be guided, if they are guided by it at all, toward its elimination rather than toward its maintenance. That is what evil means. So when we aim at evil we are swimming against the normative current.[314]

But if this is the case, and evil 'should repel' us (and God), then surely any act that is performed by God should produce as little evil as is possible. If God can choose to act to bring about some desired goal *a*, and He can bring it about via route *b* or *c*, but route *b* will have as an unintended consequence a great amount of evil, while route *c* will have as an unintended consequence far fewer cases of evil, then surely, other things being equal, if God was holy and repelled by evil, it would be unfitting for Him to choose the path that allowed a great amount of evil. Ergo, God should not allow there to be gratuitous evil if He is to be called holy. Furthermore, if God's holiness really makes Him repelled by evil, then He should be active in eliminating evil, especially when He has the power to do so without inconvenience, unless there exist strong reasons to act otherwise – for example, when evils are required for some greater good. Thus, God should be orientated towards the elimination of evil.

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[314] T. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere,* Oxford, University Press, 1986, pp. 181-2. Cited in Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 97.

The third reason why Murphy's account is insufficient is that one can question his premiss that it would be unfitting to God's holiness to intend evil. Murphy has said that 'it is commonly accepted that there is something extra shady about intending evil as an end.'[315] Indeed, but this is only the case because one also has an obligation to promote the welfare of fellow creatures and to act in accordance with moral norms. Murphy, howbeit, has argued that God lacks requiring reasons to promote the welfare of creatures and act in accordance with moral norms. Given this, it becomes difficult to see why it is problematic and unbefitting of His holiness if God chooses to have evil, say creaturely harms, as a success condition for an end of one of His actions. God has no requiring reason to promote the welfare of His creatures, nor shares any of the reasons for why it is reasonable for humans to act morally. Thus, it should not be problematic if God causes evil. Surely, doing *x* is only detrimental to the holiness, this is to say perfection, of a thing if doing *x* is in some way a defect in the thing in question. Yet, if God does not have requiring reasons under standard morality, then His action is not defective if He intends evil. Acting on this basis would not even be considered an evil act on the position of evil defended in this thesis (Chapter 3), for something is only evil if it falls short of its perfection. In sum, if God does not have requiring reasons to promote the welfare of creatures, then it cannot be a lack of perfection for God to fail to promote His creatures' welfare or even intend evil for them; hence, it cannot count as a detriment to the holiness of God on Murphy's position. For these reasons, Murphy's argument fails.

6.6 God and the Occurrence of Sin

I have argued that there are inconsistencies in Murphy's account to demonstrate that God does not intend evil but merely foresees it. In addition to these inconsistencies, there is a possible Scriptural challenge to Murphy's account: this is that an argument can be made that God does intend that the evil act of sin occur, contra Murphy that God cannot intend evil or have evil as a success condition

[315] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 96.

for an action, even if for some greater good. If God can indeed intend evil, then this poses a problem for Murphy's account. For since on Murphy's account it cannot be guaranteed that God is aiming to maximally promote the welfare of creatures, if God can indeed intend evil, it may be the case that God intends evil for reasons unrelated to the good of creatures and thus that the evil is gratuitous. This problem would not arise on my own account, since I will argue that God, having created, necessarily and maximally loves all things and thus intends to promote their welfare. Any evil that God does intend (if God does indeed intend evil), He intends for the greater good and in accordance with His maximal love and desire to promote creatures' welfare. I now turn to examine the Scriptural argument that God intends that sin occur as a potential challenge to Murphy's position.

Note, in saying that God intends sin occur, this is not to say that God does moral wrong or Himself sins, but rather that He *intends* that the evil of sin occur. This view has recently been defended in Matthew J. Hart's and Daniel J. Hill's paper, 'Does God Intend that Sin Occur? We Affirm.' and their book '*Does God Intend that Sin Occur?'*[316] Hart and Hill state that God does not merely foresee that evil will occur, but intends it as an end. Hart and Hill believe that there are numerous passages in the Scriptures that satisfy one of the following two conditions:

> (P) God chooses to bring it about that a [sin] occur in order that a [state of affairs] should obtain.[317]

> (Q) God brings it about that a [state of affairs] obtain in order that a [sin] should occur.[318]

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[316] M. J. Hart and D. J. Hill, 'Does God Intend that Sin Occur? We Affirm', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 143-171, 2020, and *Does God Intend that Sin Occur?,* Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

[317] Hart and Hill also suggest that often those propositions satisfying P also satisfy (P*): (P*) God chooses to bring it about that a [sin] occur in order that a [state of affairs that can obtain only in virtue of the occurrence of the sin] should obtain. P* is stronger than P and does not allow for a substratum move that attempts to avoid the deriving of the propositions P and Q that I will examine later. (Hart and Hill, 'Sin Occur? We Affirm', p. 156.)

[318] ibid., p. 155.

I will consider one of these Scripture passages now:

Exodus 4:21:

> And the Lord said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. (Ex. 4.21)

Hart and Hill note that this text seems to be a satisfaction of Q.[319] God wants Pharaoh to let His people go. Pharaoh does not let them go, and this is, of course, sinful. And this refusal was brought about by God bringing about the state of affairs of hardening Pharaoh's heart. Later in the passage, we are told that the reason Pharaoh's heart was hardened was so that he would refuse Moses' request to let God's people go and that God's power would be shown, and God's name declared throughout the earth when He punishes Pharaoh:

> And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had spoken unto Moses. And the Lord said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up,

[319] ibid. 157.

for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. (Ex. 9.12-16)

From this, one can, as Hart and Hill note, derive the following:

(a) God chose to bring it about that Pharaoh would sinfully refuse to let the people go, in order that God might give a greater demonstration of his power in plagues and in destruction of the Egyptians.[320]

Thus, contra Murphy, there is a case in which God intends as an end that evil occur, namely, that Pharaoh refuses to let His people go, so that He may punish Pharaoh.

An example of a Scripture passage that satisfies (P) is as follows:

1 Samuel 2:22-25 (ESV)

Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, 'Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. [...]' But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.

[320] ibid., p. 158.

Hill and Hart say:

> Here, Eli counsels his sons to abandon their wickedness, but the Lord, desiring to put them to death, ensures that they remain unrepentant, and therefore fit for his judgment. We therefore derive the following proposition satisfying (P):

(b) God chose to bring it about that Eli's sons sinfully refuse to heed their father's warning, in order that he might bring about their continued unrepentance.[321]

There are many other verses that can be utilised to demonstrate that God intends evil/sin to occur, contra Murphy. I refer readers to Hart and Hill's book referenced above for some more examples.

Hart and Hill examine two challenges to their view that one can arrive at (P) or (Q) from the Scriptures. The first is what is called Kamm's triple effect strategy, which derives from the work of Frances Kamm.[322] Kamm attempts to show that the following principle is false:

> (M) If one intends to bring about the occurrence of *x*, and one brings about the occurrence of *y*, knowing that *y* is necessary… for the occurrence of *x*, then one intends to bring about the occurrence of *y*.[323]

Kamm attempts to show that this principle is false by offering a counter-example: Suppose that I wish to host a party, in order that my friends and I may have some fun. However, I see that in hosting the party there will be a mess, and this will need clearing up; the fun would thus not last

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[321] Hart and Hill, *Does God Intend that Sin Occur?* 2022, p. 67.

[322] F. Kamm, *Intricate Ethics: Rights, Responsibilities, and Permissible Harm,* Oxford, University Press, 2007, pp. 91-127.

[323] Hart and Hill, 'Does God Intend that Sin Occur?', p. 149.

long. This acts as a defeater for my intention to host a party. I soon realise, however, that given the good kindness of my friends, they will help clear up after the party. This acts as a defeater for my defeater; so, I host the party after all. I intend to host the party, and the fact of my friends feeling guilty and wishing to help clean up is necessary for me to intend to host the party. However, contra principle (M), my intention can merely be to host a party and not that my friends feel obliged to clean up; rather, I merely *foresee* that they will feel indebted and be obliged to clear up. Thus, one could say that I invited them not *in order that* they feel obliged to clean up, but *because* they will, out of their feeling of indebtedness. Kamm says one must 'distinguish between doing something in order (or intending) to bring about something else and doing something because of something else that will thus be brought about.'[324]

Hart and Hill comment that an opponent of the 'God intends sin occur' thesis might use the '*in order that*' and acting '*because of*' distinction to read all Scriptures verses that seem to suggest Q to instead suggest the weaker thesis:

(Q') God chooses to bring it about that a [state of affairs] obtain because a [sin] will occur.

Thus, (Q) need not obtain, but only (Q'). Similarly, instead of affirming (P), it might be argued by an opponent that we should only affirm (P'): God does something *because* a sin will occur. Again, this latter reading does not suggest that God intends a sin occur.[325]

The second challenge to the position that God intends the evil of sin to occur is what is called the substratum strategy. The substratum strategy says, that like in crimes judged by the law, sins

[324] ibid.

[325] Hart and Hill, 'Does God Intend that Sin Occur?', p. 150.

involve both *actus rea* and *mens rea.* Even mental sins are understood to be complex in this way.[326] Each sin has a mental or physical aspect, called the material aspect or the 'substratum aspect', and a 'moral aspect' in virtue of which the whole is a sinful action, often called the formal element.[327]

Now, an opponent to the God-intends-that-sin-occur thesis might argue that in the above cited Scripture cases, God did not intend that the sin itself occur – this being only a foreseen consequence – but only that the substratum of the sin occur. This is the position held by Aquinas, who says:

> God is said to be the cause of a given action insofar as it is an action, and not insofar as it is deformed; not in such a way that he does the action separately from the deformity, but in such a way that he does that which is of the action in the action-together-with-its-deformity and he does not do that which is of the deformity: since even though in a given effect many things are inseparably conjoined, it is not fitting that whatever is its cause in one aspect, should also be its cause in another aspect.[328]

Thus, when the Scriptures suggests that God intended sin, really all that this can be taken to mean is that God intended the *substratum* of the sin, and although He intends to permit the formal element of the sin, He does not intend that it occur. Thus, the objector might say, as pointed out by Hart and Hill, 'Because the substratum is not evil, and because permission of evil is also not necessarily evil, it is less problematic (although, not completely unproblematic) to suppose that God intended that they occur.'[329] Thus, Hart and Hill note that if one reads from Scripture the following:

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[326] Augustine says, 'Sin, then, is any transgression in deed, or word, or desire, of the eternal law.' (St Augustine, 'Reply to Faustus the Manichaean', xxii, 27, trans. R. Stothert, In P. Schaff (ed.), *St. Augustine: The Writings Against the Manichaeans, and Against the Donatists*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1887, p. 483); See also See Aquinas, *ST*, I-II. q.71, a.6.; and Hart and Hill, 'Does God Intend that Sin Occur?', p. 151.

[327] Hart and Hill say, 'It *is* to be noted that the *substratum is* much broader than the *actus reus*, it includes the whole of the action apart from the moral property of sinfulness.' (Hart and Hill, 'Does God Intend that Sin Occur?', p. 152.)

[328] ibid., p. 152.

[329] ibid., p. 154.

(1) God brought it about that Joseph's brothers sinfully sold him into slavery so that he would end up in Egypt. (Gen. 37.18-36)

The substratum objector will read this to say not that:

(2) God intended that Joseph's brothers sinfully sold him into slavery as a means to get him to Egypt.

But only that:

(3) God intended that Joseph's brothers made certain bodily movements as a means to get him to Egypt, and allowed them to sin in so doing.

Hart and Hill write,

> The parsing we find in (3) removes the sinfulness of the brothers' actions from God's intentions. The sinfulness of their actions wasn't necessary for the occurrence of the desired end; what was necessary was only the substratum, or part of it, that the brothers made certain bodily movements that ended up with Joseph's being in Egypt. But bodily movements in themselves are not sinful, and therefore there is no need to suppose that God intended that sin occur in order to bring about Joseph's presence in Egypt. It might therefore be thought that every proposition derived from the Scriptures to show that God intends that sin occur could be handled via this substratum strategy.[330]

[330] ibid.

However, the *substratum* strategy is at a disadvantage in that the *prima facie* reading of the Scriptures must be overlooked. Hart and Hill comment that, 'The natural reading of the Scriptures describes the occurrence of sin as the employed and intended means, and the natural reading of the Scriptures carries pro tanto force, i.e. should be favoured on that account, other things being equal.'[331] Another disadvantage is that while the substratum strategy could be used to explain away both Q and P readings, it does not work if a P* reading is shown:

> (P*) God chooses to bring it about that a [sin] occur in order that a [state of affairs that can obtain only in virtue of the occurrence of the sin] should obtain.[332]

If one briefly examines the Scripture passages above, it becomes clear that the substratum and Kamm readings are implausible, when compared with the reading in which God intends that the sin occur. Consider, for example, Exodus 4.1. An objector might argue that God merely foresaw the refusal by Pharaoh but did not intend that he sinfully refuse. But there are two problems for this reading. First, this is a case of a satisfaction of P*, because it seems that Pharaoh's refusal is integral to the plan of God. Exodus 9.16 states that God wished for Pharaoh to sin so that His 'name may be declared throughout all the earth.' through the punishment of Pharaoh. Hart and Hill say:

> But wrath and punishment are justifiable only given sin, so, given that only sin would have enabled God to make the required display of wrath or punishment, it is more natural to read a sinful refusal on Pharaoh's part as the chosen means. In other words, [(a)] is better read if interpreted as a (P*) text.[333]

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[331] ibid., p. 154.

[332] Hart and Hill, 'Does God Intend that Sin Occur?', p. 155.

[333] ibid., p. 159.

Second, as noted by Hart and Hill, 'the way in which hardening is described in the Scriptures appears always to be a hardening to sin, as a review of every instance of 'hardened' in the Scriptures would bear out.'[334] The *substratum* strategy might argue that God only intends the substratum of the sinful action, not that the sinner do it sinfully; but this would not make sense of the fact that (1) every refusal of God's command is sinful – so it is difficult to see how God can separate the *actus rea* from the *mens rea.* (2) If such a separation was possible, such that God could intend only that Pharaoh does the substratum of the sinful action, without the sinfulness, it would not cohere with the fact that God intends it such that He can punish Pharaoh, which requires the action to be sinfully done. And (3) Such is an unnatural reading of the text in relation to hardening of heart.

States of affairs that P* picks out can only obtain in virtue of the occurrence of sin. Typical examples would include mercy, punishment, or forgiveness. Each of these logically require an antecedent sin to occur. Hart and Hill argue that if God intends to bring about a state of affairs that logically requires an antecedent sin, thus satisfying P*, then it should be inferred that God intended that that sinful action, with all of its sinfulness, should occur.[335]

Concerning 1 Samuel 22-25, Hart and Hill note two ways in which an objector might read this in a way in which God does not intend that sin occur using the substratum strategy. Either, (1) God only intends that Eli's sons perform the physical action of saying 'no' (corresponding to the Hebrew equivalent) to their father's entreaty; or (2) that God did not intend anything *positive.* He only intended a mere lack as opposed to a positive omission.[336] Again, this reading is implausible, for the Scriptures are clear that the reason why He wanted the sons to not heed their father's counsel was so

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[334] Hart and Hill, *Does God Intend that Sin Occur?* 2022, p. 62. cf. Deuteronomy 2:26-30, Joshua 11:18-20,2 Kings 17:14,2 Chronicles 36:13, Nehemiah 9:16, Jeremiah 7:26, and Daniel 5:20, and, from the New Testament, Mark 8:17, Acts 19:9, Romans 9:18, and Hebrews 3:13.

[335] Hart and Hill, 'Does God Intend that Sin Occur?' p. 156.

[336] Hart and Hill show the difference between lack and omission by noting that whereas we all lack the property of heeding Eli's counsel, only his sons omitted to heed it, since an omission occurs when some duty is breached, and in contrast to us, Eli's sons had a duty to heed his counsel. (Hart and Hill, *Does God Intend that Sin Occur?* 2022, p. 68.)

they could be punished with death, but punishment requires that they had sinfully refused. This is best read as a P* text.[337]

In these two cases above, contra Murphy, evil forms part of the success conditions of God's action. If Pharaoh had not sinned, then God would not have hardened his heart, etc. And if evil is part of the success conditions of God's action, then God intends that it occurs.

Murphy has argued that cases in which God inflicts divine punishment on a group or individual do not count as God intending evil. This is because, as I have proposed too, Murphy sees evil as a deprivation of a due good; and he maintains that the wicked in being punished are deprived of a good no longer due to them. Murphy writes:

> A better option, I think, is that there is clear sense under such (retributive) justice accounts of punishment in which the good of which the party is deprived is no longer 'due' to that person, and given our characterization of evil as the absence of *due* perfection in punishment is not the intending of evil.[338]

Could Murphy's explanation demonstrate that God does not intend evil in the above passages? No. Here is why. While it may be the case that punishments God intends and inflicts are themselves not evil, the passages examined are clear that God intends that sin occur. And sin is always evil, since it is a due good to not sin.

While I am not fully convinced of Hart and Hill's thesis, it is nevertheless plausible and thus cannot be dismissed out of hand.[339] If, indeed, the Scriptures demonstrate that God can intend evil, this is to say that sin occur, then Murphy's account is placed at a disadvantage relative to accounts

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[337] Hart and Hill, *Does God Intend that Sin Occur?* 2022, p. 68.

[338] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p., 121.

[339] For a response to Hart and Hill, see C. Hughes, 'Does God Ever Intend Sins to Occur?', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* vol. 14, no. 2, 2022.

of God's goodness in which He seeks to maximally promote the welfare of creatures. This is because Murphy argues that God cannot intend evil as a goal or have evil amongst the success conditions of His actions; and he takes this position in order to assuage a worry the believer might have that if God cannot be said to necessarily promote his welfare maximally, then this might suggest that God could intend evil to befall him. On this view, this worry is assuaged because while God might not seek to promote the welfare of his creatures, and might be indifferent to their concerns or cares, he will at least not intend that harm befall them. However, if Hart and Hill's thesis proves to be correct, then Murphy cannot assuage the believer's worry, and build up his confidence in God on this basis.

On the account I will offer, if Hart and Hill are right, it may then be that God intends sin or evil to occur, but it will remain the case that God will intend sin or evil only in accordance with His goal of seeking to promote to the greatest extent possible the welfare of His creatures.

6.7 Conclusion

In sum, I have argued that Murphy's account fails on the following fronts. First, Murphy's argument leads to the frightful possibility that God might be indifferent to the welfare of His creatures, thus weakening confidence that the theist should have in God, particularly during times of trouble and conflict. Indeed, by Murphy's own admission, one can have no more confidence that a particular trouble or difficulty will be resolved on the hypothesis that the world has been created by God than on the Hypothesis of Indifference. Or to make this point in another way, Murphy has argued that the probability of gratuitous suffering is the same whether God exists or not. I have argued that this is not a view that should be entertained by Christian theists. Second, Murphy is incorrect to think that the Scriptures do not commit one to the position that God is essentially loving. Unlike God's attribute of being a creator, God is identified with 'love' itself, suggesting that it is essential to Him – the Scriptures do not identify God with 'creatorness' itself. Third, Murphy's distinction between

requiring and justifying reasons is unjustified without further argumentation, especially when faced with the more popular understanding in which reasons are characterised by degrees of strength, with rationality requiring one to perform the action favoured by the strongest set of reasons. Fourth, I do not think that Murphy can successfully draw a distinction between intending evil and merely foreseeing evil such that the holiness of God makes Him averse to intended evil and not just foreseen evil. If God finds evil repugnant, then God would not only not intend evil but seek its removal from His sight. Fifth, there is a plausible case to be made that God intends for the evil of sin to occur. If this is correct, then Murphy is wrong that God cannot have evil as an end or success condition of His actions, even for the greater good. This poses a problem for Murphy's account, since there would then be no guarantee on Murphy's position that any evil God intends is for the sake of promoting human welfare. Here, my position has an advantage relative to Murphy's, in that, on this position, if God does intend evil, since God is maximally loving towards all things, that evil would only ever be to promote the greater good in accordance with His love for all things.

Part III. Why God is Maximally Loving

In this part, I will lay out my argument for a satisfactory theory of God's goodness. I argue that God is maximally loving towards all things. This is because God maximally loves Himself, and in doing so loves the pre-existent ideas – the 'blueprints' – of everything that will come to exist, which exist in His mind as divine ideas. And in loving the divine ideas, He will love the things themselves which are the instantiation of the divine ideas. Given that to love *x* entails a desire to promote the welfare of *x* and, where possible, be in union with *x*, this allows the theist to have confidence that God will act in accordance with the norms of morality and seek to promote the welfare of creatures. There will be two chapters in this part. In the first chapter, I will lay out the argument briefly summarised above. In the second chapter, I will address objections to my argument.

7. My Own Position[340]

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the core argument of my thesis, which is that God maximally loves all things through loving Himself. To remind ourselves of the argument, I will repeat what I said in 0.4:

> My argument for why God is necessarily and maximally loving towards His creation is as follows. I argue that the only end (reason) that could have moved God to create is Himself. For if creation (something other than God) is the final end of God's act, it would indicate a want or desire in God that could only be fulfilled by creation and, therefore, His dependency on it, and thus present a challenge to God's self-sufficiency. I argue that for God to create with Himself as His own end is for God to create out of love of Himself. Thus, given that God has created, it can be concluded that God loves Himself. I further argue that God's love of Himself entails that He loves all things, since by loving Himself, God loves the pre-existent ideas of everything that will come to exist, and by extension the things themselves which are the instantiations of these ideas. This, I argue, allows us to have confidence that God will act in accordance with moral norms, but without subjecting Him to them.

To give a clearer idea of some of the premisses that this chapter seeks to establish and defend, I will lay out a more formal summary of my argument. At the end of this chapter, I will give a full, long form version of my argument. What follows is a shorter form, its purpose to give a quick bird's-eye view of the argument of the chapter. I will also present a different formulation that my argument could take. This second formulation will not be the primary argument defended in this chapter.

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[340] The argument I lay out in this chapter I first made in a very slightly different form in the following paper: P. P. Sivyer, 'What Does it Mean to Call God Good', *The Heythrop Journal,* vol. 64, no. 4, 2023, pp. 503-516.

Nevertheless, I present it as a point of comparison and as a possible alternative. My first argument can be put more formally as follows:

1. God could only create out of love of Himself.
2. God has created this world.
3. Thus, God loves Himself. (from 1 and 2)
4. For God to love Himself entails that He loves the pre-existent ideas (the divine 'blueprints') of everything that exists.
5. Thus, God loves the pre-existent ideas of everything that exists. (from 3 and 4)
6. For God to love the pre-existent ideas of everything that exists entails He loves everything which is an instantiation of these ideas.
7. There is no thing that exists (apart from God) which is not an instantiation of the divine ideas.
8. Thus, God loves all things. (from 3, 5, 6, and 7)
9. For God to love something entails He will seek to promote its welfare and where possible be in union with it.
10. God thus seeks to promote the welfare of and, where possible to be in union with, all things. (from 8 and 9)
11. For God to seek to promote the welfare of all things entails He will act in accordance with the norms of morality.
12. Thus, God can be said to act in accordance with the norms of morality. (from 10 and 11)

As said, it is possible that my argument could be formulated in a slightly different way. I explored that alternative formulation in my paper.[341] This alternative formulation takes a modal approach, and aims to prove that God is not only maximally loving towards His creation in worlds in which

[341] Sivyer, 'What Does it Mean to Call God Good?'

He has created, but that in all possible worlds, whether He creates or not, He is maximally loving. Instead of arguing from 1. *God could only create out of love of Himself.* and 2. *God has created this world.* to 3. *Thus, God loves Himself*, the modal approach aims to prove that God loves Himself in every possible world, including those in which He has chosen not to create. The modal approach appeals to God's status as the greatest possible being, and argues that for God to be the greatest possible being, it must be the case in any given possible world not only that it is logically possible for God to create, but that it is in fact possible for God to create. In any given possible world, it will be logically possible for God to create provided that there is some logically possible world where God does create. For it to be in fact possible for God to create in a given possible world, it must be the case that all the metaphysical preconditions for God to create hold in that world, and it must therefore be the case that God loves Himself in that world. Intuitively, other things being equal, a being is greater if with respect to each possible world, it is in fact possible for that being to create in that world, rather than simply logically possible for it to create in that world. If this form of the argument is taken, then it would run as follows:

1*. It will be logically possible for God to create in a given possible world if there is some possible world in which God loves Himself.

2*. It will be in fact possible, and not just logically possible, for God to create in a given possible world only if God loves Himself in that world.

3*. Other things being equal, a being is greater if with respect to each possible world, it is in fact possible for that being to create in that world, rather than simply logically possible for it to create in that world.

4*. God is the greatest possible being.

5*. Therefore, with respect to each possible world, it is in fact possible for God to create in that world.

6*. Therefore, with respect to each possible world, God loves Himself in that world.

The argument then continues as in the first formulation I gave…

4. For God to love Himself entails that He loves the pre-existent ideas (the divine 'blueprints') of everything that will come to exist…

I name the first formulation the 'a posteriori formulation', since it establishes that God loves Himself posterior to His choice to create. The second formulation, or modal approach, I name the 'a priori formulation', since it does not rely on any empirical premise (in particular, the evident truth that God has created), and instead proceeds simply by reflection on what follows from God's status as the greatest possible being. The second formulation is more ambitious, while the first is more modest. The second is more ambitious because it proceeds purely a priori, and aims to establish that God loves Himself in every possible world, rather than simply those in which He has created. While Christians are committed to saying that God loves Himself in every possible world, on account of God's Trinitarian nature, there remains a question about whether this claim can be established on philosophical grounds. If my interlocutor takes the view that the a priori argument I have sketched for the claim that God loves himself in every possible world fails, then I would direct their attention to my first, less ambitious argument. The first formulation will be the primary argument defended in this chapter, and suffices for the purposes of this thesis.[342]

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[342] It might be questioned why I do not take a more direct route by arguing as follows: God is maximally great and, therefore, maximally desirable and valuable. God, as a maximally great being, will recognise Himself as maximally desirable and valuable. God will thus maximally love Himself. The reason I do not take this route is that I think it is a weaker argument than the two presented. There may be a difficulty in proving that God is maximally loveable without avoiding circularity. Would God be loveable if He Himself is not already loving? A maximally powerful omni-malevolent being would not be maximally loveable. Moreover, it can be asked why God's value and desirability require God to love that value. Thus, in the interest of forwarding the strongest argument I can, I do not take this route. Nevertheless, having proved that God does love Himself, an appeal to His maximal greatness can demonstrate that He maximally loves Himself.

The journey this chapter takes in defending my argument is as follows. In 7.2 I argue that God must have created for a reason. I reject the position of Davies that God does not act for reasons. I instead argue that the only reason that could have moved God to have created is Himself. I will reject any other possibility as making God's satisfaction of a need, want, or desire dependent upon something other than Himself, which would question His self-sufficiency. I will argue that for God Himself to be the reason for why He created is to say that God created out of a desire to express His attributes – God created because He saw the expression of His attributes, for their own sake, as good and desirable. I will address a few concerns one might have with the idea that it is God Himself and a desire to express His attributes that moved God to create. This chapter thus sets up my defence of premiss 1 of the a posteriori argument.

In 7.3 I will argue that for God to see the expression of His attributes as good and desirable, for their own sake, is for Him to see the attributes themselves for their own sake as good and desirable. And that if He sees the attributes, which He expresses in His act of creation, as good and desirable for their own sake, He will love these attributes for their own sake. This is what it means for God to love Himself. Thus, this will establish premiss 1 of my argument.

For God to love *x* is for God to desire to promote the good of *x*. I will further state that in loving Himself in this way, God will maximally love Himself. This is because it is greater to be seen as maximally desirable to the greatest possible being than to be of a lesser value to Him. Thus, if it can be established that God loves Himself, then it should be taken that God maximally loves Himself. Finally, I will address a worry that God could not love Himself for He cannot promote the good of Himself, already being fully good.

In 7.4 I will draw upon what I have established in the previous two chapters and the metaphysical preliminaries in Part 1 to draw the conclusion that God's love for Himself, as explained above, entails that He loves us in a way that can ensure that He will seek to promote our welfare. For God to seek to promote our welfare will meet the second desideratum for a theory of

God's goodness, namely, that His goodness will be similar to human goodness and thus that it can be relied upon during times of trouble. I will show how each of the premisses of my argument either follow from previous premisses or can be supported by what has been established in the previous chapters of this thesis. I will then offer a formal long form of my above argument.

Before I turn to begin establishing my own position in 7.2, I restate a metaphysical principle I touched upon in 4.4 that will play a key role in the development of my arguments in this chapter. This is the principle that intentional actions are done for the sake of an end or goal, which the agent takes to be in some way good. To clarify, this is not to say that everyone aims for what they perceive to benefit themselves, but only that whatever is aimed for, the agent takes that end to be in some respect good. 'Good', in this context, should only be taken to mean that the agent sees what he aims for as being at least in some sense desirable and worth acting towards – I am making a very modest and uncontroversial claim here. As mentioned in 4.4, and which I rehearse here:

> An objector might argue that it is plainly false that an agent always acts towards that which he perceives to be good. After all, people smoke, and drink in excess, commit adultery, and so on, despite knowing these things to be bad. However, such facts do not disprove this principle; while those who commit these vices might agree that doing these things over a long time is bad, what they do not judge as bad is the pleasure gained from doing these actions. For example, a smoker may not intend to smoke for a long period of time, but rather only to have a smoke in the here and now; he judges that this one smoke will be good and just what is needed, and won't have too drastic consequences; and even if a smoker does intend to smoke for the rest of his life, it would be absurd to suppose that he judges this to be completely bad. On the contrary, while he may think there are bad consequences to long-term excessive smoking, he will also judge that there are good consequences that come from it, e.g. pleasure; and this good of pleasure will be thought to outweigh the bad effects of smoking in that instance.

The fact that an agent also acts towards things that are known to be morally bad does not disprove this principle, for all the principle states is that *the agent sees* the end as somewhat good or desirable. Thus, given the modesty of this claim, frightfully little evidence is needed in support of it; those who fail to see it do not understand the simplicity of the claim that is being made. 'Good' in this context need mean no more than the end being desirable to the agent. Since this is a modest and relatively inoffensive principle, I feel confident in postulating it and moving along. Hence, I will not move to defend it at any length.

7.2 God's Reason for Creating

In this section, I will seek to demonstrate that God created for a reason. I also aim to demonstrate that the only reason that could have moved God to create is Himself. I will take this to mean that God was moved to create out of a desire to express His attributes. I will reject the idea that God could be moved to create for a reason other than Himself as this would compromise His self-sufficiency. I will also reject a position advanced by Davies that God does not act for reasons. I turn to address Davies' position now.

Davies has argued that there cannot be a reason for why God chose to create, as reasons cannot be attributed to God.[343] Given the metaphysical principle stipulated above, Davies argues that if an agent acts in response to reasons, they do so out of a desire or want for some perceived good. Since God has no desires or wants, God can have no reasons to act.[344] To demonstrate his case, Davies asks us to imagine asking someone why they rolled over in bed (when asleep). Such a person, argues Davies, would have no answer, and this is because this movement admits no answer. This is due to there being no aim in rolling over: the person was not intending anything, not striving for any

[343] Davies, *The Reality of God*, pp. 215-19.

[344] ibid., p. 215.

goal in rolling over. Of course, there might have been a physiological explanation – a muscle spasm, etc. But this would not be the agent acting *for a reason*. To be able to say that he acted for a reason, one must be able to ascertain what his goal was.[345]

Suppose that one continued to pester the above person – let us call him Daniel – when he woke up from bed; that when he began to brush his teeth, one asked him why he was doing that, to which he replies, 'I am brushing my teeth to stop my teeth from decaying.' Let us then suppose that one followed him downstairs and asked him why he was making breakfast; he replies that it is so he can remain healthy and get his nutrients for the day. One sees him get in his car and asks him why; he replies that it is so he can get to work. In each of these cases, Davies would say that it is clear what Daniel's reasons are – he is doing something because he has a want/desire: to keep his teeth healthy and clean, to get his daily nutrients, to get to work so as to earn a living and not lose his job, etc. And this sort of answer is always given when one asks for a reason: 'Reasons for acting invariably coincide with wants'.[346] (This includes actions that do not directly benefit oneself. For instance, under this principle, Mother Teresa only helped others because she *wanted* to help people.)

It does not make sense, argues Davies, to say that God acts for reasons. If God is said to act for reasons, then this would suggest that God has wants, desires, and needs that need to be satisfied. But, says Davies, it would not be fitting to ascribe to God, the unchanging creator of all things, wants, needs, or desires, that need to be satisfied:

> Does it make sense, however, to suppose that God has needs that would go unsatisfied if he did not act in certain ways? I do not see that it does. If God is the source of all that exists (the reason why there is something rather than nothing), then he cannot have a need that would be met by how things go in the created order. For how things go there will be his doing, not something he

[345] ibid., p. 216. See also G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, Cambridge MA, Harvard Press, 1963.

[346] ibid.

> waits on or desires to help him on his way. And if God is unchangeable, then nothing he does can satisfy a need that he has, for a need something has can only be satisfied on the assumption that the thing in question is mutable.[347]

It is for this reason that Davies believes we should not believe that God acts for reasons. Now, one might respond that God acts in order that such and such might occur. For instance, one might say that God created the clouds because He needed them to water the plants; in creating the clouds, is God fulfilling a need that He has? No, says Davies. Davies argues that God's creation of the clouds to water plants 'does not mean that he [God] is thereby aiming at something he needs; all it means is that God makes clouds which, as it happens, water the Earth given how he has made things to be.'[348] One might argue that God must have had a reason to create, otherwise He would not have created at all. Davies denies this, arguing that there can be no 'intelligible answers' to questions relating to the ends or reasons for why God chose to create. Such questions, he says, are equivalent to asking why 'my cat is not humble' or other similar nonsensical questions.[349] To be clear, Davies is not saying that God acts irrationally. Rather, Davies' position is that God is not a being that can be said to act with or without reason. Reasons are not applicable to God. To think so would be to commit a category error. However, Davies' position is problematic for the following two reasons.

First, to assert that reasons cannot be attributed to God is to suggest that God does not act freely. This is because reasons are a necessary component of a free action.[350] As Swinburne has shown, this is clear from the fact that a crucial test to see if some movement of my body was a free action or merely something that happened to my body (a muscle spasm, for instance) is to see if I can give a reason for this movement, that is, whether I can answer the question, 'Why did you do that?' If I

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[347] ibid.

[348] ibid., p. 217.

[349] ibid., p. 218.

[350] See K. Timpe, *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 23.

cannot answer the question, then my movement cannot properly be counted as free. Whereas if I can, the movement can be counted as a free action. Now, since an agent that acts freely is greater than one that does not, to be justified in calling God the greatest possible being, one must say that He acts freely.[351] I suspect Davies would contend that God's freedom is radically other and different to our freedom and thus it would not depend upon reasons in the same way. As evident from my wider discussion of Davies' view in Chapter 5, I am not satisfied with such an approach; it makes God completely incomprehensible – more akin to the ineffable Absolute of Hindu mysticism[352] rather than Biblical Christianity. What I have just said also shows why God's choice to create is a free intentional action of His, and not the result of non-rational impulse, similar to a muscle spasm in a human, etc.

Second, Davies' position is contrary to the picture of God that we see in the Scriptures. The Scriptures tell us that it was because 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' (Jn 3.16; cf. 1 Jn 4.9-10) Here, we see that the reason for why God sent His Son into the world is so that none should perish (cf. 1 Tim. 2.4; 2 Pet. 3.9) but that instead all should believe in His Son and be saved. And if God had a reason to send His Son into the world, then Davies' position that God cannot have reasons is to be rejected, and we thus no longer have cause to think that God did not have a reason to create the world.[353]

Davies might try to reinterpret this to say these verses are not claiming that God was motivated by a desire that none should perish, or had a reason to send His Son into the world that none might

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[351] Swinburne, 'Duty and the Will of God', p. 219.

[352] cf. Ward, *India and the Hindoos,* p. 268.

[353] It might be thought that the Dionysian principle disproves the idea that God must act for a reason. Dionysius argues that goodness is diffusive simply by nature. But in that case, can it not be said that the creation follows directly from God's goodness, without the need for God to have any reason to create? Thomas Aquinas provides an answer to this objection by noting that goodness is self-diffusive in the sense that it is a final cause and not an efficient cause. Goodness thus provides a reason for God to create. My thesis is an attempt at showing why goodness provides this reason. See *ST* I. q.5. a.4.

perish, but rather that God's love just led to His action of sending His Son into the world. God's sending of His Son was some effect of His love. Similar to the response that Davies gave to the objection that God created the clouds because He had a want that it should rain and water plants, where Davies argued that rather God creates clouds that just so happen to water plants, no need or want indicated, Davies could reply that God sent His Son into the world, not because He wanted none to perish, but just that it so happens that in sending His Son none perish.

The above response is unsatisfactory, as it not only goes against the prima facie reading of the Scriptures, but it also contradicts other passages of the Bible, which indicate that God has a want/ desire that none should perish. For instance, 2. Peter 3.9 states that God is 'not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' and 1 Timothy 2:4 states that God is one 'who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.' (ESV).

Given that God must act freely and what the Scriptures state, it seems that God must have created for a reason. But what is this reason? As postulated in 7.1, actions are aimed at an end that the agent perceives as good and desirable; this includes God's act of creating. Some have argued that God created because He perceived some good that He could not have obtained without creation.[354] However, this idea is problematic if by it we mean to say that God's desire for this sum of goodness can only be satisfied by creating, as this would make God reliant on creation and would be to deny His self-sufficiency. Yet, if God is to be the greatest possible being, then He ought not to be dependent upon anything else besides Him, for it is greater to be self-sufficient than to be reliant on something else for one's full satisfaction.[355] Note, this is not to say that creation is not good, but only that it is not intrinsically good, that is, not good in and of itself independently of its relation to God, and that its goodness is not required if God is to be fully satisfied. God's ultimate reason for

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[354] K. Ward, *Christ and the Cosmos: A Reformulation of Trinitarian Doctrine*, Cambridge, University Press, 2015, pp. 26-7.

[355] J. Webster, 'Love is Also a Lover: Creatio Ex Nihilo and Creaturely Goodness', *Modern Theology,* vol. 29, no. 2 , 2013, p. 160.

creating, therefore, cannot be a desire or want for anything that is external to Him – a desire for creation, therefore, cannot be the ultimate end of God's action of creating.

Having denied that God could be without reason for choosing to create, and having said that it cannot be creation in and of itself that moved God to create, it might be thought that there are few options left beyond the trivial and frivolous – God created for fun, etc. However, there is one other option that has been popular throughout church and philosophical history; this is that God Himself is the reason for why He chose to create. As the Calvinistic theologian Herman Bavinck explains: 'God wills creatures not because of some quality inherent in them but for his name's sake. He ever remains his own object.'[356] There are different understandings in church tradition of what it means for God to be His own reason for creating. Some have said this means God creates so that He can express His attributes;[357] others say that this means God creates for the sake of willing His own goodness: the idea here is that by creating, God, somehow, maintains the perfect goodness that is intrinsic to Himself;[358] yet others have said that this means God creates for His own glory.[359] I think there is truth in all of these claims. God creates to express His attributes, omnipotence, wisdom, knowledge, etc., which glorifies God and itself is a willing of God's own goodness – it being better that God's attributes are expressed than not expressed, just as there is something greater about an artist who expresses creative talent and creates something than one who has the creative talent but chooses not to create.

That the expression of His attributes is the reason for God choosing to create is demonstrated by the following consideration. When an agent performs an action, there are two possible reasons which explain why the agent did this action; either the action was performed because the agent sees

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[356] H. Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. & ed. W. Hendriksen, Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977, pp. 227-8. See also *ST* I. q.19. a.2.

[357] J. Edwards, *A Dissertation Concerning The End For Which God Created The World* (1765), https://www.monergism.com/dissertation-concerning-end-which-god-created-world-jonathan-edwards, (accessed April 2022).

[358] L. Garcia, 'Divine Creation and Freedom', *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 167, 1992, pp 199; Mullins, 'Arbitrary Creation', pp. 401-02; *ST* I. q.19. a.2.

[359] A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God,* p. 10.

as good and desires the effect of that action, or the agent sees the action itself, for its own sake, as good and something desirable; and whichever of these two options or combination of these two options is correct can be said to be the end of that action. This is seen in the fact that when a man says he did an action not because he desired or saw the effect of that action as good, which is usually, misleadingly, expressed as being done 'for no reason at all', the natural interpretation is that he did it for the sake of doing the action itself. What we do not assume is that the action is completely without reason.

As said above, I take it that free actions are always done intentionally. To do any action is to attempt to move toward an end or a goal, with the agent in some way seeing the end or goal of this action as being in some sense good. This goal or end is the reason for the said action. Again to refer to Swinburne's example, a crucial test to distinguish between an action and something that just happened is whether an answer can be given to the question 'Why did you do that?'[360] If this is denied, it is to suggest the absurd conclusion that an agent's actions and their beliefs are only contingently connected, which is to suggest the strange possibility that all of the actions of an agent could have no relation to his beliefs. As I just said, an agent's actions are goal orientated – he acts because he wants something, and this is tied to his beliefs and desires. Thus, if I am out for a drive and someone asks me if I am driving because I wish to reach a certain destination, or perhaps whether I am being paid to drive, and I say, 'no' to both of these suggestions, and if I also deny that I am driving because I am being compelled by non-rational or external forces, then the natural interpretation is that I am driving for the sake of driving, namely, because I like driving. Similarly, if the existence of the creation is not God's fundamental reason for creating, and it is not because He is compelled to by non-rational forces, then it is because He sees the act of creating, the expression of His attributes, for its own sake, as good. Therefore, if God's reason for creating is not that He sees the effect of His action, namely, the creation, as good independently of its relation to His own activity, then it is because He sees the act of creating, for its own sake, as good.

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[360] Swinburne, 'Duty and the Will of God', p. 219.

An anonymous reader has raised the following objection: to postulate it is God's act of creating, as an expression of His attributes, that moves Him to create is to still imply that it is creation that satisfies God, and thus still makes Him dependent upon it. The reader thinks that if God creates for the sake of expressing his attributes, then the existence of the creation will still be necessary for the fulfilment of God's purposes, and God will therefore still be dependent on creation for the fulfilment of his purposes. I think this objection can be satisfactorily answered. To say that the existence of creation is the final end of God's activity would be to say that God finds satisfaction in the existence of creation in and of itself. My position, however, is that creation is not the final end of God's activity, but that the final end of God's activity is the expression of His divine attributes, which may result in creation. On this view, it does not follow that God derives satisfaction from the existence of creation in and of itself; God does not in any way receive from creation, nor is He is gratified by creation.

Even if creation is a necessary result of God's expression of His attributes, it would not follow that God receives something from it, just as smoke does not gratify a man who seeks fire or the ignition of gunpowder. Or perhaps to give a closer analogy, God's satisfaction from creating would be akin to man who is satisfied when He creates fire – not because He seeks fire, but because He wishes to exercise His ability to create fire. Again, this is not to say that creation is not good – it is good on account of being a reflection of God; but just as the sun receives nothing from the jewel that shines only by a participation of its brightness, so too does God not receive anything from creation which reflects His goodness.

Having said this, I do not think that creation is the only way in which God can express His attributes. Creation is thus in no sense required for God to express His attributes, or to find satisfaction in the expression of His attributes, it is only one way in which He might freely (from reason) choose to express His attributes. And if God does not need to create in order to express His attributes, then it cannot be that He depends on creation to express His attributes. Indeed, many theologians have said that God can express His attributes completely within the bounds of the

Triune relationship. I concur. For instance, it could be suggested that the eternal generation of the Son is an expression of God's power, and the Son is the expression of God's wisdom, in virtue of being the Word (the Word being most closely associated with God's thoughts), and the Spirit's proceeding from the Father and the Son is an expression of God's love, and so on.[361] This latter position was held by Aquinas, who says:

> The Holy Ghost is said to be the bond of the Father and Son, inasmuch as He is Love; because, since the Father loves Himself and the Son with one Love, and conversely, there is expressed in the Holy Ghost, as Love, the relation of the Father to the Son, and conversely, as that of the lover to the beloved.[362]

One might think that the fact that God has chosen to express His attributes through creation rather than not shows a desire and want to express His attributes by creating and thus a lack of self-sufficiency and a dependency upon creating. But this would be a mistake. Again, on my view, God receives nothing from creation – His delight is purely in the expression of His attributes. The fact God chose to express His attributes through creation, rather than not, is not an indication of something additional to this. This is not to say that creation had no reason or is arbitrary, but only that there is no ultimate reason for why God chose to act in one way rather than another. As demonstrated by Laura L. Garcia, it is a mistake to suppose not only that every intentional action must be done for a reason, a generally uncontroversial claim, but that every action must be done for an overriding reason, if it is to be fully explained or intelligible, viz. that for every action, there are

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[361] This is not an option with certain articulations of this position. For instance, Jonathan Edwards argues that God must create because it is only towards fallen creatures that God can express his attribute of wrath. I disagree with Edwards in that I see everything expressed in God's wrath to be sufficiently expressed in His justice, where He distributes to each thing what they deserve. (See *ST,* I, q.21, a.1) Thus, my own position is not committed to such necessarianism. For a discussion on Edward's position, see J. Beilby, 'Divine Aseity, Divine Freedom: A Conceptual Problem For Edwardsian-Calvinism', *Journal of Evangelical Theology,* vol. 47, no. 4, 2004, p. 653.

[362] *ST,* I. q.37. a.1. cf. St Augustine, 'The Trinity', trans. S. McKenna, in H. Dressler et al (eds), *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation,* vol. 45, Washington, Catholic University Press, 1963, xv, 7.

reasons why that very act was chosen in preference to another alternative open to the agent. The maxim of Leibniz 'A man never has a sufficient reason to act, when he has not also a sufficient reason to act in a particular manner'[363] is false.[364] It is evident that in cases where various equally rational options for acting are available to one, one can still have good reason not to refrain from acting and choose to act on one of the available options. To use Garcia's example: suppose there are four exits in a room equally accessible to an agent and equally convenient to him with respect to his present situation, and a fire breaks out around the wiring above his head. It would be absurd to say he has no sufficient reason to leave the room because he has no more reason to leave through one door than another door.[365] The agent does have a compelling reason to leave, and this is that his life is in danger; and this reason is good enough to explain why he might escape through any particular door; this is so even if this reason does not fully determine or necessitate the specific act.[366] Similarly, the expression of God's attributes is sufficient to explain God's creative act, even if there are equally good reasons not to create and for Him to express His attributes another way – i.e. through expressing His attributes solely within the Triune relationship.

To note, I do not intend to say that God's act of creation is to be differentiated from the act of God's intra-Trinitarian relationship. On the contrary, I believe creation is a way in which God can live out the intra-Trinitarian life. But it is not the only way by which He can live it out. For God can achieve all the value gained in the intra-Trinitarian life that results in creation just as much by way of the intra-Trinitarian life that does not result in creation; this is to say, creation does not add to or detract from, the sum of value that would be realised were the divine intra-Trinitarian life to be lived out independently of creation. Therefore, my argument does not contradict God's self-sufficiency, as it does not hold that God can only fulfil what He desires by creating.

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[363] G. W. Leibniz, *The Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H. G Alexander, Manchester, University Press, 1956, Leibniz's Second Paper, p. 60.

[364] Garcia, 'Divine Creation', p. 198.

[365] Humans are not asses. Unfortunately for Buridan's ass, when equally placed between two identical piles of hay, he starves to death because he does not have a reason to choose one over the other.

[366] Garcia, 'Divine Creation', p. 198-9.

The above argument allows me to answer an objection raised by Paul Helm and Ryan Mullins. They have objected that God's willing of His goodness (which I have argued God does through the expressing of His attributes) cannot be His reason for choosing to create. This is because God's act of creation was a free choice, while God willing His own goodness is necessitated; thus, to say that willing His own goodness was the reason for why God chose to create would make the creative act necessary. Mullins writes, 'With regard to God's creative act, it is free. What reason is there for this free action? If this action is going to be free, it cannot be necessitated. So, the reason for why God chose to create cannot be willing His own goodness because that is a necessary action of God.'[367] There has to be, Mullins and Helm argue, a further reason for why God chose to create to avoid necessitarianism about creation.[368]

However, this objection is confused. While it is true that the willing of God's own goodness is a necessitated action, the way by which God wills His own goodness is not. Mullins and Helm suggest that creation is additional to God's willing of His own goodness. But this is not so. It is just a way by which He can do it; creating is a way by which God can live out the intra-Trinitarian life, but not a necessary way, there being the option for God to live out this life without creation. This is also argued by Aquinas, who writes, 'But, as to an effect that does not follow of necessity from a cause, it is not necessary that someone will it because he wills the cause. Now, other things proceed from God without necessity… It is not necessary, therefore, that God will other things from the fact of willing Himself.'[369] This is to say, since the effect of creation does not follow necessarily from the cause of God willing His own goodness, creation does not necessarily follow from God willing His own goodness.

Thus, to summarise what was said above, I have argued that the only reason that could have moved God to create is Himself. I rejected Davies' position in which it is denied that God acts for

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[367] R. Mullins, 'The Problem of Arbitrary Creation for Impassibility', *Open Theology*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, p. 402.

[368] Mullins, 'Arbitrary Creation', 401-2; P. Helm, Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time, Oxford, University Press, 2010, pp. 176-77.

[369] Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, trans. A. C. Pegis et al (eds), Joseph Kenny, New York. Hanover House, 1955- 57, I.81.5.

reasons on two grounds. First, because Davies' position either entails that God does not act freely or that His freedom is so radically different to ours that He becomes incomprehensible. Second, Davies' position is contrary to the Scriptures. God must, therefore, have acted for a reason. I have further argued that this reason cannot be anything external to God. Given reasons coincide with wants and desires, if the reason for God's choice to create was external to Him, it would entail that there is a want or desire that is satisfied by something other than Himself. But this would contradict God's self-sufficiency. God's reason, therefore, for creating could only be Himself. I took this to mean that God created out of a desire to express His attributes within the intra-Trinitarian life (this being what it means for God to express His own goodness). This said, I have also said that while the intra-Trinitarian life can be lived out in relation to a created order, this is by no means necessary.

7.3 God's Love of Himself

In this section, I demonstrate that in seeing the expression of His attributes as good and desirable for their own sake, God must see the attributes themselves as good and desirable for their own sake. I then will show that for God to see the attributes themselves as good and desirable for their own sake, He will love them for their own sake. For God to love His own attributes is for Him to love Himself. To love something, as stated in the introduction (0.3), is to seek to promote the good of the said thing and, where possible, seek to be in union with it.

I will give two reasons for why if God sees the expression of His attributes as good and desirable, He sees the attributes themselves as good and desirable. First, if a classical theist position is adopted, then the attributes 'behind' God's act of creating are just His act of creating. As I have briefly mentioned (1.2), on classical theism, God is conceived to be pure act (*actus purus*) and simple. If this is so, then God just is His act of creating; and when we refer to God's power, wisdom, knowledge, and so on, we are actually referring to God's *act* of power, wisdom, knowledge, and so on. Thus, if the act/expression of His attributes is good, then the attributes must

be good since they are identical. However, if one is not convinced of classical theism and DDS, then I can offer a second reason for my point.

The second reason for why God seeing the expression of His attributes as good and desirable for their own sake entails God seeing the attributes themselves as good and desirable is that to see the expression of an attribute as good and desirable for its own sake is to see the attribute itself as good and desirable for its own sake. This is clear from the following illustration. It is clear from the fact that if I see as good and desirable, for its own sake, the expression of a friend's attribute, say his wisdom, then I must see (if I am to be consistent) as good and desirable the wisdom behind it. It would be incoherent to say that I saw as good and desirable, for its own sake, the expression of this friend's wisdom but in no sense saw as good and desirable, for its own sake, the wisdom that is being expressed. For, the expression of an attribute can only be good for its own sake if the attribute itself is good for its own sake, for the goodness of the expression supervenes upon the goodness of the attribute which is expressed.[370]

It might be objected that this is not true, and this can be seen by considering the reverse. That while the attribute is desirable, the expression could be used in an undesirable way. For instance, it may be desirable to have the attribute of power, but even so we can recognise that there are bad expressions of this attribute – evil dictators, etc. Thus, it can be concluded that attributes are neutral in terms of their desirability or goodness, and it is the expression of them that can either be good or bad.

I think this objection is mistaken. For the power that a dictator expresses is not bad qua power. It is not the power in a dictator's bad actions that is bad. Rather, it is the use of power with some

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[370] Note that it is the expression of an attribute *for its own sake* that is good because the attribute is good for *its own sake.* Of course an expression of an attribute might be desirable even if the attribute is not desirable. For instance, suppose that there is a morally corrupt man, and in some circumstances the expression of this moral corruption secures a great benefit to mankind. Since the man is morally corrupt, he himself may not intend this outcome, but the outcome could nonetheless be a good outcome that flows from the morally corrupt nature. In this case, the expression of this attribute in this circumstance can be considered good. But in this case, neither the attribute or the expression of it is seen as good *for its own sake.* Rather, the expression of the moral corruption is only *instrumentally* good, namely, that it secures a great benefit for mankind.

other evil attribute, malice, or hatred, etc. And it is the expression of these evil attributes that is bad about the dictator's use of power. But if the attribute of power is good, then the dictator's expression of power qua power is good.

Given the two reasons above, it can be concluded that God sees His attributes as good and desirable for their own sake, given that He sees the expression of them as good and desirable for their own sake. Now, if God (or any being for that matter) sees *x* as good and desirable for its own sake, then He will love *x* for its own sake. And, as stipulated, to love *x* is to desire to promote the good of *x* and, where possible, to be in union with *x*. God thus loves His own attributes and seeks to promote their good. That for a being to find *x* good and desirable entails that that being will love (seek to promote the good of *x*) can be seen from the following illustration. If I said I find a particular gold ring good and desirable for its own sake, but never made any effort to care for it when I had it in my possession, or to preserve it from damage or decay, then one would be justified in thinking that I was not sincere when I said I found the ring good and desirable for its own sake. Thus, it can be said that seeing *x* as good and desirable for its own sake, loving *x* for its own sake, and desiring to promote the good of *x* for its own sake are co-referential, such that anything that is a case of seeing x as good and desirable for its own sake will be a case of loving x for its own sake, etc.[371]

Moreover, the extent to which I will promote the good of a thing, and thereby love the thing, will be proportionate to how good and desirable I see that thing. This is clear from the fact that if I said I saw *x* as highly good and desirable, but devoted little time to promoting *x*'s good, one would be justified in thinking I was insincere when I said that I saw *x* as highly good. An exception to what I have said here is where I may not be able to value and promote the good of that which I see as good and desirable, or may not be able to promote its good to the extent that I see it as good and desirable because of some limitation that I face, such as a lack of power or because to value and

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[371] This is also true of abstract ideals that we might be said to value, such as democracy or the monarchy. For there is even a sense in which one will try to do what is good for the ideals we value. If I value the institution of monarchy, then I will seek to promote monarchical ideals and values.

promote the good of this thing would entail that I could not value and promote the good of something else that I saw as more (or at least equally) good and desirable than the thing in question.

It might be objected that experience demonstrates the aforementioned principle is not true. I often walk through the local Oxford parks; and while I admire the flowers, and find them good and a desirable thing, it certainly is not irrational to just walk by the flowers with little regard for them – that is, to not stop and care for them. This can be taken to demonstrate that one does not promote or care for something to the same extent that one sees it as good. However, I do not think this would be a correct inference. The reason why it is not irrational to not stop to care for the flowers is because there are other, overriding goods I am more inclined to pursue, including my own, as I continue on my walk uninterrupted. Since I am a limited creature, I cannot focus on promoting every available good; therefore, I must prioritise certain goods over others. I cannot promote everything that I consider to be good and valuable, but only what I consider to be most good and valuable, including my own free time. Of course, God has no such limitations, so these restrictions do not apply to Him. This said, any thing that is considered good by an agent will give reason for the agent to tend to it. I might be inclined, if I have a lot of free time and the weather is permitting, to consider stopping to care for some flower that needs a bit of care and attention.

Thus, it can be concluded that God sees His own attributes as good and desirable for their own sake, and therefore loves His own attributes for their own sake. I take this to mean that God loves Himself. Now, if God loves Himself, then it is the case that He maximally loves Himself. This is because it is greater to be seen as maximally desirable to the greatest possible being than to be of a lesser value to Him. This is true even if that which is valued by the greatest possible being is the greatest possible being Himself. We would therefore expect God, who is the greatest possible being, to see Himself as maximally good and desirable and therefore, since, as we said above, one loves

the beloved to the extent that they see the beloved as good and desirable, maximally love Himself.[372]

It might be asked how God could be said to love Himself or His attributes, this is to say to promote the good of Himself or His attributes. Is not God already fully good? Yes, but this is not to say that God's love of Himself is not constitutive of the divine goodness. Throughout this discussion, I have suggested that it is part of the intra-Trinitarian life for God to express His attributes and love Himself. This constitutes what it is for God to be good. Again, this is not to make the goodness of God dependent upon creation, since creation is not the only way in which God can express His attributes and live out the intra-Trinitarian life, nor does God receive anything from creation in and of itself, just (as I have stated above) as one does not find gratification in smoke when desiring fire.

7.4 God's Necessary Love for Us

Let us briefly take stock. So far I have established that the only reason that could have moved God to create is Himself. I rejected the possibility of other reasons as bringing into question God's self-sufficiency. I also rejected Davies' position that God does not act for reasons. I have said that for God to be His own reason for creating is for Him to see the expression of His attributes as good and desirable. God created to express His attributes. I further argued that for God to see the expression of His attributes as good and desirable, for their own sake, is for Him to see the attributes themselves, for their own sake, as good and desirable. Moreover, I said that if God sees His attributes as good and desirable for their own sake, then He will love His attributes for their own sake. I hold that for God to love His attributes is for Him to love Himself. And as I have stipulated,

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[372] Note, if the a priori formulation of my argument is taken, then an additional argument for why God maximally loves Himself can be forwarded. Given God is necessarily loving on this formulation (otherwise He would not have the ability to create), God's love can be counted as a great making property and therefore a necessary divine attribute. And given the omniGod thesis I defended in Chapter 1, God has all of His necessary attributes to their maximal extent. Thus, if God's love is a necessary attribute, then God is maximally loving.

to love something is to desire the beloved's good (and when possible to be in union with the beloved). God thus loves Himself and promotes His own good.[373]

It is my argument that God's love for Himself entails that He loves us. This can be proved by drawing upon what I have said above in this chapter and the metaphysical preliminaries I established in Chapter 2. I argued in Chapter 2 that the essences of all things, the 'blueprints' of creation, exist in the mind of God as divine ideas. I have also established that God sees as good and desirable the expression of His attributes which He expresses in His act of creation. Now, given that all the things God has created are an expression of the divine ideas, part of God's reason for creating is that He saw as good and desirable the expression of these ideas (I hold that God's ideas are divine attributes). And if what I have said above in 7.3 is correct, then in seeing the expression of these ideas as good and desirable, God will see the ideas themselves as good and desirable.

I further have argued in 7.3 that for God to see *x* as good and desirable is for Him to love *x,* which is to say to desire to promote the good of *x* and when possible to desire union with *x*. Thus, to say that God sees as good and desirable the ideas which He expresses in His act of creation is to say that He loves the ideas which He expresses in His act of creation. I shall now argue that this is to say that God will seek to promote the good of the individual instantiations of these ideas and where possible to be in union with them.

I mentioned in 0.7 that essentialism, or more particularly, Divine Conceptualism, is key to my argument. And I will repeat some of what I said there. In loving the divine ideas, God is not loving just some 'thought' of a certain thing, similar to how I might have a thought of a certain thing, say of a cat or tree, etc., where such thought does not define the very thing it is an idea of. Rather, there is a strong connection between God's idea and that which corresponds to the idea. This is important, because if such a strong connection did not exist, then it would not follow that in loving the ideas God will love that which corresponds to it. This can be seen by considering one's own thoughts. I can love my memories, which contains many ideas, but I do not love all the things these ideas

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[373] Given the doctrine of the Trinity, God can also be said to seek union with Himself.

correspond to. Equally, I have ideas corresponding to the various concepts that I have. I have the idea of a dung beetle, the idea of the blob fish, the idea of a sycamore tree, and so on. However, I do not necessarily love the things which these ideas correspond to, even if it can be said that I love the knowledge that I have, which includes these ideas.

However, if the idea which is loved is the very ideal, essence, of a thing, that which defines what all things which fall under that idea are, the very standard of perfection of that thing, then in loving it, I am not loving a mere idea without a strong connection to the thing which corresponds to it. This is clear from the analogy mentioned in 0.7.

Consider the difference between loving a painting or sketch of a house and loving the plans or blueprints of the house. There are many reasons why one can love a painting of a house. Perhaps the artist has painted it in a particularly artistic way, or put a unique spin on it, or perhaps the colours are vibrant etc. One of the powers of an artist is that he can turn a usually drab object into something of interest. As such, one's interest in a painting is not necessarily connected to the object that it depicts apart from how it is represented within that artwork. This is in contrast with a blueprint of a house, however, where there is a strong connection between the blueprint and what it represents. Rarely does one like a blueprint of a house because of its artistic qualities. A blueprint stands to define what the house should be. Therefore, to like the blueprint as a blueprint (rather than just for its artistic qualities) is to like that which matches that representation. Additionally, to love the blueprint means that what is good and perfect for what the blueprint represents will be loved. For, if I love the blueprints of a house, then I will love the design of the house as it is meant to be, etc. I will seek to improve or fix the house when it falls short of the blueprint.

Given essentialism as established in Chapter 2, God's love of His ideas is analogous to the love of the blueprint in the above illustration. His ideas are the blueprints of things which He expresses in His act of creation. And since these blueprints stand to define what a thing is, and what it should be like, in loving His divine ideas, He will love the thing which corresponds to the idea and that

which is good and perfect for the thing. The premisses of this section can be briefly summarised as follows:

1. God maximally loves the attributes He expresses in His act of creation (established by 7.2 and 7.3).
2. The divine ideas are attributes of God which are expressed in His act of creation.
3. Thus, God maximally loves the divine ideas. (from 1 and 2)
4. Given essentialism, to love the divine ideas, which are the very definition of the things which stand in relation to the divine ideas, is to love the things themselves and their good and perfection.
5. Thus, God maximally loves all those things which stand in relation to the divine ideas and their good and perfection. (from 3 and 4)
6. All created things stand in relation to the divine ideas.
7. Thus, God maximally loves all created things. (from 5 and 6)

As mentioned, to love something is to seek to promote its good and where possible to be in union with the beloved. I have established above that God maximally loves all things. In relation to us, this entails that God seeks to promote our good and welfare, and therefore acts in accordance with the norms of morality in a way that meets the second and third desiderata of a successful theory of God's goodness, as laid out in 0.2.

Finally, given the privation position established in Chapter 3, in loving all things, God cannot be said to love the ideas of evil or evil things – given that evil has no positive existence. Moreover, God cannot be said to love what is bad for a thing, since what is bad for a thing is a privation from what is good for it. God only loves the good in everything, wishing for its perfection as defined by its divine idea.

7.5 The Argument in Full

In this section I will briefly summarise the argument of this thesis before presenting a long form formal statement of the argument. My argument can be summarised as follows:

The only reason that could have moved God to create is Himself. Any other reason would indicate a want or desire that could only be fulfilled by creation and, therefore, a dependency on it, and thus present a challenge to God's self-sufficiency. I take it that for God to be His own reason for creating is for Him to have created because He sees the expression of His attributes which He expresses in His act of creation as good and desirable. For God to see the expression of His attributes as good and desirable is for Him to see the attributes themselves as good and desirable. I further argued that for God to see the attributes themselves as good and desirable is for Him to love the attributes. For God to love His attributes is for Him to love Himself. Thus, for God to create, He must love Himself. Given that God has created, it can be said that He loves Himself. If God loves Himself, then He maximally loves Himself, since it is greater to be maximally desirable\loveable by God than of a lesser extent.

In loving His attributes expressed in His act of creation, God will love the divine ideas. Given the essentialism argued for in Chapter 2, these divine ideas stand as the blueprints of everything that exists, by which the things which stand in relation to these divine ideas are defined. And for God to love the 'blueprint' of a thing is for Him to love what is good and perfect for what the blueprint represents. Since all created things stand in relation to God's divine ideas, it can be concluded that God loves all things. In relation to us, this means that God loves us, which is to say desires to promote our good and be in union with us. This allows us to have confidence that God will act in accordance with moral norms, and meets the desiderata for a successful theory of the goodness of God laid out in 0.2.

The argument summarised above and which has been set up in this whole thesis can be put more formally in propositional terms in its long form as follows:

1. God is an Anselmian being.
2. There are two possible accounts of Anselmianism: (1) the combination thesis, or (2) the omni-thesis.
3. There are good arguments for the omni-thesis.
4. There are good arguments against the combination thesis.
5. Thus, the omni-thesis is true.
6. There are good arguments for essentialism.
7. Thus, essentialism is true.
8. There are good arguments to take essentialism in a divine conceptualist sense.
9. Thus, divine conceptualism is true.
10. Evil exists.
11. The ontology of evil can be explained in two ways: (1) evil can be said to have real positive existence, or (2) evil can be said to exist in so far it is a privation and lack of a due good.
12. There are good arguments for why evil is a privation.
13. There are good arguments against evil having positive existence.
14. Thus, evil is a privation.
15. God either acts for reasons or He does not act for reasons.
16. There are good arguments for why God acts for reasons.
17. There are good reasons to reject the position that God does not act for reasons.
18. Thus, God acts for reasons.
19. It is greater to always act freely than non-freely under the impulse of non-rational forces.
20. To always act freely requires always acting for reasons.
21. Thus, God always acts for reasons. (given 1, 18, 19 and 20)
22. Every intentional action, that is an action done for a reason, is done for an end which the agent in some way sees as good and desirable.
23. If God chooses to create, God has chosen to create for a reason. (from 21)

24. If God chooses to create, His action is done for an end which He in some way sees as good and desirable. (from 22 and 23)
25. God is completely self-sufficient.
26. Given reasons correlate with desires, if the end for God's choosing to create is external to Him, it would entail that there is a desire that is satisfied by something other than Himself. (from 22 and 24)
27. For God to be satisfied by something external to Him would be for God not to be self-sufficient.
28. Thus, God is not satisfied by something external to Him. (from 25 and 27)
29. Thus, God cannot be motivated to choose to create by something external to Him. (from 26 and 28)
30. If the reason for God choosing to create is not external to Him, then God Himself is His own reason for why He chooses to create.
31. Every agent sees as good and desirable either (or both) the effect of his intentional action, such as when I mow my garden so that I can enjoy the mowed lawn, or the action itself for its own sake, such as when I go for a walk just because I enjoy walking.
32. For an agent to act because he sees the effect of his intentional action as good and desirable is for Him to desire something external to Him.[374]
33. For an agent to desire something external to Him means that this desire can only be satisfied by something external to the agent.
34. Thus, if God chooses to create, it is not because He desires the effect of His act to create - creation. (from 29 and 33)
35. If God does not choose to create because He desires the effect of His act to create, then He sees the action itself for its own sake as good and desirable.

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[374] Note that by external to an agent I mean to say that the effect of the action is not intrinsic to Him. There may, of course, be effects that are directly related to the agent. For instance, I might go to the gym and work out so as to improve my fitness. This effect is still 'external' to the agent as the desired effect is not intrinsic to the agent.

36. For an agent to act because he sees the action itself for its own sake as good and desirable is for the agent to act because he sees the expression of his attributes as good and desirable for their own sake.
37. For an agent to act because he desires the expression of his attributes means this desire is satisfied by himself and not something external to him.
38. Thus if God chooses to create, it is because He sees the expression of his attributes as good and desirable for their own sake. (from 22, 23, 34, 35 and 36)
39. One cannot see the expression of one's own attributes for their own sake without seeing the attributes behind the act as good and desirable for their own sake.
40. Thus, if God chooses to create, it is because He saw the attributes behind His act of creating as good and desirable for their own sake. (from 38 and 39)
41. To see something as good and desirable for its own sake is to see it as being valuable for its own sake, and therefore to love it.
42. Thus, if God chooses to create, it is out of love of the attributes behind the act of creating. (from 40 and 41)
43. To love one's attributes is to love oneself.
44. Thus, God could only create out of love of Himself. (from 42 and 43)

From here I present the a posteriori formulation of my argument. See 7.1 for how the next few premisses would run on the a priori formulation.

45. God has created.
46. Thus, God loves Himself. (from 44 and 45)

Both the a posteriori formulation and the a priori formulation continue the same from this point.

47. If God loves Himself, then He maximally loves Himself, because it is greater to be seen as maximally desirable to the greatest possible being than to be of a lesser value to Him.
48. Thus, God maximally loves Himself. (from 46 and 47)

49. If God maximally loves Himself, God maximally loves the attributes He expresses in His act of creation if He chooses to create.
50. The essences of all things, the blueprints of creation, exist as ideas in the mind of God.
51. These divine ideas are attributes of God which are expressed in His act of creation.
52. Thus, God maximally loves the divine ideas. (from 48, 49, and 51)
53. Given essentialism, to love the divine ideas, which are the very definition of the things which stand in relation to the divine ideas, is to love the things themselves and their good and perfection.
54. Thus, God maximally loves all things which stand in relation to the divine ideas and their good and perfection. (from 52 and 53)
55. All created things stand in relation to the divine ideas. (from 9)
56. Thus, God maximally loves all things. (from 46, 54, and 55)
57. If *x* loves *y,* then *x* will seek to promote the welfare of *y* and, where possible, to be in union with *y.*
58. Thus, if God loves something, He will seek to promote its welfare and, where possible, seek to be in union with it. (from 57)
59. God thus seeks to promote the welfare of all things and where possible to be in union with all things. (from 56 and 58)
60. God thus seeks to promote our welfare. (from 59)
61. It is possible for God to be in union with us.
62. God thus seeks union with us. (from 59 and 61)
63. For God to seek to promote our welfare and be in union with us entails He will act in accordance with the norms of morality towards us.
64. Thus, God can be said to act in accordance with the norms of morality towards us. (from 60, 62, and 63)
65. In loving all things, God loves no evil. (from 14)

66. To maximally love all things, seek to promote the welfare of all things, and union where possible, and therefore act in accordance with the norms of morality, while loving no evil, is to act in a way that is recognisably similar to how we would expect a morally good human to act.

67. For God to maximally love all things, seek to promote the welfare of all things, and union where possible, and therefore act in accordance with the norms of morality, while loving no evil, is for Him to be able to be relied upon and trusted during all troubles and concerns a theist might face.

68. A good God is one who will act in a way that is recognisably similar to how we would expect a morally good human to act and can be relied upon and trusted during all troubles and concerns a theist might face.

69. Thus, God is good. (from 60, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67, and 68)

8. Objections

In this thesis, I have attempted to provide a successful theory of God's goodness that meets the desideratum that God's goodness is similar to human goodness and that He can be relied upon during times of trouble the theist might face. My theory, presented above, has argued that through maximally loving Himself in His act of creation, God loves us. And in loving us, God is good in a way that meets these two desiderata. In this chapter, I will address eleven objections that might be raised against the argument I have presented. I will state each objection and then my reply to it, stating why it is not a problem for my theory.

8.1 The Imperfection in Creation

Obj. It might be argued that God cannot love everything because some things are imperfect and in some sense are evil – given evil is a privation of due good. Just as an architect might dislike or hate a palace that he had planned and built due to its imperfections and it not meeting expectations, it falling short of the blueprint, God might hate those things He has created that do not meet expectations.

Ans. Some might attempt to avoid this objection by asserting that any imperfection that exists in creation is part of God's divine plan and as such cannot truly be hated by God. However, this solution is not tenable, as the Scriptures clearly teach that God hates evil and desires it not to exist. As the Psalmist writes, 'thou [God] hatest all workers of iniquity.'[375]

To respond to this objection, I appeal to Aquinas. In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas writes that the wicked are loved under one aspect and hated under another: God loves sinners in so far as they are human, and have existence, but hates them in so far as they fall short of perfection.[376] To hate a person under the aspect of his imperfections while also loving him under the aspect that he is a

[375] Ps. 5.5.

[376] *ST*, I. q.20. a.2.

person is not contrary to love. For in doing this, we will desire that that which is good in the person is exalted, while that which is bad is debased. This is in contrast to malice, which is to hate that which is good in the person, and, in doing so, desire what is ultimately bad for the person, hoping that his good is debased. God's hate is not the hate of malice but rather hate of imperfection.

Consider again my analogy with the architect. The reason why the architect dislikes the palace is because it is defective – it failed to meet its expectations. What the architect does not hate, however, is his original plan and what the palace could have potentially been, nor that which remains true to his original plan within the defective thing.[377] And should the architect not be restrained in time and resources, he will do what he can to fix the defects in the palace and to make it perfect, removing what is defective to his original plan.

Similarly, God, who is never restrained in time or resources, will love that which is good in us and desire that we meet perfection. But he will hate the imperfection in us, desiring it to be gone. This is what it means when the Psalmist says God hates workers of iniquity. Given nothing can be completely evil or defective, for evil and defection are a privation from that which is good, we can conclude, from what I have argued in this thesis, that God in maximally loving Himself must completely and maximally love all things. God will never *completely* hate something that is in some way good.

8.2 God's Love for the Mundane

Obj. An objector might ask whether my position entails the seemingly absurd idea that God loves a millipede, or any other mundane object, as much as He loves man, given that the idea of a millipede also exists in the mind of God. This seems to be supported by the ancient writings. Wisdom 6.7 says, 'He careth for all alike'. Furthermore, if, as I have said, God is maximally loving, then His love should not admit of degrees.

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[377] Supposing his tastes have not since changed!

Ans. God does indeed love all things equally in that He loves all things with the same equal judgment and measure. This said, there is a sense in which man will be favoured by God. In loving Himself, God not only loves the divine ideas, but His attributes of love, wisdom, intelligence, etc., which He expresses in His act of creation. Given God's attributes are more greatly expressed in mankind, man being made in the divine image (Gen. 1.27), than in a millipede, God's love for man will be favoured over his love for the millipede.

It is evident that a greater expression of something loved will be loved more than a lesser expression. This is made clear by the following illustration. Suppose that I love a particular skill, say, violin playing. Further, suppose that I have a choice between supporting the violin playing skill of a master violinist and someone who is a complete novice; ceteris paribus, I would, if I loved the skill of violin playing, choose to support the master violinist over the novice. If I did not support the master violinist, and there is no evident reason for why I should otherwise favour the novice, one would question whether I really did appreciate violin playing.

It might be thought that angels are more expressive of the divine image than man is, and thus would pose an objection not only to what I just said but to my thesis as a whole. For if God loves creatures partially, some more than others, according to the degree to which they express the divine image, and angels express the divine image to a greater extent than man, then God would love angels to a greater extent than man. However, here lies the supposed problem; for partial love can lead one to neglect the welfare of another – for example, if one were to neglect one's son due to a greater love for one's daughter. This could then raise the pastoral concern that God might not act in accordance with moral norms in his dealings with man because of His greater love for angels – He might allow some harm to come to man.

This concern, however is misplaced for the following reason. It is incorrect to assume that angels express the divine image to a greater extent than man; the Scriptures are clear that it is man that is made in the divine image, not angels. It would not be possible to provide a philosophical argument to prove this particular point; but the fact that the Word became incarnate as man and not

as an angel is the greatest demonstration of this. (cf. Heb. 1.5) St Paul is clear that through sin the divine image becomes marred. Christ is the means by which the divine image is restored, for Christ is the perfect image of the divine. The Incarnation shows not that the Word becomes modelled after man but rather that man is modelled after the Son, who is made manifest in the Incarnation. This the position of Irenaeus, who writes:

> [Man is] conformable to, and modelled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father… man, and not (merely) a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.[378]

A second objection might be that this would lead to partiality amongst his dealings with men; a holier man who best reflects the attributes of God will be favoured over the one who is not holy. I do not see this as an objection; it is indeed true that those who are holy are favoured by God – Noah, Abraham, etc. (Gen. 6.8; 12.2) This is just part of God's just dealing with mankind. But this should not be seen as a problem. As said, God deals with all with the same judgment, viz. the same standard. And repentance and salvation is equally available to all. All of mankind, no matter who, is loved by God; for, as indicated just above, man is the best expression of Him and His attributes. As said by William Blake:

> For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
> Is God, our father dear,
> And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

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[378] St Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. A. Robert & W. Rambaut, in A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. C. Coxe, New York, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885, revised and edited for New Advent by K. Knight, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103.htm, (accessed September 2024), Book v, Ch. 6.

Is Man, his child and care…

…And all must love the human form,

In heathen, Turk, or Jew;

Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell

There God is dwelling too.[379]

The theist should thus not worry about impartiality concerning God's love. However, the objection could be pushed to say that God might be forced to neglect a less holy man to favour a holier man. But, God's favour for one will never mean He has to neglect another due to a lack of resources, unlike a man who might have to neglect feeding his son to feed his daughter. God, unlike us, is not limited in time and resources; thus, He is not limited in who He can show His favour towards. We, however, are limited; thus, to favour one may mean dedicating our limited time and resources to the favoured one at the expense of being able to favour another.

It might be thought, however, that there will be circumstances in which for God to favour one will be detrimental or harmful to another; one can imagine a rare scenario in which to favour person *x* means some sort of harm for person *y*. It can, therefore, be argued that there will be cases in which God's partiality will cause Him not to promote the welfare of someone, and therefore raising a pastoral problem of evil. I do not think this poses a major threat to my thesis. Any account of God's goodness has to explain why God allows evil to befall certain men and not others; my account is not more disadvantaged in this respect. I intend to fully address the Problem of Evil below. What I will say here is: (1) the theist can have confidence that God loves him and thus any allowed evil is not the result of God's lack of love for him. (2) Unlike the difference between a millipede and man, the difference between a holy man and an unholy man is slight such that God will not massively and

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[379] W. Blake, *The Divine Image,* https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43656/the-divine-image, (accessed September 2024).

disproportionally favour the holy man at the expense of the unholy man.[380] (3) Such situations will be rare – the welfare of one man is not intrinsically connected to the suffering of any other man; thus, to favour one man at the expense of another's welfare will occur only when necessary. (4) Since God loves all mankind and man lives eternally, the possibility is open for God to recompense any man who suffers some evil necessary for a greater good.

To return to the point regarding the millipede, not only will God love man more because of the fact that man expresses the divine attributes to a greater extent than a millipede does, but also because man has the ability to have a relationship with God and be in union with Him. This added difference means that the love God has for man will be far more intense and extensive than His love for the millipede; this love involves an intimate relationship and is therefore stronger and more complex. To love an inanimate object or an animal can involve admiration, or caring for the thing, or promoting the good of the thing; but to love another person goes further – it involves trust, loyalty and friendship. These added elements as a result of the relational aspect of the love between God and man mean that the love will always be more intense and greater with man than with a millipede. This position is also argued by Aquinas. He writes:

> Friendship cannot exist except towards rational creatures, who are capable of returning love, and communicating one with another in the various works of life, and who may fare well or ill, according to the changes of fortune and happiness; even as to them is benevolence properly speaking exercised. But irrational creatures cannot attain to loving God, nor to any share in the intellectual and beatific life that He lives. Strictly speaking, therefore, God does not love irrational creatures with the love of friendship.[381]

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[380] Of course punishment and reward will come into play here. It may be the case that God withdraws His favour for the unholy man as a punishment. However, this need not be seen as a problem for my argument, as God deals with all according to the same measure. The punishment for the unholy man is the same as it would have been had the holy man acted in an unholy manner.

[381] ibid.

Again, it might be argued that angels have a greater relationship with God and therefore will be favoured at the expense of man. But again, it is erroneous to think that angels are in a closer relationship to God. Man was made to be in a special relationship with Him. Besides, such should be a minor worry to the theist; there is nothing to suggest that the relationship with angels would somehow be detrimental to man.

It should also be noted that God loves what He creates not only on an individual level, but as a whole also, taking into account how each thing fits into the larger and grander plan of creation. Thus, it might be thought that the killing of animals would not be permitted by God – this being seen as God not loving the thing in question; a similar thing can be said concerning vegetation. Yet, as Aquinas says, part of the ultimate divine plan is that plants are used by creatures and man, and then animals for man.[382] One of these uses is using said animals for food, which involves the killing of the animal. Thus, loving the divine plan as a whole, and in loving man, God permits the killing of animals.

It might be objected that this would open up the possibility that the divine plan would somehow discriminate against man. This is incorrect. Again evidenced by the Incarnation, the end goal of man is to have an everlasting relationship with God. Man serves no creatures. (Heb. 1.14) Moreover, to press the point, God loves each thing maximally relative to the kind of thing that it is. And unlike animals, man has been created as a rational creature and thus can be loved by God with the love of friendship. So in this respect, God loves man more than and to the discrimination of animals rather than vice versa, because the former can be loved with the love of friendship.

8.3 Is God's Self-love the Sin of Selfishness?

Obj. If God loves Himself maximally, God is maximally selfish; and since selfishness is a vice, God commits sin and is thus not maximally good.

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[382] *ST* I. q.20. a.2.

Ans. This criticism misunderstands the reason why it is a sin to be selfish. The reason why it is a sin for a man to be selfish, to only care about himself, is because in loving himself in this way the man unduly values himself to the exclusion of other beings. If Daniel acts selfishly at the supermarket, it means that he takes the last three pints of milk when he really only needed two. Thus, to love oneself selfishly is a vice in that it unduly values oneself to the exclusion of others. It is not necessarily a sin, however, to love oneself. This is made clear by Christ's injunction to 'love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mk 12.31). If a man, in loving himself, was moved to do good to others, and he did not love himself to the undue exclusion of others, then it would not be a vice that he loved himself. When God loves Himself, He does not do so to the exclusion of others; His love for Himself means that He loves all things. Thus, the vice that attaches itself to being selfish does not apply to God. The interests of God are not contrary to the interests of man. In fully loving the essences, the divine ideas, of each of His created beings, He will want the best for those beings.

Furthermore, one ought to love themselves according to their station. Often in the case of one who is selfish, they do not love themselves appropriately; they forget that they have no more importance than others, and yet they expect to be accorded a privileged position, having the first pickings in all things. Now, if we consider our King, it is not a vice if he loves himself more, although not to an excessive extent, than those of a lower rank, for it is expected that the King has the first pickings of the spoils. He is, to some extent, to be treated with greater respect than those around him; therefore the love that he has for himself will be greater than his love for others. Now, since God Himself is the greatest of all beings, to such an extent that man is but a speck of dust compared to Him (this being far greater than any gap that exists between a king and his subjects), it would be unbecoming that God, the Anselmian being, should not love Himself maximally, as I have argued previously in this thesis (7.3). Moreover, God loves each thing maximally relative to the kind of thing it is. Since God is maximally loveable, He loves Himself to the maximal degree.

Additionally, this objection forgets that God is a triune being. So, even if my response so far fails, there may be a way that God can love Himself without problematic self-regard (and therefore non-selfishly) due to His triune nature, which is not available to us due to our non-triune nature.

8.4 God's Love of Evil

Obj. It might be objected that my argument entails that God must maximally love evil, as the ideas and blueprints of evil things will also exist in the mind of God; and a God who loves evil would not be good in a way that meets my desideratum.

Ans. This argument only has force if evil has positive existence. However, evil has no positive existence, but exists only as a privation, as I showed in Chapter 3. Evil, therefore, is not a thing just as a hole in a sock is not a thing. Rather, evil exists as a privation of *due good* in things, just as the hole exists only as a lack of due material in the sock. Since divine ideas only stand in relation to things, and evil is not a thing, there are no blueprints or ideas of evil things for God to love.

8.5 The Praiseworthiness of Necessary Goodness

Obj. If God's love for us, and his following of the norms of morality, is a necessary implication of His love for Himself, and not a free choice, then God is not worthy of our praise and thanksgiving. For one can only be praised for doing something one had a choice either to do or not to do. An essential doctrine of Christianity, however, is that God is worthy of praise.

Ans. Given God is not a moral agent subject to moral norms, God cannot be praiseworthy for following the commands of morality or for doing His duty, as we might be. Thus, while man can be praised for doing His moral duty, God cannot be praised for doing His moral duty. So, are we to say that God is not be praised? No. For while it is true that God cannot be praised in the sense of us

commending God for doing His duty, as if to say, 'way to go, God!', there are other ways in which God is to be praised.

First, God can be praised for His acts of free choice; for instance, His act of creation, or some miraculous act, etc., which by His nature He was not compelled to do. As I have argued, it is entirely consistent with His nature that God could not have created at all, and there are certainly many miracles that He need not have done.

Second, God is to be praised for his essential goodness. Even if God is not praised for fulfilling His moral duty, we can praise Him for His essential goodness – the fact that God is the *summum bonum* (the highest good). Indeed, if we can recognise the simple goodness in a beautiful landscape and admire and adore that, then we can on a much greater level admire the goodness in God. Furthermore, while we cannot praise God for fulfilling some duty, we can still admire and praise the fact that God essentially is such that He acts in accordance with the norms of morality.

8.6 The Praiseworthiness of Contingent Goodness vs Necessary Goodness

Obj. Avak A. Howsepian in his paper 'Is God Necessarily Good?'[383] has argued that it is greater for God to be contingently good than necessarily good. His reasoning is that a contingently good being can do more good actions than a necessarily good being and is therefore more praiseworthy. His reasoning is as follows. According to Howsepian, there are two kinds of good action types: first, one can do a good action by directly performing some positive action towards good; second, one can do a good action by refraining from evil. So, an example of the first type would be feeding the hungry. An example of the second type would be choosing not to steal the scraps of the hungry. Howsepian argues that one can only refrain from an evil action if there is the possibility of doing otherwise and one knows of that possibility: I cannot intend to square a circle because I know that a square circle is impossible. A necessarily good being, argues Howsepian, cannot intend to refrain from evil, because He would know that doing evil is impossible for Him. A being who is only contingently

[383] A. A Howsepian, 'Is God Necessarily Good?', *Religious Studies,* vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 473-484, 1991.

good, on the other hand, can refrain from doing evil, having the ability to do both action types. Howsepian says that the latter is clearly more praiseworthy than the former, because He can do more good action types. Hence, God should be conceived as a contingently good being rather than a necessarily good being, for then He does not do just one good action type, but two, and is thus more praiseworthy.[384]

Ans. Howsepian is mistaken in claiming that a contingently good God is more praiseworthy. As I have argued in this thesis, God is not some moral agent whose goodness comes from following the precepts of morality. He is not good because he does good actions; rather, we say God is good because He is perfect, and as such will act in a way that is recognisable to our goodness, viz. loving all creatures maximally. Thus it is not necessary that God should be able to refrain from doing evil so that he may fulfil more moral precepts. God is not to be praised for fulfilling His moral duty, but rather for His essential goodness. But even granting that God is in some sense praiseworthy for the good actions that He does, Howsepian errs in assuming that refraining from an evil action is morally praiseworthy in a similar sense to how doing a good action is praiseworthy. Howsepian argues that to be counted as praiseworthy for refraining from doing an evil action, one has to be actively and consciously refraining from said action. For instance, he argues that if I am absorbed in a game of chess, I might not be doing evil, but I am not refraining from it.

However, one only intends not to do evil in this way when weakness is involved: the recovering drug addict intends not to do the evil action of taking drugs because he is tempted towards that evil. In my case, and hopefully yours, the thought of indulging in drugs does not cross the mind. I aim to live a healthy life, etc. and it follows from this that I do not take drugs, but I am not actively intending to refrain from taking them. Thus, on Howsepian's view, the absurd conclusion is thus entailed that the drug abuser who needs to be constantly refraining from taking drugs is in this respect more good than myself who does not need to refrain from drug taking. Indeed, pushed to its

[384] ibid., p. 479ff.

logical conclusion, Howsepian's position would posit a very strange type of morality. It would mean that in order to maximise the amount of good actions that I am doing, I should become addicted to drugs and alcohol so that I feel compelled to take these substances and can refrain from acting on the temptation. It would also suggest that God could only be maximally good by subjecting Himself to external temptations and weaknesses. But this would contradict God's perfection.

Howsepian has gone wrong by confusing the praise we give for achievement and moral praise. The reason we praise the drug abuser who has resisted the temptation to take drugs is because it was a difficult thing for him to do and not because he is to be morally praised. It therefore can be denied that resisting evil is a morally praiseworthy act. When we praise God, we are certainly not praising Him for overcoming weakness or some difficulty. This is not to say that the drug abuser did not have a moral duty to stop taking drugs – he did. But not all moral duties provide a basis for praise when we act on them – this is especially the case if the moral duty arises due to a fault or sin on the behalf of the agent whose duty it is. It would be absurd to think that a mugger who is violently mugging an old lady is morally praiseworthy because he decides half-way through his mugging to stop, even though he had a moral duty to do so.

8.7 Our Gratitude to God's Love

Obj. 1) We are only moved to gratitude towards those who have done something for us when it is motivated by some pure end. For example, someone who saves you from drowning in order to enslave you does not deserve your gratitude. 2) God in loving us through loving Himself is motivated by something impure in the relevant sense, namely, we are a means to his end of expressing his attributes, which renders us as objects for this end. 3) Therefore, we have no need of gratitude to God.

Ans. This would only be true if God loved us because we were a means by which He could love Himself. But this is not the case. God's love for us is an effect of His love for Himself. And this

does require a response of gratitude. This can be seen by the following illustration. A slave owner might love his slave, Friday, because he is hard working and provides a good yield. In such a case, Friday does not have to be thankful or grateful for the love he receives from the slave owner; for Friday is just being used as a means. It would be absurd to suggest that one should expect Friday to be grateful to his owner. Now consider the love that a parent might have for a child. Part of the reason a parent loves their child, and not some random other child, is because the parent loves themselves. It is because said child is their child that they are loving towards him. The child is not loved simply as a child qua vulnerable human being. Yet, the child still has an obligation to love his parents. God's love for us is similar to this parent relationship and not a slave owner relationship.

8.8 The Good of Creation

Obj. To argue that God is not moved to create because He sees creation as good but only because He sees His act of creating as good is to contradict the book of Genesis. 'And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.' (Gen. 1.31)

Ans. The argument of this thesis only denies that creation is intrinsically good, not that creation is good in God's eyes. Being intrinsically good, again, means that the thing has goodness independently of anything else. The reason God sees creation as good is because it is an effect of His act of expressing His attributes and not because it has independent goodness beyond the goodness it has by being an effect of God's expression of His attributes. In other words, creation is good in God's eyes only insofar as God's expression of His attributes, in His act of creation, is good.

8.9 Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin

Obj. God is not omnipotent if He cannot do sinful actions due to Him being necessarily loving/ good towards His creation. An omnipotent being should have the ability to do every possible action.

To sin is a possible action. If God cannot sin, then there is a possible action He cannot do. Thus, if God cannot sin, He is not omnipotent.

Ans. To answer this question, I turn to Aquinas. Aquinas argues God's inability to sin is not contrary to our assertion that God is omnipotent. Rather, it would be contrary to His omnipotence if He was able to sin. He has the following to say:

> To sin is to fall short of a perfect action; hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence. Therefore, it is that God cannot sin, because of his omnipotence. Now, it is true that the philosopher says that God can deliberately do what is evil. But this must be understood either on condition, the antecedent of which is impossible – as, for instance, if we were to say that God can do evil things if He will. For there is no reason why a conditional proposition should not be true, though both the antecedent and the consequent are impossible; as if one were to say: if a man is an ass, he has four feet.[385]

Aquinas has argued that we can make sense of how God could be incapable of evil and yet omnipotent by claiming that if God were to will to do an evil action, He could do it, even if it is impossible for the antecedent of this conditional to be true. Nelson Pike believes that Aquinas has erred.[386] He believes that this conditional statement is insufficient to demonstrate the compatibility between God's omnipotence and inability to do evil. He aims to show this by asking us to consider two similar statements.

(1) Jones has an ace in his hand if he wants to play it.

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[385] *ST* I. q.25. a.3.

[386] N. Pike, 'Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin', *American Philosophical Quarterly, v*ol. 6, no. 3, 1969, pp. 208-216.

and,

(2) Jones can wiggle his ear if he wants to.

Pike argues that while at a prima facie level it may appear that these are subjunctive conditionals, such that the consequent determines the antecedent, they are in fact not. This is because the consequents of these statements do not determine whether or not Jones has an ace in his hand or whether he can wiggle his ear or not. If Jones has an ace in his hand, he has an ace in his hand whether or not he wants to play it. Similarly, Jones has the ability to wiggle his ear whether or not he wants to. What the preposition serves to do here is indicate the indeterminacy of whether or not Jones will exercise his power.[387] In these statements, the relation between the truth value of the antecedent and the consequent are such that if the antecedent is false, so is the consequent; if Jones does not have an ace in his hand, then he cannot play an ace, even if he wants to; and if Jones does not have the ability to wiggle his ear, then he cannot wiggle his ear, even if he wants to. Pike maintains that Aquinas' conditional statement is analogous to (1) and (2), entailing that if 'God can do evil things' is false, then 'God can do evil things if He wills to' is also false. Thus, given that Aquinas argues God cannot do evil, he must maintain that He cannot do it even if He wants to.

Pike, however, is mistaken. Pike is correct to say that in statements (1) and (2) the consequent depends upon the antecedent that precedes it and does not determine it. However, is Pike right that these statements are analogous to the claim that God can do evil if he wants to? No. This is because, as I have established in this thesis, God's ability to sin is dependent upon what God wills. But the reason why God would never will to do evil is because, as Aquinas says at the start of the above quote, 'To sin is to fall short of a perfect action; hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence.' In Aquinas' thought we all aim for happiness and therefore by extension the perfection of our nature, because only by fulfilling our nature can we be happy. We sin, Aquinas argues, when we wrongly see as good and conducive to happiness that

[387] ibid., p. 211.

which will not lead to the perfection of our nature. Hence, to sin is to imperfectly aim for that perfection that we are all aiming for. And God will never make this sort of mistake.

I need not concern myself in this thesis as to whether Aquinas is right in defining human sin in this way. The real question is whether it is correct that for God to 'sin' is for Him to fall short of a perfect action. If what I have said in this thesis is true, then it is correct. For if God has created, it will follow necessarily that he aims to maximally and completely love Himself. This in turn entails He loves all things. But for God to 'sin', say by causing harm to us, would be for Him to not love all things. Hence, for God to 'sin' would mean He is falling short of perfectly loving Himself. Now, God could only fail to properly love Himself having chosen to create if He was either (a) not omniscient, and hence lacked the knowledge to do it, or (b) not omnipotent, and therefore lacked the power to do it. Therefore, in agreement with Aquinas (although Aquinas had different reasons for why it would be falling short of a perfect action for God to sin), 'it is that God cannot sin, because of His omnipotence.' Or in other words, if we understand God "sinning" to mean God harming creatures, or failing to love creatures fully, we know that this is impossible, because we know that in any world where God has created, which includes all worlds in which there are creatures, because God is omnipotent, He will never fail to will to love Himself, and in turn the creatures He has created, even if it is true that should He have willed otherwise, He would have the power to do otherwise.[388]

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[388] It could be argued that my response can defend the idea of an evil god. The argument would be that while an evil god cannot create, this does not contradict his greatness or omnipotence, as he could create if he willed, even if he never actually wills it. However, this reasoning differs from my position. In the case of a good God, His inability to sin is due to His perfection and divine attributes ensuring He always loves Himself. It is not that He lacks the ability to sin, but that He would never will to. In contrast, an evil god's inability to create would result from his lack of self-love, meaning he lacks the ability to love. Thus, he would also lack the ability to create. Even if this response fails, my thesis still shows that if God creates, He is loving. Therefore, if an evil god exists, he would only exist in a world where he does not create. Given that God has created, we can be confident that He is loving.

Max Baker-Hytch has noted in private correspondence that this constitutes a response to Stephen Law's 'Evil god challenge' (see Law, 'The evil God Challenge'). Law argues that belief in an evil god is absurd. He also argues that belief in an evil god is equally as reasonable as belief in a good God. Therefore, he argues, belief in a good God and belief in an evil god are epistemically symmetrical, and thus equally absurd. The above constitutes a response by showing that this symmetry does not hold. For, if correct, given God has created, belief in a loving God is reasonable whereas belief in an evil god is unreasonable.

8.10 Best Possible World?

Obj. If God is maximally good, then He will want the maximal amount of good things to be created. God will thus create the best possible world. Indeed, Leibniz believed that the fact that God has created demonstrates that there must be a best possible world. His argument, found in his *Theodicy,* is presented as follows:

(1) God is omnipotent, omniscient and maximally good.

(2) When choosing to create, God is presented with a large number of possible worlds, only one of which he can bring into being.

(3) God does nothing without sufficient reason.

(4) It is God's goodness that settles his choice when it comes to which possible world to create.

(5) Being perfectly good, God would only create the best possible world.

(6) If there is no best possible world, God would not create at all.

(7) But God has created.

(8) So there is a best possible world and our world is that world.[389]

Furthermore, if God is maximally loving, He will want to love as many things as possible, so He will create as many things as He possibly can in order to love them.

However, the objection maintains that the best possible world has not been created. God could have created the world with one more saint, one more nice island, etc. He could have prevented a door from trapping my thumb, and so on. Thus, God is not maximally good.

Moreover, since there are always more things God could create to satisfy His maximal desire to love, if God were maximally loving, He would have to create an infinite amount of things to love. God has not created an infinite amount of things to love, thus He is not maximally loving.

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[389] G. W., Leibniz, *Theodicy,* ed. A. Farrer, Open Court, Illinois, 1985.

Ans. Regarding God's maximal goodness, the account of God's maximal goodness argued for in this thesis does not entail that God has to create the best possible world in the sense of maximising the amount of good things that He has created. God is not required to create the maximal amount of saints, nice islands, etc. This is because created things do not contribute to the total amount of goodness there is. Therefore God's creating of more things would not entail that He is creating more goodness. God Himself is the sum of all goodness in and of Himself. This is not to say that creation is not good. As argued for in 8.8:

> The reason God sees creation as good is because it is an effect of His act of expressing His attributes and not because it has independent goodness beyond the goodness it has by being an effect of God's expression of His attributes. In other words, creation is good in God's eyes only insofar as God's expression of His attributes, in His act of creation, is good.

And, as said in 7.2, just as the sun receives nothing from the jewel that shines only by a participation of its brightness, so too does God not receive more goodness from creation which reflects His goodness. I draw from an example by Murphy to explain how creation can be called good and yet also hold that more goodness is not created at creation, by means of the following example of his.[390]

Consider different ways in which one party who is justified in holding some belief might bring it about that some other party is justified in holding that belief. A man might prove some theorem, and so be justified in believing it. He might then teach me the proof, I understand it, and come to hold the corresponding belief. This would be a world in which there is not only one more justified believer in that proposition than a world in which the man alone knows the proof, it is also a world in which there is, in a straightforward sense, more justification. Compare this to a case where the man simply reports to me that the proof is successful, and I believe him on the basis of his

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[390] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 81.

testimony. This is a world where there are more justified believers in that proposition, but not more justification.[391] Murphy writes,

> This is what goodness by participation is like. If one being is intrinsically good and another is good simply because it participates in the intrinsic good's goodness, there is an additional good (and even agent-neutrally good) thing, but there is no more goodness than if the intrinsically good thing alone existed.[392]

I am inclined to agree with Murphy's example here. I do not think God needs to create more things, as doing so would not result in more goodness. God gets all goodness from expressing His attributes. Creation is good by being an effect of this expressing of God's attributes, just as a ring might shine not of its own brightness but by reflecting the brightness of the sun. God, therefore, does not, on the account of God's goodness presented by my argument, need to create the best possible world in the sense of maximising the amount of good things that He has created.

There is, however, a sense in which this is a 'best possible world'. After all, for any world that God creates, He will love the things created in it maximally. So there is no world that is superior to the actual world in the sense that God loves creatures more in that world than in our world.

Concerning God's maximal love, God does not need to create an infinite amount of things to satisfy His maximal love. For God's love is not directed fundamentally towards creatures, but Himself. Creation is an expression of intra-Trinitarian love and creatures are loved as a byproduct. And God's love of Himself fully satisfies His maximal love.

This response allows me to also address a concern voiced by Murphy that love cannot be a divine perfection as it cannot reach an intrinsic maximum. Murphy defines love as I did in the

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[391] ibid.

[392] ibid.

introduction – a desire for the good of the welfare of the beloved and, if possible, to be in union with the beloved. (0.3) But this means, argues Murphy, that

> …for every plant and animal, God must will its maximal good and God's maximal unity with that object. With every blade of grass, with every dung beetle, with every earthworm, with every honey badger, with every human, with every angel… God must want the *maximal* good of and as *complete* unity as possible with every being…[393]

Beyond the seeming absurdity of this (addressed in 8.2), Murphy questions whether it is even possible for a creatures's good to be maximally promoted and for God to be in maximal unity with every creature.[394] As such, it is questionable that love can have an intrinsic maximum and therefore be a divine perfection. Speaking of the objects of God's love, Murphy writes:

> But if there is no such thing as the most complete possible good of any of those objects – if, for one of those beings, for any good realised for it, it is possible for its good to be realised to a greater degree – then there will be no such thing as willing the most good for that being. And if there is no such thing as the most complete possible unity with any of those objects – if, for one of those beings, for any unity realised between the lover and it, it is possible for there to be greater unity, then there will be no such thing as willing the most unity for that being. In that case, love, understood in the supreme degree sense, will fail to have an intrinsic maximum. And nothing counts as a divine perfection that lacks an intrinsic maximum.[395]

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[393] ibid., pp. 35-36.

[394] ibid., p. 37.

[395] Murphy, *God's Own Ethics,* p. 36.

What I have said above answers this objection by Murphy, since it is in maximally loving Himself that He satisfies His maximal love. And God maximally and completely promotes His own goodness. Further, He is in complete unity with Himself. Thus, even if it is not possible to maximally promote the good of creatures, or be in complete unity with creatures, God can still be maximally loving. His maximal love for Himself will then entail that He is always seeking further unity with us and promoting our good, either in this life or the next.[396]

8.11 Problem of Evil

Obj. A maximally loving God would not allow for the existence of evil, or at the very least gratuitous evil. Gratuitous evil exists. Thus, God is not maximally loving.[397]

Ans. The objection just presented is what is called The Problem of Evil, mentioned briefly in my introduction (0.1). The Problem of Evil is a typical objection to the idea that God loves all things because it is argued that a loving God would not permit as much suffering as we observe in the

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[396] Alexis Torrance (*Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ*, Oxford, University Press, 2020, pp. 49-53.) has pointed to a few places in which the idea of ever growing in goodness and unity (*eschatological epektasis)* is found in the Fathers. The most major source of this view in the Fathers is Gregory of Nyssa ('Commentary on Song of Songs'*,* trans. R. A. Norris, in J. T. Fitzgerald et al. (eds), *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs,* Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2012, p. 259.), who writes:

> [Paul] teaches us, on the one hand, that what is ever and again discovered of that blessed Nature that is the Good is something great but, on the other hand, that what lies beyond what is grasped at any particular point is infinitely greater; and during the entire eternity of the ages this becomes the case for the person who participates in the Good, since those who participate in it receive increase and growth in that they encounter ever greater and better things.

[397] Some forms of the Problem of Evil take there to be an absolute logical incompatibility between the existence of God and any kind of evil. (Mackie) Not many philosophers today accept that the *logical* Problem of Evil provides a good challenge against theism, largely due to the work of Alvin Plantinga. As such, I do not see it as a challenge to my thesis and will not address it here. I instead refer readers to Plantinga's work: A. Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil, Grand Rapids*, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1977. Indeed, most forms today take what is called an evidentialist approach. The Evidential Problem of Evil argues that while there may not be a strict incompatibility between God and the existence of evil, there is an incompatibility between gratuitous evil and God. And given the sheer extent of evil that is experienced in the world, the evidentialist argues that it is more *probable* that this evil is gratuitous, and that God does not exist, than that it is non-gratuitous and a morally good God does exist.

world. A morally good person is one who, as far as he is reasonably able, helps others and prevents and alleviates suffering – this is clear from a quick survey of notable figures that are seen to be morally good: Mother Teresa worked to provide aid in Calcutta; William Wilberforce fought to end slavery; the Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon set up and funded orphanages, and so on. Hence if God is morally good in broadly the sense that we are morally good, and maximally so, then He too would be aiming to prevent and alleviate suffering. And since God is omnipotent, it is reasonable to conclude that this would result in the complete elimination of evil, or at the very least gratuitous evil. Yet, as is evident, there is a great amount of seemingly gratuitous evil in the world. Disease, disaster, moral atrocities and wanton cruelty are common occurrences. Thus an all loving, good God cannot exist, His existence being disproved by the existence of evil of the kind and on the scale that we find in our world.

The Problem of Evil threatens all theists who hold to God's goodness. Murphy and Davies have both offered a theory of God's goodness that attempts to explain the existence of evil in light of the existence of a good God. In doing so, they adjust the definition of God's goodness, by supposing that God is either not good like us (5.1) or else has no requiring reasons to promote our welfare (6.1). In doing this, they are making a concession to the proponent of the Problem of Evil because they deny that an all good God – in the sense commonly understood by proponents of the Problem of Evil, a God who is committed to upholding creaturely welfare – exists.

Murphy and Davies' theories are successful in avoiding the Problem of Evil but they do so at a high cost. First, they appear to have changed the definition of goodness compared with what most theists understand by the notion, and, in so doing, have conceded ground to proponents of the Problem of Evil. Second, they introduce a pastoral problem of evil.

My theory is not as successful at avoiding the Problem of Evil: on my account, the problem still has bite. But this lack of success comes with an outweighing advantage: namely, not appearing to have denied that God is good in the sense normally affirmed by theists. Furthermore, I completely avoid the pastoral problem of evil. Theists who want a theory of God's goodness will have to decide

amongst these theoretical pros and cons and decide which is too high a price. But I note that most theists have accepted the burden the Problem of Evil proponent has placed on them, and have advanced various theodicies to explain why a good God might allow evil. And my theory sits neatly in that tradition. It is no more at a disadvantage against other theories that hold to an account of God's goodness as similar to human goodness. If a theist is happy to accept the burden of explaining the Problem, then he will not see the Problem of Evil as a reason not to accept my theory. For many theists, however, to shoulder the burden of the pastoral Problem of Evil while apparently denying the traditional understanding of God's goodness will be too high of a cost.

This said, I do believe that my theory has an advantage relative to other accounts which construe God's goodness to be similar to human goodness. Here is why. Given the severity of the evils in our world, it may be that without a strong prior reason to suppose that God is good, the typical responses to the Problem of Evil given by theists will not be convincing. My argument, as I hope to show, provides this prior reason to trust in God's goodness.

Typically, in response to the Problem of Evil, theists have offered a variety of theodicies, with the aim of showing that God allows evil for some greater good and thus that the existence of evil is not contrary to His maximal love or goodness. However, while theodicies work in showing why God might allow some evils – God allows for moral evil to allow for the good of free choice, etc. – there is a lot of evil that seems gratuitous and without explanation. Is it reasonable to conclude from the observable empirical evidence around us that all the evil observed is working towards some good, such as allowing for the good of free will? Would I be reasonable in concluding from an observation of the empirical landscape that it is obvious obvious that God is working for good? I do not think so. On the contrary, it looks as if there is a great deal of gratuitous suffering. This point is observed by William Rowe, who argues that:

> In the light of our experience and knowledge of the variety and scale of human and animal suffering in our world, the idea that none of this suffering could have been prevented by an

> omnipotent being without thereby losing a greater good or permitting an evil at least as bad seems an extraordinary absurd idea, quite beyond our belief.[398]

Others, such as Davies, have reached similar beliefs. Davies cites the example of trapping one's thumb in the door as an example of an evil that is seemingly gratuitous.[399] So while there may be theodicies that can be offered which give a plausible reason as to why a good God might allow for the existence of evil, they do not explain all the evidence at hand. And it is even possible to reasonably conclude from the evidence so understood that God is not good.

A common tactic taken at this point is to introduce a type of 'sceptical theism'. This is a 'as far as we can see' approach. The main gist of the sceptical theist argument is to appeal to our own epistemic limitations and to claim that we cannot know that the evil we experience is not logically or metaphysically tied to some greater good. After all, we are not omniscient and in some cases we may not see what good can come from the evil that we experience. Even small things can have massive effects that are beyond our ken. The flapping of a butterfly's wings (for example) can cause perturbations in the wind which can result in a hurricane in some distant place; yet, mere observation of the butterfly would not give us the knowledge to accurately predict the effects of its wings flapping. Similarly, it is argued, we cannot identify, in all cases, the connections that hold, of logical or metaphysical necessity, between the evils that we observe and various potential goods from mere observation. After all, we may not be aware of the full range of possible goods, and may not grasp the connections that obtain between those goods that we do know and the evils that we observe. Since therefore, we are not in the epistemic position to access whether evil will lead to

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[398] W. L. Rowe, 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism', *American Philosophical Quarterly,* vol. 16, no. 4, 1979, p. 335.

[399] Davies, *The Reality of God,* p. 157.

greater good or not, we are not justified in concluding from evil that it demonstrates, or even provides good evidence for the claim, that God is not morally good.[400]

An analogue can be found in a chess game played by two grandmasters. Knowing the basic rules of chess, we can tell that the game starts well. Traditional openings are made, etc. However, into the game, one of the grandmasters makes a move which costs him his Queen. Usually, this is considered a major blunder. As far as we can see, this is a blunder. However, what we cannot see is that this was a trap, whereby by having his Queen taken by his opponent ensured victory.[401] Now, the grandmaster who made this move knew that the move he was making would give him the win, even though from our perspective it looked bad. It could be argued that we should have trusted that the grandmaster knew what he was doing and ourselves withheld judgment, since we are not grandmasters and not in place to make judgment. Similarly, the same is said with regard to God; God is like the grandmaster. We should expect that He knows how He is acting, and not assume that we are in a position to pass judgment on him.

Sceptical theism, however, has been criticised for leading to radical scepticism about what kind of things we can take at face value.[402] There are many things that I take to be the case on the basis of how things appear to me to be without being omniscient. But sceptical theism invites us to think that since I am not omniscient, it is quite possible that much of what I take to be true on the basis of how things seem to me are not in fact true, because of certain evidence that lies beyond my ken. Thus, unless full blown scepticism is adopted, we have to accept that there are some things that we can justifiably believe without being omniscient.

Consider the following. At a crime scene it is concluded that Mr Jenkins, the butler, is responsible for the murder of Miss White, the cook. This is concluded because Mr Jenkins'

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[400] For an example of a sceptical theist approach, see W., Alston, 'The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition', in Howard-Snyder (ed), *The Evidential Argument From Evil,* Indiana, University Press, 1996, p. 98.

[401] See, for example, the Chess match between Bent Larsen and Tiger Petrosian in Santa Monica, 1966.

[402] Davies, *Reality of God,* p. 158.

fingerprints are on the trigger of the gun, it is his gun, he sent emails to Miss White titled 'I want to kill you', and the maid, Mrs Peacock, says she saw Mr Jenkins shoot Miss White. Now, from the evidence presented to us, it would be reasonable for us to conclude that Mr Jenkins committed the murder. But, there is a possibility that Mr Jenkins did not commit the murder: that someone placed Mr Jenkins' fingerprints on the weapon, stole his gun, hacked Mr Jenkins' computer and sent the emails on Mr Jenkins' behalf. And perhaps the maid was hallucinating. However, while this is a small possibility, it is not reasonable to endorse this version of events. But might this be analogous to the move made by those who suggest that God is good despite evidence to the contrary? Davies argues that it is. He claims that the 'sceptical theist' approach is to deny what is in fact clearly the case on the grounds that there may be truths beyond our ken that allow for a different interpretation, which is to invite to scepticism.[403]

I believe that my theory of God's goodness offers a response to Davies' position, by providing a prior argument for the goodness of God, and therefore additional justification for believing that the evil the Problem of Evil points to must be for some greater good, this thereby pointing to a significant disanalogy between the case of Jenkins and the case of God.

The aim of this thesis has been to show, contrary to the view of Davies and others, that granted simply that God has created, it will follow that God is maximally loving towards all things and therefore acts in accordance with the norms of morality. So, if one accepts my thesis, then before we consider the facts about human experience that give rise to the Problem of Evil, we already have reason to suppose that God is maximally loving and acts in accordance with the norms of morality. This serves as an argument in and of itself against the challenges of the Problem of Evil, showing God is maximally loving despite what the existence of evil may otherwise suggest. And this case for thinking of God as good in this sense can be strengthened when it is combined with the standard theodicies, which give an indication, although not a wholly sufficient indication, of why a good God

[403] ibid., pp. 156ff.

might allow evil. Moreover, if we cannot identify the reasons why God would permit certain evils, then contrary to Davies, we will still have reason to think of God as good, because the case of God presents a significant difference from the case of Jenkins: in the case of God, we are not dealing with the bare possibility that God might be good in the face of evidence that may suggest otherwise; instead, given the argument I have presented, we have good reason to think of God as good given the mere fact that God has created, even if we are unclear about why God should have permitted certain evils. Thus, granted the argument I have presented, when God acts towards His creation in a way that does not appear to be in accordance with the norms of morality, He can be trusted in a way that is more akin to trusting a grand chess master who makes what appears to be a dubious move and not akin to trusting Mr. Jenkins is innocent despite all evidence to the contrary.

Other accounts may be at a disadvantage by not providing such a strong prior basis for thinking of God as good, before we come to consider the facts of evil, and the theodicies that attempt to explain evil. For instance, on Alston's account, the supposition that God is good in the relevant way seems to rest purely on brute fact, which as I suggested in 4.3, is not sufficient when faced with the powerful evidence against God's goodness that the Problem of Evil presents. My account, however, has argued that God could only create through maximal love of Himself and by entailment us. Thus, to exist in a world created by God, like we do, means that He must love us, despite it sometimes seeming to be otherwise.

Conclusion

To conclude, I have attempted in this thesis to provide an account of God's goodness which finds an intermediate position between two schools of thought regarding the goodness of God. The first school states that to call God good is to call Him a moral agent who follows the norms of morality perfectly, God being subject to them. The second school of thought states that to call God good is to say He is metaphysically perfect, but does not go further to call Him morally good, either because (1) it would be a category error to apply moral categories to God, or (2) because God does not have requiring reasons to promote our welfare. I argued in this thesis that the first school of thought is unacceptable, as it subjects God to an independent system of morality, thus questioning His aseity and sovereignty. Regarding the second school of thought, I have argued that to only call God metaphysically good is incomplete, and without a moral aspect of the goodness of God, it leaves the theist without the confidence that should form part of orthodox Christian practice. I argued that it falls afoul of Mill's criticism that to say that God's goodness is not moral goodness is really to say that God is not good at all. This is especially the case when this proposal is taken in Davies' sense, according to which the 'wholly otherness' of God means no positive attribution can be made of God. Davies' position further errs in conflicting with a prima facie reading of the Scriptures, which suggests that God is love, good, cares for His creation, etc. acts towards it in the way that one would expect a morally good person to act. (Jer. 31.18; Lam. 3:33, Wis. 11:24, etc.)

I have also addressed William Alston's position, which holds that, because of His metaphysical perfection, God will necessarily act in accordance with moral norms, even if, properly speaking, God is not a moral agent in the sense of being subject to and bound by moral rules, as we are. I have argued that Alston's account is unsatisfactory as it relies on brute fact as to why God's nature is such that He will act in accordance with moral norms. I believe this is unsatisfactory since a reliance on brute fact may not provide the prior confidence needed to trust that God is good when faced with the overwhelming evil experienced in this world as presented by the Problem of Evil.

My own account, like Alston's, argues that because of His metaphysical perfection, God will necessarily act in accordance with moral norms. However, my position has the advantage of providing a reason as to why God acts in accordance with moral norms beyond appealing to just brute fact. My theory is that the only reason that God could have had for creating is love for Himself, for any other reason would attribute dependence to God and therefore not be fitting for a conception of God as an Anselmian being. For God to love Himself entails, I have argued, that He loves all things. For the blueprints, the divine ideas, of the things He will create pre-exist, sans creation, in the mind of God. Thus, in loving Himself, God loves these divine ideas; in turn, I argue that this entails that God loves the things themselves when He creates them.

The advantage of my position, then, is that we can call God morally good without subjecting Him to norms of morality and therefore bringing into question His sovereignty or aseity. Moreover, since my position does not rely on brute fact, it is more resilient against problems of evil. This is because relying on brute fact alone is not enough to counter the evidence from evil that suggests that God is not good. My own position provides a prior reason to believe that God acts to promote our good, which helps outweigh the reasons presented by the Problem of Evil not to believe so. Thus, while not explored in detail in this thesis, my argument provides a way to supplement the standard theistic responses to the problem of evil, namely, the appeal to theodicy or to sceptical theist considerations. Without a strong prior reason to believe that God is good, theodicies and sceptical theism may, on their own, not be enough to counter the powerful evidence that God is not good that is presented by evil.

The position I have developed is, I believe, a novel contribution to the discussion about the metaphysical character of God's goodness. This said, my position it is not completely novel but finds its roots in the fathers and early theologians of the church. For example, we find in Augustine the idea that God loves Himself. Augustine says, 'Who dares to say that the Father loves neither Himself, nor the Son, nor the Holy Ghost, except by the Holy Ghost?'[404] There is a great hint of my

[404] Augustine, 'The Trinity', xv, 7.

thesis found in Aquinas, who also speaks of God's love of Himself through the intra-Trinitarian love.[405] However, in contrast with my thesis, neither Augustine nor Aquinas see God's love of Himself as entailing that He loves all things maximally and aims to promote their good. However, there is a sense in which for Aquinas God loves all things through loving Himself:

> Although creatures have not existed from eternity, except in God, yet because they have been in Him from eternity, God has known them eternally in their proper natures; and for that reason has loved them, even as we, by the images of things within us, know things existing in themselves.[406]

So perhaps a case like the one I have presented could be developed from remarks of Aquinas, but any such case would be exegetically controversial, since Davies, a renowned authority on Aquinas, evidently reads him very differently.

As has been clearly indicated throughout, I believe my thesis has not only a philosophical application, but also a pastoral one. When faced with evil, a difficult circumstance, and trying times, knowing that God is love, that, having created, He loves His creation necessarily and wishes the best for His creation, can be a great comfort. The theist can say with Nahum: 'The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble.' (Na. 1.7) While accounts in which God is not necessarily morally good towards His creation, such as those provided by Davies and Murphy, avoid a philosophical problem of evil, they do not avoid a pastoral one. If the possibility is open that God may fail to act on moral norms, confidence and trust in God might be lost. Additionally, my account has the advantage of according with a prime-facie reading of the Scriptures, which explain that God is loving and cares for His creation, indicating that His goodness is similar to moral goodness.

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[405] See fn. 359.

[406] *ST* I. q.20, a.2.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– *Book of Common Prayer, Collect for Ash Wednesday*

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