GOD AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

OF SUFFERING

PhD by papers

by

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Abstract

The five papers that follow are set in the context of the problem of, or argument from, evil. I have chosen to discuss, in that context, three topics that are of special interest to me in the hope that what I have to say about them may make a useful contribution to literature on the subject. The topics discussed are, first, the inductive evidential version of the argument from evil considered in light of the subjectivity of human experience; second, the question of attributing blame to God for causing or allowing human suffering; and, third, God's knowledge of the human condition of suffering.

The topic discussed in paper one is the inductive version of the evidential argument from evil, considered in light of the subjectivity of human experiences. I argue that when the latter is taken into account, not only does the evidential problem of evil have less force than might be expected, it also becomes impossible to formulate it in a straightforward way that would be understood and/or accepted by everyone engaged with the problem.

Paper two is concerned with James F. Ross' argument for the illegitimacy of blaming God for the existence of evil even though God has, or shares, responsibility for it. Ross' contention is that once the relation between God and the created world is understood, it will be clear that God is isolated from, rather than the deserver of, blame. The argument offers a neat and rather ingenious response to those who contend that evil threatens God's perfect goodness. There can be no such threat, argues Ross. Viewed sympathetically, I try to fill in some of the gaps Ross leaves open in an attempt to see how far the argument may be defended against objections. In the end, however, I give reasons why the theist should not accept it.

The subject of paper three is the Free Will Theodicy, which attempts to isolate God from blame for our suffering. Among the conditions necessary for the Theodicy to be effective are (a) that created agents possess the God-given gift of free will to do good and/or cause suffering, and (b) that free will has such a high, positive, and invariant value that God desires us to keep it even if suffering may be the result. If either condition is false, the Theodicy is undermined. I grant (a) but argue against (b) by showing that the value of free will is sensitive to the context in which it is exercised. Specifically, the value can be low or zero, or even negative depending on the context. To argue for this I appeal to our intuitions concerning right and wrong supported by scientific method. The consequence is that the Theodicy is seriously undermined.

Set in contexts of the argument from unsurpassability and the argument from evil, in the fourth paper I examine four accounts addressing the question of the kind of world we should expect an unsurpassable being to create, and whether ours is that kind of world. It seems that God must create the best world He can in order to remain unsurpassable and hence free from blame, but is it likely that, given the existence of evil, our world is the best? I examine four accounts that attempt to establish that our world can be regarded as the creation of God. Only one of these argues that God need not create the best. The other accounts try to show that evil is somehow insignificant or non-existent, and ought not to feature in our judgements about the quality of the world. But much depends on one's point of view. From God's perspective

the world may appear better than it does from ours. No account explains how, given the world's evils, it is consistent with having been created by God *from our point of view*.

The fifth and final paper addresses the question of whether the God of traditional theism can have knowledge of what it is like for His creatures to experience pain and suffering. I explain why God should have this knowledge, and also why attributing it to Him is problematic. The possibility of doing so depends on how the nature of God and that of ourselves are conceived. I discuss three such conceptions: (a) that God is a spirit and we are physically embodied (the traditional conception); (b) that both God and ourselves are spirits (the idealist conception); and (c) that God is one substance and we are parts of God (the pantheist conception). I argue that it is only according to (c) that the knowledge attribution is plausible. But we are then left with the task of rendering the pantheistic God consistent with what the traditional theist wants to say about Him, and how such a conception is affected by the existence of evil.

Dedication

I lovingly dedicate these papers to my wife, Carol, and daughters, Katy and Rachel.

Acknowledgements

Contents

INTRODUCTION AND BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE PAPERS

There follow five papers in the philosophy of religion that relate to the title, *God and the Human Condition of Suffering*. While this title applies to all of the papers in various ways, it doesn't convey a clear message about the content of those papers. So I want to make that message clear at the beginning. First, what I mean by 'the human condition' is the condition comprising the many experiences human beings have that collectively determine the quality of life that each one has. There are features of that condition which are both peculiar to us as individuals, and those that are common to us all. Most of us share those features that are positive, such as joy and happiness, that make the human condition desirable. But we also share features that are less positive, such as pain and suffering, that have a detrimental effect on our overall quality of life and state of well-being. These less desirable features may also raise the question, even among the faithful, whether a loving God (if there is one) really is lovingly and morally concerned for us, or whether He is the proper object of blame for the pain and suffering He causes or allows us to endure.

This question is familiarly associated with the problem of evil, a human invention based on experience, that theists and anti-theists have debated for centuries. It is this problem, insofar as an understanding of the human condition gives rise to it, that is the focus of the five papers that follow. I address three issues in all that are associated with the problem. These I have chosen on the basis of particular interest, and also in the hope that they fill gaps I see in the literature, to which they may make a useful contribution. The issues concern, first, the problem of evil itself, where I see difficulties with its formulation and forcefulness; second, the question of the attribution of blame to God for the pain and suffering we endure; and, third, God's knowledge of the human condition – whether God is in a position to know, as we

do of ourselves, what it is like for each and every one of us to experience pain and suffering. I will shortly offer a brief outline of each paper, but before doing so I should mention a couple of assumptions I will be making throughout.

Since God and evil are prominent features of all papers, I will be assuming, first, that the term 'God' refers to the God of traditional Judaeo-Christian theism. This being, in western philosophical circles, is often referred to as the Anselmian God, the greatest possible being, possessing, of necessity, all perfections, including omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness.

I will assume, secondly, that the term 'evil' refers to the profoundly negative human experiences of pain and suffering. (I will not be addressing problems associated with the pain and suffering of non-human animals.) We sometimes refer to certain human beings and natural phenomena as 'evil'. But they are so-called only in a derivative sense. For if Jack the Ripper and the 1755 Lisbon earthquake had caused no one any pain or suffering, we would have little reason to call either of them 'evil'.

Those, then, are two key assumptions I will be making throughout. Now, I want to offer a brief introduction to each paper.

Paper one: The evidential argument from evil and human subjectivity

The focus here is on the problem of evil itself – the so-called inductive evidential version of it – and how the subjective nature of human experience affects it. This version turns on the evidence of human pain and suffering to support its conclusion, which is that, in view of the evidence, God's non-existence is very likely. I try to express the problem in a way that best

brings out how the gathering of evidence is used to arrive at that conclusion. However, what counts as evidence is called into question when the subjectivity of human experience is brought to bear. Some of us experience, for example, pain, as being very unpleasant. For those who do, then those experiences count as evidence. But others' experiences of pain are not unpleasant at all, so those experiences – while still of pain – do not count as evidence. Moreover, some people are wholly insensitive to pain but suffer instead from the harm that pain normally warns us to avoid. For such people, it is the absence of pain that counts as evidence, not its presence. The consequences of these considerations are twofold: that there is somewhat less evidence supporting the likelihood of God's non-existence than might be expected, so that the inductive evidential problem of evil is not as forceful as might be supposed. Moreover, it is impossible to formulate the problem in a way that everyone could understand and accept.

Paper two: James Ross' metaphysical dependence defence of God's goodness

Any theistic argument designed to answer the case against God's perfect goodness for causing or allowing evil, deserves serious attention; one designed to show that there isn't even a case to answer, especially so. The topic of this paper is just such an argument, offered by the philosopher and theologian, James F. Ross. The argument is expressed in chapter 6 of his book, *Philosophical Theology* (1969). It is from an appeal to two key principles that Ross arrives at his conclusion. The principles in question are metaphysical and ontological respectively. The first concerns the dependence relation between God and ourselves, and the second, the different levels of reality in which both exist. Conjoined, these ensure (according to Ross) the illegitimacy of inferring anything about God's moral character from known facts about evil in the world.

It is likely, however, that we are mystified why those principles should entail that conclusion. Hence, Ross attempts to demystify us by citing a familiar case in which both principles are believed to apply – the case of authors and their fictional characters – and in which there is no doubt about any attribution of moral blame. That is, just as it is illegitimate to infer the moral character of authors from the suffering of their fictional beings, so it is illegitimate to infer God's moral character from the suffering of ourselves.

It is Ross' reference to the suffering of fictional characters that is likely to destroy any plausibility his argument is thought to have, the reason being that one cannot draw conclusions about real beings by an analogy with merely fictional ones. Peter Geach (1979) expresses this very thought in terms of a 'real beings' objection. After Ross has expressed his argument, he briefly considers a few anticipated objections, the real beings one among them. He says that he is not arguing from analogy as the objection has it, but from the two principles I have stated, above, so the objection misses the target. Or so Ross believes.

I first encountered the argument some years ago and, because it appeared to offer a straightforward and neat solution to the problem of evil, for me the argument had an immediate and intuitive appeal. Still having a sympathetic attitude towards the argument, I feel it is worth devoting a paper to it and defending it as much as seems reasonable against several objections, including the so-called 'real beings objection', and others that Ross did not consider. The conclusion must be, after all due support, that the argument could not be accepted by the theist, despite its bold claim to immunise God from blame for our suffering. The argument, if taken on board, forbids any inference whatsoever to God's moral character from known facts about the world, including inferences to God's perfect goodness from the world's beauty and majesty. In fact, we cannot even legitimately infer that there is a God.

None of this would be acceptable to the theist, and so Ross' argument must ultimately be rejected.

Paper three: Value contextualism and the Free Will Theodicy

Still on the theme of immunising God from blame for evil, the subject of this paper is the Free Will Theodicy ('FWT') as set out and defended by its modern supporters, especially Alvin Plantinga (1977). The argument is that God does not will evil; certain created free agents do. God remains indirectly responsible for that evil, however, in that He allows it, but avoids blame for doing so by permitting created agents to keep the valuable gift of free will. The world is better for containing agents who are free to do evil as well as good (given a certain balance of good over evil) than would be a world containing mere automata.

What I believe to be fundamentally wrong with FWT is its dependence on free will's having a high, positive, and invariant value – enough to make free will worth our keeping even if a certain amount of evil is the result. I argue, with reference to our intuitions about right and wrong supported by scientific method, that the value of free will is not invariant but sensitive to the context of its exercise. In some contexts, the value is indeed positive and high, but in others it is negative and low, and hence not worth keeping in those contexts. This, I argue, is sufficient to undermine FWT.

Paper four: What kind of world would we expect an unsurpassable being to create, and could our world be it?

The question addressed here is whether our world is consistent with having been created by God. If the created world contains more evil than a better world would, then God is to be blamed for not creating that better world. Likewise, if God created the world and another being could have created a better one with less evil, then God would be surpassed by that

being. This is the argument from unsurpassability. Apparently, if God is unsurpassable, then anything he does or creates must be such that no other being could do better. Consequently, we would expect a world created by God to be the best possible in order to be consistent with the nature of an unsurpassable being.

I examine four accounts, each of which purportedly explains why our world is consistent with having been created by God. These are the accounts of the Bible, Leibniz, R.M. Adams, and Klaas Kraay's theistic multiverse account.

I begin with the story of Job found in the Old Testament. The reason for this choice is that references are made there to the character of the world God created, and to human pain and suffering. Especially interesting is that, on a literal interpretation of the text, we find that the character of the world is described in the words of God Himself.

According to the story, God allows Satan to cause Job inordinate suffering in order to test Job's faith in Him. Job, hitherto a good and faithful man, came through his suffering to question God's sense of justice in creating an imperfect world in which the good (like himself) suffer as well as the wicked. God hears Job's question but only half-answers it. Regarding the character of the world, God answers that if only Job possessed God's unlimited understanding, he would know that the world is a wondrous, majestic creation; an expression of supreme divine wisdom and power. However, in the Biblical account, God does not address the question of divine injustice, perhaps believing that He had already done so in pointing out to Job the character of the world. But that is not to explain why, from Job's point of view, there is suffering and injustice in the world. On that account, God's answer is not, for Job at least, a satisfying one.

Several interesting points emerge from the story. Chief among them is how matters appear from different points of view. The world is worthy of being God's creation from God's point of view, but has become a vale of misery and suffering from Job's. God does compensate Job in the end, but initially seems wholly indifferent to Job's suffering, viewed in context of the entire world's majestic character. A problem has to do with those two deeply contrasting perspectives. Unless God enlightens us as He might have enlightened Job, we are left to draw our own conclusions about the characters of the world and God, for ours is the only perspective we have. The problem of evil is a human invention just as a solution would be. That no such problem exists in God's eyes hardly settles the matter for us. Nor is the question of different perspectives unique to the story of Job, for we will find it again when we turn to Leibniz's account, next.

Leibniz is well known for his claim that ours is the best possible world. I focus on just two of his arguments that deal with God's freedom to create any world, while being *inclined* to choose the best; and an argument that the world is free from evil from God's perspective, thus explaining why it might seem the best to Him. Again, the difficulty is that the problem of evil is not to be solved in this way because we cannot share God's perspective and are limited to our own, from which evil is still evident.

The third account, given by R.M. Adams (1987), attempts to show that an unsurpassable God need not create the best possible world. According to Adams, God could choose to create a lesser world, perhaps not unlike ours, by appealing to a principle of selection that differs from the principle of the best, and one that is consistent with ethical views typical of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Aside from pointing out some oddities in Adams' argument, I respond by showing that the ethical views Adams relies upon afford an inadequate basis or principle to which God could appeal in choosing a world. Their scope is simply too wide and incapable of focusing God's attention on one particular world rather than another. Given God's perfect nature, only the principle of the best could determine God's creative activity. Consequently, Adams seems committed to the view he argues against, that God must create the best, or else surrender His unsurpassability.

Then I turn, fourthly, I turn to Klaas Kraay's argument (2010) that we should expect an unsurpassable being to create a multiverse consisting of such universes that, collectively, comprise the best possible world (others besides Kraay offer arguments to the same conclusion, but because these have much in common, I focus chiefly on Kraay's for simplicity). The idea seems simple enough. In God's understanding there is a hierarchy of ever-better possible universes. To bring about the very best state of affairs, and thereby escape the charge of surpassability, God creates all of the better universes and disregards the rest. Metaphysically speaking, the idea is that an unsurpassable being will freely choose to bring into existence as much positive reality as possible, and only positive reality that is good. Hence, two principles are appealed to in creating and sustaining universes: the principle of plenitude and, as Kraay has it, the principle of axiological status.

There are, however, difficulties associated with the application of these principles. For example, concerning the principle of plenitude, a difficulty is whether a universe could be as plenitudinous as a multiverse, given that a universe could be infinitely large. Another, concerning the principle of axiological status, is that the status of universes can change over time, making unselected universes worthy of selection as their status increases, and selected

universes unworthy of being sustained as their status decreases. This poses problems for God's unsurpassability, for unless He continually brings into existence those unselected universes that become worthy of creation, and annihilates selected universes that become unworthy, God's unsurpassabiliy is called into question.

Then there is the question of how multiverse theorists address the problem of evil. Some universes comprising the multiverse will contain more pain and suffering than others, namely, those having lower axiological status. A way out of this would be for denizens of those universes to hop to ones having higher status where fewer evils exist. On Kraay's understanding, however, this would be impossible because universes are causally isolated entities. There is no passage between them. The consequence is that occupants of some universes have a greater right to question God's justice in creating them where they are than others. The multiverse account doesn't, therefore, solve the problem of evil.

Paper five: God's knowledge of the human condition of suffering

In the final paper I investigate whether it is possible to attribute to God knowledge of the human condition – that is, knowledge of what it is like for each and every one of us to have experiences, especially of pain and suffering. On the face of it, it might seem obvious that God would have this knowledge. As an omniscient being, God knows all there is to know, and if *we* know what it is like to experience pain and suffering, then this is something God would know. But, in fact, it is no easy matter explaining how such knowledge for God is possible.

The question is not whether God knows what pain and suffering are like *for Him*, but for each and every one of us, His creatures. Would it matter if God did not have this knowledge? For several reasons, it would. First, in lacking this knowledge God would not be omniscient, for

there would be a kind of knowledge God doesn't possess. Second, how could God show us loving compassion when we are suffering if He doesn't understand what our suffering is like? Theists believe that God shares in our woes as well as our joys, but that seems possible only if He knows what our woes and joys are like. But more importantly, in relation to the problem of evil, theists believe that God causes or allows us to suffer in order that greater goods can emerge from that suffering without which those goods would not be possible. Along with this view is the question of balance between the costs paid in terms of suffering and benefits ensuing, such that God is responsible for ensuring that the balance does not dip towards the side of suffering. To do that God needs to know, as we know, what it is like to pay the costs and to reap the benefits.

Being able to attribute to God this knowledge turns out to depend on the way in which the natures of God and ourselves are conceived. I investigate three familiar but different conceptions to see what difficulties arise with each and how they might be overcome. First I investigate the traditional conception, according to which God is an incorporeal being and we are corporeal. There is an ontological difference between us. There are several routes the traditionalist might take but none turns out to be entirely satisfactory.

Next is the Berkeleian idealist conception, in which both God and ourselves are incorporeal, so there is no longer an ontological difference between us. Berkeley claims that God knows perfectly well what it is like for us to experience pain and suffering, but offers no argument for this claim. We must, therefore, search Berkeley's writings to discover such an argument if his claim is to be believed. For the claim to be true, it must be argued that our ideas of relevant experiences flow from us to God, just as God's ideas flow from Him to us. Berkeley seems reluctant to admit such a flow, but seems committed to allowing it nevertheless. That

explains God's knowledge of our experiences, but two key problems lurk in the wings. First, whether the ideas God receives from us are in any way different from the ideas in our minds, and how we could possibly know. And second, a problem of identity – that it is not easy to see how, from the ideas God receives from us, He can know whose ideas are whose. This problem arises from the nature of ourselves as spirits, about which neither we nor God can have any sort of idea, and thus little hope of identifying one spirit from another.

It is only according to the third, Spinozistic pantheist, conception that attributing to God adequate knowledge of the human condition seems possible. Humans are modes of God, so that whatever we know is, ipso facto, known by God. This solves our problem but only to create another. The investigation in this paper concerns the God of traditional Judaeo-Christian theism, and we are now speaking in terms of the pantheist's (i.e., Spinoza's) God. The task is now to bring together these two apparently different ideas of God in order to make pantheism and traditional theism compatible. The advantage Spinozistic pantheism has over traditional theism, in its ability to explain God's knowledge of our pain and suffering, may tempt some traditionalists to embrace it. But there is more at stake than God's knowledge for, according to traditionalists, God is somehow transcendent from creation, and is also a person. I try to show that these qualities belong to the God of Spinoza as much as the God of tradition, thereby bringing compatibility much closer to hand. I can see no reason, in the end, why Spinozistic pantheism should not be acceptable as a personal religion capable of upholding some of the central beliefs the traditionalist holds dear.

Incidentally, having just stated that I will be examining the arguments of Berkeley and Spinoza, I want to allay a worry that I focus on works that are four hundred years old rather than those of more recent thinkers who may have developed and refined the ideas expressed

by those historical figures. However, in the case of idealism and pantheism in particular, such a worry is hardly justified. For present-day philosophers interested in these fields, both Berkeley and Spinoza are still alive and kicking. Concerning Berkeley, Cowan and Spiegel's (2016) anthology on idealism and Christianity contains 10 current essays focusing solely on Berkeley's work. Even in our own time, these writers regard that work as having tremendous benefits for almost every area of understanding. Even the anthology itself is dedicated to Berkeley. For some, therefore, there are grounds for planting the old firmly in the present.

Much the same applies to Spinoza. Levine (2014) notes that the most thorough account and defence of pantheism is found in Spinoza's *Ethics*. And in his book on the God of metaphysics, Sprigge (2008) devotes the first 70 pages to examining what Spinoza says on the subject. In short, if one wishes seriously to examine idealism and/or pantheism, one could not find more systematic and detailed presentations of them than those of Berkeley and Spinoza, who still have much to teach us.

And finally, in this paper I consider consequences of our findings for the problem of evil, especially in connection with Spinozistic pantheism since, in earlier papers, I have covered some of the issues associated with traditional theism's approach to the problem. There are some unusual issues arising as far as pantheism is concerned.

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Paper one

HOW THE SUBJECTIVITY OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE AFFECTS THE FORMULATION AND FORCEFULNESS OF THE EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

In the literature, there are two prominent versions of the evidential argument from evil: one is deductive and the other, inductive. While there are differences between them, they share the feature of turning on evidence of one sort or another. Some supporters of both versions accept the theist's belief that some evils – instances of human pain and suffering – are justifiably caused or allowed by God in order that certain outweighing goods can exist and could not do so unless those evils did or, alternatively, that some evils exist in order to prevent the existence of evils equally bad or worse. One deductive argument from evil has been set out and defended by William Rowe (1979). Rowe accepts what the theist claims to an extent, but argues that it is rational to believe that there is at least one instance of pain and suffering from which there emerges no outweighing good at all, or evil equally bad or worse that God could not have prevented in another way. To make this more vivid, he cites an imaginary case in which a lone fawn is badly burned as lightning strikes a tree under which the fawn is standing. No one is at hand to ease the fawn's suffering, and it dies days later having suffered inordinately. The point is that we can see no outweighing good entailed by that suffering, or any evil equally bad or worse that God could not have prevented without that suffering which thus turns out to be, as Rowe puts it, entirely gratuitous. Clearly, the evidence that Rowe's argument turns on is *evidence of the absence* of some moral justifier, or consequence, that is sufficient to make us believe that God should allow that suffering. If it is true that there is such evidence, then Rowe thinks that an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God cannot exist.

In this paper, I will say no more about the deductive argument, for I want to focus on the inductive argument (referred to henceforth as the 'inductive evidential argument from evil'), a particular version of which focuses more on the evidence of instances of pain and suffering in the world than on evidence (or an absence thereof) of the consequences those instances. This inductive argument, in common with all inductive arguments, does not aim to establish that a certain proposition is true absolutely, but that it is to some degree *likely* to be true. In our case, the proposition in question is that God does not exist. It would seem a straightforward matter, given that aim, to accumulate evidence in the form of human pain and suffering and draw a conclusion from that about how likely the non-existence of God is. That would be one approach to exploring the inductive evidential argument. But I am going to take the unusual step of viewing the argument in light of the subjective nature of human experience, for, as we will see, when that light is shone, some unexpected results arise from the argument. Prominent among these are that the argument becomes impossible to state in a way that would attract universal approval; that it is not quite as forceful as might be supposed; and that evidence of some perfectly innocuous experiences count as much in favour of God's non-existence as experiences of pain and suffering do. It is for these unexpected (and in my view interesting) consequences that I will argue below. To that end, I will proceed as follows:

I will divide this paper into parts. In part one I will set out my own formulation of the inductive argument from evil as precisely as I can, and with two aims in mind: to bring out the key features of the inductive evidential argument from evil as I see them; and to present the argument in such a way that shows how it is susceptible to modification in the light of the subjectivity of human experiences of pain and suffering. In part two I will set out three (what I assume to be uncontroversial) assumptions I will be making concerning the subjective

nature of our experiences, and also introduce what I will call the 'mini-problem of pain'. In part three, I will examine the nature of pain and its relation to the body; and in part four, I turn to pain and its unpleasantness. In part five, I will explore the notion of pain in relation to the subjectivity of our experience. In part six, I revisit the inductive evidential argument from evil, and finally, in part seven, I consider reformulating the argument in light of what the subjectivity of our experience teaches us.

1.1: A formulation of the inductive evidential argument from evil

The primary focus of this version of the argument from evil is evil itself, or instances of pain and suffering. Less in focus are the consequences, if any, that such instances have (I say more about evil and its consequences in terms of costs and benefits in the final paper). In the words of Robert Bass (2011) this is the general idea of the argument:

> The idea is to consider a state of affairs in isolation from other things and to judge whether the world is worse for containing that state of affairs than it would otherwise be. The concern is not to say what good or bad effects or causes the state of affairs may be connected to. Instead, the intrinsic badness (or goodness) of a state of affairs is to be judged against a baseline in which nothing else makes a difference in value. Thus, we are to ask whether the world is worse for containing *this* suffering, considered entirely apart from its causes or consequences, than if it did not contain this suffering. (p. 119)

Bass seems to agree about the focus of the argument, although he does not completely dismiss the notion of consequences. One he mentions in this passage is the state of the world, or a judgement about it, that is a consequence of instances of suffering rather than the suffering itself. Nevertheless, it seems to me reasonable to set the focus primarily on experiences of suffering as Bass suggests, and only secondarily on the consequences, if any, emerging from them. But why place such importance on instances of pain and suffering rather than on their consequences? Think once again of Rowe's fawn. Had the creature the

faculties to do so, uppermost in its thoughts would be its immediate suffering, how to escape it, or how to cope with a certain lingering death. It is doubtful that its mind would turn to the worthwhileness of its pain; that it is morally justified in case some outweighing good eventually comes of it, or that it prevents suffering equally bad or worse. Most probably, the fawn's awareness of and fear for its plight would leave no mental space for such thoughts.

So how does this type of inductive evidential argument from evil work? It has a similar structure to familiar inductive evidential arguments deployed, for example, in courts of law, the two arguments being relevantly similar in several ways. The general form of the argument is that the accumulation of evidence item by item tends to make some proposition – for example, 'the accused is guilty as charged', or 'God does not exist' – more and more likely to be true. Since, as in many legal cases, absolute certainty on the matter is difficult or impossible to achieve, verdicts are based on likelihoods rather than absolute certainties. The inductive evidential argument for God's non-existence that I will be examining works on the same principle, that God's non-existence becomes more and more likely in proportion to the weight of evidence pointing in that direction.

I will focus on my own formulation of the argument which is designed to demonstrate both how the accumulation of evidence for God's non-existence works, and also how the subjective nature of our experiences has an impact on the argument. I have found no similar formulation in the literature, although there are hints as to how one might conceive it, notably in the work of G.N. Schlesinger (1983, chapter 3), where the problem of evil is under discussion. Schlesinger asks whether there is too much pain and suffering in the world, and in response he quotes the Jewish theologians Richard R. Rubinstein and Eugene B. Borowitz, both of whom think the answer to Schlesinger's question is an affirmative one. Rubinstein

writes, 'After Auschwitz, many Jews did not need Nietzsche to tell them that the God of patriarchal monotheism was dead beyond all hope of resurrection' (1966, cited in Schlesinger, 1983, p. 51); and Borowitz, 'Any God who would permit the Holocaust, who could remain silent during it, who could 'hide His face' while it dragged on, was not worth believing in. There might well be a limit to how much we could understand about Him, but Auschwitz demanded an unreasonable suspension of understanding. In the face of such great evil, God, the good and the powerful, was too inexplicable, so men said, "God is dead."' (1973, cited in Schlesinger, 1983, pp. 51-2) About these views, Schlesinger concludes, '... if these theologians are right theism has been essentially subject to the same process as, for instance, the flat-earth theory. As the centuries passed with their wars, famines, epidemics and so on it became increasingly difficult to maintain theism ... In short, the set of evidence relevant to theism cannot be regarded as static.' (Schlesinger, 1983, p. 52) On this understanding, God's existence, judged according to the evidence, is not a binary matter – either God exists or He doesn't – but one of likelihood *given* the evidence. As more and more of it is gathered, the more and more likely God's non-existence seems. According to the theologians Schlesinger quotes, the evidence accumulated up to 1945 suggests that the likelihood has reached a degree to justify their belief in God's non-existence beyond any reasonable doubt.

By the same reckoning, were we to travel backwards in time to the beginning of the world, we would need to strike out each evil as we came to it, implying that the amount of evidence signalling the likelihood of God's non-existence diminishes along our journey to the point at which we have little or no evidence at all. Perhaps we would have arrived in the Garden of Eden, or Paradise, where evil simply did not exist. As Benton *et al.* put it, 'If the world were like that, then we think that would constitute a fairly overwhelming argument for the

existence of God. In such an Edenic world, atheists would face the problem of Paradise.' (Benton, *et al.*, 2016, p. 5)

So that is the gist of the inductive evidential argument I have in mind. How might we formulate it more precisely? Let us consider two ways of doing so, each incorporating items of evidence in the form of unpleasant human experiences. This is the first:

(1) Unpleasant experiences support the proposition that God does not exist.

(2) The greater the number of unpleasant experiences that exist, the more likely to be true is the proposition that God does not exist.

(3) The number of unpleasant experiences that exist is enormous.

(4) Therefore, the proposition that God does not exist is enormously likely to be true.

While this formulation conveys an idea of what the inductive evidential argument is all about, it provides only a rough idea. While premise (3), for example, states that the number of unpleasant experiences existing now is enormous, so that we have a correspondingly enormous amount of evidence, it fails to convey the idea of a gradual accumulation of evidence, at each stage of the accumulation process, whereby God's non-existence becomes that little bit more likely. It is this idea that a more accurate formulation should convey, perhaps one along the following lines which, for clarity's sake, I express symbolically (and note the 'stepwise' progression involved):

Step 1: $L(P|e_1) > L(P|{\sim}e_1)$

Step 1 reads as follows: The likelihood ('L') of the proposition 'God does not exist' ('P') being true, given the first piece of evidence we know of ('e_1') is greater than the likelihood of P's being true in the absence of that evidence ('${\sim}e_1$'). Setting aside the suffering of animals, the recorded item of evidence, e_1, could be Abel's experience of pain and suffering at the hand of his jealous brother, Cain, who murdered him. We then take into account the next relevant piece of evidence, e_2, and move on to the next step:

Step 2: $L(P|e_2\&e_1) > L(P|e_1) > L(P|{\sim}e_1)$

This step reads that the likelihood of the proposition 'God does not exist' being true when adding the second piece of evidence to the first, is greater than the likelihood of its being true given only the first piece of evidence as well as an absence of that evidence. In a similar fashion, we continue to gather relevant evidence until we arrive at step n,

Step n: $L(P|e_n...\&e_3\&e_2\&e_1) > ... > L(P|e_3\&e_2\&e_1) > L(P|e_2\&e_1) > L(P|e_1) > L(P|{\sim}e_1)$

The first expression of this step ('$L(P|e_n...\&e_3\&e_2\&e_1)$') could be interpreted by Rubinstein and Borowitz, and others of like mind, as: 'the accumulated evidence of evils up to and including e_n (where e_n is the suffering endured by victims of the holocaust) is of sufficient weight to justify the belief that God's non-existence is proven beyond any reasonable doubt.'

It is interesting to note, as an aside, how this or similar symbolic notation can be used, with interesting results, to formulate not only the inductive evidential argument from evil itself but

also the 'greater-good' solution to it as discussed by Rowe, above. The focus of the solution is on evidence of pain and suffering *together with* that of any greater goods entailed by those evils. In terms of a symbolic formulation, greater-good theodicists would claim that, for instance, evil, e_1, entails an outweighing good, g_1, such that jointly they generate a better worldly state of affairs overall than e_1 would in the absence of any consequence, which is what we see when e_1 alone is the focus of attention. Using the above formulation, this is what greater-good theodicists seem to be claiming:

Step 1: $L(P|e_1\&g_1) < L(P|e_1\&\sim g_1)$

Step 1 now reads: The likelihood ('L') of the proposition 'God does not exist' ('P') being true, given the first piece of evidence we know of ('e_1') *together with* its associated greater good, g_1, is *less than* the likelihood of P's being true given e_1 without any greater good (that is, e_1 considered in isolation). Following this, we have:

Step 2: $L(P|(e_2\&g_2)\&(e_1\&g_1)) < L(P|e_1\&g_1) < L(P|e_1\&\sim g_1)$

and so on, to the point at which every known instance of suffering and greater good is included. The formulation shows that as the evidence of instances of suffering plus greater goods are accumulated piece by piece, the likelihood of God's non-existence becomes less and less, not more and more; the very opposite of what we conclude when, taking the lead from Rubinstein, Borowitz, and Bass, suffering alone is in focus.

Alternatively, the greater-good theodicist might prefer to begin with the world in its original Edenic state (a state of goodness, not necessarily perfection, but one lacking evil), and formulate her argument from that point onwards, as follows:

Step 1: $L(P^*|e_1\&g_1) > L(P^*|e_1\&\sim g_1)$

and following this we have:

Step 2: $L(P^*|(e_2\&g_2)\&(e_1\&g_1)) > L(P^*|e_1\&g_1) > L(P^*|e_1\&\sim g_1)$

Step 1 now reads: the likelihood of the proposition 'God exists' ('P*') being true, given the first piece of evidence we know of ('e_1') *together with* its associated greater good (g_1), is even greater than P*'s being true where e_1 exists in isolation, or in the absence of any greater good. Step 2 moves on to include in the formulation the next known evil, e_2, together with its entailed greater good, g_2, having the effect of rendering P* yet more likely to be true, to the point at which (Step *n*) all known evils together with their entailed greater goods render P* true beyond any reasonable doubt.

The general idea is that while the original Edenic state of the world affords a fairly overwhelming case for God's existence (so say Benton, *et al.*), evidence of (possibly all) subsequently-occurring evils *together with* their entailed greater goods serves, not as disconfirmatory, but as confirmatory evidence for P*. The underlying assumptions on which this idea is based include the beliefs: (a) that the amount of goodness in a world created by an omnibenevolent God would increase, directing the world towards a final state of perfection; (b) that certain important goods contributing towards such a state are obtainable only by means of the existence of evils; (c) that an omnibenevolent God would, therefore, cause or

allow those evils to exist; and (d) that the existence of those evils (with ensuing goods) affords confirmatory evidence that an omnibenevolent God exists.

The startling differences in conclusions drawn from the above ideas and formulations are only to be expected, of course, for we have been considering expressions of a problem on the one hand, and of a solution to it on the other. The greater-good theodicy has an important role to play in theistic apologetics, and I will discuss it further in paper five. Mention of it here was simply to make the case for an interesting formulation of it, not for a defence of it. Since the focus of this paper is on the inductive evidential argument from evil in itself rather than any proposed solution, the continuing focus will be on that argument alone and the evidence relating to it, as suggested by Bass, Rubinstein, and Borowitz.

We shall proceed, then, on the assumption that evidence in favour of God's non-existence is available, we need to be sure of its nature – of what counts as evidence and what doesn't. We could begin by provisionally stipulating the following:

> Each and every unpleasant experience counts as evidence towards establishing the likelihood of God's non-existence.

On the other hand:

> No *non*-unpleasant experience counts as evidence towards establishing the likelihood of God's non-existence.

> The *absence* of unpleasant experiences doesn't count as evidence towards establishing the likelihood of God's non-existence.

To expand a little on these stipulations: those unpleasant experiences that count as evidence towards establishing the likelihood of God's non-existence include experiences of pain and suffering, as already stated. Non-unpleasant experiences that wouldn't count as evidence include experiences of, say, redness or the gentle tinkling of a bell. And absences of unpleasant experiences, as in the case of not being in pain, wouldn't count either. Given these provisional stipulations, it would seem a straightforward matter of gathering the right sort of evidence (while discarding the wrong sort) to be used in establishing the likelihood of God's non-existence.

However, the matter turns out not to be straightforward at all. The focus is on our experiences, but how each of us regards our experiences is a subjective matter. This generates problems for the stipulations made above. Pain, for example, is an unpleasant experience that would count as evidence for God's non-existence according to the stipulations. But from the subjective viewpoint of some people, experiences of pain are not unpleasant, and so for them pain would not count as evidence at all. This might strike us as odd, but equally odd is the fact that non-unpleasant experiences count as evidence for some people, while, for others, absences of some unpleasant experiences count just as much. In order to establish these important facts, I am going to explain three assumptions I will be making concerning the subjectivity our experiences, as well as what I call the 'mini-problem of pain'.

1.2: Three assumptions about the subjectivity of our experiences, and the 'mini-problem of pain'

My first assumption concerns the notion of subjectivity itself. That we each have a subjective point of view regarding our experiences is well known. While I believe riding on a fairground ghost train is scary and you don't doesn't imply that the ghost train is both scary and not scary. It implies, rather, that *from my subjective point of view* it is scary, and *from your*

subjective point of view it isn't. There is nothing unfamiliar about such differences in points of view, for we encounter such differences regularly in everyday life. We could put it this way: there is something that it is like for me to experience *x* and something that it is like for you to experience *x*. These differences might be small or large, depending on personal tastes, or the ways in which we are physically and psychologically constituted. I will be assuming that what I have just described is true. And a further aspect of this assumption is that there are weak and strong forms of subjectivity. That I subjectively find ghost train rides scary and you don't is weakly subjective, for it is possible that your or my subjective viewpoint could change. For example, I might overcome my fear of ghost trains if I were to ride on them regularly. By contrast, strongly subjective viewpoints are unchangeable. It is a strongly subjective matter that some people find the taste of orange peel unpleasant and others don't. Whichever viewpoint one has with respect to orange peel is determined not by one's own preference or taste, but by one's genetic makeup. Unless that makeup is manipulated in some way, the pleasantness or unpleasantness of orange peel's taste is what we are stuck with.

The second assumption concerns the existence of the 'mini-problem of pain'. This idea derives from the belief that evil consists in unpleasant experiences, and experiences of pain are just one of many different types of unpleasant experience there are, each of which constitutes in itself evidence for the non-existence of God. Corresponding to the mini-problem of pain there are mini-problems of anxiety, remorse, grief, despair, and so on. When we speak of the evidential problem of evil *per se*, we are, in effect, speaking of a 'maxi-problem' comprising all the types of unpleasant experience we have. Now, although I refer to the *mini*-problem of pain (equally of anxiety, remorse, and so on) I do so not because I believe it is a trivial or an insignificant problem. On the contrary. Experiences of pain are arguably the worst evils of all. Rather, the mini-problem of pain is so-called because of the

part-whole relationship it bears to the maxi-problem of evil. Or, to put this in a different way, I will be regarding the problem of pain as a 'sub-species' of the wider problem of evil.

And the third assumption concerns that relationship. I assume that if difficulties arise with formulating a mini-problem – for example, the mini-problem of pain – then similar difficulties will arise with formulating the maxi-problem of evil, for the difficulties will simply transfer from one problem to the other. To illustrate what I mean: diesel engines are currently getting bad press on account of the maxi-problem of emissions which include particulates, and oxides of nitrogen and carbon. Each of these is a mini-problem in its own right, and should a difficulty arise with formulating the mini-problem of, say, particulates, this would cause difficulty for formulating the maxi-problem of emissions as well, for particulates are part of that problem. And presumably, the same would apply to the maxi-problem of evil and its component mini-problems.

On the basis of these assumptions I will proceed to discuss the 'maxi' evidential problem of evil in terms of the mini-problem of pain, in the expectation that difficulties uncovered with the latter will transfer equally well to the former. I will be discussing only one mini-problem believing that it would be impractical, in the space available, to choose several, and that it would also be pointless, for what can be said of one mini-problem should apply equally well to others. There is no doubt, however, that the mini-problem of pain is a serious one. Pain can affect us profoundly, and it is something we experience periodically from the moment we cut our first teeth until we die.

Despite what our experiences of pain teach us about the nature of pain, some truths about it may be surprising, and have consequences for the inductive evidential argument from evil. In

order to reveal these surprises, I need to investigate the nature of pain, its relation to the body, and our reactions to pain in light of the subjectivity of our experience.

1.3: The nature of pain and its relation to the body

The term 'pain' is used in both literal and metaphorical senses. The pain a mother feels as she sees her child gradually descend into alcohol and drug dependency is different from the pain she felt giving birth. It is also a pain driving through Birmingham in heavy traffic, as is doing dull and repetitive work in a stiflingly hot office. But these pains are not the same as the pain we feel when we inadvertently immerse a hand in scalding water, or break a leg when falling from a height. Our concern is with pain understood in its literal rather than its metaphorical sense, for it is pain in this sense that counts as evidence for God's non-existence far more than 'metaphorical' pain (although this is not necessarily trivial). It would be less plausible to blame God for the existence of heavy traffic or boring, repetitive work in unpleasant surroundings than for the pain caused by serious accidents and diseases.

There are both medical and philosophical interests in pain. Medical literature has much to say about it in relation to its causes, severity, management and cure. Philosophers may be interested in these matters, too, but also in determining what the nature of pain is in itself. Pain *simpliciter* ('neat pain' devoid of any emotional content) has long been considered a purely mental item, even though we normally think of it as a physical phenomenon occurring, as it seems to, in parts of the body. There are, however, compelling reasons for thinking of pain in terms of the purely mental. For a start, pains are private in the way thoughts are. Only I can feel my pains, and only you, yours. And there is also the 'to be is to be felt' character of pain. There are no pains that are unfelt; the claim that I have pain but do not feel it is absurd. Furthermore, sincere pain reports are incorrigible. I cannot sincerely report that I am in pain

when I am not (overlooking cases in which subjects report imagined pain they assume to be real). These characteristics of pain are typical of phenomena we readily categorise as purely mental, along with feelings, dreams, states of happiness, misery, and so on.

In the 17th century, John Locke thought of pain this way. He described it as a simple idea of sense, a perception in the mind of something external to the mind (Locke, 1690, *Essay*, II.xx.1, in Yolton, 1983, p. 103). This is part of Locke's general theory of perception. Pain, on this theory, represents a quality (e.g., a disturbance) in the body just as other simple ideas (as of redness) represent qualities of objects perceived in the external world. But there are two dissimilarities between what Locke says about pain and other simple ideas of sense. First, the perception of pain involves an inner as opposed to an outer sense. Pains are perceived within and not without the body. Second, Locke's simple ideas involving outer sense are claimed by him both to represent *and* resemble qualities in objects that are perceived. Resemblance does not apply to pain, which may well represent disturbances in the body but hardly resemble them. Pains are not scalded-hand shaped, or appear as any other disturbed bodily part. But pains, unlike bodies, retain the character of privacy in Locke's view. Anyone can perceive my scalded hand, but only I can perceive the pain it causes me. And Locke has his followers. In the 1970s the so-called 'perceptual view' of pain became reignited, due to the work of, for example, George Pitcher (1970, pp. 368-393). Yet the mental-item view of pain might seem contrary to common experience. For when I have a pain in my hand or toe, it seems to me (and to common sense) that those are the places where my pain is, and not in my mind. What I would report is that my hand or toe has a pain, not that one or the other is disturbed such that I have a pain in my mind. If it is true that I have a disturbance in one location and a pain in the other, why does this not seem so to me? The answer perceptualists give is that although pain is in the mind, the mind (my self) is not separate from the body and

in a different location from it, but is *in* the body, pervading it throughout. Imagining my mind as my conscious self which I refer to as '*I*', as when reporting 'I have a pain in my hand', Wittgenstein says:

> But isn't it absurd to say of a *body* that it has pain? – And why does one feel an absurdity in that? In what sense is it true that my hand does not feel pain, but I in my hand? … Is it the *body* that feels pain? … What makes it plausible to say that it is *not* the body? – Well, something like this: if someone has a pain in his hand, then the hand does not say so (unless it writes it) and one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer. (Wittgenstein, 1984, Part I, §286, p. 99e)

What Wittgenstein seems to be saying is that I am present to every part of my body. Whatever part of that body suffers a disturbance, I (my conscious self) am so related to that part that it is I who feels the disturbance. This is not contrary to common sense or perceptualists' claims, but perfectly consistent with them.

This, then, is a brief account of what pain is and how it is related to the body. Pain, in summary, is a mental item caused by an act of inwardly perceiving a disturbance in the body. In the context of our inductive evidential argument from evil, we must investigate why our pains present to us, not as simple ideas or sensations, but as particularly *unpleasant* simple ideas or sensations.

1.4: Pain and its unpleasantness

John Hick describes pain as 'a physical sensation with its own nerve structure' (1985, p. 292). The mind perceives occurrences in the body through nerve pathways, with the result that pain is felt. This explains why we feel pain (because we have disturbances in the body) and how we feel it (by means of having a certain nerve structure in the body). But does it explain why the pain we feel is unpleasant? It would if pain was inherently unpleasant, such that pain and

its unpleasantness are somehow identical or necessarily linked. But there is a conceptual problem with this: that pain and its unpleasantness can be conceived as separate things. Of course, not all pains are unpleasant, or especially so. Mild pains may be an annoyance but not especially unpleasant. Severe pains, on the other hand, are especially unpleasant. Or that is how it seems to us. But, according to Hick, there remains a distinction between the two. On the one hand there are neat pains, or 'pain sensations', and on the other, pains accompanied by unpleasantness, or 'pain experiences' (Hardy, 1962, cited in Hick, 1985, pp. 293). Pain experiences are of neat pain *plus* unpleasantness – that is, an affective state of distress or 'suffering'. So combined, pains are suffered and distressful, and that is what their unpleasantness consists in. Pain sensations, by contrast, are not suffered or distressful, and are not, therefore, unpleasant.

So there is a conceptual distinction between pain and the unpleasantness of pain. But is the distinction merely conceptual – or are there actual or possible instances in which there are pains but not unpleasant ones? We might start by asking whether the pairing of pain and unpleasantness can be undone. Let us look at some examples of pairs that might help us decide:

Group (a) pairs:

Needles and pins; soap and water; shoes and socks; poverty and ignorance; age and wisdom; horse and carriage.

Group (b) pairs:

Incline and decline; mountain and valley; top and bottom; inside and outside; east and west; a game and the passage of time.

We are interested in the connections, if any, between the pairs in these groups. While the items in group (a) are often found in pairs, there is no connection between them apart from what, through our own invention or convention, we are accustomed to seeing. There are needles without pins, soap without water, and so on. Items in group (b) are paired also, but there are connections between them. There could be no mountain without a valley, a top of something without a bottom, an inside without an outside, and so on. As to the nature of the connection, it can be of different kinds. For example, the connection between Birmingham's being to the west of Leicester, and Leicester's being to the east of Birmingham is logical. Neither city could be to the east of each other, nor to the west. The link between a game's being played and the passage of time is one of metaphysical necessity (if that is different from logical necessity).

Into which group should pain and its unpleasantness be placed? Let us start with group (b) pairs. We can *conceive* of a mountain and a valley individually, even though they are logically paired. Were we to claim that the two are distinguishable features of the world, as they surely are, we are speaking of a mere verbal distinction – that we *speak* of a mountain or a valley without speaking of both as connected. So are there grounds for claiming that the distinction between pain and the unpleasantness of pain is likewise a merely a verbal one?

At a pre-philosophical level, unpleasant pains present themselves not as separate items of experience, pain *and* unpleasantness, but as a single, uniform experience, sensation or idea. If that experience is recognisably accompanied by another, then that other is usually so different in character as to make it easily distinguishable. For example, unpleasant pain is sometimes accompanied by feelings of nausea, faintness, or weakness of the limbs. These feelings are easily distinguished from the unpleasant pain causing them. We can imagine a doctor asking

a patient whether nausea always accompanies her pain, or how faint it makes her feel. If pain and its unpleasantness are just as distinguishable, then it would make sense for a doctor to ask how severe the pain in my hand is, and *then* ask how unpleasant I find it. One might think the second question is superfluous, and that all of relevance that needs to be known would be contained in the answer to the first. If this is what we think, then we appear to suppose that the pain and its unpleasantness are but one uncompounded sensation, and when we have described the pain's severity there is nothing more of relevance to be described.

This view has echoes in Berkeley's dialogue with Hylas where the topic of discussion is heat and pain. Berkeley's focus isn't *unpleasantness* and pain, but what he says could be relevant. In *The First Dialogue* Hylas claims that a fire's intense heat and the pain it causes are two distinct ideas. Philonous disagrees. He replies, 'Seeing therefore that they are both immediately perceived at the same time, and the fire affects you only with one simple, or uncompounded idea, it follows that this same simple idea is both the intense heat immediately perceived, and the pain; and consequently, that the intense heat immediately perceived, is nothing distinct from a particular sort of pain.' Hylas admits that it seems so. (Berkeley, 1713, in Warnock, (ed.), 1985, pp. 155-6)

What Hylas admits to is that although we speak of heat and of pain, the distinction we seem to be making is only a verbal one. For, once we have described the pain we feel when holding a hand close to a fire, there is nothing else in the situation, such as the heat, that could be an object of description. That, at least, is how Berkeley sees things. But if Hylas is correct, we should expect it to be possible (at least in principle) to describe the pain, and also the heat. After all, why couldn't Hylas describe the pain as severe and the fire as hot?

Relating this to our investigation of pain, we would expect Philonous to say that unpleasantness 'is nothing distinct from a particular sort of pain' for the two are but 'one simple, or uncompounded idea'. Once the pain has been described, there is nothing (such as unpleasantness) left over to form an object of description. However, Hylas might insist that once the pain has been described, he could go on to describe the unpleasantness accompanying it just as he could describe both pain and heat. But if Hylas is right, we need to understand what the unpleasantness he describes consists in if it is not the pain itself, and to understand the connection, if any, between the two.

It appears that sufficiently eloquent pain subjects have been able to describe both the pains they feel and the unpleasant aspects of those pains. Both philosophers and medical practitioners have listed the characteristics of pain's unpleasantness as described by these subjects (see, for example, Bain, 2012, and Bond, 1984). Chief among those characteristics are pain's *affective qualities* involving feelings of anxiety and, sometimes, terror at the possible bodily damage that causes pain. Similarly, *feelings of fear* have been identified as further aspects of pain's unpleasantness, in that pain is perceived as punishing, cruel, and undeserved. There is also an *evaluative* element, marking pain as troubling, bothersome, intractable, and so on. And finally, a certain *motivational* quality has been identified: subjects feel motivated to alleviate their pain in some way, by moving a hand away from the scalding water, for example, or seeking medical help. So if it were possible to feel pain but not any associated unpleasantness, we are now better informed about those qualities of unpleasantness we would expect to be absent. However, we have yet to settle the question of whether those qualities *could* be absent, and that is what we turn to next. I believe the answer lies in reference to the subjectivity of our experience, in both the weak and strong senses described, above.

1.5: Pain and the subjectivity of our experience

There are some familiar cases in which, from a weakly subjective standpoint, pain lacks its characteristic unpleasantness. It is said that wounded soldiers on the battlefield sometimes feel pain but not as unpleasant. Their closest attention is being paid to the battle, not the pain which, nevertheless, they continue to feel. Also, people swim in the River Thames during December when conditions are close to freezing. They feel pain caused by the cold, but for them it isn't unpleasant. The soldiers' lack of pain-unpleasantness is due to distraction, and the swimmers' to habituation – through regular acquaintance with freezing water, they no longer find the pain caused by the cold as unpleasant. But both cases have weak subjectivity in common. If soldiers were not so distracted, they would probably find their pain unpleasant again, as would the swimmers if they had lost the habit or were new to the experience.

There are less familiar cases, too, in which certain drugs impose upon us a particular subjective view of pain. For example, patients in severe unpleasant pain are sometimes administered the drug, morphine, to ease their suffering. The effect of this drug is to eliminate all the qualities of patients' pain they find unpleasant. Patients generally discover, after receiving the drug, that their pain is felt as intensely as before, but they no longer mind it (Bond, 1984, p. 54, Case 2, and Dennett, 1997, p. 208). Alcohol, perhaps more familiarly, has a similar effect. But these cases also involve subjectivity in the weak sense, because without the use of drugs including alcohol, patients would view their pain as they normally would. The point, however, is that the use of such substances shows that the distinction between pain and its unpleasantness is not merely verbal or conceptual, but actual. The connection is, therefore, contingent and not logically or metaphysically necessary.

In addition to the use of drugs that impose on us a weakly subjective view of pain, some people are 'hard-wired' to feel pain on appropriate occasions as others do, but none of the associated unpleasantness. This is due to them having a medical condition known as 'pain-asymbolia'. And, indeed, there are people who never feel pain at all. Concerning pain-asymbolia, this is a condition which can occur early in life or later on following a disruption to brain function. The philosopher David Bain (2014) has recently investigated pain-asymbolia with an interest in what goes on in people who have it.

Bain describes the case of two people he refers to as Norm and Abe. Norm is a normal experiencer of pain while Abe has pain-asymbolia. In an experiment, both are invited to immerse a hand in scalding water. On doing so, Norm almost immediately withdraws his hand and shows typical pain behaviour (nursing his hand, crying out, dancing around the room, etc.). Abe, by contrast, keeps his hand immersed, says that he feels pain but not unpleasant pain, and laughs. Bain's interest is to explain Abe's unusual reaction, and he offers two possibilities:

(i) The *pain* Abe feels is not normal;
or,
(ii) Abe's pain is normal but there is something about Abe that is not.

According to Bain, it isn't clear which of these explanations is true. If (i) is true, however, then Abe's case doesn't support the pain sensation/experience distinction – that 'normal' pain may lack unpleasantness. Only Abe's abnormal pain does. It retains a motivational quality as normal pain does, but in Abe's case that quality is abnormal, too (he is motivated to laugh but not to alleviate the pain he feels). On the other hand, if (ii) is true, then pain may indeed be a

simple, uncompounded idea, as Locke and Berkeley might have put it. Presumably, any unpleasantness *not* associated with Abe's pain sensation is filtered out by a feature of Abe that is abnormal.

Medically speaking, (ii) is more likely to be regarded as true than (i) because having a certain physical condition explains Abe's unusual regard for pain. Philosophically speaking, the same is true on account of such an explanation being available, and also because it would be difficult if not impossible to demonstrate that Abe has 'abnormal' pain, as (i) states. Owing to the private nature of pain, no one including Abe himself, could compare his pain with the normal pain of someone else in order to establish any abnormality. So, if (ii) is to be the preferred explanation, then each of the following statements would appear to be true:

(iii) It is possible to have a pain sensation but not a pain experience (as Hick would put it).

(iv) Pain is a simple idea, sometimes uncompounded with the idea of unpleasantness (as Hylas would put it).

(v) Pain can be sensed but not as unpleasant (as Abe would put it).

As noted, Abe's point of view regarding pain is strongly subjective. He could not, by a wish or change of habit, alter that point of view. This means that, if Abe never did have unpleasant pain, he could not know what it is like to have such pain. His point of view is fixed in the same way as our experiences of tasting orange peel are fixed. An interesting consequence of Abe's situation is that there is no reason to suppose that his simple uncompounded idea of pain is not dissimilar in kind to any other simple uncompounded idea he has, such as his ideas of colours, tastes, sounds, and so on. I will return to this consequence presently.

Next, there is another interesting group of people who never have pain experiences at all – not because they astutely avoid situations that would cause pain, but because their strongly subjective constitution prevents them having pain, unpleasant or otherwise. Cases involving this group have a long history, although medical interest in them wasn't sparked until the late 1930s when it was felt that an investigation into the lives of 'painless' people was overdue (Nagasako, *et al.*, 2003). Since then, it is estimated that one person in every million belongs to this group, and their condition is given the name 'congenital insensitivity to pain' (CIP), otherwise known as 'congenital analgesia'. Those with CIP can make certain relevant distinctions in feeling, such as between hot and cold, and different pressure stimuli applied to the skin, but they find that no stimulus, however noxious, is capable of causing pain.

The cause of CIP has been traced to people's biological constitution. For those interested in finding out more, here is the gist: in human DNA is a gene known by the name PRDM12, located on chromosome 9. And within PRMD12 is a genome believed to have as many as 10 mutant varieties, any one of which causes the gene to be defective. And defective PRMD12, in turn, causes CIP. Other defective genes (SCN9A and SCN11A) cause it, too. Subjects with defective PRDM12 genes have no nerve endings in their skin, and don't feel pain because of their absence. Subjects with defective SCN9A and SCN11A genes have, in the former case, non-functional sodium channels that fail to send pain signals to the brain; and in the latter case, overactive sodium channels which interfere with the pain-signalling process. Investigators have found that, whatever the cause of CIP is, and despite our general attitudes towards pain, CIP is far from a desirable condition to have. These are just a few of the findings that investigators have unearthed:

Many children born with CIP seriously harm themselves by chewing their inner cheeks and tongues as soon as their first teeth erupt. Parents are required to monitor their children vigilantly and constantly because they (their children) will never be aware, nor provide any normal indication, of the serious harm they are causing themselves. No pain implies no pain behaviour. The prescribed treatment for many such children (known as 'biters') is to have all of their teeth removed as soon as they appear which, in turn, causes other problems in the early years. Moreover, biters often scald or burn their mouths and digestive tracts by taking in liquids and food that are far too hot for them. Nor do such children react to internal abnormalities like a ruptured appendix or cramps (see Lampert, *et al.*, 2010, and Vartan, 2015).

The problems children born with CIP have remain with them for ever. It is interesting to consider the testimony of a CIP subject just to get the flavour of what those problems include. I quote, below, the testimony of Steve Pete who was born in Washington State, USA, in 1981. Both he and his younger brother were born with CIP, and this is what Steve has to say:

> It first became apparent to my parents that something was wrong when I was four or five months old. I began chewing on my tongue while teething. They took me to a paediatrician where I underwent a series of tests. At first they put a cigarette lighter underneath my foot and waited for my skin to blister. Once they saw that I had no response to that then they began running needles up and down my spine. And since I had no response to either of those tests they came to the conclusion that I had what I have - congenital analgesia. By which point, I had chewed off about a quarter of my tongue through teething.
>
> We grew up on a farm. My mum and dad tried to be protective without stifling my brother and me. But when you're out in the country, especially if you're a boy, you're going to go out and explore and get in a little mischief. So during my early childhood I was absent from school a lot due to injury and illness. There was one time, at the roller-skating rink. I can't recall all of the details, but I know that I broke my leg. People were pointing at me because my pants were just covered in blood from where the bone came out. After that, I wasn't allowed to roller skate until I was much older.

When I was five or six years old, I was taken away from my home by child protective services. Someone had reported my parents for child abuse. I was in the state's care for, I believe, two months. And during that time I broke my leg before they finally realised that my parents and the paediatrician were telling the truth about my condition.

At school, a lot of children would have questions about my condition. They would ask: "Why do you have a cast on?" Most of the time I was in a cast, until I was around 11 or 12.

I was involved in fights quite frequently. Whenever a new kid came to school, the children would try to get that person to come and pick a fight with me, as a kind of introduction to the school. They would say: "If you can't feel pain, you will once I'm done with you."

Nowadays, I am not a particularly reckless person. I believe I'm actually more vigilant than most people because I know that if I were to injure myself I wouldn't know how severe it would be. Internal injuries are the ones I fear the most. Appendicitis is what really scares me. Usually whenever I have any type of stomach issues or a fever I go to the hospital just to get it checked out.

The last time I had a broken bone, my wife actually noticed before I did. My foot was swollen, black and blue, so I went to the doctor and had an X-ray and they told me that I had broken two of my toes and they wanted to put a cast on it. I had to go to work the next day. If had a cast on I wasn't going to be able to work for quite some time so I just told them I'd take care of myself. I went home and took some duct tape, taped it up, put my boots on and went to work that next morning.

One of the things I'm going to have to face soon is the fact that I won't have my left leg anymore. I've had quite a bit of surgery on my left knee in the past and it's got to the point where my doctors have told me to wait until it gives out completely. Once that occurs they're just going to have to amputate.

I really try not to think about it. I try not to let it get to me. But I can't help thinking congenital analgesia was partly why my brother chose to take his own life. His back was getting progressively worse. He was pretty close to graduating from a local college and the doctors told him that probably in the next year, year-and-a-half, he would be in a wheelchair. (Pete, 2012)

Far from being a blessing, this narrative of a life without the possibility of pain describes the

bleakest of situations. Steve's point of view with regard to pain – or rather its absence – is as

strongly subjective as Abe's. No amount of wishing, therapy or drug use could bring about a change allowing Steve to feel pain, not even the non-unpleasant kind that Abe feels.

Steve's narrative alerts us to the fact that pain – especially unpleasant pain – can have a beneficial function in preserving, or even enhancing, our general state of well-being. Sometimes, we find ourselves in a situation that is potentially harmful and we need a warning mechanism to motivate us to remove ourselves from it. Unpleasant pain fulfils that function perfectly. It is perhaps on this account that we should praise God rather than blame Him for making us susceptible to the pain we find so unpleasant.

There are other cases, too, in which people seem thankful that they have unpleasant pain. Among such cases are those classed as 'pain-prone', for whom unpleasant pain is necessary for preventing or mitigating other medical conditions, mostly of psychological origin, that are perceived as far worse than pain. Such medical conditions have symptoms which include inward turmoil and tendencies to self-harm, against which pain is an effective barrier. These people are relatively few, however, and have usually fared badly in life, scoring poorly in terms of social and/or professional success (Bond, 1984, p. 51).

Overall, these are just some of the cases in which pain is felt but not as unpleasant pain, pain is not felt at all through an insusceptibility to it, and unpleasant pain is welcomed rather than perceived as an evil. We need now to relate all of this to the inductive evidential problem of evil.

1.6: A return to the inductive evidential problem of evil

I gave, above, two different formulations of this problem. As a reminder, here they are again (I will refer to them as 'formulation 1' and 'formulation 2'):

formulation 1:

(1) Unpleasant experiences support the proposition that God does not exist.

(2) The greater the number of unpleasant experiences that exist, the more likely to be true is the proposition that God does not exist.

(3) The number of unpleasant experiences that exist is enormous.

(4) Therefore, the proposition that God does not exist is very likely to be true.

formulation 2:

Step 1: $L(P|e_1) > L(P|{\sim}e_1)$

Step 2: $L(P|e_2 \& e_1) > L(P|e_1) > L(P|{\sim}e_1)$

↓

Step n (conclusion): $L(P|e_n{\ldots}\&e_3\&e_2\&e_1) \ldots > L(P|e_3\&e_2\&e_1) > L(P|e_2\&e_1) > L(P|e_1) > L(P|{\sim}e_1)$

These formulations represent the 'maxi-problem' of evil, where many types of evil and their tokens count as evidence for the likelihood of God's non-existence. It is true that the focus has been on the mini-problem of pain, on the assumptions that pain is representative of other

kinds of evil, and is itself among the greatest of them. If we substitute 'evil' (that is, all kinds of evil) in the second formulation for pain, then, according to that formulation, step *n* represents the point at which all tokens of evil gathered so far bring the likelihood of God's non-existence to its maximum degree. This, at least, is what Rubinstein and Borowitz appear to be claiming. And we are assuming, too, that whatever difficulties arise with formulating the mini-problem of pain will transfer to the maxi-problem of evil and cause as much of a difficulty for that problem as for the mini-problem of pain itself.

In view of these assumptions, and of what we have said above about our experiences of pain, let us look again at formulation 1. In view of the fact that unpleasant pains have various beneficial functions in our lives, the second premise,

(2) The greater the number of unpleasant experiences that exist, the more likely to be true is the proposition that God does not exist,

must be false if pain experiences (or some of them) alone are in focus. Unpleasant pain can be beneficial. Also false would be some of the steps in formulation 2. Consider step 1 of that formulation:

$$L(P|e_1) > L(P|{\sim}e_1)$$

On the basis of the evidence of unpleasant pain, this step would be true for those who regard those experiences as evil, but not for those like Steve Pete and pain-prone people who see something positive in having pain. For such people, this would be true:

$$L(P|e_1) < L(P|{\sim}e_1)$$

That is, the likelihood of God's non-existence, given the evidence of unpleasant pain, is *less* than the likelihood of God's non-existence given an absence of such evidence. I believe this is plausible, given that unpleasant pain has certain benefits regarding our well-being.

But this seems open to the following objection: some might admit that experiences of pain are necessary for the reasons given, but do we really need to have *unpleasant* pain? Perhaps the non-unpleasant kind of pain that Abe has would be sufficient. That is, if pain serves as a warning of impending or actual bodily harm, or (in pain-prone people) mitigates the effects of psychological disorders, then pain sensations, as Hick calls them, would serve as well as pain experiences but without any concomitant misery, fear or distress.

But it is questionable whether this type of pain would serve the purpose required of it. Without any unpleasantness, mere pain sensations would lack those qualities of unpleasantness that are themselves important for our well-being. One such is the motivational quality that urges us to put right in the body what is going wrong. Remember that Abe – who has pain-asymbolia – was motivated to laugh at the pain he had. For people sharing Abe's condition, experiencing pain would be no different from experiencing any other innocuous simple idea, such as seeing redness or hearing the gentle tinkling of a bell. As these experiences have no undesirable effects, they could easily be ignored, as could the bodily damage of which those simple ideas of pain are a warning. In this sense, we may be reminded of episodes of the television series, *Big Bang Theory*, in which Penny continues to drive her car despite an engine-failure warning light flashing on her dashboard. She finds the light so innocuous that it is easy to ignore. But eventually Penny's heeding the warning comes too

late; her car engine has reached the point of death. Penny needed a less ignorable warning (an ear-splitting alarm, perhaps), and in order to preserve our state of well-being, so do we.

So premise (2) of formulation 1 is false as it stands. It would be false absolutely, however, only on condition that all possible experiences of unpleasant pain served a beneficial function. But it is doubtful that they do. Many unpleasant pain experiences seem to lack such a function, or when they do, they are sometimes disproportionate to the bodily damage being done. Those pains, as Rowe would claim, are simply gratuitous. The pain of infected teeth, for example, can be chronic and excruciating even though the damage causing it, though bad, is not *that* bad.

Even worse are unpleasant pains whose causes are untreatable. Not very long ago, people suffered excruciating pain that, due to a lack of medical knowledge and expertise, no-one could do anything about. Nor have drugs, like morphine and other analgesics, always been available to mitigate pain. And perhaps worst of all, pain can arise when it is too late for appropriate treatment to be carried out. Leriche writes: 'Nearly always the disease is a drama in two acts, the first of which is played secretly in the silent depths of our tissues … When pain develops, nearly always the second act has been reached. It is too late. The issue has already been determined, and the end is near'. (Leriche, 1939, cited in Hick, 1985, p. 299)

Only to add to our woes are cases of 'pain sense-deception'. On the perceptual theory of pain, pain is a simple idea in the mind representing disturbances in the body, and is caused by an act of inner perception. This mode of perception is no different from external modes of perception inasmuch as both kinds are capable of deceiving us. Instances of external sense deception are so familiar we don't need to rehearse them here. But inner sense deception is

less familiar. The phenomenon of 'referred pain' is a form of inner sense deception to which we all seem exposed. Typically, we have the illusion that the bodily disturbance resulting in pain is in one place when, in fact, it is in another. For example, disturbances in the heart or its associated structures are often presented as pain in the left upper arm. But that is not where the disturbance is. Of course, this is not to say that deceptive pain has none of the functional values of non-deceptive pain, for it still serves as a warning of impending or actual bodily damage. Nevertheless, it tricks us into believing that we have pain caused by one thing when it is caused by another. Once we understand the trick, however, the true cause and origin of the pain can correctly be identified. On the other hand, there are cases in which unpleasant pain is experienced with no identifiable physical cause or origin at all. These are cases of pain hallucinations, a good example of which is the so-called 'phantom limb phenomenon'. Those experiencing this suffer pain, which is sometimes excruciating, in a place once occupied by a limb that has been amputated. Although pain of this nature exists, it would be hard to imagine a justifying reason for it.

Now, if premise (2) of formulation 1 has lost some of it plausibility, these sorts of case put a little of it back. Given there are such cases, premise (2) should read:

(2a) The greater the number of experiences of unpleasant pain that exist *and serve no beneficial purpose*, the more likely to be true is the proposition that God does not exist.

Nevertheless, there are still experiences of unpleasant pain that *do* have a beneficial purpose, and so (2b) remains true:

(2b) Experiences of unpleasant pain that *do* have a beneficial purpose don't count as evidence for the likelihood of God's non-existence.

Given that (2b) *is* true (and it would be hard to argue that it isn't) there is rather less evidence available to the likes of Rubinstein and Borowitz who believe that, evidentially, the likelihood of God's non-existence is at its maximum degree. That degree might be attained only if (2b) was false. This clearly has an effect on formulation 2 of the inductive evidential argument from evil. The first expression of the conclusion of formulation 2 was:

Step *n* (conclusion): $L(P|e_n...\&e_3\&e_2\&e_1)$ ... $> L(P|e_3\&e_2\&e_1) > L(P|e_2\&e_1) > L(P|e_1) > L(P|{\sim}e_1)$

As a reminder, the first expression of this conclusion, $L(P|e_n...\&e_3\&e_2\&e_1)$, is to the effect that the total amount of evidence of evils – that is, *all* experiences of unpleasant pain – up until (say) 1945, is sufficient to render the likelihood of God's non-existence maximal. But no account has yet been taken of those so-called evils – experiences of unpleasant pain – that have a beneficial purpose. So, taking those evils into account, we now have:

$L(P|e_n...\&e_3\&e_2\&e_1\boldsymbol{\&e_b})$

where 'e_b' represents all experiences of evil, or at least unpleasant pains, that are beneficial to us. The result is that:

$L(P|e_n...\&e_3\&e_2\&e_1\boldsymbol{\&e_b}) < L(P|e_n...\&e_3\&e_2\&e_1)$

That is, the notional totality of evils, some of which are beneficial, constitutes less evidence for the non-existence of God than the notional totality would do if no evil was beneficial. This implies that the inductive evidential problem of evil is somewhat less forceful than Rubinstein, Borowitz and others might suppose. Of course, we are now considering evidence of the *beneficial consequences* of evil as well evil itself, echoing the claims of greater-good theodicists. Maybe it is difficult to avoid such a consideration, since evils and their consequences often appear 'stapled together'. But there are bad consequences as well as good, including unpleasant pains that appear to have no beneficial purpose whatsoever, and which, in support of Rubinstein's and Borowitz's claims, furnish yet more evidence that God's non-existence is likely.

The point at which we arrive, therefore, is that there is some evidence which, as far as we can see, supports the proposition that God does not exist. We have not, however, taken into account considerations that reduce that amount of evidence still further, such as the claim that evils entail greater goods that are beneficial, but not necessarily for the ones suffering those evils. Supporters of the Free Will Theodicy, for example, maintain a focus on an overall benefit to human beings – the possession of free will – which comes at the expense of God's allowing some evils to exist – those that are caused by beings exercising their free will deliberately to cause harm. Thus a girl who is tortured by an evil sadist suffers and may not, herself, gain any benefit from that suffering. But God does not intervene to prevent his pain because in doing so He would be compromising the torturer's free will, which is a valuable possession God prefers us all to keep, torturer included. Goods such as free will and others that evils entail would doubtless reduce the amount of evidence for God's non-existence still further. My purpose has been, rather, to investigate how the subjectivity of our own

experiences affects the amount of evidence available, and there is little doubt that the effect is a considerable one.

1.7: Providing an acceptable formulation of the inductive evidential problem of evil in light of the subjectivity of our experience

Facts about the subjectivity of our experience affect not only the force of the inductive evidential argument from evil, but also the possibility of formulating it in a way that would be acceptable, or at least understandable, by all. According to Benton *et al.*: 'The basic idea of the problem is simple enough for anyone to understand …' (2016, p. 1). But in light of what we have said above, this could not be further from the truth.

Let us consider first the subjective view of people like Steve Pete who are born with CIP. What would count as evidence for God's non-existence from their point of view are not instances of unpleasant pain, but the absence of such instances. Having CIP, Steve and people like him are unable to reap any of the benefits unpleasant pain affords. Indeed, being insusceptible to pain has led Steve to lead a hazardous and sometimes miserable existence. From Steve's subjective point of view, he could argue that if God existed, He would have made him the same as people who do experience unpleasant pain, for then his general state of well-being would have been far higher. As it is, were Steve to formulate the evidential problem of evil in his own terms, it would probably look something like this:

formulation 3:

(5) An absence of unpleasant pain experiences renders the non-existence of God likely.

(6) There is an absence of unpleasant pain experiences.

(7) To that extent, the non-existence of God is likely.

Alternatively, in stepwise fashion:

formulation 4:

Step 1: $L(P|{\sim}e_1) > L(P|e_1)$

Step 2: $L(P|{\sim}e_2 \& {\sim}e_1)) > L(P|{\sim}e_1) > L(P|e_1)$

Step 1 says that the likelihood of God's non-existence is greater given the absence of an unpleasant pain experience than it would be if there was such an experience. Step 2, building on absences of these experiences, makes God's non-existence more likely still, and so on as the number of steps increases. Formulation 4 is clearly inconsistent with formulation 2, for it cannot be the case both that experiences of unpleasant pain and an absence of those experiences make likely the non-existence of God. In fact, together, these formulations create nothing at all except a contradiction. This immediately provides a difficulty for a simple, straightforward formulation of the evidential problem of evil that is 'simple enough for anyone to understand'. What we have, in fact, are two such problems, not one, and which of them is the more compelling depends entirely on one's subjective point of view.

That is not all, for we should also consider the point of view of people like Abe who have pain-asymbolia. They have pains like most of us but, unlike most of us, not unpleasant pains. Such people would not find formulations 1 and 2 in the least compelling – at least as far as they concern pain. They would simply fail to understand why experiences of pain indicate the likelihood of God's non-existence, for the pains they have are but simple ideas of sense uncompounded with ideas of unpleasantness. For Abe and others like him, pain sensations (the simple ideas of pain as Locke would say) bear no relevant difference from other simple

ideas of theirs, such as of redness or the gentle tinkling of a bell. On that account, if a supporter of the evidential problem of evil who upholds formulations 1 and 2 insisted to Abe that those formulations are effective, Abe could respond that, for him, the following formulation is equally effective:

formulation 5:

(8) Experiences of redness render the non-existence of God likely.

(9) There are experiences of redness.

(10) To that extent, the non-existence of God is likely.

Naturally, there is no good reason why anyone (including Abe) should find this formulation effective. There is nothing peculiarly bad about experiences of redness that would incline us to believe they render God's non-existence likely. But that is beside the point. The point is that, from Abe's subjective point of view, the argument expressed in formulation 5 is just as effective as that expressed in formulation 1. He would imagine that if pains constitute evidence for God's non-existence, and pains are (for Abe) perfectly innocuous, then any innocuous sensation whatsoever (as of redness) would serve the purpose just as well as pain.

So, having considered how the mini-problem of pain is affected by the subjective nature of our experience, the conclusion we have arrived at is this: that none of the formulations of the inductive evidential problem of evil we have examined so far would attract universal approval. Which of them is the more effective depends entirely on one's own standpoint.

In order to avoid this difficulty, we should ask what conditions must be met in order to provide a formulation that *would* attract universal approval. An obvious condition is that we all share exactly the same point of view regarding our experiences, at least of pain in our

case. Let us suppose that, in three different possible worlds containing human beings, this condition is met. In world W_1 all human beings experience unpleasant pain, as many of us in the actual world do. In world W_2 all human beings have pain-asymbolia, as Abe does; and in world W_3 everyone, like Steve Pete, has congenital insensitivity to pain. Since the condition requiring universally-shared points of view concerning pain is met in each of these worlds, it seems possible to formulate the inductive evidential problem of evil in each of them that would be straightforward enough for everyone to understand. In W_1 the formulation would run along the lines of formulations 1 and 2, above. In that world, experiences of unpleasant pain would count as evidence supporting likelihood of God's non-existence. In W_2, where pain sensations exist, they are sensations of non-unpleasant pain. So the problem would be as expressed in formulation 5, which we have attributed to Abe. And in W_3, the formulation would be something like formulations 3 and 4, which turn on the absence of unpleasant pain experiences rather than their presence. Thus, whichever of these worlds we pick, it is possible to arrive at a simple, straightforward and universally agreed formulation of the inductive evidential problem.

The difficulty is that we live in a world which, effectively, is W_1, W_2, and W_3 all rolled into one. We have people who experience unpleasant pain, those who experience pain but not as unpleasant, and those incapable of experiencing pain at all. This means that all of the formulations of the evidential problem of evil we have examined above exist simultaneously. What should we expect God to make of this situation? Create all humans such that they experience only unpleasant pain? No, because that would incline humans to blame God in the way Rowe, Rubinstein, Borowitz, and others have done, even though the pain they have has some beneficial purpose. God wants humans to turn towards, not away from, Him. So create instead humans susceptible to pain but not unpleasant pain? No, because pain-asymbolics like

Abe could ignore pain when it warns of bodily damage. Moreover, they could cite any simple idea as evidence against the existence of God, as we saw above. Or create humans such that they are totally insusceptible to pain, unpleasant or otherwise? No again, for that would mean humans are susceptible to the sort of problems Steve Pete encountered.

So what should we make of this puzzle? I mentioned at the start that I regarded the inductive evidential argument from evil as having similarities with a trial in a court of law. Since then we have replaced the accused man standing in the dock with God. In the light of all evidence collected, the verdict now seems unclear, for while evidence of unpleasant pain that is non-beneficial suggests 'guilty as charged', other evidence suggests 'guilty but not as charged'. In the latter case, God is guilty of making some people insusceptible to unpleasant pain, as well as making others susceptible to pain that is not unpleasant. As for the sentence appropriate to these seemingly inconsistent charges, should it be 'case dismissed; God is free to leave the court'?

Arriving at an appropriate judgement does seem difficult, but we must not leave out of account the *numbers* of those whose subjective experiences of pain appear to be at odds. According to official figures, those who are insusceptible to pain account for only one-millionth of the world's population. I have no figures for pain-asymbolics like Abe, but there are surely not as many of them as there are experiencers of unpleasant pain. There are, therefore, far more people whose experiences contribute to the likelihood of God's non-existence than those whose experiences don't. Yet the evidence remains inconclusive, and as long as that is taken into account, there can be no simple formulation of the evidential problem of evil that everyone could either understand or accept. Nor, given that unpleasant

pain can be beneficial, is the problem as forceful as might be supposed, even if there was a universally acceptable formulation of it.

Finally, we have restricted the discussion to one type of evidence relevant to the problem of evil, namely, pain. There are many types of evil besides pain that afflict us deeply. But these evils, too, will be experienced subjectively as much as pain, and so even if we had considered these other evils as well, the conclusions arrived at would doubtlessly be the same.

The question does linger, though, about a surplus of unpleasant experiences, of whatever kind, in the world, such as experiences of unpleasant pain, anguish, grief, despair, and misery that have no obvious beneficial effect on our lives. If invited to play the numbers game, most would bet on there existing too much pain and suffering for the overall good of humankind. So let us end with speculating why this is so. An all-good and all-powerful God would understand that unpleasant experiences are beneficial to us, and on that understanding would cause or allow us to have those experiences. If, however, God did not understand what it is like for us to have those experiences, it is likely He would grant them to us in excess, believing that the more negative experiences there are the more positive benefits result. An excess of evils results from God's noble attempt to enrich our lives and our well-being, but without an adequate understanding of what He is doing to us. This is an important issue. The question of whether God can really know what it is like for us to experience pain and other evils needs carefully to be addressed, and that will be the subject of Paper five.

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Paper two

JAMES ROSS' METAPHYSICAL DEPENDENCE DEFENCE OF GOD'S PERFECT GOODNESS IN THE FACE OF EVIL

Many theists addressing the problem of evil see their task as one of absolving God from the charge of being responsible and hence blameworthy for evil's existence. They acknowledge that nothing exists unless God wills it, and that God must, therefore, will evil. Either He causes it directly, or indirectly by allowing it to exist if caused by something, or someone, else. In either case, they see God's absolution being possible only if morally adequate reasons can be offered as to why a being powerful enough to eliminate evil nevertheless refrains from doing so. If there are such reasons, then while God is responsible one way or the other for evil's existence, it would be inappropriate to blame Him for being so responsible. That would be sufficient for God to be absolved of the charge brought against Him.

In his book, *Philosophical Theology* (1969), the philosopher and theist James F. Ross takes us along a different route regarding God's absolution. Intriguingly, he argues that no absolution is possible because it is not required in the first place, so there is nothing of which God needs to be absolved. This position could be achieved by arguing that God has no responsibility at all for evil or is powerless to remove it. But this is not the line taken by Ross. On the contrary, he admits from the start that God *is* responsible for evil; it is just that blaming God, or thinking that He is anything less than perfectly good, is simply illegitimate. The argument is that by paying attention to certain key principles operating between God and His creatures, one comes to see why it would be entirely improper to blame God for causing or allowing so much pain and suffering to exist in the world.

What I find immediately appealing about Ross' argument is its promise to solve the problem of evil at a stroke. For that reason alone, it should be taken seriously. Unfortunately, very few have done so, not because the principles on which Ross bases his argument are thought to be implausible or false in themselves, for they appear to be neither, but because of the way Ross explains how those principles entail God's isolation from blame for the suffering of His creatures. The explanation he offers refers to our beliefs about the suffering of fictional characters. We believe that authors who cause this suffering are blameless for doing so, not, Ross says, because those characters are fictional and don't actually suffer, but because the principles operating between them and their authors, which also operate between God and ourselves, entail that apportioning blame to authors, and to God, for the suffering they cause their creations is simply illegitimate. It is the point at which Ross derives support from truths about fictional characters and their suffering that any initial sympathy for his argument tends to disappear. One can conclude nothing concerning real beings like ourselves from what may be true of beings that are merely fictional, according to the 'real beings' objection. Yet, despite that objection and others too, I retain some sympathy for Ross' argument and feel is appropriate to examine and defend it as far as it is reasonable to do so. This is the task I will undertake, below. Ultimately, however, I think the argument is one that the theist should reject, despite what might be said in its favour. Two issues in particular seem responsible for the argument's failure: that, despite best efforts in its defence, it falls foul of the real beings objection, and if it were to succeed, it would disallow any legitimate inference to God's good character from known facts about the world, which is an inference theists typically hold dear.

I am going to divide this paper into six parts. In part one I introduce Ross's metaphysical dependence defence and the principles underlying it. In part two, I discuss the nature of the metaphysical dependence relation on which Ross' argument turns. In part three, I discuss

how, according to Ross, the metaphysical dependence relation is used to isolate God from blame for evil in the world. Part four will be devoted to summarising the main points discussed so far, and in part five I discuss a range of objections and responses that Ross has either made himself, or which, from his text, could be made on his behalf. Yet despite attempts to defend Ross' argument in respect of the objections discussed in part five, I offer, in part six, a fuller explanation of why I believe the argument ought not to be endorsed by theists.

2.1: The metaphysical dependence defence and its underlying principles

Ross' defence of God's perfect goodness in the face of evil turns on what he refers to as 'the relation of metaphysical dependence' obtaining between God and the created world for whose existence and continuance in existence God alone is responsible. As the title of this paper suggests, I will refer to the defence as the 'metaphysical dependence defence' of James Ross, or 'MDD' for short. Ross begins by citing selected passages from St. Thomas Aquinas that give weight to the defence. As noted, the conclusion to be drawn from MDD is that it is a mistake to hold God blameworthy or believe Him to be anything less than perfectly good based on inferences to His character from known facts about evil in the world. As Ross puts it in quasi-legalistic terms, there is not even a prima facie case to be made against God for the pain and suffering we endure, regardless of their frequency, severity, and pervasiveness among the human population, even though our pain and suffering occur with God's permission or commission.

Theists, who are concerned to explain evils in terms of benefits those evils provide us, or by means of morally adequate reasons God has for their existence, clearly believe there *is* a prima facie case against God to be answered. A prima facie case may, in general, be defined

as a case against an agent, *A*, for committing an offence, *O*, if all evidence supporting *A*'s committing *O* is strong enough to support a finding in favour of *A*'s guilt where all evidence to the contrary is disregarded.[1] Theists concerned about benefits and morally adequate reasons believe that if those benefits and reasons are left out of account, God does appear guilty as charged. What Ross denies is not that there are such benefits or reasons, but that God hasn't a case to answer in the first place, despite being responsible for our pain and suffering.

Ross and his supporters believe, therefore, that a proposition along the following lines is true:

(*p*) Regardless of the amount and severity of human pain and suffering for which God is responsible, it is illegitimate to infer, from the existence of that pain and suffering, that God is to be held blameworthy.

This proposition is not the sole property of MDD supporters, of course, for those who defend God's perfect goodness in terms of benefits and/or morally adequate reasons for His responsibility for evil can lay claim to (*p*), too. They differ from Ross and his supporters in the belief that the illegitimacy of inferences regarding God's character depends on the existence of benefits and/or reasons, which is precisely what Ross denies.

The claim expressed in (*p*) might, without further ado, strike one as audacious and questionable. For, in everyday life, where agents are responsible for causing pain and suffering to others, it would seem implausible to invoke (*p*) or something like it in their defence. Far from being isolated from blame for their actions, those agents positively deserve

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[1] Ross defines a *prima facie* case in legalistic terms, for it is an expression having frequent use in legal matters. See Ross, 1969, p. 251f.

it, along with any punishment deemed appropriate. It might appear equally implausible, then, that (*p*) holds true when the agent in question happens to be God. But it is not, the reason being that God and ourselves are related in terms of metaphysical dependence, unlike ourselves and human agents who cause us harm. It is this relation that does all of the work.

Rather than depending, as some theists do, upon supposed facts about benefits and reasons in support of (*p*), Ross' support is derived from principles that determine the sort of judgements we should make about God's actions. These principles differ from those to which we might appeal in judging our own actions, an example of which is as follows:

(P$_1$) Any agent that *could*, at no moral cost to himself, prevent the pain and suffering of others *ought* to do so. (Ross, 1969, p. 263)

By appealing to this principle we could and ought to act so as, for example, to prevent the starvation of others, or put an end to oppression and tyranny, as long as in either case we do so at no unreasonable cost to ourselves. Similarly, by the same principle, manufacturers who could make products without the sort of defects that harm others ought to do so. But in cases such as these, (P$_1$) isn't a particularly compelling principle. For, even if we know what we ought to do, we don't always feel inclined to do as we ought. Evidently, many of us don't act so as to prevent others from starvation, or actively work against oppression and tyranny, even though we know those are actions we ought to carry out. The reason why (P$_1$) isn't as compelling as it might be is that 'ought' isn't strong enough. So we require a stronger principle, perhaps something like this:

(P₂) Any agent that *could*, at no moral cost to himself, prevent the pain and suffering of others *must* do so.

'Must' seems a stronger imperative than 'ought'. If we sincerely wish to keep our neighbours from starvation, it is better knowing that we *must* contribute to the food bank rather than merely knowing that we ought. It is worth noting that, in effect, principles (P₁) and (P₂) have, in a another moral context, been strongly upheld by Peter Singer (1972) who writes about the sorry plight of the people of East Bengal who suffer shortages of food, shelter, and medical care. Believing, as most would, that these shortages are bad, he argues for the principle that 'if it is in our power to prevent something that is bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it' (p. 231). For Singer, this principle is uncontroversial, as it appears to be when applied to the case in which he imagines himself walking by a shallow pond and sees a child drowning. He immediately feels he ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting his clothes muddy, but that is a sacrifice worth making compared to the very bad situation of a child drowning. Also very bad is the sorry plight of the people in East Bengal. If, in appealing to Singer's principle, everyone donated a small sum towards their cause, and doing so without sacrificing anything of moral importance, that would be sufficient to fulfil the most pressing needs of the poor people in question. Given that Singer's principle and (P1) and (P2) appear equally uncontroversial, it follows that knowingly to disregard them by turning one's back on the suffering of others implies moral imperfection in oneself or at best a weakness in one's character, through a failure to fulfil a moral obligation. The inference from this appears to be that God's seemingly turning His back on the suffering we are allowed endure implies moral imperfection in Him, for surely He could mitigate that suffering at little or no unreasonable cost to Himself.

However, even if we accept that those principles are uncontroversial and morally binding *when applied to ourselves and other human beings*, they fail to apply to God by Ross' reckoning, even in the knowledge that through creating defective moral agents, a world containing earthquakes, tsunamis, killer-viruses and the like, God harms us and fails to act in ways that prevent such harm. Could the following principle, more suited to a creator of worlds, be more applicable to God?

(P$_3$) Any agent that *could*, at no moral cost to himself, create a world that lacks moral and physical defects must do so. (Ross, 1969, p. 263)

We might believe so, but MDD supporters think that (P$_3$) is false, assuming that the creator of worlds is God. It is not because God is a unique being that explains the alleged falsity of (P$_3$), or that God is a being with special attributes. Rather it is the relation of metaphysical dependence that obtains between God and what He creates that renders the principle false. From this MDD supporters uphold a further principle that absolves God from all blame for creating a defective world – namely:

(P$_4$) Any agent that *could*, at no moral cost to himself, create a world *metaphysically dependent* on it that lacks moral and physical defects is under no moral obligation to do so. (*loc. cit.*)

If this principle is true, then this explains why, purely in virtue of the metaphysical dependence relation between God and ourselves, God is blameless (and still perfectly good) for evils whose existence He is responsible. And it is this principle that entails proposition (*p*), which was:

(*p*) Regardless of the amount and severity of human pain and suffering for which God is responsible, it is illegitimate to infer, from the existence of that pain and suffering, that God is to be held morally blameworthy.

These considerations explain why Ross and his supporters see MDD as a principled response to the problem of maintaining the moral character or perfect goodness of God in the face of our pain and suffering. And the principle (P$_4$) that makes this true is implied by the relation of metaphysical dependence obtaining between God and what He creates. Or so Ross and MDD supporters would have it. But, without further ado, it is not yet clear why the metaphysical dependence relation mentioned in (P$_4$) does the work demanded of it. We need to learn more about the relation's nature and its derivation, and this we will turn to next.

2.2: Metaphysical dependence – its nature and derivation

Metaphysical dependence as Ross understands it is a 'one-way' relation (1969, p. 255). The created world is metaphysically dependent on God, but God is not similarly dependent on it. Although this relation obtains in the case of God and the world, there are other cases that exemplify it, or some form of it, too. The prominent feature of all cases is that whatever happens to be metaphysically dependent on something else, those things could not exist and, in some cases, continue to exist unless something else did. Here are some familiar examples. One is that of a lit candle and the rays of light it casts. The rays of light are metaphysically dependent on the lit candle, without which they could neither exist nor continue to do so. But the lit candle is not similarly dependent on them. The relation between them, of metaphysical dependence, runs in one direction but not the other. Other examples exhibiting the same relation include authors and their fictional characters and settings, and minds and their ideas. It is obvious that authors and minds can exist independently of fictional beings and their

settings, and of ideas, but these are able to exist and continue to do so only in virtue of being metaphysically dependent on authors and minds that create and conserve them. Interestingly, something that is metaphysically dependent on something else for its existence is not necessarily dependent on the same thing for its continuance in existence. The fictional character, Fagin, owes his coming into existence to Charles Dickens, but since Dickens no longer exists, there must be something else, such as a printed novel, a stage performance, or some mind, that keeps Fagin 'alive'. It is metaphysical dependence that likewise explains the relation between God and the world that He first brought into existence and subsequently conserves.

A concern at this stage might be that Ross employs the metaphysical dependence relation as an *ad hoc* hypothesis serving the purpose of absolving God from blame for our pain and suffering, as well as one which he surreptitiously slips into traditional theistic doctrine making it appear that it belonged there all along. But neither is the case. In fact, the relation is actually implied by the doctrine of divine creation and conservation which is indispensable to traditional theism; that is, a doctrine which asserts the necessity and sufficiency of God's will in whatever exists and occurs in the world.

But the necessity and sufficiency of God's will in this sense raises the immediate danger of making God appear wholly responsible for the world's moral and physical defectiveness, thereby eliminating entirely any responsibility born by created agents and physical features of the world. It would be as if God created the heat of fire, the fire itself having no part in causing it. Or as if God was wholly responsible for moral wickedness and no created agent was truly capable of moral wickedness. These reflect the position held by some occasionalists who place all responsibility for action on God. If this position reflects how things really are,

then it is hard to see, with or without the relation of metaphysical dependence, how God could possibly escape blame for the pain and suffering He causes us. Ross is aware of this position and strongly opposes it. What he argues is that while God's will is both necessary and sufficient for all that occurs in the world, the will of created beings is also necessary and sufficient. And he finds some support for his argument in Aquinas who claims that natural effects – including evil effects – have both divine *and* natural causes. Aquinas writes:

> The same effect is not attributed to a natural cause and to the divine power in such a way that it is partly done by God and partly by the natural agent; rather it is wholly done by both, according to a different mode, just as the same effect is wholly attributed to the instrument and also wholly to the principal agent. (cited in Ross, 1969, p. 253)

And again:

> … we must admit without any qualification that God operates in the operations of nature and will. Some, however, through failing to understand this aright fell into error, and ascribed to God every operation of nature in the sense that nature does nothing at all by its own power … they said that fire does not heat but God creates heat in that which is made hot … and that the fire itself would have no part in the action of heating.
> (Aquinas, 1259-1268, *De Potentia*, Question III, Article VII, 16)

What some fail to understand is that, in addition to God's necessary and sufficient causes, He imparts to natural things causal powers of their own:

> God is the cause of everything's action inasmuch as he gives everything the power to act, and preserves it in being and applies it to action, and inasmuch as by his power every other power acts. And if we add to this that God is his own power, and that he is in all things not as part of their essence but as upholding them in their being, we shall conclude that he acts in every agent immediately, without prejudice to the action of the will and of nature. (*ibid.*)

By the transference of powers from God to creatures, both are causally responsible for natural events. Ross explains the situation in terms of natural and metaphysical causes:

> [T]he claim that God and the human agent are both necessary and sufficient causes of the same event is not a claim from two different points of view. Rather, a natural explanation of an event includes a statement of its natural cause and of the law under which it operated; a metaphysical explanation of an event involves a statement of its metaphysical causes [that is, a statement about God's necessary and sufficient cause]. (Ross, 1969, p. 261)

Here is a simple illustration. Rays of sunlight are metaphysically dependent on the sun for their existence and powers. For sufferers of polymorphic light eruption, a rash appears on the skin where rays of sunlight fall on it. The rash has both a natural cause (rays of sunlight) and a metaphysical cause (the sun upon which those rays metaphysically depend). Both kinds of cause, natural and metaphysical, are, in this sense, necessary and sufficient both to produce the rash and explain it.

Ross describes these two different types of cause as remote and proximate. In the illustration, the sun's metaphysical cause is remote, and causes belonging to the rays of light are proximate. Similarly in the case of God and creatures, God is the remote cause of whatever creatures do and creatures are the proximate cause of their actions. And again, both types of cause are necessary and sufficient for creatures' actions and to explain them.

2.3: The metaphysical dependence relation and God's isolation from moral blame for our pain and suffering

Although the relation of metaphysical dependence is essential to the success of Ross' argument for the illegitimacy of blaming God for the causal responsibility he bears for our suffering, it is not obvious that this conclusion follows from considerations of that relation alone. Ross would have it that Eve, and not God, is blameworthy for her sins. The explanation is that blame falls upon the natural, proximate cause of the effect and not the

metaphysical, remote cause. One might accept that Eve deserves blame but, given the metaphysical dependence relation, wonder why it should be *only* Eve that does. Think again of the polymorphic light eruption sufferer. Since, in terms of causal necessity and sufficiency, the sun and its rays of light are equally efficacious in bringing about the effect, any blame for the rash would surely fall squarely on the shoulders of both sun and its rays rather than on one in particular – the rays of light in this case. If so, then why should the metaphysical dependence relation isolate God from blame any more than it isolates the sun? Either the relation cannot adequately account for the apportioning of blame in the way Ross believes, or there is more to the relation than has so far been acknowledged. And, according to Ross, there is indeed more, at least in the cases of God and His creatures or, more generally, creators and their creations.

Ross claims that the system of remote and proximate causes presupposes another system – of a hierarchical order of being, incorporating different levels of reality. On this view, beings existing at one level are metaphysically dependent on a being or beings existing at a higher level. God alone exists at the highest level of reality while His creatures exist at a lower level. This is how Ross defines a creature or object, *b*, existing at a lower level of reality than another being, *a*:

> *b* is of a lower level of reality than *a*, if and only if *b* belongs by essence to a class of things *B* such that no member of that class could exist unless: (1) some member (or members) *a* of the class *A* exists; (2) produces the existing members *b* of class *B*; (3) maintains a conserving relation to those members (*b*) throughout their existence; and (4) no member of the class *B* has any property whatever that is not bestowed upon it by *a* or by some member of *A* or some member of some class of things to which the members of *A* stand in relations (1), (2) and (3). (1969, p. 254)

The claim is that God's isolation from blame for our pain and suffering is accounted for by the relation of metaphysical dependence obtaining between us, and also considerations of

different levels of reality. We now need to grasp how these notions serve to isolate God from blame,, and this is what Ross turns to next. To that end, he discusses a familiar case exemplifying (a) the metaphysical dependence relation between two kinds of being, (b) different levels of reality, and (c) the obvious inappropriateness of attributing blame to one of these kinds for the pain and suffering it causes to the other. The case Ross chooses is that of authors and their fictional characters, and this is how Ross draws the desired conclusion from that case:[2]

Suppose that a student of English Literature, sitting an exam, is asked to explain the existence of the fictional character, Fagin. Her answer naturally refers to Charles Dickens who, as we know, created the character in his novel *Oliver Twist*. Clearly, the student has provided the correct explanation. Next, she is asked to explain Fagin's sins, which include the corruption of young boys, receiving and trading stolen property, and picking the pockets of rich folk in Old London Town. Once again, the student refers to Dickens who was responsible not only for Fagin's existence, but also for all his properties, including the disposition to behave sinfully. Her conclusion, therefore, is that Fagin cannot be blamed for his sins because it was Dickens who made him act sinfully.

Her explanation this time is not correct, the reason being that she has her levels of reality confused. The expected answer makes reference to Fagin's own level of reality, not to the level in which Dickens exists. She should have referred to those individuals and circumstances in Fagin's own world that conspired to make him the sinful person he was. If blame for Fagin's sins is directed at anyone, it is to those individuals and circumstances rather than Dickens himself. This is so, even though Dickens' causal activity (in writing) was

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[2] To remain consistent with an objection discussed later, I use different illustrations from Ross'. This doesn't affect the point Ross is making, or strengthen or weaken his argument.

sufficient for Fagin's existence and properties, as well as those of everyone and everything else appearing in the novel.

Of course, if it is true that beings that are metaphysically dependent for their existence and properties on a higher-level of reality being, as humans and fictional beings like Fagin are claimed to be, then concerns arise over the question of free will. For, ordinarily, agents are held responsible and blameworthy for their wrongdoings only on the understanding that their wrongdoings were carried out freely. Without the ability to act freely, an agent may be responsible for their wrongdoings, but not blameworthy. Imagine that Jones shot Smith under compulsion, because Brown was holding a gun at his head and forced him into the act. Jones is responsible for the shot insofar as it was he who pulled the trigger, but under the circumstances blame passes from him to Smith who compelled him to do so. In order to attribute blame to Jones we would have to assume that he could have acted otherwise than he did. But since that assumption is false in the supposed circumstances, blaming Jones is not appropriate. This is something for Ross to worry about for, if God's will is sufficient for bringing about whatever His creatures do, it is God who deserves the blame, not His creatures. This also applies to Dickens' novel, of course. Blaming Fagin and not Dickens for Fagin's wrongdoings requires that Fagin acted freely – that he could have acted otherwise. But could he? Well, of course he could, *if* Dickens had made him act otherwise. But he didn't. That said, it is worth noting that some philosophers (notably Frankfurt, 1969) have argued that the ability to act (or to have acted) otherwise is not a necessary condition of acting freely. If these philosophers are right, then Fagin could be said to deserve the blame for the wrongdoings he did, even though he could not have refrained from doing them, or have acted differently instead.

Moral wickedness aside, what might Ross say about evils that no free agent causes, such as earthquakes that devastate local populations? The option of blaming defects in the Earth's crust, or abnormal weather conditions, rather than God for these devastations isn't as readily available as it might be in the case of agents' wrongdoings. That is, we cannot reasonably claim that those defects resulted from the Earth's crust, or the weather, acting of its own free will. Natural phenomena are determined by the laws of nature which, in turn, are determined by God. Only God can be blamed for defects in nature since there is no other cause on which to divert blame. About this, Ross turns again to Aquinas. The gist of what Aquinas writes is that defects, both moral and physical, although occurring under the power of divine providence, are effects of creature (proximate) causes and not divine (remote) causes. Hence, creatures, not God, are blameworthy for the defectiveness they cause.

What this amounts to is a principle concerning the illegitimacy of inferring anything about God's properties – especially those of moral defectiveness and blameworthiness – from properties we discover in the world. According to this principle, it would be illegitimate to infer wickedness in God from the wickedness we see performed by created beings in our world. The illegitimacy is explained, of course, by reference to the relation of metaphysical dependence uniting God and ourselves. This is how Ross himself expresses the principle:

(P*) For any two beings, a and b, such that b is metaphysically dependent on a, if b is F, then it is illegitimate to claim that a is also F unless it is impossible that Fb and not-Fa.
(1969, p. 257)

This principle refers to two types of property: the type which b has and we *cannot* legitimately infer a has as well; and the type which b has and we *can* legitimately infer a has

as well because if *b* has them, *a must* have them. There are many properties of the first type: for example, I have the properties of being a certain weight and height, but it is illegitimate to infer that God has those properties also. I can think of only one property of the second type, however, which is existence (if that is a property). From the fact that a creature has the property of existence we can legitimately infer that something – a creator – has (or had) that property as well. A creator *must* have the property of existence if something created has it. The 'must' derives from the very meaning of the terms 'created' and 'creator'. But our concern is with knowing to which type the property of being morally defective (or evil) belongs. In deciding, (P*) is unhelpful because it makes mention of no properties at all. There is, however, help to be found elsewhere.

Let us return to the student. The final exam question asks for an account of Dickens' moral character. The answer given is 'As for this, Dickens was obviously morally corrupt. In his novels, he frequently causes the innocent to suffer, forces children into a life of crime and deprivation. And in *A Christmas Carol* he made Tiny Tim a cripple and caused him to exist in squalid conditions.' Now, if the property of being morally corrupt was like that of existence, which we know must belong to beings of a higher level of reality on the basis that their metaphysical dependants have it, then we should assume that the student's answer made good sense. But, quite clearly, it doesn't. Dickens may or may not have been morally corrupt, but no reasonable judgement either way would be based on the type of properties he gave his metaphysical dependants. On the contrary, those dependants seem altogether irrelevant to forming such a judgement.

Well, much has been said about Ross' argument for MDD. It might be helpful if we were to take stock of the main points emerging so far.

2.4: Taking stock

This, then, is a summary of the main points:

(i) There are different 'levels of reality'.

(ii) All beings are assigned to one specific level of reality.

(iii) Beings existing at any level of reality are (in virtue of the meaning of that term) *real.*

(iv) All beings, except for those existing in the highest level of reality, are metaphysically dependent for their existence, continuance in it, and properties, on beings (or a being) in a higher level of reality.

(v) It is appropriate to attribute moral blame to beings existing in the same level of reality.

(vi) It is inappropriate to attribute moral blame *across* levels of reality in 'an upward' direction.

Since Ross believes he is providing the theist with an effective response to the problem of evil, we should distinguish between which of these points have a sound footing in traditional theism and those that don't. Points (i), (ii), and (iv) have such a footing since they are implied by the doctrine of divine creation and conservation. The remaining points, for which MDD supporters have argued, are, theistically speaking, a little more contentious. Point (iii) might strike one as especially so. Ross and his supporters maintain, as they must, that beings at every level are *real existents*, and that includes what we regard as 'fictional characters' like Fagin. Many would suppose that calling the level in which these characters feature a 'level of reality' is insufficient by itself to make them real. Are they not simply 'made up' beings? Those who believe they are simply made-up will imagine they have a strong case to make against Ross which will need addressing urgently if Ross is to succeed. I will say more about this in part five when I turn to consider objections.

Meanwhile, points (v) and (vi) may also appear contentious. They are, after all, the fruit of Ross' labours. What seems contentious about them is the fact that the justification for them is based on the author/fictional character case which, while familiar to us and yields the results Ross is searching for, seems a pretty flimsy basis on which to argue for the illegitimacy of attributing blame to God for His being responsible for causing us pain and suffering.

Contentious or not, this summarises how Ross utilises some of these points in arguing for MDD: he begins by viewing the problem of evil as a quasi-legal challenge to the goodness of God, who (as the problem is often conceived) has the prima facie charge to answer of being morally defective, or less than perfectly good, in the face of evil in the world He has created. Ross' concern is to argue that no such charge exists. The argument runs as follows: all beings can be assigned to a specific level of reality (points (i) and (ii)) and are metaphysically dependent on a being (or beings) in a higher level. Blame that is due to a being for any wrongdoing is appropriate only for beings within the same level of reality and no other – in particular, a being in a higher level upon whom the wrongdoer is metaphysically dependent. This is so even if the higher-level being's will is sufficient for the wrongdoer's actions to be brought about. If this is so, then it seems that no matter how much pain and suffering the wrongdoer (created being) is willed to bring about, it is inappropriate to blame the higher-level being for willing what the wrongdoer does. This is Ross' position. It is now time to consider objections that could be, and have been, raised against that position.

2.5: Objections

I am going to discuss several objections to MDD, one of which is especially telling. That one objection would likely be voiced by almost anyone taking Ross' argument seriously, and would be assumed to be unquestionably fatal to it. Briefly, the objection is that nothing of

value can be inferred about a case involving real beings and their suffering from a case of merely made-up beings (like Fagin) and their suffering. That Ross is believed to make such an inference is more likely to inspire outrage than admiration, and a resolve to dismiss the argument out of hand. This, the 'real-beings objection', is one that Ross considers towards the end of the chapter in which he argues for MDD. But what he says, in my view, is too little to overcome the objection, thus leaving him in a vulnerable position. Indeed, the little he does say serves only to create another problem. But, finding Ross' argument intuitively appealing, at least initially, I will try to defend it against the objection by filling in some of the gaps Ross leaves bare. In the end, however, despite the effort, it seems that the real-beings objection remains as forceful as ever. Moreover, there is a further reason why the traditional theist should not find MDD acceptable. I will discuss both these matters presently. Before then, however, some other, perhaps less serious, objections deserve attention.

Very often objections are based on either a misunderstanding of the position they are attacking, or the identification of a flaw in a position the author of which has failed to recognise. Objections of the first kind cannot succeed, whereas those of the second kind, where a flaw in the position under attack has not been noticed, certainly can. Both kinds of objection can be, and have been, raised against Ross. I begin with two objections based on misunderstandings. Because they are similar in nature and make the same mistake, we can consider them together. They have in common the claim that the metaphysical dependence relation, as Ross explains it, cannot be relied upon to isolate an agent from blame in the way Ross believes. The misunderstanding each makes concerns the significance of differences in levels of reality that, according to Ross, the relation incorporates.

In September 2016 I was invited to speak on Ross' argument at a philosophy of religion workshop at the University of Birmingham. The objections I refer to came from members of the audience there. The first objection is that wholes and their parts are related by metaphysical dependence in the way God and creation are. Wholes depend for their existence on their parts, as do human bodies and the cells of which those bodies are composed. The claim is that if the cells comprising a particular body conspired to cause that body harm, blame would not belong to that which is dependent – the body – but to the cells on which the body metaphysically depends. Likewise, if God causes His dependents harm, then the blame does not belong to that which is dependent but to God upon whom His dependents depend. This is what Ross denies but according to the objection his denial is not justified.

The second objection is this: suppose that a sensitive person is part of an audience being entertained by a theatrical performance of a play based on Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, and that this person becomes psychologically traumatised by the violence and wickedness he sees enacted on stage. Even though the characters portrayed by the actors and the actions they carry out are metaphysically dependent on Dickens, it would still seem proper to blame Dickens rather than the characters being portrayed for the trauma suffered by that person. Likewise, human beings who are traumatised by the violent actions of wicked people should not attribute blame to those people but to God if it is true that His cause is both necessary and sufficient for such violence and wickedness to occur.

Now, while these objections might be right in relating, in terms of metaphysical dependence, cells and bodies, and violence enacted on stage to the author of that violence, they are wrong in supposing that metaphysical dependence *so understood* is what Ross understands by it. On Ross' understanding, but not on the objectors', is included the notion of different levels of

reality. If we refer to the last two of the six points made above, we can easily see what difference levels of reality make to apportioning blame:

(v) It is appropriate to attribute moral blame to beings existing in the same level of reality;
and
(vi) It is *in*appropriate to attribute moral blame *across* levels of reality in an 'upward direction'.

Both objections concern only point (v), so they are right in claiming that blame should be apportioned just as they say it should: cells and bodies, and Dickens and the traumatised member of the audience, all exist in the same level of reality. And since (v) allows that blame may be apportioned to beings in the same level, the objectors are right but only according to what they understand metaphysical dependence to mean. But God and ourselves exist in different levels of reality and so, according to point (vi), it is not appropriate for blame to pass from our level to the higher level containing God. Consequently, both objections fail on account of misunderstanding how the metaphysical dependence relation operates over those different levels of reality.

A third objection, one which Ross himself addresses, is that we can infer moral defectiveness in God from the character of His creation in the same way as some critics and psychologists 'try (sometimes successfully) to read the personality of the author out of his works' (1969, p. 257) The idea is simple enough: some fiction writers depict in their works scenes of moral corruption and suffering, ideas of which could have come into their minds only if those writers were morally corrupt themselves. Where critics and psychologists have been successful in making such an inference, perhaps they have had independent grounds for

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claiming their success – grounds other than the works of the authors in question to justify their claims. Such grounds could include knowing about authors' morally corrupt activities through witnessing them or coming to learn of them from other reliable sources. Inferring moral corruption from authors' works alone, by contrast, is far less reliable and probably only guesswork. But in the case of God, we have only His 'works' on which to form a judgement about His moral status, for what grounds independent of His works might there be?

However, if the world had been created without the defects it has, or no defects at all, there would be little or nothing on which to base an inference to God's moral defectiveness. As it is, we have grounds, however tenuous, on which to base an inference to God's moral status. In any case, if God was perfectly good and wholly without moral defect, surely He should have created a world that is itself without defect. But according to Ross, this is not so. Consider again a principle mentioned above:

(P$_4$) Any agent that *could*, at no moral cost to himself, create a world *metaphysically dependent* on it that lacks defects is under no moral obligation to do so.

According to this principle, there is no requirement, logical or moral, for God to have created a defect-less world, even though that is something that lies within His power and would have cost Him little or nothing. How so? If we refer again to the author/fictional character case, it was presumably within Dickens' power to have written *Oliver Twist* very differently. The situations he might have created could have been totally benign, such that every character was prosperous and happy, and free from suffering of any kind. But few would suppose that because that is something Dickens *could* have done at no cost to himself, it is something he *should* have done because of some overriding logical or moral requirement. So in effect, what

Dickens actually did in writing his novel was to appeal to principle (P₄), in the knowledge that despite being responsible for whatever sins were committed in it, as well as for all the suffering endured by his characters, it would be illegitimate to infer from those things that Dickens has a defective character or that he is morally blameworthy. And if all of that is true of Dickens, it must also be true of God, according to MDD.

Another objection concerns what I call 'bounce-back'. According to this, the blame for defects (for example, sins and suffering) at one level of reality that are caused by a higher level of reality being, bounces back from the lower level being to a higher level being. Here is an illustration: suppose that a woman (a real woman – call her Mary) reads *Oliver Twist* and soon becomes fascinated and inspired by the crimes described on its pages. Being poor herself, it occurs to her that she might become rich if she copies the criminal practices described in the book, such as picking pockets on busy streets. That is what Mary decides to do, and finds that her wish to become rich is soon fulfilled.

Would it be appropriate to regard Dickens as blameworthy for Mary's sins? On the one hand it might seem so, for it was he who put the idea of those sins into Mary's head. Had she not picked up a copy of *Oliver Twist* in the first place, she might not have descended into a life of crime at all. On the other hand, all Dickens did was point out to Mary a means of living on the proceeds of crime; in no sense did he suggest that any of his readers should adopt that means in real life. For my part, there is a stronger intuitive pull towards the second alternative, and thus towards believing that the bounce-back objection has no effect at all on the integrity of MDD. It seems just implausible that if Mary were to stand trial for her sins, a reasonable defence would be to shift the blame onto Dickens' shoulders. Alternatively, intuitions could pull the other way, suggesting that Dickens is the proper subject of blame

since responsibility was his alone for describing the crimes Mary read about in the novel, and adopted herself.

Even if this intuition is the right one, it would have no effect on the God/creation case. For it to have an effect analogous to the Dickens/Mary case, there would need to be a being besides God in God's level of reality who perceived the sins in our lower level of reality that God caused, who then felt inspired to become sinful himself, and subsequently blamed God for those sins. While I think this is no more plausible than Mary's blaming Dickens for her sins, it is also implausible because there is no being besides God in God's level of reality; no being who could be inspired to sin by the perception of sins in our level of reality; and no being capable of placing blame for sin on the shoulders of God. So the finding must be that the bounce-back objection is ineffective as a weapon against MDD.

In fairness to the objection, however, a defender of bounce-back could point out a weakness in the response just described. It is that God's isolation from blame rests on the claim that He alone occupies His level of reality, and that doesn't make a strong case. For, if there happened to be another being in God's level of reality who was inspired to become sinful and wicked as Mary became, then blaming God for the wickedness and suffering in our level of reality would seem appropriate. It is hard to see why God's 'aloneness' should, of itself, isolate Him from moral blame for our suffering.

It is questionable, then, if not certain, whether the bounce-back objection succeeds, or whether a stronger defence of MDD is possible against the objection. I will say no more about it now, for I want to examine the strongest objection of all: the real beings objection. Ross appears to rely heavily on the use of fictional beings such as Fagin to clarify how the

metaphysical dependence relation exists and operates between beings of different levels of reality, and how moral blame cannot pass from a lower to a higher level. His position is that, because moral blame for Fagin's suffering and wickedness does not rise up a level to Fagin's creator (who was responsible for that suffering and wickedness), nor does it rise up a level to God for the suffering and wickedness He is responsible for causing us. In light of Ross' reliance on fictional beings to support his argument, critics would doubtlessly find it irresistible to respond with some form of the real-beings objection which they regard as sufficient to stop the argument in its tracks. Here is one form of the objection by Peter Geach:

> Yet another explanation [of God's isolation from moral culpability for our pain and suffering] is that we are to God as characters in a novel are to the author, and God is no more responsible for our sins than Dickens for Fagin's; or perhaps rather, though responsible, not blameworthy, any more than Dickens is. I should find it hard to keep a straight face in bringing this out. It is enough to reply that Judas did exist and Fagin didn't, so that the comparison is useless. (Geach, 1979, pp. 62-3)

This is all Geach says on the matter, and provides no argument in support of it. Presumably, therefore, he thinks no argument is required. All we need to do in order to grasp the force of the objection is appeal to our intuitions regarding the suffering of real as opposed to fictional beings, and to where blame for that suffering is appropriate. From what Geach says, two points emerge:

First, that a strong analogy between cases A and B may be drawn only on condition that A and B are alike in some relevant respect, r. If case A = 'we are to God' and case B = 'characters in a novel are to the author', then because 'we and God' are both real and 'characters in a novel' are not, there is a relevant respect, r, in which cases A and B are not alike. Consequently, arguing analogically from what is true of B to what is true of A is not strong.

And second, Geach thinks that while it is inappropriate to attribute blame to authors for the suffering they cause to fictional beings, it is appropriate to attribute blame to God for the suffering He causes real beings. Fictional beings like Fagin are unreal, and are not harmed by the suffering their authors force them to endure. But the real Jesus was harmed by the suffering God (through Judas and his persecutors) forced him to undergo.

Although Geach doesn't direct these points at Ross explicitly, there might seem little reason why he should not have done so, for Ross *appears* to be upholding the very position Geach is attacking: 'that we are to God as characters in a novel are to the author, and God is no more [blameworthy] for our sins than Dickens for Fagin's'. But Ross is mindful of these points, for he denies that he is arguing by means of analogy. Rather, he points out that his argument is based on principles – (P_1) to (P_4) inclusive, together with proposition (p) which they imply (pages 57-59, above). The reasoning is this: we may be unclear about the relation between God and ourselves, and what that relation entails concerning God's moral character. Ross provides an instance of that relation, involving authors and their fictional characters, which is more familiar to us. The similarity of the relations exemplified in both instances (that is, the metaphysical dependence relation) entails that what is true in one instance (of authors and fictional beings) is also true in the other (of God and ourselves). In particular, since it is true that authors, though responsible, are not blameworthy for the suffering of their characters, so God, though responsible, is not blameworthy for the suffering of ourselves. In a word, the fact that fictional beings appear in one of these instances while not in the other is completely irrelevant. It is not the nature of beings involved in these instances that carries the burden of proof but rather the relation of metaphysical dependence that is common to both. Presumably it is because Ross places such reliance on that relation in order to isolate God from moral blame for our suffering, that Geach's second point concerning the distinction between real

and merely fictional beings is held by Ross to be unimportant. After all, if it is the relation that does all the work, then questions of reality versus fiction seem beside the point.

But this is a mistake. In order that Ross' argument should work, he needs to maintain that fictional beings are, in some respectable sense, real. To suppose that fictional beings like Fagin are unreal in the sense of being non-entities, made-up beings who have zero ontological status, or something of that sort, would rule out positing the relation of metaphysical dependence between such beings and their (real) authors. Relations of whatever kind require something 'real' to get a grip on. There can be no relation between something that is real (for example, an author) and something that doesn't exist. If fictional beings that don't exist because unreal cannot stand in a relation to a real being like Dickens, then MDD can't get off the ground, or at least be justified in the way Ross explains. This leaves Ross with a couple of options. One is to ditch talk of authors and their fictional beings altogether and explain God's isolation from blame for our suffering in terms only of what the metaphysical dependence relation between God and ourselves entails. The difficulty with this option is that this single case alone fails to make clear how the metaphysical dependence relation works in such a way as to isolate God from moral blame and protect His perfect goodness. That is precisely what the familiar case of authors and fictional characters is meant to illustrate. So dispensing with that case is not an easy option that Ross could take. It is an option, but one that could leave us mystified as to why the relation implies what it is meant to.

The second option is to argue as Ross has done but try to persuade us that fictional characters are not non-entities after all but, in some respectable sense, real. And *as* real they can stand in the relation of metaphysical dependence with their authors. But this isn't an option Ross saw

on the horizon. In fact, he claims (1969, p. 258) that the God/creation case is the only one involving real beings at either end of the metaphysical dependence relation, for only God creates real beings. That is straight from tradition, that nothing (real) can exist or occur unless God wills it. What Ross needs to do now is argue for the view that others besides God can, through an act of will, sheer mental effort, or being creative in some way, achieve the same thing.

If Ross is to offer such an argument to the effect that authors can create real beings, we need to know what is meant by 'real beings' in that context. We should start by stating what is *not* meant. It is not meant that authors' creations stalk the planet as we do, such that we might bump into them walking along the street. In any case, that is not what the ontology Ross has in mind supports. On that ontology, fictional beings, *if* real, are as real in their own world or level of reality as we are in ours, a world (a real world) that authors create.

How are we to conceive this? One way is to think of fictional beings as possibilia who are real in non-actual but possible worlds. In the present context, these worlds are possible containers of all the objects, characters, events and properties with which authors decide to fill them. The character Fagin and all others depicted in *Oliver Twist* are possibilia in one such world. But this conception doesn't provide Ross with all his argument requires. It is hard to conceive how the relation of metaphysical dependence could obtain between beings in the actual (real) world and beings in a non-actual world. Unless one holds that possible worlds are actual, such worlds are (as fictional beings appear to be) non-entities having zero ontological status. And non-entities are surely *unreal* entities.

A different argument, based on the work of Amie Thomasson (2003), tries to show that fictional beings are real as long as certain conditions are satisfied. One condition is that we accept that there are literary practices in which authors create characters that have no referent in the actual world (in our own level of reality, as Ross would put it). To paraphrase Thomasson: the sentence 'Charles Dickens writing a novel pretending to describe and refer to Fagin' is, in virtue of the concepts involved, logically sufficient for us to refer to the fictional being, Fagin'. The name refers to something rather than nothing – something real. She says, further, that the existence (reality) condition of fictional beings is determined by literary practices, and if we accept that condition it would be hard to deny that fictional beings exist or are real (Thomasson, 2003, p. 145). Thomasson is not claiming that 'real' fictional beings stalk the Earth as we do, but that they do stalk the world in which they exist, thanks to literary practices being carried out.

A virtue of Thomasson's view is that it seems consistent with the ontological framework Ross upholds. Above we have seen how Ross conceives that framework. From defining what it is for a creature or object, *b*, to exist and be conserved in existence at a lower level of reality than *a*, which is causally responsible for *b*, we can arrive at these three statements:

(1) There exists a higher level of reality being, *a*, that brings about the existence of a lower level of reality being, *b*.

(2) That higher level of reality being maintains a conserving relation between itself and the lower level of reality being as long as both beings exist.

(3) That higher level of reality being also determines all the properties of the lower level being.

Combining these statements with Thomasson's line of reasoning, we can conclude (using Thomasson-speak) that a higher level of reality being (for example, Dickens) exists and by means of a literary practice creates and conserves a being (for example, Fagin) at a lower level of reality, together with all its properties.

It is worth noting that (2), above, can be amended in order to accommodate conserving agents that are not necessarily identical with creators, as mentioned earlier. It is obvious that a lower level of reality being, such as Fagin, can continue to exist even if its higher level of reality creator, Dickens, has ceased to exist. In some cases, lower level of reality beings are conserved in existence by, for example, printed text in a novel, or by means of theatrical performances, rather than by the agent who first brought them into existence. But the requirement is still met: that there exists an agent of some kind or other in a higher level of reality that conserves in existence a being in a lower level of reality.

But is it a virtue of Thomasson's view that it can explain the reality of fictional beings through literary (creative) practices? We know well enough that authors and other creative agents are real in our level of reality, and that the practices in which they engage are real, too. According to Geach, Dickens is among those real individuals but Fagin, a result of Dickens' creative practice, isn't real. But is Geach entitled to make that assumption? Doubt arises about this since we are inclined to believe that the results of some creative practices surely *are* real. Consider this example:

These are the opening bars in the form of a printed manuscript of the aria from J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Like the story of *Oliver Twist* this is the result of a creative practice, and I think most of us would want to say that the aria is real. After all, we can state facts about it as confidently as we can about other real beings. For example, we can state that the aria came into existence in 1741; that is has a certain age; that before 1741 it did not exist; and that it is the result of a creative practice. But if we were to state that the aria does not exist, that it is a non-entity with zero ontological status, or that it is unreal because it is merely a figment of the imagination, the above statements would surely be false for it could not be a fact that a non-existent, unreal, non-entity came into existence and has an age. And just think of the silliness of the claim that J.S. Bach didn't create (compose) a *real* aria at all; that what he created was merely a piece of fiction (that we attended a concert to hear a piece of fiction played on a real instrument!).

Now, if we are inclined to endorse the idea that the aria is real because it is the result of a creative practice, and yet deny that Fagin is real even though a similar practice resulted in him, then we are simply showing unjustifiable bias, or at least inconsistency, in what we choose to call real and unreal. In order to avoid such charges, therefore, we must either affirm or deny that both the aria and Fagin are real. By 'real' I mean having a positive ontological status in a level of reality other than that in which their creators are real. Of course, there may be reasons against this notion as well as for it.

Reasons *against* may be based on the fact that the creative practice that resulted in, for example, the aria, is itself fairly and squarely located in our world, or level of reality. The aria came into being at a certain time and at a certain place in our level of reality. It is at this level that the aria is publicly perceptible, as by audiences listening to or giving a performance of it.

It is in the same level that there are recordings and memories of the music, together with printed musical manuscripts that instruct players how to perform it.

But there are also reasons *for* believing that the aria exists in a different level of reality from ours. Memories, recordings, performances, and manuscripts are *of* the aria but not the aria itself. There are many memories, recordings, performances, and so on, but only one aria. Nevertheless those performances, recordings etc. do have an important function: they *conserve* the aria in existence. As Ross might put it, there is a relation of metaphysical dependence between the aria and its conservers. As long as the things exist at our level of reality that act as conservers, the aria will exist also at its own level of reality. And if there came a moment when all of these 'conserving agents' ceased to exist and act, the aria would cease to exist along with them, and thereby fail to be a part of the world it once occupied.

I think a useful way of coming to understand what is being affirmed here is to compare what has been said about the aria and fictional beings like Fagin, with Berkeleian idealism, which bears strong similarities to the ontology Ross describes. According to Berkeley, God exists in one level of reality and finite things in a lower level. Those things – trees, houses, mountains – are created and conserved in existence by a higher level of reality being just as the aria and fictional characters are. They each enjoy a real sort of existence but not in the same level of reality as their creators and conservers.

Now, spending some time considering arguments for the reality of fictional beings and the levels-of-reality ontology has shifted our focus somewhat from Ross' central thesis, which is that it is illegitimate to blame God for all the suffering and defectiveness in our world. Ross believes that, when considerations of levels of reality and metaphysical dependence are

brought to bear, it will be seen that there is not even a prima facie case to be answered against God's goodness. It is time to return to that thesis bringing to bear the issues of 'real beings' and levels of reality as discussed.

In defending his thesis against the objections raised by Geach, Ross thinks he is invulnerable to the first since he denies (rightly) that he is not presenting an argument from analogy. But he then has to address the real-beings objection, which claims that if a being is responsible for causing another harm (and is not coerced in doing so), then that being is not only responsible but also blameworthy for the harm done, just as Judas was responsible and blameworthy for the harm he caused Jesus. If we agree that blame is appropriate in such cases involving only real beings, and that Ross is committed to maintaining that fictional beings like Fagin are real, then he cannot escape the force of the real-beings objection. It would be as proper to say that Dickens is blameworthy for the harm he causes Fagin as it would to say that Judas is blameworthy for the harm he caused Jesus. Ross' escape from this objection is, as we have seen, to claim that the question of reality is irrelevant, for all that matter are the metaphysical dependence relation and levels of reality between creators and the created, which together affect the apportioning of blame for the harm creators cause their created beings. But we can now see that Ross faces a tricky dilemma. He faces the options of claiming that fictional beings are real, or that they are unreal. If he opts for the first, he can invoke the metaphysical dependence relation and levels of reality to support his thesis, but then he meets head-on the real-beings objection. If, on the other hand, he opts for the second, according to which the reality of fictional beings is irrelevant, his argument cannot get off the ground if those beings are supposed unreal, for only if they are real can the metaphysical relation be posited. Either option leads Ross into serious trouble from which it seems very hard to escape.

Despite any intuitive appeal Ross' argument (MDD) might have, it seems to me in the end unsupportable, despite efforts to defend it against more or less serious objections. However, all need not be lost. Ross does offer an explanation, in metaphysical terms, of how we might understand the God/creation relation, involving a creative activity the result of which are real beings existing in a different level of reality from God. What Ross tries to derive from that relation is a moral consequence concerning responsibility and blame, and it is hard to see how, from the metaphysical relation alone, any moral conclusion is derivable from it.

But let us suppose that Ross is able to overcome that problem and provide a defence against the real-beings objection. Given the straightforward account MDD provides in defence of God's blamelessness and perfect goodness, is MDD a response to the problem of evil which the theist should jump to accept? I don't believe so. Theists believe that the character of the world, in particular its grandeur, majesty, beauty, and the gifts of providence we receive, are sure signs of the goodness and power of the creator, and of His concern for the well-being and pleasure of creatures. This belief inspires theists to praise and worship God, and to be thankful for the goods He bestows on us. But the principled argument Ross provides counts just as much against praising God as it does blaming Him. Recall that proposition, (*p*), for which Ross argues, is as follows:

(*p*) Regardless of the amount and severity of human pain and suffering for which God is responsible, it is illegitimate to infer, from the existence of that pain and suffering, that God is to be held morally blameworthy.

If we grant Ross' claim that it is illegitimate to infer God's moral blameworthiness from the negative character of the world, he would seem committed to the following proposition as much as he is to (*p*):

(*p**) Regardless of the amount and intensity of human pleasure and happiness for which God is responsible, it is illegitimate to infer, from the existence of that pleasure and happiness that God is to be held praiseworthy.

Taken together, (*p*) and (*p**) have it that there are no features of the world, bad or good, from which we are entitled to infer anything about God's character. Just as there is no prima facie case against God's goodness from human suffering, so there is no such case in favour of it from human pleasure and happiness.

Even worse, on Ross' principles we may not even be entitled to infer that there *is* a God, or at least a God with the sort of character theists wish to ascribe to Him. They maintain that from the majesty and splendour of the world, we may infer the existence of an all-powerful God who clearly loves His creatures and is morally concerned for their well-being. If Ross' argument is taken on board, then theists would have no justification for maintaining this.

Interestingly, this is a problem Ross acknowledges, but is dismissive about it. He says that if one were to accept his argument, 'Does that mean that the moral character of God cannot be established through knowledge gained from the structure of the world? It does,' he admits. Then he continues: 'yet we do not deny that, in observing the world, one finds many things to rejoice in and admire God for. If the question to be answered is "Has God acted in a morally perfect way in His acts?" I think we may be able to discover that this is so.' (1969, p. 272)

Here Ross appears to be upholding the principles on which his argument is based whilst, at the same time, rejecting them.

As for God Himself, theists have tried to establish His existence by providing a range of arguments, among which are the following:

The Argument from Design (broadly covering the Argument to an Intelligent Designer, and the Fine Tuning Argument);

The Argument from the World as an Interacting Whole;

The Argument from Miracles;

The Argument from Consciousness;

The Moral Argument;

The Argument from Religious Experience; and

The Argument from Aesthetic Experience.

These arguments have in common that they are *a posteriori*; they proceed from particular features of the world to the existence and character of God. Theists maintain that those features owe their existence to God, and would not be present if the world were the product of, say, mere chance. Such features include regularities of the laws of nature, and beings who have a moral sense. They may also include miraculous events that can be due only to a miracle-worker. But according to Ross' principles, arguments turning on inferences from the world to God are illegitimate.

Overall, it seems reasonable to assume that Ross' argument affords an unusual, bold, and ingenious defence of God's goodness in the face of human pain and suffering. However, two

problems in particular confront it: the real beings and the acceptability problems. Ross, in support of MDD, can escape the minor charge that he is presenting an argument from analogy which, if he had been, would have made him susceptible to Geach's objection. As it is, the real-beings objection is a major block to the argument's success. The version of MDD Ross argues for needs fictional characters to be, in some respectable sense, real; but if they are real then any harm caused to them by their authors leaves those authors guilty of the charge of moral wickedness. That they avoid guilt for that harm seems out of the question given the moral intuition most of us share with respect to the suffering caused to real beings. If, on the other hand, it is allowed that fictional characters are in no sense real, then the metaphysical dependence relation posited between them and their authors cannot exist.

And then there is the acceptability problem. For the reasons given, few theists would endorse MMD despite its claim to isolate God from moral blame for our suffering. Were it not for these problems, MMD might go some way to addressing the problem of evil. But I doubt that the problems will go away.

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Paper three

VALUE CONTEXTUALISM AND THE FREE WILL THEODICY

My aim in this paper will be to focus on the Free Will Theodicy in order to explain what I believe is fundamentally wrong with it. I am not alone in thinking that the Theodicy is in trouble. Over the years others, too, have voiced their pet criticisms, prompting adherents of the Theodicy to leap to its defence. Questions have been raised about our possession of free will – whether we have it and, if so, what kind – and whether free-willed agents must, at some time, do wrong. In this paper, I don't intend to discuss any of these criticisms, mainly because I wouldn't have much more to say about them than has already been said. Rather, I want to present and defend a criticism that, as far as I know, is both novel and, I believe, strong enough to deprive the Theodicy of much of its plausibility. Henceforth, I will take certain claims of the Free Will Theodicist for granted. For example, I will assume that humans among other beings, such as devils, angels, and any other non-human agents, have free will; and that the type of free will – libertarian free will – is the type supporters of the Free Will Theodicy suppose agents have. So my criticism is not to do with issues related to such assumptions. It has to do, rather, with the *value* supporters of the Theodicy suppose free will has. I will begin with short statements of the Theodicy (as held by one of its modern champions) and its purpose, say a little about the value free will is reckoned to have (and *must* have if the Theodicy is to be plausible), and then express and defend my criticism of the Theodicy against possible objections.

The aim of the Free Will Theodicy is to address and solve the evidential problem of evil. It tries to do so in two stages: first, to place all responsibility for causing evil onto the shoulders of beings other than God, and hence to remove the blame that would attend God's having

such a responsibility; and second, while admitting God's responsibility for not eliminating the evil caused by others, it diverts any blame for that responsibility by arguing that, were God to embark on such an elimination, it would have to be at the expense of compromising a gift of tremendous value, namely free will, that God believes His creatures should keep. In God's eyes, free will has such value that, under certain conditions at least, it positively outweighs the negative value of evil, or so supporters of the Theodicy would argue.

Now, a modern champion of the Free Will Theodicy is Alvin Plantinga, and where appropriate it is his version of the Theodicy I will be discussing. To begin, then, Plantinga states that the following proposition is true:

(P1) A world containing beings who are free to perform good and bad actions, and *do* freely perform good and bad actions, is better (given a favourable balance of good over bad) than a world containing only automata, even if these beings perform only good actions. (Plantinga, 1977, p.30)

And since the good brought about by agents exercising their free will is *moral* good, and that brought about by automata, or determined causes, is *non-moral* good, (P1) implies the following proposition:

(P2) A world containing moral good, even if it contains some moral bad, is better (given a favourable balance of moral good over moral bad) than one containing only automata, even if that world contains only non-moral good.

I will be assuming, as already noted, that humans as well as possible non-human agents, have free will as given to them by God, and that the sort they have is libertarian, or contra-causal, free will. And I will assume also that supporters of the Free Will Theodicy need to maintain that the free will has a high, positive, and *invariant* value. My task will be to argue that the value of free will is not invariant but sensitive to the context in which we regard it. It *may* have a high and positive value in some contexts. That I do not question. But there are contexts in which its value is negative. If that is right, then the Free Will Theodicy loses much of its plausibility as a defence of God's blamelessness for our pain and suffering. Let us turn to the assumed value of free will next.

3.1 The assumed value of free will

William Rowe (2008) discusses what makes possible worlds good or bad. Possible worlds are maximal states of affairs. Good possible worlds are those containing states of affairs that are intrinsically good, like having creatures that are happy, while bad possible worlds contain states of affairs that are intrinsically bad, such as creatures that are miserable. Another state of affairs a good possible world might well exhibit is having creatures that possess free will, for free will, Rowe says,

> if not itself a great intrinsic good, appears to be indispensable for some very important goods we know of – freely given love, freely sacrificing for the well-being of others, freely chosen acts of charity, etc. Indeed, from the point of view of the creator it might be uninteresting to create beings who are programmed from the start to worship God, to honor Him, to do good to others. From the perspective of the creator it may well be better to have beings who can freely choose to love and worship or not to love and worship, for love and worship that are freely given are of much greater value than love and worship that is compelled. (2008, pp. 77-78)

Whether free will has intrinsic or extrinsic value, it certainly has (according to this passage) a high, positive value – one high enough to outweigh the possibility or actuality of evil acts

performed freely, and high enough to make free will worth having even if the cost we must pay to have it is some amount of moral evil. Not only is the value of free will held to be high, it is also held to be *invariantly* high. Invariance seems to me a central requirement of the Free Will Theodicy, for if the value of free will varied – high, low, zero, or negative – then it isn't clear that free will would be worth having in the way the Theodicy supposes. There are, indeed, reasons for holding that free will does have a high, positive *and* invariant value.

3.2 The high, positive and invariant value of free will

That free will has a high and positive value is implied by propositions (P1) and (P2) since, according to those propositions, a world containing beings who are free is better (has a higher, positive value) than a world containing only automata (beings who lack free will). Those propositions do not explicitly mention the invariant value free will is supposed to have, but I believe they presuppose it, for both propositions depend for their truth on such a value – or so I would maintain. There are several reasons why the Free Will Theodicist should agree. These are some of them:

First, according to the Theodicy, free will is the gift of God, and presumably, since God's gifts don't fluctuate in value according, for example, to how we might regard them, neither would the value of free will. This is supported by the fact that our free will seems not to be compromised or withdrawn by God even when, through its exercise, human suffering is the result, or when love freely given to another is unrequited, or an act of charity is freely withheld.

Secondly, the kind of good free will makes possible, namely moral good, is always considered to be of higher value than non-moral good, such as good brought about by mere

automata. Giving to charity freely is always of higher value than doing so under compulsion. If the value of free will was believed to fluctuate, then perhaps not all moral good would exceed in value non-moral good, so that freely-made charitable gifts were no better, or worse, than giving under compulsion.

Third, there may be parallels between God's gift of free will and other such gifts that seem to have an invariant value in themselves, an example being the gift of knowledge, or the desire to acquire it. This seems true of knowledge *in itself*, regardless of any extrinsic value or disvalue it may have, or how knowledge is put to use.

Fourth, in connection with the last point, is the view that free will has intrinsic value and thus a value that is invariant. This view is held by, for example, Frankena (1973) who obligingly provides a comprehensive list of things he sees as having intrinsic value. He includes knowledge, truth, love, self-expression, wisdom, happiness, and free will on the list. The uses to which we put knowledge and wisdom may have positive or negative values, while knowledge and wisdom *in themselves* or intrinsically, have a positive and unwavering value; and so, according to Frankena, has free will.

And fifth, various commentators on the Free Will Theodicy write as though a high, positive and invariant value of free will is something its supporters assume, at least tacitly. Mackie (1982), for example, regards the Theodicy as a species of greater-good theodicy which he characterises broadly in terms of 'orders' of good and evil. Higher-order goods are those which justify the existence of lower-order evils which entail them. In answer to the question, why God would give beings freedom they have misused, he writes:

> The answer must be either that such freedom is itself a higher, third-order, good which outweighs the evils which are either constituted or brought about by its misuse – or, at the very least, which, when the freedom was conferred, outweighed whatever risk of these was even divinely foreseeable. (p. 155)

On this account, if free will had a value that was not invariant, it would, in situations where its value was low, fail to outweigh the 'evils which are either constituted or brought about by its misuse', and so rob the Free Will Theodicy of much of the plausibility it might otherwise have.

Again, according to R.W.K. Paterson (1979):

> … the existence of free moral beings is in itself so great a good that it outweighs the evil contributed to the world by any surplus of moral evil over good produced by the actions of these free moral beings. (p. 3)

In further support for the invariant value of free will, after acknowledging the claim that God created free beings, S.T. Davis (1972) remarks:

> Perhaps he did so because the inherent goodness of freedom outweighs any possible evil which free men might bring into the world. (p. 335)

Of special significance here is that, in the views of Paterson and Davis, and arguably Mackie too, free will has not only *intrinsic* value (valuable 'in itself', or a value that is 'inherent'), but a high and positive value such that it outweighs any 'surplus evil' in the world, or indeed 'any possible evil' that might be brought about. Not only a high and positive value, however, but also invariant – independent of contexts in which agents exercise their free will. For, if its value were admitted to be variable, then free will would not *always* be a third-order good, or outweigh any surplus or possible evil free men might bring into the world. Invariance in

value is precisely what the Free Will Theodicy needs to uphold: that the high, positive and invariant value free will has is sufficient to justify God's failure to intervene when beings exercise their free will in causing harm.

Now for my objection: it is that, despite these seemingly good reasons supporting free will's invariant value, I will argue that its value is not invariant at all. Any value free will has is wholly dependent on the context in which it is regarded. In some contexts, free will does indeed have a high, positive value, but in others it can have little or none, or even a value that is negative. In order to make this clear and be thorough, it is important to remember that there are different aspects of free will, and we will see what they are next.

3.3 Different aspects of free will

I want to argue that the value of free will depends on context; that it is not necessarily high and positive and thus not invariant as the Free Will Theodicist maintains. But since there are different aspects of free will, three in fact, it is important to understand which of these could be the target of my argument. Are the values of all three aspects dependent on context, or only some? Each aspect has a mention in (P1), above, which, as a reminder, was:

(P1) A world containing beings who are free to perform good and bad actions, and *do* freely perform good and bad actions, is better (given a favourable balance of good over bad) than a world containing only automata, even if these beings perform only good actions.

This proposition explicitly mentions two aspects, and implicitly one. The first explicitly-stated aspect is the *capacity* or *potential* in agents who are 'free to perform good and bad actions'. And the second such aspect is the *exercise* of that capacity or potential, as when

agents '*do* freely perform good and bad actions'. The implicitly-mentioned aspect falls somewhere in between these, which is the *choice* and/or *intention* agents freely form to act in a certain way, or to refrain from acting in that way. Each of these aspects has a different metaphysical status. The capacity to act freely is simply an unexercised power, and even if one were never to exercise that power, one would presumably retain the capacity to do so notwithstanding. The exercise of that capacity (setting the capacity in motion, so to speak) leads in the first place to a free choice and/or intention. Choices and intentions are states of mind. Acting on that choice or intention then becomes the 'public face' of free will – the bringing about of states of affairs, events, even objects – that are, in principle, publicly observable and actual features of the world (unless one's choice or intention is to *refrain* from bringing about anything). Capacities, and choices or intentions are not themselves publicly observable, of course, and are the 'private faces' of free will, known immediately only to the agent to whom they belong.

Now, when the Free Will Theodicist claims that free will has a high, positive and invariant value, it must be to at least one of these three aspects that the value is being ascribed. It is important, therefore, to see which, if any, of these aspects the Free Will Theodicist has in mind.

3.4 The capacity to act freely

According to Genesis 1:26, God made man in His own image so that, in certain respects, we resemble God. We may not attain that resemblance immediately at birth but tend towards attaining it throughout our lives as we, or our souls, develop into a state of maturity. It is through the possession of our capacities that such a development can occur. In that sense, some would argue that capacities are 'excellence-making properties' that God bestows on us

so that, through exercising them, we may grow more like Him. The capacity for knowledge, for example, appears to be an excellence-making property which, through its exercise, has enabled us to have Einstein's theorems, Bach's compositions, and rockets that aim for the stars. The Free Will Theodicist might believe that the capacity for free will is also an excellence-making property and, like knowledge, has a high, positive and invariant value in itself.

3.5 Free choices and intentions

Choices and intentions are states of mind that are the immediate result of exercising the capacity we have for free will. They lie intermediary between that capacity and actions that are freely performed – actions, that is to say, that spring from those free choices and intentions. (Often, choices and intentions are similar states of mind, or they mean the same thing; but not always. Following orders, a soldier might intend to do *x* although he would not choose to do so, implying that he would choose to refrain from *x*-ing without intending to do so. A point emerging from this is that, in law, a person (such as a terrorist) can be deemed punishable for intending to do something he either didn't choose to do or didn't in fact do – see below).

So are choices and intentions candidates for having high, positive and invariant values? The Free Will Theodicist might insist that they are. Free will is supposedly an excellence-making property, and free will includes choices and intentions, for these are aspects of it. Think again of knowledge, another supposed excellence-making property. Whatever knowledge we have derives from the exercise of our capacity (or desire) to acquire it. Like choices and intentions, knowledge *in itself* is a state of mind, and lies intermediary between the capacity to acquire it and the exercise of it. In that sense, knowledge is analogous to choices and intentions. If the

value of knowledge *in itself* is thought to have a high, positive and invariant value, the same would seem true of our choices and intentions.

Does knowledge itself have a high, positive and invariant value? Arguably it does, regardless of the various ways in which it might be exercised or acted on. To illustrate this, we might refer to the case of Wernher von Braun who acquired immense knowledge of rocket design and propulsion. Surely, that knowledge *in itself* has a high, positive and invariant value regardless of whether von Braun's rockets delivered bombs that destroyed cities or enabled men peacefully to explore the cosmos. If free choices and intentions are relevantly similar to knowledge *in itself* regardless of how either is exercised, then, knowledge does lend support to the former having the same sort of value.

3.6 Freely-chosen actions – actions resulting from the exercise of free will

Action, the third aspect, is the public face of free will and so, unlike the two previous aspects, readily lends itself to public scrutiny. Agents are judged in various ways – morally, legally, academically – according to what we observe them freely do. Engineers who design and construct systems of irrigation in arid regions of the world to enable local populations to grow crops and feed themselves are praised for what they freely do. The good they bring about (that people are fed and kept from starvation) is a *moral* good, not least because free will is involved in bringing that good about. It is a good the engineers could freely have refrained from bringing about and devoted their energies to some other project instead. But, of course, automata and natural phenomena would be capable of bringing about the very same good without any involvement of free will. We can imagine a super-humanoid robot or ample rainfall achieving the same result. But that result, while good, is not *morally* good because neither the robot nor the rainfall would have acted freely. The result is a non-moral,

as opposed to a moral, good. From this case and many others like it, it seems reasonable to conclude that exercises of free will have a high, positive and invariant value that determined causes lack. And this is why propositions (P1) and (P2) are upheld by Free Will Theodicists as truths. Worlds containing moral good are more valuable to that extent than those containing non-moral good, and the difference in value is explained (at least in part) by the presence or absence of exercises of free will.

3.7 Taking stock

If free will has a high, positive and invariant value, we have identified three aspects of free will that are possible candidates for being ascribed that value and, according to what we have noted so far, all three seem to be successful, but for different reasons. The capacity we have for free will, like the capacity to acquire knowledge, is supposedly the sort of 'excellence-making' property we possess that both distinguishes us from other material objects in the world, and indicates how we are made in the image of God. It is natural to believe that any property that fulfils these roles is a valuable property, one having, perhaps, a value that is high, positive and invariant.

An exercise of that capacity immediately produces (freely made) choices and intentions, just as an exercise of the capacity to acquire knowledge produces knowledge. Knowledge *of itself* has an undeniable high, positive and invariant value, and if it is like choices or intentions in a relevant respect (for example, being produced by an excellence-making property) then choices and intentions freely made have a similar sort of value.

And finally, actions that spring from freely-made choices or intentions are the public face of free will. When agents act on such choices and intentions, there is little doubt that such

actions are ascribed value inasmuch as they are observable and thus readily amenable to moral judgements – judgements that are based on the value that such actions have. And those values, too, are likely to be thought high, positive and invariant no less than the values ascribed to other aspects of free will. In all, let us accept, provisionally, that each of these aspects is a likely candidate for having the values we have ascribed to them, or at least that the Free Will Theodicist can present an argument to the effect that those ascriptions are appropriate.

Now, before moving on, I want briefly to discuss the distinction between two ideas that will feature in the following discussion. One is invariance, and the other, context-sensitivity. These ideas have been used in recent years in epistemology where questions of the standard of justification for knowledge are at issue. According to philosophers in the invariantist camp, that standard is both high and unwaveringly so. On this understanding, many of the things we claim to know are not really known because the standard of justification for those claims is too high to be achieved. By contrast, some argue that the standard of justifying what we claim to know is sensitive to the context in which those claims are made. In some contexts, the standard is as high as invariantists believe, while in others it is low enough for knowledge claims to be justified. Many of the claims that invariantists reject as knowledge turn out to be accepted as such as long as the context in which those claims are made are those in which the standard of knowing is low enough (see Steup and Sosa (eds.), 2005, pp. 47-71 for discussions relating to this). Below, I will adapt the ideas of epistemologists and apply them, not to standards as they do, but to *value* – the value of free will in particular. The Free Will Theodicist believes that the value of free will is invariant, or unwavering, and that this belief, moreover, is also God's they think. That accounts for God's non-intervention in acts of moral evil. Allowing agents to retain free will, even when such acts are performed, is

of higher value overall than compromising it in order to prevent those acts. By contrast, I will argue for the contextualist position, which has it that the value of free will is not invariant but sensitive to context. In some contexts, the value of free will may indeed be high and positive while in others it is low or even negative. But not across all contexts is it true that the value of free will is invariant. We will move on to this next.

3.8 The value of free will is not invariant but sensitive to context

How is it possible to argue, against the Free Will Theodicist, that the value of free will is not invariant but sensitive to context? One might, for example, argue that it is only a matter of opinion as to what that value is. Think again of populations in arid regions of the world fed and kept from starvation by the crops they grow. Their opinion might be that the only thing of value is being kept alive thanks to those crops. Quite how those crops come to be irrigated, by dint of engineer or nature, is irrelevant since either would have secured the same result. The Free Will Theodicist could go along with this, to a point. She could admit that opinion settles the question of value, but not just anyone's opinion, only God's. For, in God's all-seeing eye, what creatures do of their own free will has greater value than what mere automata (or determined causes) do, and that is what bestows a high, positive value on free will. And that value is also invariant because God's opinion on the matter is immutable.

Another argument could be based on our intuitions rather than opinion. Depending on what it is we have intuitions about, they can either guide us to the truth of a matter or else seem unreliable or mistaken, or we may have no intuitions about a particular matter at all. In the case of moral goodness and badness, however, I believe we have strong intuitions that often serve as a sound guide in deciding what is right and what is wrong, just or unjust, praiseworthy or blameworthy, and which actions performed by free agents have positive

value, negative value, or no value at all. Assuming that our intuitions are both strong and reliable in such matters, I will argue below that appeals to intuitions are reliable guides to assessing the value of free will which, as we know, is often involved in the actions of agents. I will also argue, by way of supporting the argument from intuition, that we can employ scientific method in determining what the values of free will are. This involves the numerical quantification of free will in connection with moral goodness and badness, to show how its value fluctuates from one context to another. The overall conclusion of these arguments is that the Free Will Theodicy cannot offer a satisfying response to the problem of evil.

3.9 Scientific method

Scientific method is undoubtedly both a useful and valuable tool enabling us to obtain sound knowledge of certain matters. Here is a short quote from the mathematician and physicist, Lord Kelvin, formerly Sir William Thomson (1824-1907):

> In physical science a first essential step in the direction of learning any subject is to find principles of numerical reckoning and practicable methods for measuring some quality connected with it. I often say that when you can measure what you are speaking about and express it in numbers you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind: it may be the beginning of knowledge, but you have scarcely, in your thoughts, advanced to the stage of *science*, whatever the matter may be. (Thomson, 1891, pp. 80-81)

According to this passage, genuinely to know about a quality – free will in our case – what we require is a principle of numerical reckoning and a practicable method of valuation that will enable us to obtain the knowledge we are after. Otherwise, the knowledge we have, and which I believe the Free Will Theodicist has, is only of an unsatisfactory and meagre kind. Since we want genuine knowledge, the method advocated by Lord Kelvin is one we should try to pursue.

Before doing so, it is worth noting the misgivings many philosophers would have about embarking on such a project. Clearly, scientific inquiry, as Kelvin sees it, applies with ease to features of the world that appear readily amenable to empirical investigation, including numerical reckoning, but not obviously to features that don't. And issues concerning morality – good and evil, right and wrong – appear to be among the features that don't. Some believe, however, that there is a scientific approach to morality. Moral naturalists, for example, maintain that if we suppose science can, at least in principle, explain all natural phenomena, and morality is part of nature, then science can help explain morality (see, for example, Shafer-Landau, 2012, p. 335). Now, we want to investigate the value (or *values*) of free will, which is an ingredient of moral goodness and badness. If our investigation bears the hallmarks of a scientific investigation, then we may assume that it is one to which we can apply scientific method as advocated by Lord Kelvin. We should begin by seeing whether the criteria we apply to our investigation match those applicable in science. In order to discover what the criteria are, we will look at a simple scientific investigation and take them from that.

Suppose, then, that a scientist (call her Sarah) has decided to test the hypothesis that the value of the temperature at which water boils is not invariant but sensitive to the context of pressure. She first boils up a flask of water at sea level and, after using suitable measuring apparatus, records both the temperature at which the water boiled and the atmospheric pressure surrounding the flask. Soon afterwards, she repeats the experiment at the top of a nearby mountain, and notes the same information. Sarah discovers that both the temperature at which the water boiled and the atmospheric pressure surrounding the flask were lower on the mountain top than they were at sea level, and takes these results to confirm that the hypothesis she is testing is true.

I don't imagine anyone would deny that Sarah's investigation was scientific. But what criteria do her investigations incorporate that make us want to say that it *was* scientific? In all, there are four of them. First, there is a hypothesis lying at the heart of the investigation, the results of which confirm or disconfirm that the hypothesis is true. In Sarah's case, the hypothesis is that the temperature at which water boils is not invariant but sensitive to the context of pressure. The second criterion concerns the existence of 'qualities' to which numerical values may be assigned. For Sarah's purposes, temperature was one such quality, and atmospheric pressure was the other. The third criterion concerns the availability of suitable 'units of measurement' in which numerical values may be expressed. Again, in Sarah's case, these were 'degrees Celsius' for temperature and 'pascals' for atmospheric pressure. And the last criterion is the appropriateness of applying numerical reckoning to any values obtained that enables Sarah to know whether the hypothesis being tested is to be confirmed or otherwise.

Our investigation concerns the value (or values) of free will, and if it satisfies the same criteria as Sarah's investigation did, then there seems to be no reason to deny that it is scientific, and thus amenable to the methods advocated by Lord Kelvin. And indeed, it seems that those criteria can be satisfied. First, we have a hypothesis to test: that the value of free will is not invariant but sensitive to context. Second, there are 'qualities' relevant to the investigation to which I believe numerical values may be ascribed. Those qualities are embedded in propositions (P1) and (P2), and before moving on to the third criterion, let us say more about those qualities, which are:

(i) Non-moral goods which we will refer to as 'goods *simpliciter*' that are typically brought about by automata. They differ from moral goods in being the effects of determined causes not involving exercises of free will.

(ii) Free will itself (for example, the exercise of free will), and

(iii) Goods, which we will call 'moral goods', that are goods the bringing about of which involves the exercise of free will.

Now, goods *simpliciter* (quality (i)) are effects whose causes are determined, such as are brought about by automata or, equally, natural phenomena such as rainfall or wind. The rainfall that irrigates the crops in arid regions of the world is the cause of a good *simpliciter* because free will is not involved in bringing that good about, the good in question being that the local population is fed and thereby kept from starvation. By contrast, the engineers who, rather than relying on unpredictable rainfall, build systems of irrigation to water the crops bring about the *same* good, but one we call a *moral* good (quality (iii)) because acts of free will are involved in bringing it about. Free Will Theodicy supporters would insist that a world in which the engineers bring about that good is better than a world in which the rainfall does, in virtue of the fact that the former world contains acts of free will (quality (ii)) and the latter doesn't. In other words, the former world contains *moral* good and the latter only good *simpliciter*.

Returning to the question of criteria, the third is that we require for our investigation 'units of measurement' applying to the three identified qualities ((i), (ii), and (iii)) to which numerical values can be ascribed. In our case, unlike Sarah's, there don't appear to be any units of measurement readily at hand to meet the requirements. But that doesn't mean there are no units we can adapt to suit our purpose. In fact, two candidates come to mind, which I will call 'moral value units' (MVUs) and 'axiological value units' (AVUs).

MVUs would naturally seem appropriate units for the numerical valuation of moral goods. In these units, it would seem possible (with some numerical reckoning) to order moral goods in terms of, for example, their 'moral magnitude'. For example, the moral good of Donald Trump's freely giving 2 cents to a street beggar would presumably be assigned fewer MVUs than his giving away his entire fortune in order to help alleviate poverty in Florida. Similarly, on a grander scale, a world containing a wealth of moral goods would attract a higher MVU valuation than a world containing only a few such goods. However, MVUs are inappropriate for our purpose because not all of what we need to value has a moral character: good *simpliciter* doesn't and nor does free will (which is a *part* of moral good or an instrument for creating it, but not a moral good itself). So we require units whose scope is broad enough to encompass everything we need to value.

So we now turn to AVUs which may have the kind of scope we need, for these serve as units of measurement for all relevant properties of worlds. Writing on worlds' axiological status, Klaas Kraay (2010, p. 356) defines that status in terms of 'world good-making properties' ('WGMPs') and 'world bad-making properties' ('WBMPs'). The idea is that properties of the former kind elevate a world's axiological status while those of the latter kind lower it. Kraay obligingly offers examples of such properties. The WGMPs he mentions are the presence of free beings, a favourable balance of moral good over moral evil, the variety of phenomena in the world, and the simplicity of the world's governing laws. The WBMPs he lists are unjustified suffering in the world, and possibly the absence or contraries of WGMPs. AVUs, on this understanding, encompass more worldly qualities than MVUs alone. Accordingly, worlds having more (and perhaps more important) WGMPs than others have a higher AVU status than they have. Contrariwise, worlds having more (and perhaps more important) WBMPs than others have a lower AVU status than they have. A world's overall axiological

status would, therefore, be determined by the balance of WGMPs over WBMPs, which, presumably, is something God would be capable of determining. Because of the scope they afford, I will be assuming that AVUs will serve as units of measurement in our investigation, and on that basis, it seems that the third criterion of scientific method is also satisfied.

As an aside, it is worth noting that interest in the world's axiological status has led to debate about that status in connection with God's existence. Briefly: for some, that status is higher given God's existence than it would be given His non-existence, while for others the reverse is true. 'Pro-theists' think, for example, that cosmic justice and the meaningfulness of life are constituents of the world since God promotes them, while 'anti-theists' claim that God would undermine our privacy and dignity, and even render morality incoherent (more on this is currently available at https://philevents.org/event/show/89394 – the 'Mini-Conference on the Axiology of Theism'). I have no space to pursue this matter further, but note that it affords an interesting line of inquiry to pursue later on for its own sake.

Returning, then, to scientific method: if doubts linger over the employment of this method in our present investigation, they will probably have to do with Kelvin's idea of numerical reckoning, for what we are investigating in particular (moral goodness and badness, and free will) seems resistant to any kind of numerical quantification, vague or precise. Jeremy Bentham met with the same issue after he attempted to apply numerical reckoning to certain properties of moral actions in defence of his version of utilitarianism. If we consider what he said, there is something useful to be learned from it.

Briefly, Bentham maintained that actions were morally right if they maximised pleasure or minimised pain, and wrong if they maximised pain or minimised pleasure. He then tried to

explain, using numerical reckoning, how it might be possible, in principle, to work out in advance which action among alternatives would be morally right in such-and-such circumstances. To help with this reckoning, Bentham referred to seven qualities of pleasure and pain which are amenable to numerical valuation; namely, *intensity*, *duration*, *certainty*, *nearness or remoteness*, *fecundity*, *purity*, and *extent* (in Crimmins, 2021, §3.2). To each of these it seems possible, in principle, to ascribe either an absolute or a comparative numerical value. To some of these could be ascribed (fixed or absolute) numerical values, such as certain periods of time for duration, or mathematical probabilities for the likelihood of pleasure/pain following an action. Pleasure and pain, by contrast, while seemingly resistant to fixed, absolute, numerical valuations in terms of their *intensity*, admit more readily of comparative numerical valuations (see, for example, The%20Hedonistic%20Calculus.html at **philosophy.lander.edu** for a fuller discussion of this). It is common medical practice for doctors, in trying to assess patients' regard for their pains, to ask them to point out on a simple scale of one to ten how intense they feel their pain is. Patients can arrive at a figure by comparing past and present pains, or the degree to which present pains seem tolerable. This provides doctors, not with any absolute numerical value of patients' pains, but with a comparative (although still meaningful) valuation. In a similar way, beautiful objects resist absolute but not comparative numerical values (according to some scale). Plato notes that the fair maid is beautiful, but that the goddess even more so. The latter rests at the top of the scale and the former somewhere lower down.

In order to allay the objection that the qualities we are investigating ((i), (ii), and (iii)) resist absolute (or determinable) numerical valuation in terms of AVUs, I will assume that it is legitimate to assign to them *comparative* numerical values as just discussed; that it is permissible to say that one of these qualities has a higher/lower comparative numerical

valuation than another on some scale of reckoning. That way we can test whether our hypothesis (that the value of free will is sensitive to context) is true following Lord Kelvin's methods. So what numerical valuations have I in mind? Since no such values already exist, they need to be valuations that the Free Will Theodicist as well as ourselves would agree upon. As will become clear, a little flexibility will be required here, but at all costs we need to avoid the charge that our valuations are rigged in a way that shows our hypothesis to be true when, in fact, it isn't.

In terms of numerical values, we might begin with free will itself (quality (ii)). A clue as to what that value might be is found in the quote from Mackie, above, where he claims that free will is a 'third-order good' as far as the Free Will Theodicy is concerned. Without pursuing the line of argument Mackie takes in his discussion of the Theodicy, it would seem useful, at least provisionally, to agree with his assessment of free will and assign to it a corresponding numerical value of +3 AVUs. For the remaining qualities, I suggest that good *simpliciter* (quality (i)) has a value of +1 AVU. That seems about right since its value should be comparatively lower than that of free will. A higher valuation might also appear unreasonably high for a mere good *simpliciter* while a lower valuation may apply to nothing worthy of the name, *good*. Correspondingly we should note the existence of *bad simpliciter,* since there is such a thing, and assign to it a value of -1 AVU.

And now we are in a position to ascribe a numerical value to moral good (quality (iii)). Moral good is actually a compound of two things: a good *simpliciter* and an exercise of free will. Think yet again of the population fed by those irrigated crops. Whether we describe that outcome as a moral good or a good *simpliciter*, the good in question is the same in both cases. The difference in *value* is accounted for by the involvement of free will in one case and its

absence in the other. Accordingly, using the values ascribed so far, that of moral good turns out to be (+1 AVU) + (+3 AVUs), or +4 AVUs in aggregate. So we have now, at least provisionally, ascribed numerical values to each of the three qualities identified. Those values allow the Free Will Theodicist enough scope to claim that moral good is better than good *simpliciter*, that a world containing moral good is better than a world containing only good *simpliciter*, and (arguably) that some amount of moral evil is a price worth paying in order to hang on to the free will God has given us. And to please her still further, we will proceed by provisionally granting her assumption that free will has the sort of value she says it has, which is high, positive, and invariant.

Well, that is the theory. In order to test our hypothesis (that the value of free will is not invariant but sensitive to context) we need to see how the numerical reckoning works *in practice*. To that end, I am going to tell a short story and describe four possible situations that arise from it. Of interest will be what the numbers have to say about each of those situations. First, here is the story:

Mr. and Mrs. Jones and their young son, Jones Junior, are enjoying a holiday by the sea. One morning, they take a walk along the cliff path to see the ships in the distance. After a while, Jones Junior becomes more interested in seeing the jagged rocks at the base of the cliff being thrashed by the waves. He therefore lingers behind his parents leaving them to walk on, and treads cautiously to the cliff's edge where the rocks beneath are plainly visible. Mr. and Mrs. Jones, now some distance ahead, suddenly realise that their son is no longer with them. Looking back, they are horrified to see him wobbling unsteadily at the cliff's edge, clearly in danger of falling. They call out for him to step back but their words seem to go unheeded: Jones Junior is too terrified to move. But then:

Situation one

A freak gust of wind suddenly blows inland from the sea, pushing Jones Junior back from the edge. Frightened, but unharmed, he runs to re-join his parents.

Situation two

A freak gust of wind suddenly blows from the land out to sea, pushing Jones Junior over the edge. He falls to his death.

Situation three

A passer-by sees Jones Junior teetering on the edge of the cliff. She notices two adults calling out to the boy but they are too far away to reach him. She, however, could reach the boy easily. Should she ignore the situation and walk on or do something? She decides to step calmly towards the boy and gently pull him back to safety.

Situation four

A passer-by sees Jones Junior teetering on the edge of the cliff. She notices two adults calling out to the boy but they are too far away to reach him. She, however, could reach the boy easily. Should she ignore the situation and walk on or do something? She decides to step calmly towards the boy and push him over the edge. He falls to his death.

3.10 Intuitions and numerical reckoning

Despite knowing that intuitions about some matters can be false and lead us towards making bad judgements, I am going to assume that, about the above story, we have intuitions that are both clear and strong, and that lead us towards making sound judgements about each of the situations described at the end of the story. Moreover, I will assume that the intuitions we have will be those that most of us would agree about. Now, of particular interest will be how

those intuitions agree or disagree with the figures we arrive at following some numerical reckoning. Before carrying out that reckoning, let us first take a look at what I believe those intuitions are.

Intuitively, I would say the best outcome occurred in the context of situation three, in which the passer-by exercised her free will in rescuing the boy. Perhaps, in an instant, she weighed up the chances of a successful intervention on her part against the likelihood of falling over the cliff's edge herself in an attempt to save the child. She may also have taken into account the feelings of the two adults in the distance whose cries went unheeded, and considered the consequences of ignoring the situation and simply walking on. But in next to no time at all she decided to do the courageous thing and did what she did.

I would say the outcome in situation one comes second. The child's life was saved albeit by a natural, determined cause – otherwise describable as the act of an automaton. Third would be the outcome of situation two, where the boy lost his life by a similar cause. And the outcome of situation four would intuitively be ascribed the lowest value of all: the passer-by freely and knowingly pushed the child over the edge whence he fell to his death.

Now, situation four is *bad*, for in it the world contains not only a child's death, but also a freely brought-about child killing, all of which contribute to the badness I intuitively feel in that situation. And there are collateral matters to account for, too, which only make the badness worse. For we should also consider the parents' grief and sense of loss, and the horror they must have felt watching the passer-by do what she did to their child. And while the outcome in situation two is exactly the same as in situation four, for the child lost his life in both, there is a marked difference between those situations inasmuch as the killing in one

resulted from an exercise of free will and in the other by means of a determined cause. The former amounts to both a moral and a common-law crime while the latter amounts to neither.

3.11 Application of scientific method: numerical reckoning

Keeping those intuitions in mind, it is time to apply Lord Kelvin's suggested method to the four situations described above. We will be using the numerical values already mentioned that we ascribed to the three qualities explicitly and implicitly stated in propositions (P1) and (P2). For the sake of presentation and clarity, I have shown the relevant figures in a table, in the columns of which are the numerical values and their aggregates, while the four situations are represented in rows. Here, then, is the table:

	(a) Good *simpliciter* AVUs	(b) Bad *simpliciter* AVUs	(c) Exercise of free will AVUs	(d) Aggregative AVUs
Situation 1	+1	0	0	+1
Situation 2	0	-1	0	-1
Situation 3	+1	0	+3	+4
Situation 4	0	-1	+3	+2

Table 1

Of particular relevance are the aggregative totals of values shown in column (d). For situation one, the aggregative value shown is +1 AVU. The good in that situation is that the child's life was saved by a gust of wind (or equivalently, by an automaton) which merits the value shown. No further awards are warranted in that row because nothing in columns (b) and (c) merit one: nothing bad occurred, nor was anything brought about through an exercise of free will.

In the second row the aggregative award of -1 AVU in column (d) is explained in just the same way as the award in row 1, except that the value is now negative rather than positive on

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account of something bad having occurred which, again, is the result of a determined cause and not an exercise of free will.

As for row three, to the axiological value of Jones Junior's life being saved (which is +1 AVU) must be added the value of the exercise of free will involved in its occurrence, which is the (supposedly invariant) value of +3 AVUs, equalling +4 AVUs in aggregate.

It is the fourth row that is especially revealing. An exercise of free will is involved in situation four just as it was in situation three, meaning that a numerical value of +3 AVUs must be added to the values in columns (a) and/or (b). The only difference between the two situations is that a good *simpliciter* occurred in one and a bad *simpliciter* in the other. Worryingly, however, the aggregative axiological value for situation four turns out to be positive (that is, +2 AVUs) just as it was in situation 3. But, contrary to intuition, it is alarming that situation four, in which the child was deliberately killed, is axiologically *better* than situation 1 in which his life was saved! This is surely an absurd and unpalatable result, but one implied by an insistence that an exercise of free will has a high, positive, and invariant (that is, context *in*sensitive) value.

The absurdity of this result is magnified to industrial proportions if we turn attention to entire worlds. Recall that the Free Will Theodicist maintains that propositions (P1) and (P2) express truths. Consider, therefore, two possible worlds, Wa and Wb. In Wa only automata exist, doing good but no bad. In Wb free willed agents exist who do bad but no good. But if we agree about the high, positive, and invariant value of free will, we must accept that Wb is better than Wa in terms of aggregative axiological value, which is absurd since only bad is ever done there.

3.12 Possible responses from the Free Will Theodicist

If intuitions be our guide, I assume that we would find the result of numerical reckoning for situation four unacceptable, and also that the Free Will Theodicist would no more be prepared to accept it than we are. In that case, the Theodicist would likely insist that something, somewhere, has gone wrong. An obvious suggestion is that Lord Kelvin's method of numerical reckoning is inappropriate to our investigation, for we are dealing with matters that don't fall within the province of physical science. Although, as noted, there might be misgivings about the employment of scientific method in the present case, the Theodicist's suggestion would need to be justified. I have tried to show that, by satisfying the criteria for scientific investigation, and ascribing comparative (as opposed to absolute) numerical values to the three qualities we have identified, Lord Kelvin's method is appropriate in our case. So if the response is to be taken seriously, the Free Will Theodicist will have to show that, perhaps as a matter of principle, those criteria cannot be met; but I don't believe that this could easily be done.

Another response is that, even if the values and reckoning about them are appropriate and correct, the absurdity arises only because we have taken the illegitimate step of comparing all four situations together. It is legitimate, so the response goes, to compare situations one and two since the absence of one quality (namely, the exercise of free will) is common to them both. The result of comparing those two situations matches our intuitions because situation one, in which the child's life was saved, is indeed shown to be axiologically better than situation two in which his life was lost. Similarly, it is appropriate to compare situations three and four because the same quality (the exercise of free will) is common to them both, again making the two situations relevantly similar. That result also matches our intuitions because situation three, in which the passer-by freely saves the child, is axiologically better than

situation four in which she pushes him over the cliff's edge. What is illegitimate is comparing situations involving an absence of a quality (the exercise of free will) with those involving its presence. As we have not compared like with like, it is only to be expected that absurd and unacceptable consequences will follow.

But this response fails on two counts. First, as long as the Free Will Theodicist maintains propositions (P1) and (P2), she is being inconsistent in making that response. For, explicit in both propositions is the comparison between worlds containing free-willed agents and moral good and those containing automata and good *simpliciter*, the claim being that worlds of the former kind are axiologically better than those of the latter. Indeed, it is in respect of upholding propositions (P1) and (P2) that the Theodicist's comparison was made in the first place. So the she cannot plausibly claim that it is unacceptable for *us* to compare the four situations but quite acceptable for her. But even if the response was reasonable, there is something odd about the comparison between situations three and four, for both of them (according to the figures) appear morally good! Situation three is certainly good, but how can situation four be good according to the numbers when it involves a deliberate child killing and a deliberate child killer?

If the Free Will Theodicist cannot reasonably object to the use of scientific method in our investigation, nor to the way we have drawn comparisons between situations, it remains open for her to question the numerical values we originally ascribed to each of the three qualities. Perhaps some adjustments to those values will close the gap between what the original numbers and our own intuitions suggest.

Let us, therefore, take each of the three qualities in turn, starting with good *simpliciter*. It is possible that this has been undervalued. Good *simpliciter* is a good, after all. So for that type of good let us raise the stakes and award a further +2 AVUs (+3 AVUs in total) and see what the result is. The table now looks like this:

	(a) Good *simpliciter* AVUs	(b) Bad *simpliciter* AVUs	(c) Exercise of free will AVUs	(d) Aggregative AVUs
Situation 1	+3	0	0	+3
Situation 2	0	-1	0	-1
Situation 3	+3	0	+3	+6
Situation 4	0	-1	+3	+2

Table 2

Following the adjustment, situations one and two still match our intuitions, as does situation three as we might expect since moral good is of higher value than mere good *simpliciter*. But situation four still seems to be valued as a moral good, which we would not expect. The adjustment we made had no effect on making situation four appear morally bad which, if intuitions can be trusted, it certainly is.

So let us see whether an adjustment to the value of the second quality, the exercise of free will, fares any better. Indeed, such an adjustment may seem called for since, as matters stand, the value of the exercise of free will is no higher than that of good *simpliciter*, and not high enough, therefore, to make a world of free agents better than a world of automata. So we will increase that value by +3 AVUs with the following result:

	(a) Good *simpliciter* AVUs	(b) Bad *simpliciter* AVUs	(c) Exercise of free will AVUs	(d) Aggregative AVUs
Situation 1	+3	0	0	+3
Situation 2	0	-1	0	-1
Situation 3	+3	0	+6	+9
Situation 4	0	-1	+6	+5

Table 3

Even the last adjustment has done nothing to align situation four more closely with our intuitions. In fact, it has made matters worse since, according to column (d), that situation is not only good now but *very* good; much better, in fact, than situation two. Yet situation four still represents a deliberate child killing and situation two doesn't. So this adjustment has done nothing to remove the absurdity in situation four that has been present all along.

Yet another proposal might be negatively to increase the value of bad *simpliciter* corresponding to the positive increase already made to good *simpliciter*, so that its value becomes -3 AVUs rather than -1 AVU. So this is the result:

	(a) Good *simpliciter* AVUs	(b) Bad *simpliciter* AVUs	(c) Exercise of free will AVUs	(d) Aggregative AVUs
Situation 1	+3	0	0	+3
Situation 2	0	-3	0	-3
Situation 3	+3	0	+6	+9
Situation 4	0	-3	+6	+3

Table 4

It appears that, for the most part, this proposal has worked insofar as most aggregative values match our intuitions. But situation four still remains problematic because it has kept its positive axiological value.

3.13 Time to rethink values

It is clear that somewhere, something is going wrong. The problem for the Free Will Theodicist seems to be thinking of numerical values that make morally bad actions, like freely pushing a child over a cliff edge, *appear* morally bad, and making it appear also that exercises of free will maintain a high, positive and invariant value. But it is beginning to look as if this problem is very difficult to solve.

In light of that, let us test our hypothesis by re-evaluating free will according to the context in which it is exercised. The contextualist approach readily grants that when free will is exercised in bringing about moral good, it retains a high, positive value. I can't imagine that that clashes with any of our relevant intuitions. On the other hand, when free will is exercised in bringing about moral bad, its value becomes negative. Does *that* match our intuitions too? I believe so. For, if we suppose that exercises of free will can have as much negative as positive value *depending on the context of its exercise*, then all our intuitions are better matched. Here is a table illustrating the result:

	(a) Good *simpliciter* AVUs	(b) Bad *simpliciter* AVUs	(c) Exercise of free will AVUs	(d) Aggregative AVUs
Situation 1	+3	0	0	+3
Situation 2	0	-3	0	-3
Situation 3	+3	0	+6	+9
Situation 4	0	-3	-6	-9

Table 5

Clearly, the re-evaluation I have proposed has succeeded in closing any gap between our intuitions and earlier valuations according to which free will has a high, positive and invariant value. This is most evident in the case of situation four. By assuming that our hypothesis is true, we have created a plausible distinction between the valuations of morally

good and morally bad actions, as supported by our intuitions. In light of the investigation so far, the Free Will Theodicist would seem hard pressed to argue that this distinction, as plausible as it appears, is nevertheless a bogus one.

But that is not the end of the matter. We might have won a battle against the Free Will Theodicy as far as the value of free will *exercises* are concerned, but we have not yet won the war. The Theodicist has more troops to send to the front. She may admit that exercises of free will don't themselves have invariant value, and it was a mistake to believe that they should have. Rather, it is the other aspects of free will, which we have not yet considered, to which a high, positive and invariant value should be ascribed. Those aspects, mentioned earlier, are the capacity for free will, and freely-made choices and intentions. Let us consider the capacity issue first.

Some believe that capacities are valuable possessions insofar as they may bring us closer to the image of God. As already mentioned, some argue that capacities are excellence-making properties, and as such are likely candidates for a value that is not sensitive to context but invariant. According to this kind of argument, the value ascribed to the capacity of a motor car to reach 150 miles per hour is not affected by the vehicle's never achieving that speed, or indeed any speed at all. With reference to free will, we will provisionally grant that the capacity for it is invariantly high, and ascribe to it the same numerical value as we ascribed to exercises of free will. Table 5 showed that the value of these exercises was +6 AVUs which we will now ascribe to the capacity for free will. The revised table looks like this:

	(a) Good *simpliciter* AVUs	(b) Bad *simpliciter* AVUs	(c) Exercise of free will AVUs	(d) Capacity for free will AVUs	(e) Aggregative AVUs
Situation 1	+3	0	0	0	+3
Situation 2	0	-3	0	0	-3
Situation 3	+3	0	+6	+6	+15
Situation 4	0	-3	-6	+6	-3

Table 6

On the assumption that the value ascribed to the capacity is what the Free Will Theodicist agree with, the numbers in column (e) bear out, at least to an extent, what she has in mind. A comparison of results for situations one and three serve to support the intuition that good freely brought about is more valuable than good brought about by determined causes (or automata); and that, in turn, is a another reason for believing that propositions (P1) and (P2) are true. On the other hand, a comparison of the results for situations two and four reveals that moral bad is no worse, axiologically speaking, than bad *simpliciter*. And that does not match our intuitions. The free, deliberate killing of the child is intuitively worse than a killing through natural causes. This indicates that the value ascribed to the capacity for free will hasn't made the situation any better.

As mentioned, granting a high and invariant value to the capacity for free will was provisional, and was allowed on the basis of what the Free Will Theodicist would likely deem appropriate, for the capacity, after all, is seen as an excellence-making property. This, however, can be doubted for in some cases capacities, of themselves, are bad. For example, as potentialities or unexercised powers, capacities are thought to be bad properties of God, were He to have any. The possession of capacities alone means that the possessor has not reached its final, mature, form. But God has never existed except in His final, mature, form. If there is something God can yet become through the exercise of a capacity, then He could

not yet be a perfect being, for something would be lacking (or unrealised) in Him. In God's case, capacities may have an invariant value, but certainly not a high and positive one.

In our own case, although we sometimes speak of capacities in ourselves as positive, valuable attributes, excellence-making properties etc., there is really little substance to it. There is little value in Jones Junior's capacity to become a great pianist if, for whatever reason, he never tries to exercise that capacity. Likewise with the motor car. If it is driven such that it never exceeds 30 miles per hour (for it is never driven outside a residential area) then the capacity to go beyond that speed is pointless, and therefore of little, if any, value. Furthermore, we may have capacities that none of us realise we have: to become a world-class athlete, or a poet. It would be odd indeed to assign a positive and invariant value to such capacities.

A rejection of the idea that capacities have value is sometimes seen in practical ethics. In the case of abortion, for example, where arguments for and against the practice do battle, one side of the argument focuses on the capacities of the unborn. Anti-abortion campaigners justify their position by claiming that abortion, like the murder of an adult, is the deliberate killing of a person, and equally wrong. Pro-abortionists argue in response that the unborn has the capacities necessary to *become* a person, but since these are not yet exercised, the unborn is not a person; the possession of mere capacities does not make the foetus a person. On that basis aborting a foetus (at least at a certain stage of its early development) as opposed to a person, is morally permissible. And it is worth noting that while both sides have the foetus' capacities in mind, neither argues for their value. Both sides agree that the possession of capacities alone is insufficient to render the taking of an unborn's life impermissible (Glover, 1990, p. 122). Of significance is the question whether those capacities have been exercised.

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This is consistent with the Free Will Theodicist's belief that capacities may be excellence-making properties, but it is to the thing made that excellence truly belongs, not the capacity to make it.

If these considerations are right, then we must conclude that capacities per se don't attract value in the way the Free Will Theodicist might suppose. If they have any value at all, then that value seems insufficient for capacities are to serve as justifiers for the truth of propositions (P1) and (P2). If this is the case, then Table 6 must be disregarded for it does nothing to advance or support the Free Will Theodicist's claim concerning the high, positive and invariant value that free will, or one aspect of it, has.

So we now turn to the third aspect: free choices and intentions. The concern is not with actions springing from those choices and intentions, or with the capacity to form them, but with the choices and intentions themselves. These are the only candidates remaining that could possess a high, positive, and invariant value, so the Free Will Theodicist's bet must be placed on them. On this understanding, we will assign to free choices and intentions the same numerical values that were assigned to freely-performed actions (or the 'exercise of free will') as shown in Table 4. That is, +6 AVUs. This would be consistent with the Free Will Theodicist's expectation since that numerical valuation was made on her behalf in the first place, and these are all that remain of free will to have such a value. The result is that we now have a different table:

	(a) Good *simpliciter* AVUs	(b) Bad *simpliciter* AVUs	(c) Exercise of free will AVUs	(d) Capacity for free will AVUs	(e) Freely made choices and intentions	(f) Aggregative AVUs
Situation 1	+3	0	0	0	0	+3
Situation 2	0	-3	0	0	0	-3
Situation 3	+3	0	+6	0	+6	+15
Situation 4	0	-3	-6	0	+6	-3

Table 7

Table 7 displays, finally, all numerical values for the three aspects of free will that are stated explicitly or implicitly in propositions (P1) and (P2). Now, although we have a new table, the aggregative scores in column (f) are no different from those shown in column (e) of Table 6. That is because zero value was assigned to the capacity for free will in that table. So the comments made about Table 6 still apply. But we have yet to comment on the values in Table 7 that have been ascribed to freely made choices and intentions seen in column (e).

To be sure, there are such things as free choices and intentions, for they are states of mind. But unlike capacities, they are certainly not *in themselves* excellence-making properties of individuals, despite the fact that we know there are good free choices and intentions. We might say that those choices and intentions have positive value when translated into action, but that is really to ascribe value only to the exercises of free will rather than the choices and intentions from which they spring. Indeed, free choices and intentions *not* translated into action – that is, free choices and intentions *in themselves* – tend to receive values that are negative. Those who choose and intend to do great things but never do are not praised for what they planned but looked down upon for being lazy, failing to keep their word, and so on, even though they had been in a positive state of mind. As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Bad choices and intentions, even those not acted on, have even less value. In law, intending to do bad things, even when they are not done, often warrants blame and punishment just as much as if the intended action was done. Cases involving terrorism illustrate this well. For example, in 1605 the gunpowder plotters chose and intended to blow up King James I and the whole of parliament in an attempt to restore Catholicism to the nation. However, they were discovered before they could act, and received the punishment they would have received had their choice and intention been carried out. In our own times, likewise, terrorists' plots have been thwarted prior to materialisation, resulting again in what is considered to be a punishment appropriate to the crime had it been committed. Such choices and intentions, therefore, warrant a value to be sure, but not one that is invariantly positive and high. The consequence of this is that the valuations ascribed to freely made choices and intentions in column (e) of table 7 are unjustifiably optimistic, and thus fail to support what the Free Will Theodicist expects of them.

3.14 Does our investigation reveal the truth about the value of free will?

If our investigation has been fruitful, then it seems that no aspect of free will can warrant a high, positive *and* invariant value. Whatever value is assigned to any particular aspect appears to be one that is sensitive to context. This is supported by appeals to both intuitions and the scientific method of numerical reckoning. The consequence is that the Free Will Theodicy fails satisfactorily to respond to the problem of evil because its central pillar has been kicked from under it. Unless it can be established that free will, or an aspect of it, has a high, positive *and* invariant value, it is just implausible that free will, or that aspect, is worth preserving when some amount of moral evil is the price we must pay for it. This is not to deny that free will can have a high positive value, of course; the situation in which the passer-by freely saves Jones Junior's life in situation three shows as much. But free will can also

have a negative value, as shown in situation four. The truth is that whatever value free will has is sensitive to the context in which that value is ascribed.

However, let us end on a speculative note. Suppose that the Free Will Theodicist has it right after all and we have it wrong. Rather than its being the system of numerical valuation that has led us astray, it is both the rejection of value-invariance and a mistaken view of the qualities to which values apply that have. More specifically, to put matters right we need to adopt the most optimistic positions held by the Theodicist, that values are high, positive, *and* invariant (that is, insensitive to context), and that each of the three qualities of free will we have examined is equally deserving of such value. So let us adopt these positions and see what the consequence would be.

Notably, we now have a remarkable solution to the problem of evil based on the high values assigned to free will in all its aspects. To appreciate just how remarkable, we need to construct a new table in which the suggested values are represented. The highest positive value we assigned to free will was to its exercise as represented in Table 4, where that value was +6 AVUs. By assigning the same value to the capacity for free will and to freely made choices and intentions, this is the result:

	(a) Good *simpliciter* AVUs	(b) Bad *simpliciter* AVUs	(c) Exercise of free will AVUs	(d) Capacity for free will AVUs	(e) Freely made choices and intentions	(f) Aggregative AVUs
Situation 1	+3	0	0	0	0	+3
Situation 2	0	-3	0	0	0	-3
Situation 3	+3	0	+6	+6	+6	+21
Situation 4	0	-3	+6	+6	+6	+15

Table 8

The numbers relating to situations three and four of Table 8 show, on the present speculation, just how much free will addresses the problem of evil by contributing towards the excellence of beings that are blessed with it, and showing why God might believe it is a gift we should have and keep. Free will now has such a high value, all told, that it outweighs by far the cost of moral evil, including, in situation 4, the deliberate killing of a child. According to the figures shown in the table, the only bad thing that happened is that the gust of wind blew the child over the cliff's edge to his death. Every other occurrence was good; in fact, the numerical results for situations 3 and 4 show that those occurrences are not merely good but *remarkably* good. The deliberate killing of the child is only marginally less good than deliberately saving him, thanks to the high, positive and invariant values ascribed to each aspect of free will that the agent possessed or acted upon. Clearly, the remarkable feature of this is that in reality, as well as in fiction, every agent who acts freely appears to be morally excellent, regardless of doing good or bad.

We are now, of course, in the land of speculative make-believe. I have argued that the aspects of free will represented in Table 8 do not all warrant the high, positive *and* invariant values represented there. But even if we went along with such a rosy view of those values, there is something going on which even the most ardent Free Will Theodicist would find it hard to accept, or admit to. Consider again the passer-by who, in situation four, freely and deliberately pushed Jones Junior over the cliff's edge to his death. We might, with effort, agree that the ability to act freely as she did makes her a more excellent being *in herself* than she could have been without that ability. This would be rather like agreeing that having exercised her capacities to become fit and strong, and therefore able to reach the child easily and quickly in order to do the deed, the passer-by is more physically excellent than she would have been if lazy, unfit and weak. But this is to set aside the collateral effects of the passer-

by's being both free and fit enough to do what she did, effects which make the *world* if not the passer-by herself axiologically poorer. The world, we might say, is all the worse for containing parents who must grieve and fight for justice, which the world didn't need to contain if the passer-by lacked free will, or if she had acted on it as she did in situation three. The point is that properties that make agents excellent in themselves, such as free will and physical fitness, can also subtract from the world's aggregative axiological status. The result is that one would be inconsistent in holding both the high, positive and invariant values of free will as represented in Table 8 *and* that propositions (P1) and (P2) express truths.

3.15 Summary

The Free Will Theodicy depends for much of its plausibility on the value of free will being high, positive and invariant, or insensitive to context. That is a minimal although fundamental requirement, for it is in virtue of having such a value that God refrains from compromising free will when agents misuse it to perform bad actions and cause harm. I have tried to show, however, that free will, or any particular aspect of it, does not have a high, positive *and* invariant value, but a positive *or* negative value depending on the context of its use. Even if we trace back from actions freely performed (which are the public face of free will) to freely made choices and intentions, and then to our capacity to form such choices or intentions (which are 'private' mental states of ourselves) we still find nothing that has a high, positive *and* invariant value. Rather each aspect has a value that is sensitive to context, or else little or no value at all. On the other hand, we know that some exercises of free will do have a high, positive value insofar as they are involved in bringing about moral good, just as the passer-by's free action in situation three did, or Mr. Trump's donating his entire fortune to aid the needy. Such exercises, to be sure, add to the moral beauty of the world rather than detract from it.

So what conclusion should we draw from the above discussion? We have no alternative but to regard free will as a double-edge sword, for depending on context, we should either praise God for making us the gift of it, or else rue the day the very idea entered His head. The problem is that the Free Will Theodicist unwittingly gives us a justification of God's badness as well as His goodness in giving us free will. If asked to judge which world is better – one in which beings have free will along with some moral bad and the suffering it causes, or one in which automata and other determined causes do only good – I believe many would pick the latter. The good news that free will is worth having even at the price we have to pay for it might turn out to be, as Mr. Trump might have put it, nothing but Fake.

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Paper four

WHAT KIND OF WORLD WOULD WE EXPECT AN UNSURPASSABLE BEING TO CREATE, AND COULD OUR WORLD BE IT?

There is an argument to the effect that, given alternative states of affairs *X* and *Y*, such that *X* is better than *Y*, a being, *B*, that brings about *Y* when it was within *B*'s power to bring about *X* is surpassed by another being that would bring about *X*. Call this 'the unsurpassability argument', and it is one to which supporters of the problem of evil can appeal in setting out their case. They claim, for example, that there is a possible world, *W**, that contains fewer or none of the bad states of affairs that are contained in the actual world, *W*. Perhaps *W** contains fewer or no instances of the gratuitous evils contained in *W*. In this respect, *W** is better than *W* and, according to the argument, if a being created *W* while having the power to create *W**, then that being is surpassed by a being that would have created *W** instead. What supporters of the problem of evil contend is that *W* is the actual world and *W** is a better possible world than *W*. If it is claimed that God created *W* when He could have created *W** instead, then God is surpassable. But that would seem impossible, for God is believed to be (or necessarily is) unsurpassable. Therefore, either God did not create *W*, or an unsurpassable God does not exist.

However, there is an important condition that must be satisfied if the argument is to work as suggested. It is that a best among worlds is possible and lies within the power of an unsurpassable being to create it, and that a world worse than it has been created. Maybe the created world contains gratuitous evils that the best possible world doesn't. If there was no best possible world that God could have created instead, then either at least two possible worlds would be of equal goodness with none better than any other, or there would be an

infinite hierarchy of possible worlds ordered in terms of their goodness, such that the next possible world in that order would be better than its predecessor. In either case, the unsurpassability argument cannot get off the ground. God could not be surpassed by another being for creating W rather than W^* if both are of equal goodness; nor if the world He created could always be surpassed by a better one, for it would be true of any world He created that it is surpassable. So the condition to be satisfied if the unsurpassibility argument is to be defeated is that there is a best among possible worlds, and that the created world is identical to that world.

An obstacle to the belief that our world is one we would expect an unsurpassable being to create – that is, the best possible world – is the pain, suffering and misery we find in it. If God, the unsurpassable being in question, freely chose to create our world rather than some other, why did He not freely choose to create a world without such evils? I am going to examine four accounts according to which, despite its evils, the world is the kind we should expect an unsurpassable being to create. These are the Biblical account, the best possible world account (1) by Leibniz, the non-best world account by R.M. Adams, and finally, the best possible world account (2): the theistic multiverse as conceived by Klaas Kraay. I will argue that each one is problematic for one reason or another. One concerns subjective points of view, ours and God's. With the exception of the third account, all argue explicitly or implicitly that our world is the best from God's point of view if not from ours. They turn on the idea that, as God sees the world, evil is either an insignificant consideration in judging the quality of the world (accounts 1 and 4), or it is something that is not a constituent of the world (account 2) at all. The problem arising in these accounts is that evil is still a significant part of the world from *our* point of view, which lends doubt to the idea that, from the same point of view, our world is the sort we would expect an unsurpassable being to create.

Another reason why these accounts are problematic – especially accounts (2), (3), and (4), is the belief, held by most theists, that God is perfectly free with respect to creating; that He chooses to create the best, but is free to choose other than the best. This clearly bears on the argument from unsurpassability, for if God is free to choose other than the best, He would, according to the argument, become surpassable. Account (3) tries to overcome this problem by arguing that God is not obligated (morally or logically) to create the best. The argument, as presented, fails to offer a principle according to which God is able to choose a particular world to create, and so does not succeed. Let us move on to consider each account.

4.1 The Biblical account

There are references throughout the Bible proclaiming the wondrous handiwork of God, although none actually states that result of God's handiwork is 'the best possible world'. We are left in little doubt, however, that the world, according to these references, is worthy of being the creation of the Most High. One of the most detailed accounts of the nature of the world is found in the Book of Job. The account expressed there is directly stated by God Himself, although we wouldn't have received the account were it not for the pain and suffering of one man, namely, Job. In the account, we hear first all about that pain and suffering as seen from Job's point of view.

At the beginning of the story we are told that Job was a wealthy man living in the land of Uz with his large family, land, and extensive flocks. Job is a faithful, virtuous and upright man who continually thanks God for his lot. One day, Satan meets with God who tells Satan about Job's good character, and Satan responds that Job's character is good only because God has blessed him lavishly. If God were to allow Satan to punish him, Job would turn against God. This God saw as a challenge and gave Satan permission to punish Job but without harming

him personally. And so it was that in a single day Job learned that his flocks, servants, and children had been killed by ruthless invaders and natural catastrophes. Job was naturally distraught and cursed the day he was born. Several friends tried to convince Job that his suffering is God's punishment for being wicked in the past, but that didn't ease Job's pain or furnish an understanding of God's ways. Job felt that he had not been wicked in the past but a conscientious follower of God's commands. He questions, therefore, whether God is truly just; why He created an imperfect world in which the good are punished and made to suffer just as much as the wicked.

Eventually, knowledge of Job's situation causes God to speak to Job in person, which He does through a whirlwind. God's words are in the form of questions that He obliges Job to answer, knowing full well that Job lacks the understanding necessary to comply with that obligation. In the scriptural text, God asks many questions; these are only some (from Job, 38, The Bible, RSV):

> Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? …
> Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
> Tell me, if you have understanding.
> Who determined its measurements – surely you know!
> Or who stretched the line upon it?
> On what were its bases sunk,
> or who laid its cornerstone …? …
> Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
> and caused the dawn to know its place …? …
> Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
> Declare, if you know all this. …
> Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
> or loose the cords of Orion?
> Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,
> or can you guide the Bear with its children? …
> Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
> He who argues with God, let him answer it …
> Gird up your loins like a man;

I will question you, and you declare to me.
Will you even put me in the wrong?
Will you condemn me that you may be justified?
Have you an arm like God,
and can you thunder with a voice like his?
(Job, 38, vv. 2, 4-6, 12, 18, 31-32; 40, vv. 2, 7-9)

Job is overwhelmed by God's power as expressed in these passages, and laments his own limitations and ignorance. He learns two things: that the world, far from being imperfect, is a wondrous and majestic creation; the perfect expression of divine wisdom and power. God points out that Job would realise, rather than doubt, this if only his power of understanding matched that of God. As it is, Job's understanding is limited and renders him incapable of knowing what God knows in virtue of His limitless understanding. As for his suffering and perceived divine injustice, Job learns that God fails to address the matter, as though in comparison with the splendour of creation, human suffering has little or no significance for God. So of the two questions Job raises before God, he receives an answer only to the first. But in the end, God shows pity on Job and blesses him with twice as much land as he previously owned, replaces Job's family with another, and ensures that Job has a very long and fulfilling life.

Now, we immediately see that the story describes the world from two points of view (a point we meet again in Leibniz, below): those of Job and God. Following the tragic suffering Job had to endure, from his point of view the world had turned upside down and had become the worst of all worlds in a very short time. It became a world of pain, suffering, wickedness and injustice which typically are the ingredients that nourish the problem of evil. On the other hand, we see that from God's point of view the world He has created is a miraculous and wonderfully complex creation. It is very impressive from that point of view, and likely regarded by God as the best of all the worlds He could have created. It is apparent, given His

testimony, that God would find it difficult to see how the problem of evil could arise. If mortals only grasped what God knows about the world, there could be no cause for complaint. But, of course, no mortal is capable of grasping that knowledge. Hence there is a gaping disconnect between the two markedly different points of view about the world, where a connection is possible only on a meeting of the minds in question. Even after that meeting, could Job reasonably maintain that the problem of evil doesn't exist, or that it exists only for those who lack the sort of knowledge of the world that God has seen fit to pass on to him? Surely not.

It is likely, then, that the problem would retain significance for Job if not for God. As the story unfolds, it becomes evident that if there is a problem, it is an *epistemic* problem to do with Job's not knowing what God knows in relation to the world and its character. The problem of evil, which is something Job raises in questioning God's sense of justice, is meant to be laid to rest at the moment Job hears God's words. The world is not a dreadful place replete with divine injustices, but an expression of God's splendour and power.

But it may be that the situation is reversed. That is, Job knows what God does not know about his past experiences of suffering and how dreadful they were. Just as Job did not appreciate the majesty of the world until God made him wiser, God seems not to have appreciated what it was for Job to suffer. There were no words spoken by God indicating an empathetic understanding of what Job was made to endure, only words of rebuke in connection with the Job's belief about the world's imperfection. God's apparent ignorance of Job's suffering needs explaining. We know that God knows *that* Job suffered, but we don't know (and there is no indication in the text) that God knew what that suffering was like – what it was like for Job to experience that suffering. We might imagine that if God could have that knowledge,

He would have denied Satan permission to place Job in that situation the first place. Job suffered inordinately for what seems a morally inadequate reason: a wager between God and Satan to test Job's faith. It is likely that if a theist responding to the problem of evil offered that as an adequate reason for God to cause or allow His creatures to suffer, she would not attract many followers.

Some have argued that, regardless of the existence of evil, if the world God creates is the best, then there would be no grounds for raising the problem of evil. If evil is an element of the best possible world, then every other possible world would contain more evil still, all else being equal. In this sense, evil would be a *necessary* element of the best possible world. But the story of Job, apparently, is not intended to explain this idea, or to vindicate the justice of God in causing or allowing evil. It is intended, rather, to explore the depth and extent of faith in the face of human suffering. Perhaps during the times depicted in the Old Testament, the problem of evil was just that, the purpose of evil being a test of faith, and if faith survived the test, then the problem had a solution.

And we should remember, finally, that the God of the Old Testament is often depicted as a different kind of being from the God of the Philosopher. The Philosopher's God has omni-attributes or perfections which include having a moral concern for all creatures and a desire only for what is good for them. The modern problem of evil is seen as a means of casting one or more of those omni-attributes (and therefore God's existence) in doubt in terms of a perceived inconsistency between evil and those attributes. Not so during the time of Job, for God is characterised as having a partiality towards one group of people and an active dislike of others. In the Book of Exodus, for example, God punishes the Egyptians, who held the people of Moses captive, with ten plagues, and finally annihilates the entire Egyptian army by

drowning them in the Red Sea. Among those who suffered were the innocent (as in the case of the Egyptian first-born) as well as the guilty.

The conclusion to be drawn from the Book of Job is that the world is majestic and the expression of absolute power, but that power seems indifferent to the suffering of its creatures, regardless of their absolute trust in that power. In a word, the problem of evil as we now know it is not laid to rest, despite what may be true of the world and its character. It is time to move on.

4.2 The best possible world account (1), according to Leibniz

Leibniz's view about the character of the world God freely chose to create is well known. Moreover, he tackles the problem of evil head-on in an attempt to allay possible objections to his claims about the world's character. His view is argued for in several of his works, including *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* and *Monadology* (1697, and 1714, respectively, in Parkinson (ed.) and Morris (transl.), 1981), and *Theodicy* (1710, in Farrer (ed.) and Huggard (transl.), 2005). I will refer below to passages from these where appropriate.

I am going to examine two claims Leibniz makes and the arguments he offers in support. First is the claim, already noted, that God was free to create the world, and second that despite evil in the world, it is nevertheless the best of all possible worlds. The argument for the first claim is based on Leibniz's distinction between logical and/or metaphysical necessity, and moral necessity, a distinction he believes allows room for God's freedom of choice in creating. An argument I present on Leibniz's behalf for the second claim is one I have not seen much discussed, and requires a little digging to uncover it. It tries to show that

evil is not a property of the world at all, as would be realised if one were able to judge the world from God's point of view. The argument appeals, in effect, to the doctrine of eternalism. It is a doctrine that Leibniz appears to uphold, even though he doesn't refer to it by name. I shall argue that both arguments are unsuccessful: that Leibniz doesn't show how God's freedom in creating is possible, and that his argument concerning evil is not one that, from our point of view as sufferers of evil, we would find compelling. I begin with the first claim and supporting argument, that God was free to create the world considered as one worthy of being created by an unsurpassable being.

The view that God was free to choose which world to create, if any, is one that Leibniz was keen to uphold. This view contrasts with divine necessitarianism, held by some philosophers including Spinoza, according to which God had no choice with respect to creating so that the world He did create is the only possible world. On this view, whatever God does is determined by the necessity of His own nature. A world so determined cannot be described as the best or the worst since other worlds with which it might be compared are impossible. Not only does Leibniz distance himself from divine necessitarianism as held by Spinoza, he explicitly rejects it. Indeed, in his *Theodicy* he not only distances himself from an 'opinion so bad', he also finds it 'inexplicable' (§173, in Farrer (ed.) and Huggard (transl.), 2005).

Contrary to what Leibniz says about this opinion, philosophers like Spinoza who uphold divine necessitarianism believe it is easier to explain than Leibniz thinks. Given the divine nature, which is immutable, whatever flows from it would seem to be as fixed and determined as the divine nature itself. For necessitarians, it is Leibniz's view of free creation that is inexplicable if anything is. For, consider these two conditionals:

(1) If God is an unsurpassable creator, then the actual world is the only possible world.

(2) If God is perfectly free, the actual world is not the only possible world.

The first conditional expresses the claim that on pain of becoming surpassed, an unsurpassable being has no alternative but to create only one kind of world. The second conditional expresses the claim that in order for a being to be perfectly free with respect to creating, worlds other than a particular kind, 'the best', must be possible. A problem for Leibniz but not necessitarians is that Leibniz upholds the antecedents of both (1) and (2) and rejects the consequent of (1). Necessitarians escape this problem by holding the whole of (1) while rejecting the whole of (2).

It is likely that Leibniz, against his own opinions, is closer to Spinoza regarding God's freedom in creating than he would like to admit. Indeed, in connection with this issue, he explicitly remarks that for whatever God does, He requires a sufficient reason for doing so – a reason that determines His action. In the case of creating, God's sufficient reason involves the world's *fitness* or degree of perfection. The more perfection a possible world possesses, the fitter it is to claim the right to be created. God, through His wisdom, knowledge, power, and goodness identifies the world having the highest degree of perfection and 'chooses' to create that (see *Monadology* §§53-55, in Parkinson (ed.) and Morris (transl.), 1981, p.187).

What, though, is meant by 'perfection'? As Leibniz understands it, it is determined by 'the magnitude of positive reality', or the number and variety of things that would exist in a world (*op. cit*., p. 185). Hence, the best of all worlds would have, if created, the maximum degree of positive reality. It would be a maximally *plenitudinous* world, and if there were no such world – if, for example, any world God chose could always be surpassed by a more

plenitudinous one – then God would create no world at all (1710, *Theodicy* §196, in Farrer (ed.) and Huggard (transl.), 2005). But since a world exists, it must be the one having the highest degree of perfection, or the best, which God has freely chosen to create.

The crux of the matter is that, with respect to an unsurpassable (or, indeed, any) being, acting according to determining reasons and freedom of the will seems impossible. The problem for Leibniz is to explain how the world could be contingently and not necessarily the best that God, an unsurpassable being, could create. This he tries to do by making a distinction between what he calls logical, or metaphysical, or geometrical necessity on the one hand, and moral necessity on the other. Unlike those other forms of necessity, the opposite of what is morally necessary does not involve a contradiction. It is the necessity by which free agents, including God, choose the best course of action rather than any other. It is as though there were a moral-cum-psychological law that these agents are not compelled to accord with, although that is what they always do, and do of their own free will. In this sense, Leibniz explains, God freely chooses the best but is not logically obligated to refrain from choosing other than the best. In *Theodicy* (1710, §282, in Farrer (ed.) and Huggard (transl.), 2005), Leibniz illustrates the point with reference to a wise magistrate choosing to do something outrageous, such as running around the streets naked to make people laugh. Although it is necessary that the magistrate would not do such a thing, the necessity in question is moral, not logical, and it is, therefore, not contradictory to suppose such an action would be possible.

As long as the idea of moral necessity works in the way Leibniz says, he can use it to escape the difficulty of maintaining both antecedents of conditionals (1) and (2), above, as well as the consequent of (2). But it is doubtful whether invoking the idea succeeds, particularly in the case of God, an unsurpassable being. What Leibniz holds is that while God is

unsurpassable, it is not contradictory to suppose that He could freely do something that would render Him surpassable, such as creating a world less than the best. At the same time, we can be confident that God would not choose to create such a world.

Now, while we can see how moral necessity works in the case of the wise magistrate, it fails to work in the case of God. The magistrate is contingently wise which allows moral space for him to act outrageously, even if he never does. God, by contrast, is necessarily unsurpassable – *logically* and not just morally – and it is, therefore, contradictory to suppose that He could act in a way that threatens His unsurpassability. So creating a world that is less than the best necessarily entails that God would be surpassable, which is impossible.

If, in defence of God's free will, Leibniz relies on what he claims to be true of 'moral necessity' as he understands it, then I cannot see how that defence could work. As a result, he seems committed to the necessitarian position, according to which ours is the only possible world which, in the absence of possible comparatives, is neither the best nor the worst. But it is still a world containing evil. We turn to Leibniz's position on that next.

In trying to defend his claim that our world is the best possible, Leibniz believed it necessary to tackle the problem of evil head on. He would find it hard to persuade us that his claim was true if he could not explain why the best world contains so much evil. But he was not alone in trying to find such an explanation, and he knew of one that had already been offered. This explanation caught Leibniz's attention, not because he thought it was successful but because he didn't. A group of Christian theists known as the Socinians had proposed that the problem of evil can be solved (or at least partly solved) if compromises were made regarding God's attributes. The attribute they picked out was omniscience, and claimed that although God is

very knowledgeable, He is not all-knowing. One thing in particular He could not know, they said, are the future actions of free creatures. On this understanding, God cannot know in advance that certain bad choices will be made and suffering will be caused by them. Hence, God cannot intervene in advance to prevent those choices being acted on, and that explains why suffering exists without its being God's fault. Leibniz rejected this solution, believing it worked only at the expense of attributing imperfection to God, something he was not prepared to concede (see *Theodicy* §364, in Farrer (ed.) and Huggard (transl.), 2005).

This leaves Leibniz with the task of explaining why, in his view, the best of all worlds contains evil. Leibniz is somewhat inconsistent with explanations he provides. Some accept that evil is real and then go on to explain why the best possible world should contain such a reality. One such explanation is that evil is there to enable us to appreciate the good. Without evil to serve as a contrast, the good would pass unnoticed by us, just as sweetness would if we never tasted bitterness (1697, *On The Ultimate Origination of* Things, in Parkinson (ed.) and Morris (transl.), 1981, p. 143). Another and much more interesting explanation given is that the existence or non-existence of evil is entirely dependent on one's point of view. It is this explanation I want to discuss in more detail, both out of interest and the relative lack of attention to it by commentators. It may be that commentators see little merit in the explanation and leave aside discussions of it. But there may be more to it than they give credit. In any event, the crux of the explanation is that from God's all-seeing point of view evil does not exist in the world even though, from our limited perspective, it appears to. The same point could be made by saying that at the 'macro-level' from which God views the world evil is not part of it, while at the 'micro-level' from which we view things evil does seem to be a part of the world. The claim is that our limited, as opposed to God's unlimited, perception leads us into error about what we believe to be true of evil's presence in the world.

I believe that Leibniz offers not one but two arguments for this view – one more familiar than the other. The more familiar argument is based on an aesthetic analogy while the other depends on the success of some metaphysical magic involving existence, space, and time. It is an argument that latter-day metaphysicians refer to as eternalism, a term with which Leibniz may have been unfamiliar, but arguably not unfamiliar with the notion itself. It is not an argument he spells out in any detail, but there are fragments (in *Theodicy*, 1710, in Farrer (ed.) and Huggard (transl.), 2005, for example) that lead us to suppose he could have done so in order to support the conclusion of the first argument. Where there are gaps in the second argument I try to fill them in using fragments from Leibniz's writings.

Leibniz's arguments are successful in addressing the problem of evil, although in only a qualified sense. That is, they show that while it may be true from God's macro-level perspective that evil does not exist in the world, they fail to show as much from our micro-level perspective. Leibniz's point is that God's perspective on the matter is the only true one, and therefore the one we ourselves should adopt or hold to be true. But we are not in God's position, and hence capable of achieving what Leibniz says we should. In this sense, the situation is similar to the one we met in the story of Job, where the world is a majestic creation in God's eyes, and one tainted with evil in ours.

Turning to Leibniz's arguments, we begin with the first which is based on an aesthetic analogy. It is stated in *On The Ultimate Origination of Things* and begins like this: we are to imagine looking at a small portion of a painting, the rest being covered up. We see a confused mash of colours, wholly without art. Then we step back and see the whole painting now fully revealed, and are able to comprehend its overall beauty and artistic merit, far removed in quality from the patch we first saw (1697, in Parkinson (ed.) and Morris (transl.), 1981, p.

142). The analogue of this is that judgements about those parts of the world we experience (parts containing evil, for instance) are irrelevant to judgements about the whole which is viewed from eternity:

> We have knowledge of a tiny part of that eternity which stretches out immeasurably. For how small a thing is the memory of the few thousand years which history hands down to us! And yet out of so little experience we rashly make judgements about the immeasurable and the eternal. (*loc. cit.,* p. 142)

On this view, small patches of a painting may appear ugly while the whole remains a thing of beauty or, in Leibniz's words, 'the part may be disturbed without upsetting the harmony of the whole' (*op. cit.,* p. 143). This may be so, but the analogy between a painting and the world is weak. For one thing, it is not clear whether aesthetic analogies work. There is a marked difference between our being displeased, irritated, or dismissive about patches of a work of art, and suffering excruciating pain. The one we might be prepared to put up with, but not nearly so much the other, at least willingly. And for another thing, while we are able to view parts of a painting *and* the whole in order to realise the relation between them, we are hardly in a position to view the world in its 'immeasurable and eternal state', but only parts of it. It is the parts that are disturbed, and it is only those that we limited beings can possibly experience. By contrast, if God views the world in its immeasurable and eternal state, which is the state of 'the highest art', a better than which cannot be conceived.

How is it metaphysically possible for God, if not ourselves, to view the entire world in its eternal and immeasurable state, and view the world as the best possible, given that parts of it in time seem not to be the best? There are metaphysical accounts of reality. Presentism, for example, holds that most temporal parts of the world do not exist. Only the present does, and therefore not the past and future. If this is true, then the world in its eternal and immeasurable

state would not be accessible to God's understanding, for there would be no such thing as the world's *eternal* state (unless the present constitutes eternity). According to eternalism, by contrast, all points in time are real – the past, present, and future. If God is able to view the world in its eternal entirety, then eternalism affords the better explanation of how that feat would be possible, while it remains true that our view of the world is restricted to those parts experientially accessible to us.

Although our view of the world is restricted to certain temporal parts of it, the parts we are able to view often contain evil, and we judge accordingly that those parts are not the best possible parts. Does that mean that the world in its eternal and immeasurable state, as viewed by God, is not the best possible either? In answer, Leibniz writes:

> Taking the whole sequence of things, the best has no equal; but one part of the sequence may be equalled by another part of the same sequence. Besides it might be said that the whole sequence of things to infinity may be the best possible, although what exists all through the universe in each portion of time be not the best. (*Theodicy* §202)

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that temporal parts of the world that are not the best do not detract from the quality of the world in its eternal and immeasurable state. The reason must be that every other possible world would have parts that are worse in the sense of containing more evil or less good. God must be the final judge on the matter for only He is in a position to view the whole in its eternal entirety.

Does this suggest that God's satisfaction that the world is the best possible render Him insensitive to the temporal parts comprising the whole?

What I have said … must not be interpreted to mean that no account is taken of the parts; or that it is sufficient for the world to be as perfect as a whole, even though it should turn out that the human race is wretched, and that there was in the universe no care for justice and no account was taken of us … For the truth is that … the universe would not be sufficiently perfect unless, as far as can be done without upsetting the universal harmony, the good of individual people is considered. (1697, *On The Ultimate Origination of Things* in Parkinson (ed.) and Morris (transl.), 1981, p. 143)

If Leibniz were to rely on eternalism to support the claim that the world is the best possible, then he needs to address the problem of explaining *how*, and not simply *that*, 'the good of individual people is considered'. To be explained are God's having knowledge not only of the whole world in its immeasurable and eternal state, but also of the parts, and God's interaction with the parts in a way that shows His consideration to those of us affected by evils. Many would claim that there is little evidence of such consideration, with the result that the world from a human perspective is not the best as Leibniz would have it. The best to be made of the two Leibnizian arguments we have considered above is that the world may be the best from God's point of view, but not from ours. The question then becomes: is this enough to lay the problem of evil, and the unsurpassability argument, to rest? Well, that depends upon whose point of view we take.

4.3 The non-best world account, by R.M. Adams

That God is not obligated to create the best possible world is the position argued for by R.M. Adams (1987, pp. 51- 64). I have several concerns with Adams' argument that, in my view, make it untenable. Among these concerns are a failure actually to address *worlds*, contrary to his originally-stated intention, and explaining God's choice of creating in terms of a principle that is inadequate to the task. I will argue that Adams requires a more sturdy principle to guide God's choice, which can only be the principle of the best, especially if God is to escape the force of the unsurpassability argument.

Let us begin with the claims Adams is making. The principal claim is that God is not obligated to create the best possible world, although He must create a good one. Presumably, Adams would say that if God were to create a bad world, then He would be surpassed by a being that would have created a good one, but a being that created a good world need not be surpassed by a being that created the best if there is such a world. To present his case, Adams draws attention to a proposition many theists hold:

(*P*) If a perfectly good moral agent created any world at all, it would have to be the very best world that he could create. (1987, p. 51)

The claim Adams makes is that 'the ethical views typical of the Judaeo-Christian tradition do not require the Judaeo-Christian theist to accept (*P*). He must hold that the actual world is a good world. But he need not maintain that it is the best of all possible worlds.' (1987, p. 51) Adams states, for the sake of argument, that a best among worlds is possible, but that God is still under no obligation to create it in preference to a less excellent but nevertheless good world.

Before delving more deeply into Adams' argument, I should point out a problem that arises immediately in his paper. It begins with a brief discussion of possible worlds in terms of their excellence and perfection, leading us to expect that what follows would make reference to the characteristics of worlds rather than anything else. But he disappoints us by not doing so. Confusingly, he moves straight onto a discussion of creatures and the characteristics of them. The feeling this conveys to the reader is one of puzzlement, as though one had attended a talk given by a naval architect on ship building who, following a brief introduction to the subject, spoke not about ships at all but only about their passengers. This might be less puzzling if

Adams had given an argument to the effect that the quality of possible worlds reduces to the qualities of creatures. But again, he does not do so. So we have to follow the argument he actually presents rather than one he might or should have presented.

Adams admits two things: that he is not speaking about the actual world but some world or other, and that while acknowledging its relevance to his discussion, he will not address the problem of evil. To mention either would be beyond the scope of his paper. Both would require a more detailed discussion of the points he will go on to make. What he does observe, however, is that a world other than the best which God could justifiably create would contain some evil in the form of creatures' states of misery as well as happiness, which are familiar states obtaining in the actual world. Accordingly, a world good enough for God to create would exhibit these characteristics (1987, p. 53):

(1) None of the individual creatures in it would exist in the best of all possible worlds.

(2) None of the creatures in it has a life which is so miserable on the whole that it would have been better for that creature if it had never existed.

(3) Every individual creature in the world is at least as happy on the whole as it would have been in any other possible world in which it could have existed.

It may not be true of our world that these characteristics are uniformly exhibited among creatures. It is possible (even likely) that some unfortunate people in our world are so miserable on the whole that it would be better if they had never existed. Nor would it be difficult to imagine that some of us could have been happier in some other possible world in which we might have existed. But, as noted, it is not our world that Adams specifically has in mind, only some world or other displaying the above characteristics.

If God were to create the world exhibiting Adams' three characteristics, would He escape the force of the unsurpassability argument? Not as things stand, for a being that created that world would be surpassed by a being that created the best possible world. Adams doesn't try to undermine the unsurpassability argument but, in effect, to defeat it by adducing what he assumes to be an ethically adequate reason why a good world, but not the best, could be chosen by God. And that reason is embodied in the ethical views typical of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. What are those ethical views?

Before explaining what they are, Adams explains what they aren't. They aren't act-utilitarian, for '[i]f we apply an act-utilitarian standard of moral goodness, we will have to accept (*P*). For by act-utilitarian standards it is a moral obligation to bring about the best state of affairs that one can … I believe that utilitarian views are not typical of the Judaeo-Christian ethical tradition' (1987, p. 52). If they were, then what one would aim for in bringing about the best state of affairs is *maximising* amounts of happiness at large and *minimising* misery. These are qualities that typically feature in act-utilitarian moral choices and judgements, and if they are not typical of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, then they should not feature in moral choices and judgements that Judaeo-Christian theists make. Nor, for that matter, should they feature in moral choices and judgements made by God. So why does Adams cite these very qualities in his characteristics (2) and (3)? If these are the characteristics which determine that a world exhibiting them is consistent with having been created by an unsurpassable God, then Adams should say that God is an act-utilitarian, or at least that the qualities of happiness and misery are as key to God's moral choices and judgements as they are to the act-utilitarian's. In his defence, what Adams does not say is that characteristics (2) and (3) involve the *maximisation* of happiness and *minimisation* of misery, which are (as he acknowledges) the key maxims of

act-utilitarianism. It is these maxims that Adams does not appeal to when stating those characteristics.

Wishing to distance himself from act-utilitarianism, then, Adams places emphasis on the ethical views typical of the Judaeo-Christian tradition which don't involve happiness and misery explicitly. He introduces a quality of a different kind, namely 'grace', and it is this which, according to Adams, determines the kind of creatures God produces. The idea is something like this: that in the realm of possibility, there are many kinds of creature, any one of which God would have the power to produce. And, presumably, among those possibilities are kinds of creatures exhibiting characteristics (2) and (3). However, without a 'principle of determination' directing God's choice to one particular kind, it is hard to see how God could choose one kind rather than another. God's grace, Adams believes, serves as that principle. Grace, he says, is a quality that is typical of the ethical views of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and 'may be defined as a disposition to love which is not dependent on the merit of the person loved. The gracious person loves without worrying about whether the person he loves is worthy of that love … grace is a virtue which God does have and men ought to have' (1987, p. 56). On the basis of His grace, God may choose to produce less excellent creatures than He could have chosen. There is 'nothing which would require Him to act on the principle of choosing the best possible creatures to be the object of His creative powers.' (1987, p. 57)

Now, while grace, as defined, might be an element of ethical views typical of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is pretty useless as a principle of choosing a particular kind of creature to produce. God may graciously love many different kinds of creature equally and therefore none in particular. The claim that gracious love is given independently of merit only makes
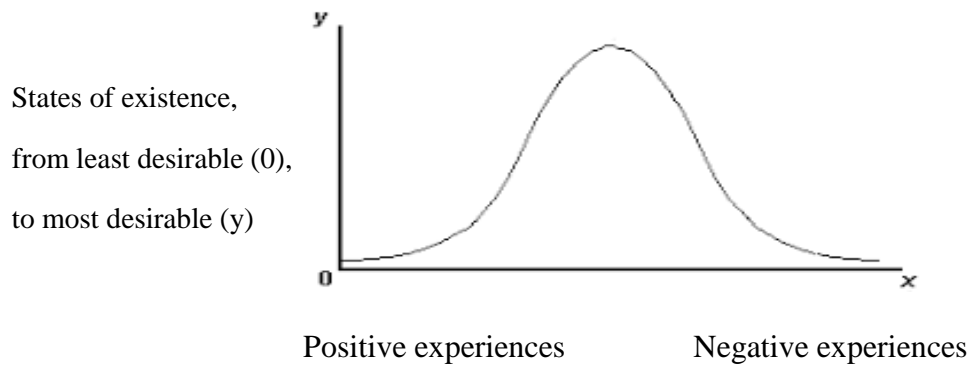
matters worse. God might as well produce thuggish rogues as saintly angels if all He goes by is His graciousness towards each of them. So the 'principle of grace' won't do the work Adams requires of it. It is simply inadequate as a principle of determination narrowing God's choice to a particular kind of creature.

Theists who uphold (*P*) argue that in order for God to be unsurpassable, He must be determined by the principle of the best – a principle consistent with God's perfect nature and narrow enough to focus God's attention on a particular world (there may be several equally most excellent worlds, but I leave this aside). If Adams were to embrace that principle as the one God appeals to in producing creatures, then He would escape the force of the unsurpassability argument, for no being can do better than the best. But then the world God chooses to create must exhibit characteristics (2) and (3) in order to be an Adams world, and it may appear contradictory to suppose the best and those characteristics go hand in hand. But if they can sit happily together, then Adams may have all he wants: an adequate principle determining God's choice of creature, and creatures that are both happy and miserable to the extent that characteristics (2) and (3) are exhibited by them.

But if God were to produce the best possible creatures in accordance with the principle of the best, it may seem that these creatures would not exhibit Adams' two characteristics because they (the creatures) would need to be blissfully happy and never in a state of misery – wouldn't they? Not necessarily. There is an argument to the effect that creatures that enjoy complete happiness may not be the best or, at any rate, have the best possible kind of existence. Such a view is argued for by philosophers who imagine what it would be like permanently hooked up to a happiness machine. George N. Schlesinger (in Cahn and Shatz, 1982, pp. 25-31) is one philosopher who explored this idea, and concluded that being hooked

up to the device would not lead to one's having a desirable state of existence. In essence, his argument is that whatever kind of creature is considered, it would exist in a state which is either desirable or undesirable. Being hooked up to the happiness machine would mean that one's state of existence is undesirable, despite the unalloyed delights one would experience. An illustration Schlesinger asks us to consider is of a person so hooked up who wants nothing more than to remain in that condition. Prior to being introduced to the machine, however, the person had a far richer and more desirable existence than she did afterwards. She interacted and socialised with others, was creative and sought self-improvement, she attended classes to advance her education, and so on. In short, she enjoyed and valued the pleasures of life even though they often came at the cost of having to struggle and suffer misery in order to achieve those pleasures. Her state of existence then was more desirable overall than it could possibly be permanently attached to the machine. This is what Schlesinger argues for at any rate, and embraces the maxim 'better Socrates dissatisfied than the fool satisfied; better the fool dissatisfied than the pig satisfied' (1982, p. 28).

In effect, Schlesinger is endorsing the view that creatures whose state of existence is desirable would exhibit Adams' characteristics (2) and (3): they would experience both happiness and misery yet lead desirable, worthwhile lives. But we can take this idea still further. If a desirable state of existence involves both happiness and misery, the most desirable state of all – the best possible state – would exhibit an optimal balance between being happy and miserable with neither in excess. We could illustrate this by means of the following graph:

States of existence,
from least desirable (0),
to most desirable (y)

y

0   *x*

Positive experiences   Negative experiences

The horizontal axis of this graph represents ratios of positive and negative experiences (for example, happiness and misery) that are possible for a person to have, while the vertical axis represents the desirability of states of existence. Points '0' to '*x*' on the horizontal axis represent purely positive and negative experiences respectively which, according to the vertical axis (points '0' to 'y'), entail the least desirable state of existence of all. In between those points, where positive and negative experiences are both enjoyed and endured, states of existence become more or less desirable according to the balance between those experiences. Where happiness outbalances misery and vice versa, states of existence may be desirable but not *as* desirable as the state in which the balance between those experiences is optimal, represented as the highest point on the curve. That state is the most desirable of all, and therefore a state of existence we should expect the best possible creatures to enjoy. We limited beings may not be able to determine what the optimal balance is, how much happiness and misery renders a state of existence the most desirable. But God is unlimited and would presumably be better placed to know what we don't in this respect and be able to bring it about that the creatures he produces enjoy the best possible state of existence. In that sense, what God would do is to create the best possible creature, which is precisely what we would expect an unsurpassable being to do. And, in fact, Adams admits that God could have chosen to produce such creatures:

God could have chosen to create the best of all possible creatures, and still have been gracious in choosing them. God's graciousness in creation does not imply that the creatures He has chosen to create must be less excellent than the best possible. (1987, pp. 56-57)

Given this admission, the above argument seems consistent with most of what Adams claims to be possible. The advantages it offers Adams are that it provides God with a principle an appeal to which narrowly focuses His attention on the kind of creature to create. It incorporates Adams' characteristics (2) and (3). It can accommodate the idea that God is gracious with respect to His chosen creatures. And it also avoids the possibility of God's being susceptible to the unsurpassability argument. A further, although perhaps dubious, advantage of the argument is that it lends weight to Adams' contention that God is under no obligation to create the best possible world, for the argument concerns creatures, not worlds. However, since Adams conveys the impression that, for him, the excellence of worlds is a function of, or reduces to, the excellence of creatures, this is an advantage he couldn't accept, so he would have to reject the argument. This leaves him in need of a principle other than that of the best, and indeed of grace, that is narrow enough to focus God's attention on the kind of creature to produce, that results in the creation of a world less than the best. What that principle might be is up to Adams to decide; but it would need to be such as to render God insusceptible to the unsurpassability argument.

Suppose that Adams accepted the above argument believing that it leaves his position unchallenged. That position, after all, is that God is not obligated to create the best possible *world*, even if He might be obligated by His own nature to create the best possible creature. This would be to regard possible worlds and possible inhabitants of those worlds as distinct entities: creatures and then worlds comprising physical objects, natural laws, natural phenomena, and so on. Worlds are containers for whatever else God chooses to create,

including, perhaps, sentient beings. These worlds may be ranked according to, for example, the regularity of natural laws, the variety of phenomena, the number of created things they contain, and so on. According to Adams, God is not obligated to create the best of these worlds or containers. But with which principle might God accord in choosing a less-than-best world or container? God cannot choose arbitrarily, for that is contrary to His perfect nature. Nor can He permit Himself to become susceptible to the force of the unsurpassability argument which would certainly hang dangerously over God given, as Adams allows, that a best among worlds is possible. Once again, God would seem obligated to accord with the principle of the best and produce only that world if He is to escape the dangers that accompany appeals to other principles. And if this is right, then Adams seems compelled to accept that his claim about God's creating non-best worlds, or creatures, cannot be supported. God is perfectly rational and for whatever He creates, He needs a principle of determination focusing His choice on a particular object, whether that be a single creature, a vast population of them, or an entire world comprising every created thing. It is with regard to this principle that Adams makes his mistake. The principle of grace, for the reasons given, is inadequate to the task, and leaves God exposed to the unsurpassability argument. The conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that God *is* obligated to create the best.

If Adams is committed to accepting this conclusion, the next move would be to argue that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds, assuming that it is the creation of God. As noted, Adams says that he is not arguing that our world is one which exhibits the conditions he sets out. Presenting such an argument would be *his* next project but not ours on his behalf. We shall leave him to muse on the possibility. Now it is time to consider the next account.

4.4 The best possible world account (2): the theistic multiverse, according to Klaas Kraay

If God exists, He is an unsurpassable being. And if God were to create a world, He would create the best world He could. For some philosophers, God creates not a single universe as others, including Leibniz, suppose, but a world comprising many universes: a theistic *multiverse*. The multiverse is meant to settle the questions of there being no best possible world, for the multiverse is precisely that. It contains all and only those universes which, as Leibniz puts it, have a rightful claim to existence, and there are many of them. The multiverse also addresses the unsurpassability argument. God could not be surpassed by a being that created a better world because there could *be* no better world. And a further supposition may be that our universe is just one of those comprising the multiverse. In the words of Bradley Monton:

> The idea is that God created an infinite number of universes – he created every possible universe he could create, above some threshold of goodness … This purportedly solves the problem of no best world since the world that God actualized includes all the different universes – this world is purportedly unsurpassable, since there are no more universes that God could create that would add to the goodness of reality. (2010, p. 113)

And Klaas Kraay holds much the same view, that 'if theism is true, we should expect the actual world to be a *multiverse* comprised of all and only those universes which are worthy of creation and sustenance' and which collectively comprise the best possible world. (2010, p. 355). Kraay further sets out some important definitions that help us better grasp what a theistic multiverse, comprised of universes, is. First, a *universe* is 'a spatiotemporally interrelated, causally closed aggregate' (Kraay, 2010, p. 359). This means that in the multiverse, there is no system of communicating between one universe and another. For example, Jane, a resident of our universe, couldn't get a taxi to a different universe, or contact anyone there by whatever means. A *multiverse* is comprised of universes which may differ in

many ways, but must nevertheless be compossible. There can be no logical contradiction between universes comprising the multiverse. Hence, there cannot be two or more universes that are qualitatively identical (or copies of one another), for that would contradict the law of the identity of indiscernibles. Nor can there be trans-universe identity of individuals within the multiverse, so that each individual can exist in only one universe comprising the multiverse.

In what follows I will focus primarily on Kraay's argument for the theistic multiverse (2010). Kraay is not alone in arguing for the theistic multiverse, but since their arguments share a lot of common ground, I will focus on Kraay's for the sake of clarity and simplicity. I begin with a statement of his argument and then move on to three problems which confront it. The first concerns Kraay's claim that the theistic multiverse is contingent, that God freely chooses which possible universes will and will not constitute it. I will argue, however, that Kraay's insistence that God's 'free' choices are principled ones means that His 'choices' are not free after all. I then turn to Kraay's proposed criterion that possible universes must satisfy in order to qualify for membership of the multiverse. In order to qualify, universes must have an 'axiological status' that surpasses a certain threshold. Universes falling below the threshold are not selected while those rising above it are. I will argue that the threshold idea, which has some initial plausibility, turns out to be problematic in terms of placement, such that its use in separating possible universes into exclusion or inclusion camps causes huge difficulties for God. Next, I turn to the 'principle of plenitude' which Kraay and others see as a principal motivator for God's creation of a multiverse rather than a universe. I will argue that there is no such motivation in that direction since it is possible that an infinite universe could satisfy the principle as well as a multiverse could. And lastly, I will examine how the theistic multiverse might address the problem of evil. I begin, then, with Kraay's account of the

world we should expect God to create. Kraay's vision of the theistic multiverse and its creation begins like this:

> God surveys the set of possible worlds, and freely selects exactly one for actualization on the basis of its axiological characteristics. Discussions of this issue, then, typically assume that worlds have axiological status, and that they can (at least in principle) be evaluated: some are good, others are bad; some are better, others are worse. (2010, p. 355)

In his paper, Kraay uses the term 'world' to mean 'theistic multiverse', so that in saying that God surveys the set of possible worlds, Kraay means possible multiverses, each having a unique axiological status. The best possible world, on this understanding, is the multiverse having not just any axiological status, but one a greater than which cannot be conceived. Although God is responsible for many of the features that contribute towards a world's axiological status, there are some for which He is not responsible:

> Consider, for example, random processes. If a world features such processes, God causes it to be the case that they occur, but he does not (by definition) determine their outcome. Next, consider libertarian freedom. Many theists maintain that human beings have such freedom, and that the free choices of such creatures affect how the world unfolds … On this view, God and creatures *jointly* actualize a world … the world is partly a product of God's actions, and partly the product of creatures' actions. (Kraay, 2010, p. 358-359)

So far, Kraay's argument is recognisably Leibnizian. God freely chooses between possible worlds in terms of their perfection which, on Kraay's understanding, is their axiological status. But not that alone. Neither axiological status nor immunity from the force of the unsurpassability argument are sufficient motivators to create a multiverse; also required is the maximisation of positive reality. Hence we see the principle of plenitude emerging again, just as it did for Leibniz. An appeal to this principle is based on the idea that an unsurpassable,

limitless creator would wish to bring about an unlimited number of things. Kraay himself says:

> [T]hese considerations suggest that an unsurpassable powerful, knowledgeable, and good deity will create *every* universe that is worth creating. I suppose that this way of thinking is motivated by a *principle of plenitude*. (2010, p. 361)

This principle in conjunction with the notions of axiological status and God's unsurpassability guide God's choice of universes to be included in the multiverse.

The plenitudinous-ness of a world is determined by the number of things existing in it, as we already know. But what determines a world's axiological value, or status? According to Kraay, it is determined by a certain balance of 'world good-making' and 'world bad-making' properties (2010, p. 356). Among the former are the presence of libertarian free creatures, a certain balance of moral good over moral bad, a richness and pervasiveness of phenomena, and the simplicity and regularity of natural laws. Among world bad-making properties are the presence of mere automata (creatures lacking libertarian free will), more moral bad than moral good, a limited variety and distribution of phenomena, and overly complex and irregular natural laws.

In terms of these criteria for selecting universes to be included in the multiverse, God knows that some universes are good, others are bad; some are better, others are worse. The best possible multiverse (or 'world' to use Kraay's phrase) would be the one containing all and only the better universes, with all and only the bad ones being excluded. How would it be possible to decide which of those universes would be worthy of inclusion or exclusion? Kraay imagines that, in aiding His decision, God has ideas of all possible universes and ranks them in order according to their axiological status, plenitudinous-ness, and so on, and rules a threshold line at a certain point marking off all those universes worthy of inclusion in the

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multiverse from all those that aren't. Using a set of propositions, Kraay sets out in a more formal way how this selection process would work (2010, pp. 361-2. I use Kraay's own reference letters and numbers for each proposition):

PP1 If a universe is *creatable* by an unsurpassable being, and *worth creating* (i.e., it has an axiological status that surpasses some objective threshold, *t*), that being will create that universe.
PP2 If a being fails to create any universe that is both worth creating and creatable (by that being), then that being is surpassable.

According to these propositions, God, an unsurpassable being, will create absolutely *all* and *only* those universes worthy of being created. As for God's sustaining universes in existence once created, Kraay sets out two more propositions, designated PP3 and PP4, which are worded identically to PP1 and PP2 except that the term 'create' is substituted by 'sustain'.

But propositions PP1 through to PP4 concern only what God is to create and sustain. Kraay gives more propositions which concern what God is not to create or sustain:

PR1 If a universe is *not worthy of creation* (i.e., it has an axiological status that fails to surpass threshold *t*), an unsurpassable being will not create that universe.
PR2 If a being creates a universe that is unworthy of creation, then that being is surpassable.

And, as before, two further propositions, designated PR3 and PR4, correspond to PR1 and PR2 respectively, except that 'sustain' is substituted for 'created'. So this is the explanation Kraay gives of the nature of the theistic multiverse (the best possible world), what it contains

and what it doesn't, and why we should expect God to create it. We shall now turn to the problems arising, which were mentioned earlier.

First, consider Kraay's initial claim that 'God surveys the set of possible worlds, and freely selects exactly one for actualization' (2010, p. 355). It is hard to reconcile God's free selection with subsequent claims that God sets out to maximize axiological value, create a plenitude, and being bound by the set of propositions PP1 through to PR4 on pain of surrendering unsurpassability. The impression Kraay conveys is that God is not free at all with respect to selecting among possible universes but is constrained to act in accordance with considerations of axiological status, plenitudinous-ness, and the set of propositions Kraay sets out. In effect, this places Kraay in the same situation as Leibniz, for both wish to uphold the notion of God's perfect freedom while offering no plausible explanation of how God could pursue alternative courses of action with respect to His 'choice' of a world to create. An obvious escape route for Kraay would be to abandon hopes of defending God's freedom in respect of creating and focus on the factors, in terms of axiological status, plenitudinous-ness and so on, that jointly *determine* God's creative activity. That would at least reinforce our expectation that it is the best multiverse God creates rather than any alternative. But this is a route that Kraay doesn't follow, as we have seen.

So this, then, is Kraay's version of the theistic multiverse and why an unsurpassable being would create it rather than any other multiverse. I stated earlier that I see problems associated with the view Kraay holds, and they arise from the belief that considerations of axiological status and the principle of plenitude have a major role in God's freely deciding, respectively, (a) which universes are to be included and excluded from the multiverse, and (b) that He should create a multiverse at all as opposed to a very large universe instead while honouring

the demands of the plenitude principle. But let us begin with problems to do with axiological status.

As we have been told, every possible universe has its own axiological status, and we are to imagine universes ranked in hierarchical order according to the status they each have. We are then to imagine a threshold line drawn at a certain place through that hierarchy that marks off universes worthy of being created from those that aren't. The threshold line is crucial here because it supposedly gives God an objective basis for selection rather than making a selection that is arbitrary or based on a whim. As long as God is able to determine what the axiological status of each possible universe is prior to selection, then deciding where to draw the threshold line should prove unproblematic. The idea seems simple enough to grasp: universes with axiological values n, $n+1$, $n+2$, $n+3$, $n+4$ … fall above the threshold and are selected, while universes whose values are $n-1$, $n-2$, $n-3$, $n-4$ … fall below it and are rejected. The idea is so straightforward, nothing could possibly go wrong - could it?

Indeed it could. Recall Kraay's claim that God *and* libertarian free creatures jointly actualise a world, and they together with the outcomes of random processes determine the axiological status of a universe and the world as a whole. God need include neither libertarian free creatures nor random processes in any or every universe comprising the multiverse, but does so because they contribute towards the axiological value universes come to have. Crucially, however, by Kraay's own admission, God does not know in advance what libertarian free creatures will choose to do that will affect the value of that status, nor (by definition) what the outcomes of random processes will be that have a similar effect. These are factors that don't require consideration at the moment of choosing and creating (or rejecting) a universe, because at that moment libertarian free creatures and random processes will not yet have had

an opportunity to warrant any changes. But as time passes by, opportunities will arise. With this thought in mind, consider this graph:
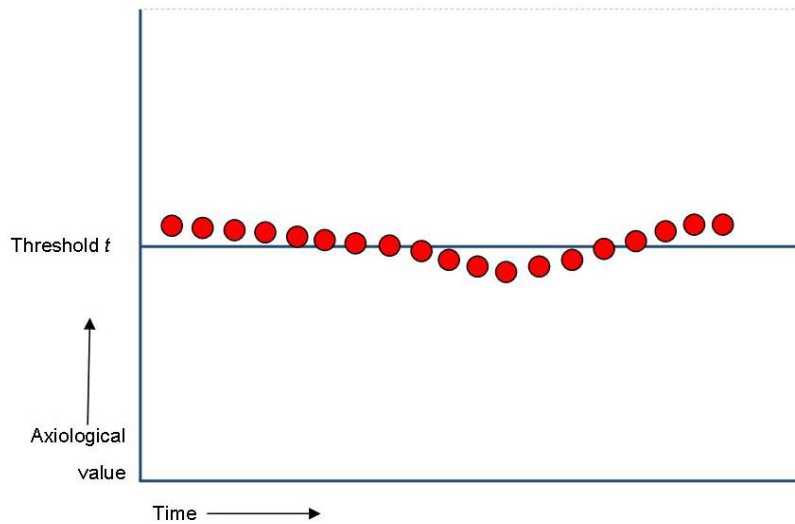
Graph 1

The horizontal axis of Graph 1 represents the times at which a universe is first created and thereafter sustained in existence. The vertical axis represents axiological status or value, and the red circles represent a universe ('red-circle universe') that has been selected and created in virtue of sitting just above the threshold line. The line of red-circles represents the progress of red-circle universe over time and how its axiological status is affected by the actions of libertarian free creatures and/or the outcomes of random processes.

In this possible scenario we see the axiological status of the red-circle universe falling below the threshold at a certain point in time and then rising above it again. This movement is due to libertarian free creatures and/or random processes bringing about bad, and later on, good states of affairs. A different but equally possible scenario is represented in Graph 2:
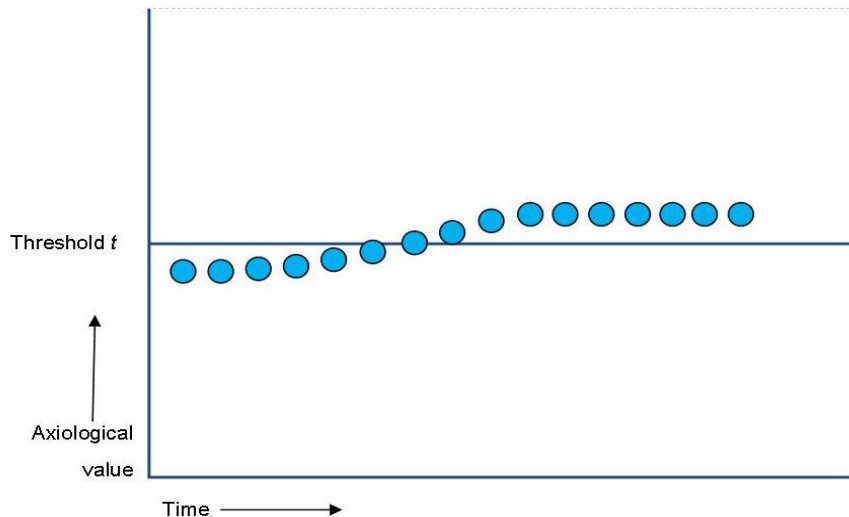
Graph 2

The axes in this graph represent the same values as those in Graph 1, the only relevant difference being that the blue-circle universe wasn't selected for creation because, initially, its axiological status fell below the threshold line. The blue-circle universe, therefore, is not actual but only a *possible* universe with good- and bad-making properties that are themselves only possible. And it is also possible that, over time, those properties would be such as to raise the axiological status of the blue-circle universe to a position *above* the threshold line. Of course, it is natural to think that since we are now talking of mere possibilities, the blue-circle universe presents no difficulties for Kraay's theistic multiverse. But it does. After all, prior to selecting any universe for creation, all of them were mere possibilities with properties that were themselves merely possible.

Moreover, we need to refer to Kraay's set of propositions (PP1, PP2, and so on) with which he thinks God is bound to accord in creating universes, for His unsurpassability depends on it. Kraay's propositions cover not only what God chooses to create or not, but also what He sustains in existence or doesn't. Presumably, it is God's task continually to track over time

the progress of every universe – both actual *and* possible – and note any changes or possible changes in their axiological status. In the case of the red-circle universe, its axiological status falls below the threshold during a certain period, signalling that it is no longer worthy of being sustained. If God were to sustain this universe in existence during that period, then by Kraay's proposition PR4 He becomes surpassable. A similar situation arises with the blue-circle universe (but in reverse) during the period in which it rises above the threshold. True, this universe is only possible, but if God tracks the progress of actual *and* possible universes (based, perhaps, on what He knows about them at the beginning, together with an eye on relevant probabilities) He will know that during a certain period it is possible that the blue-circle universe will be worthy of being created. If, during that period, God refrains from creating the blue-circle universe, then by Kraay's proposition PP2, He becomes surpassable once again.

If tracking both those actual and merely possible universes hasn't given God a headache already, He would soon realise that red- and blue-circle universes aren't alone. If the hierarchy of universes has infinitely many members (actual *and* possible) differing by minute variations in axiological status, then there must be many universes close enough to the two we have already considered that are likely to behave in much the same ways as they have. If these need to be tracked as well, then that would be enough to force God into full-blown migraine territory.

Is there any hope of relieving God of His pain? Let us consider five suggestions. The first is that, at the time of selecting universes, God decrees that those positioned below the threshold are impossible and so could never be considered for creation and sustenance. None need be *logically* impossible in the sense that their descriptions contain contradictions, but *practically* impossible, such that God could not bring Himself to create them in the first place or

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thereafter. As such they would be incapable of having any axiological status, even a *possible* one. But that decree, if Kraay were to accept it, would mean that the multiverse God creates cannot be described as the best possible, for it would be the only one God could create. And this would be to deny God's freedom of choice in selecting universes and accept necessitarianism. There would be no universes God did not create but could have.

A second suggestion is that God should ensure no fluctuations at all in a created universe's axiological status by eliminating from the start factors that tend to produce fluctuations. As noted, Kraay mentions two such factors: the presence of libertarian free creatures and random processes. But if God were to disallow them, He would be disallowing two world good-making properties, and frustrating His desire to have libertarian free creatures capable of moral responsibility and a willingness to turn to Him through their own choice. So disallowing these factors might eliminate one cause of headache but only by introducing another.

Thirdly, assuming a threshold is still required, there may be room for manoeuvre regarding its placement. For instance, if God were to lower the threshold to a position below where a blue-circle universe rests, that universe would have been created from the beginning and its increase in axiological status would not cause God the trouble of creating and sustaining it later on through the process of tracking. But this manoeuvre would achieve little because there would be another possible universe below but close enough to the threshold that, possibly, behaves as a blue-circle universe did and therefore causes God the same trouble all over again. Likewise, if God raised the threshold in order to solve the problem a red-circle universe caused, there would be a universe close enough to take its place and present exactly the same problem.

Fourthly, a way of avoiding threshold problems entirely would be for God to create nothing. This would mean that the totality of existence would be God and only God, but a plenitude comprising the infinite number of God's perfections. It would appear impossible that the plenitude, so understood, could be surpassed by anything creatable. With the possible exception of pantheists, when philosophers speak of a plenitude, they usually understand it not in terms of God's perfections (although it may be so understood) but as an expression of them. So if we are to expect such an expression in the form of a multiverse, we are left with the problem of threshold placement, and the headache it may cause God.

And fifthly, it may be that a blue-circle universe, and other merely possible universes are logically consistent entities in themselves, but not with any universe that God has chosen to actualise. This bears on the issue of compossibility, which we have already noted. But it is not clear what features of a universe would render it incompossible with another, especially if each universe comprising the multiverse stands in causal isolation. As unclear a notion as this may be, decreeing that each universe below the threshold has the property of being incompossible with universes comprising the multiverse, would rid God of the headache of deciding whether to actualise any of them. In virtue of possessing that property, none of them could be actualisable. This solution to relieving God of His pain simply returns us to the first suggestion discussed above, where the actual multiverse is the only one possible, and hence cannot be described as 'the best'.

None of these suggestions seems satisfactory. No doubt the existence and placement of the threshold line causes more problems than Kraay realises, and it is not clear how those problems could be solved. Noting these problems, let us move on to the question of the plenitude.

Kraay's 'theistic world' contains not only maximal axiological status but also maximal positive reality, and only a multiverse (he argues) satisfies the needs of these key requirements. As Kraay puts it, God creates all and only those universes that are worth creating, and in being created, they satisfy those needs. As to how many universes comprise the multiverse Kraay is silent, but we need to have an idea of that number since the principles of axiological status and plenitude depend for their satisfaction upon it. So, the multiverse is a whole whose parts are universes. Monton believes that the whole would have an infinite number of parts, and I see no reason why Kraay should disagree. But given that, the parts themselves must be finite if God is supposed to be the creator of them. For reasons I will explain later, it would be impossible for God to create a multiverse conceived as an infinite whole comprising parts that are also infinite. So the idea we will run with is that there is an unlimited number of limited universes in the multiverse, and that that is sufficient to satisfy the principle of plenitude as well as that of axiological status.

With regard to the principle of plenitude itself, we will start by asking whether a certain kind of universe could be as plenitudinous as the multiverse. If so, then God could achieve as much by creating one thing rather than many of them. God never does anything pointlessly, and creating a multiverse might be unnecessarily 'over-egging the cake'. The 16th century philosopher, Giordano Bruno, believed that a universe could be infinite all on its own if it contained an infinite number of objects – for example, planets, stars and moons. Presumably, then, he would believe that a universe is as capable of being a plenitude as a multiverse. He writes:

> I hold the universe to be infinite as a result of the infinite divine power; for I think it unworthy of divine goodness and power to have produced merely one finite world when it was able to bring into being an infinity of worlds. Wherefore I have expounded that there is an endless number of individual worlds like our earth. I regard it, with Pythagoras, as a star, and the moon, the planets, and the stars are similar to it,

the latter being of endless number. All these bodies make an infinity of worlds; they constitute the infinite whole, in infinite space, an infinite universe, that is to say, containing innumerable worlds. (cited in Almeida, 2017, p. 2)

At the heart of the matter lies the concept of *infinity*. In a Brunolian universe there is 'an infinity of worlds' and in a Kraaylian multiverse an infinity of finite universes. Is one of these entities necessarily larger, or more plenitudinous, than the other? The German mathematician, David Hilbert, imagined a hotel – the 'Grand Hilbert Hotel' – that had an infinite number of rooms. He claimed that even if all the rooms were occupied by guests, a new arrival could still be given a room. Freeing up a room for that person would be achieved by moving the present guest in room one to room two while the guest in room two moves to room three, and so on to infinity. In fact, by moving guests from room to room in this way, the hotel could accommodate 10 new guests, a thousand, or even an infinite number of them, each in a room of their own. Arguably, a Brunolian universe containing an infinite number of objects would be like the hotel containing an infinite number of rooms. It could always accommodate another moon, planet or star, or as many of them as you please. Seemingly, therefore, it could achieve the status of a plenitude as easily as a Kraaylian multiverse could.

An objection against this is that a Brunolian universe would be surpassed in terms of plenitudinous-ness by two such universes, for two would have greater capacity for positive reality than one. But this would not be the case. Imagine that in building the hotel, Hilbert's main consideration was a plenitude, by which he has in mind the size of his bank account. Soon after all rooms in the hotel have been occupied and dues paid, Hilbert discovers that the size of his bank account is infinitely large. Nevertheless, he questions whether he has yet achieved the plenitude he was seeking. To be certain about it, he builds another Grand Hilbert Hotel next to the first one and looks forward to all rooms being occupied and dues paid. Even as the cash rolls in he still questions whether he has done enough to achieve his goal, and so

he decides to build more and more hotels until he has amassed a thousand of them. Would that number of Grand Hilbert Hotels make Hilbert's bank account more plenitudinous than one hotel could all by itself? Surely not. An infinite number of dollars received from letting rooms in the original hotel supplemented by a similar number from the second, third, fourth, and so on, would still amount to an infinite number (a plenitude) of dollars. If so, then in comparing the multiverse with a universe (say, the Brunolian universe) in terms of their plenitudinous-ness, we discover that both are equally capable of satisfying the principle. And if God does nothing pointlessly, then there is no reason why He should create many universes when one will suffice? The creation of that (single) universe could amount to the creation of the best possible world, and as such would release God from the charge of being surpassable.

A further objection to Kraay's (or a similar) view has been raised by Bradley Monton (2010), who argues that the theistic multiverse does not satisfy the principle of plenitude, contrary to what Kraay believes to be true. This, Monton argues, is because a multiverse could for ever be improved by being added to, thereby never acquiring status of being the best. That is, God could for ever add to a multiverse duplicates or near duplicates of universes already existing in it. The result would be an increase in axiological value and plenitudinous-ness for each and every duplicate (or near duplicate) added, with no maximum number of duplicates/near duplicates, or degrees of axiological value and plenitudinous-ness, being possible.

However, as it stands, Monton's duplicate argument doesn't have an impact on Kraay's position because Kraay already has the duplicate (or near duplicate) issue covered. If Monton's duplicate (or near duplicate) universes are worthy of being created and sustained, and presumably he would say that they are, then God would know about them and, by Kraay's principles and propositions, create and sustain them along with all other worthy

universes, or else forfeit His unsurpassability. Consequently, Kraay would assume from the start that Monton's duplicates or near duplicates are already included in his theistic multiverse. For Bruno, too, all possible duplicates (or near duplicates) in the form of moons, planets, stars, and so on, would be included in the universe as he conceives it.

However, there is a different interpretation of Monton (one he doesn't discuss), that what he is really arguing for is replacing Kraay's multiverse with a *super*verse. That is, a series of Kraaylian multiverses where each successive member is a duplicate (or near duplicate) of its predecessor. As there appear to be unlimited originals and duplicates (or near duplicates) in the superverse, it would comprise infinitely many multiverses, each of which comprises, in turn, infinitely many universes; it would not be *an* infinity but an infinity of infinities.

As mentioned earlier, there is a reason why a superverse, so conceived, would be impossible inasmuch as God could not create it. Although we do not normally conceive God as a plenitude, there is a sense in which He is one in virtue of having an infinite number of properties or perfections. Therefore, in this sense, God is a being than which a more plenitudinous cannot be conceived. But the superverse, comprising infinitely many plenitudinous multiverses, would be more plenitudinous than God – indeed, infinitely more. Consequently, even if God can conceive of a superverse, it would not be an entity He could create without forfeiting His plenitudinous-ness, or surpassability.

The outcome of this discussion is that questions remain over the need of a multiverse – whether a universe would satisfy the conditions required for a world's being the best possible as well as the multiverse – and how God might freely choose which universes to include as well as exclude from the multiverse. These are questions to be addressed by anyone

supporting the position, or a similar one, held by Kraay. There is also the question of what Kraay, and other theistic multiverse fans, have to say about the evil that exists in our universe. We will consider that next.

According to some philosophers, the theistic multiverse would have certain advantages over a universe. Not only might it be a suitable candidate for the best possible world, it can also offer a response to the problem of evil. Michael Almeida, for example, claims that the multiverse could contain vast amounts of evil, but all of it metaphysically necessary (Almeida, 2017, p. 1), and hence compatible with God's unsurpassability. Almeida doesn't dwell on the problem of evil in the paper cited, for his concern is not with that particular problem but with another: rejecting as incoherent accounts of the theistic multiverse given by Kraay and others. So, because his focus lies elsewhere, Almeida doesn't spell out what he means by 'metaphysical evil', which is unfortunate for us since he includes under that name 'vast amounts of undeserved suffering, horrendous moral evil, and terrible natural disasters in many universes' (2017, p. 1). If he believes that these evils are metaphysically necessary in the multiverse, then it might be better for its inhabitants if they hadn't been created in the first place, for it is surely evils of the kinds he mentions that fuel the flames of the problem of evil rather than solves it.

As for the principal criteria for God's creating a multiverse (considerations of plenitude and axiological status combined with an objective threshold), these do little to address the problem of human suffering, at least from our point of view. I imagine we would be content living in a finite universe with higher axiological status if that entailed much less evil in existence. These two criteria might have great significance from God's point of view, but less from ours given the nature of the universe in which we exist.

Consider again the hierarchy of created universes, their axiological status, and those universes in particular that hover around the objective threshold. If our universe is a member of the theistic multiverse, it is likely to occupy such a position given the amount and pervasiveness of evil in existence. We can, at any rate, imagine universes that are better than ours in terms of having less evil and, possibly, a higher axiological status. One problem with universes like ours may be illustrated as follows: as I write there is news of a national chain of homeware stores regarded by many customers as the best of its kind. Despite that, the chain is now in financial difficulties because some of its stores – those in areas hardest hit by government austerity measures – are no longer turning in the profit they once did. The owners of the chain are losing money rapidly, and realise that unless action is taken, the existence of the whole chain is threatened. Whatever action they decide upon must take into account the fact that employees themselves have played no part in the stores' failings, and it is likely that feelings of hurt and injustice will be aroused by any corrective measures the owners believe necessary. It has since been decided that the offending stores should be closed and that in order to allay any bad feelings, workers will be offered positions in more successful stores that will continue to function. The owners' decision was based on several factors: for example, to keep the best possible chain store in existence; to show they have a duty of care to their less fortunate workers, and to avoid suffering and hardship where possible. There is little in that decision that the affected workers should feel disappointed or angry about. Indeed, given the relationship they have with the owners, it is the decision they might have hoped for.

Now, there are parallels to be drawn between this case and the theistic multiverse as Kraay sees it. The multiverse is the best possible world, he argues, yet it contains universes that are not as good, in terms of their axiological status, as those that surpass them; and its creator has

(so we believe) a duty of care to all His creatures. But such a duty is not obviously acted on in respect of those in, for example, our universe, who suffer more than creatures would in better universes. It is reasonable that they should have feelings of hurt and injustice just as the chain store's employees had. How could such circumstances arise if ours is the best possible world, or multiverse? This is what Kraay says: 'the surpassability of our universe … cannot count against the actual world's being TM [theistic multiverse], since there is no particular reason to expect that *we* would find ourselves in an unsurpassable universe'. (2010, p. 365)

That we should not expect to find ourselves in an unsurpassable universe is questionable. If there are such universes, why should a loving God *not* place us there instead of in a surpassable universe? We have already seen how some universes that are close to the threshold are still worthy of being created on account of their axiological status. But that status can diminish after creation to the point at which a universe is no longer worthy of sustenance. That is analogous to the stores in the chain mentioned earlier that failed to turn in an acceptable profit, and become unsustainable. But whereas the unlucky employees of those stores can, if they wish, relocate to better stores, the option of our relocating to a better universe is not open to us. Universes that are members of the theistic multiverse are, according to Kraay, causally isolated, so that it impossible to relocate to another (Kraay, 2010, p. 359, footnote 17). Our situation, unlike that of the chain store workers, is something like this: at the turn of the 20th century, the White Star Line ran a fleet of passenger ships, a fleet widely regarded as the best fleet in existence. Among that fleet was the luxury ship, *Titanic*, which, on 14-15 April 1912, sank after striking an iceberg. Through a shortage of lifeboats, more than 1500 souls lost their lives. It might be true that the White Star Line ran the best fleet of ships, but knowing that would have provided little comfort to the passengers condemned to die on one of them. Had there been an opportunity for them to transfer to

another vessel, none would have suffered in the way they did. But no such opportunity arose. Much the same seems true of the denizens of universes close to the threshold. While it may be true that they exist in the best possible multiverse, there is no 'vessel' for them to make an escape to when evils threaten.

Overall, Kraay's account of the theistic multiverse is problematic in the ways I have explained. Some of the problems identified have, at their root, the assumption that God is free, not only with respect to creating or not, but also with respect to what *to* create. Given a hierarchy of ever-better universes, God is free (says Kraay) to choose to create only those that are worthy, axiologically speaking, which seems to require an objective threshold to mark off any that are not worthy. But this raises problems concerning God's freedom and the possibility of universes crossing the threshold. It is difficult to see how God can be free and, at the same time, threatened by losing unsurpassability if His 'choice' is not in accordance with propositions stating what an unsurpassable creator *must* choose or reject. The question of God's free choice with respect to creating was discussed, above, in connection with Leibniz who, like Kraay, thinks it necessary to defend such choices in order to preserve one of God's perfections. Recall that the problem is revealed by these two conditionals:

(1) If God is an unsurpassable creator, then the actual world is the only possible world.
(2) If God is perfectly free, the actual world is not the only possible world.

The antecedents of both conditionals are likely to be accepted as true by theists, but only on pain of inconsistency can both their consequents be accepted as well. The actual world cannot be both the only possible world and not the only possible world. Kraay wants to have it both ways, but that seems impossible. Given that, the best option for Kraay would be to abandon

the idea of a contingent multiverse and accept necessitarianism. That is, adopt the position Spinoza did and claim that God creates everything that He conceives, from the lowest degree of perfection upwards. The result would be a plenitudinous world with maximal axiological status, be it a multiverse or a Brunolian universe. Either way, no other world could surpass it in respect of both properties since everything that is possible would be actual. I will consider a necessitarian world as part of the next paper, and argue that God would indeed create a multiverse of the highest state of perfection. But even then there remain issues to be addressed regarding the problem of evil.

4.5 Final thoughts

The question we have tried to address is whether our world is consistent with having been created by God, an unsurpassable being. In order for it to be consistent in this sense, the world must be of a kind the creation of which does not impugn God's supposed unsurpassability. The four accounts we have investigated that deal with this question tell us what kind of world we should *expect* God to create, although it is ultimately a matter of experience as well as argument as to whether our world is of that kind.

From our investigation, we are led to believe that the actual world, if God's creation, must be the best that could be made. Adams argues for a different view, according to which a good enough world would do, as long as its inhabitants aren't too miserable overall, are happy some of the time, and are recipients of God's gracious love. I have argued that these criteria of selecting a world are inadequate to the task, for they are not narrow enough in scope to direct God's attention to a particular world for creation. Given God's perfect nature, it seems that the principle of the best is the only principle to which God could appeal when choosing a world, if He has a choice at all. It would be to place His unsurpassability on the line if He

decided to abandon that principle in favour of another that led to the creation of a lesser world than the best. Even the Biblical account we examined leads us to suppose that the world is a wondrous and majestic creation, illustrating God's immense power. In the words spoken to Job by God Himself there is no indication that the world is anything other than the best God could produce.

If the world is the best, and thereby consistent with having been produced by God, we remain unclear about its nature. According to Leibniz and Kraay, the world is a plenitude and, in Kraay's view, enjoys a higher axiological status than any rival world. If these are the criteria that decide which world is the best of all alternatives, we are still unclear as to whether it must be a multiverse as Kraay believes, or a single universe as Leibniz and Bruno believe. Either, it seems, could satisfy those criteria equally well.

There is, however, a difference between what we should expect the world to be like if created by God, and what the actual world seems like to us based on our experiences of it. Perhaps if our world was an Edenic paradise containing no gratuitous evil, and beings that led fulfilling and worthwhile lives untarnished by natural disasters and moral wickedness, perhaps experience would allow us to believe that our world is indeed the product of an unsurpassable being. But experience of such disasters and wickedness may dissuade us from holding that view.

Leibniz and Kraay, and indeed God Himself, according to His words spoken to Job, maintain that judgements about the world's character are dependent on one's point of view. We make improper judgements because we base them on our limited experience of the world. It is only from our point of view that the world is less than the best. From God's all-seeing point of

view, either the world contains no bad features at all or they are insignificant given, from that point of view, that the world is the best. The difficulty is that if God is morally concerned for His creatures, He should judge the world from our point of view as well as His. The world can be as plenitudious as God likes, and have maximal axiological value, but we limited beings might settle for a limited world having a lower axiological status if, in exchange, we were made to endure far less pain and suffering. Such a world – perhaps an Edenic world – would be more likely to be judged by ourselves as the best rather than the world of our present experience.

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Paper five

GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE HUMAN CONDITION OF SUFFERING

Introduction

In this paper, I understand the term 'God' to refer to the God of traditional Judaeo-Christian theism; the being Anselm described as that than which no greater can be conceived, and who is assumed by traditional theists to be the proper object of praise and worship. God, so conceived, has of necessity many attributes that render Him an absolutely perfect being: for example, of necessity God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, perfectly free, and the creator of all that exists. The term 'human condition' can be defined in a number of ways, but for present purposes I will define it as the condition comprising the many experiences we have which collectively determine the quality of life that each of us enjoys and/or endures. And experiences themselves are determined, in part, by the particular circumstances in which each of us exists. There are features of life common to all human beings which, in that sense, place us all in the same condition. We are all born of our parents, for example, and are mortal. But broadly speaking, since many of our experiences are unique to ourselves, there are many differences in which the human condition presents itself. My condition is different from yours, and yours from the next person, however small or great those differences might be. Thus, from the human condition point of view, there is something it is like to be me, something it is like to be you, and so on for everyone that exists.

Below, I want to investigate whether God can have adequate knowledge of what it is like for each of us to enjoy or endure the experiences we have: what it is like to be me, or you, or anyone at all. I am asking in particular, if rather narrowly, whether God can adequately know what it is like for each of us to experience pain and suffering, although they need not be the

only kinds of experience that matter. It may be important to know whether God can adequately know what it is like for us to experience pleasure and happiness as well as pain and suffering. But it is on pain and suffering I wish to focus here, for they are, among other things, central features of the problem of evil as well as effective barriers to the belief in a God who is morally concerned for our well-being, comforts us when we suffer, and immerses us in His gracious love.

At the same time, theists generally accept that God causes or allows us to experience pain and suffering, and that He appears to do little if anything to prevent such experiences. However, in mitigation, reasons have been proposed explaining why this is so. Pain, for example, or some amount of it, seems necessary for prolonging or saving lives, and suffering may be morally justified as God's punishment for sin. Or again, pain and suffering make possible certain noble goods that could not exist unless those evils did. There could be no generosity unless want and need existed, just as there could be no genuine compassion. Nor, if Leibniz is right, could we appreciate the good gifts of Providence unless we could view those gifts against a background of pain and displeasure. Even if these reasons are plausible, we should expect to find a suitable balance between the bad and the good so that, in a just world, we don't have to suffer too much in order to enjoy any good that emerges from that suffering. If anything, we should expect the good to outweigh the bad; to experience more happiness and pleasure overall than pain, suffering and misery.

For some of us, however, it is far from obvious that the balance between good and bad swings in the way we should expect. For, although pain may help prolong or save lives, it sometimes serves no such purpose, as when imminent painful death is inevitable. In similar vein, it is argued that some evils are gratuitous, and therefore exist in the complete absence of

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any emerging, outweighing good. Or even when such a good comes of pain and suffering, it is sometimes insufficient in itself to outweigh, and hence justify, those evils.

In terms of the relation between evils and emerging goods, it is useful to liken that relation to that obtaining between certain costs and benefits. A perfectly good God could appeal to the 'principle of costs and benefits' when causing or allowing evil to exist in the world. Being perfectly just, He could ensure that any costs in terms of human pain and suffering are always worth paying for the benefits that come from them. Those who believe that some evils are gratuitous would doubt that God knows of any such principle, or that, if He does, He fails to appeal to it. Of course, we limited humans are not in a strong epistemic position to *know* whether gratuitous evil exists, for there could be benefits arising from seemingly gratuitous evils that we are not immediately aware of. It may require omniscience on our part to have this knowledge.

It follows that if there is an omniscient being, that being would know what we seem unable to. It would know, in particular, whether the principle of costs and benefits was being adhered to when permitting or causing evil to exist. Since the God of traditional Judaeo-Christian theism is such a being, presumably this is an item of knowledge He would have. Indeed, being perfectly good as well as omniscient, He would ensure that the principle was adhered to, knowing that the costs in terms of human pain and suffering were worth our paying for the benefits springing from them.

But let us suppose that God lacks this kind of knowledge. In that case, for all He *does* know, He is behaving as a perfectly good being should behave in causing or allowing us sometimes to pay too high a price (in terms of pain and suffering) for the benefits ensuing – or even for

no benefits at all. Think again of patients who suffer pain when death is close at hand and there is no possibility of avoiding it. Theists would be loath to imagine their God lacking the knowledge necessary to weigh human costs against benefits, and to be the cause of suffering that has no function in making the quality of human life better. An all-knowing and all-loving God should be better informed than that. He should know precisely what it is like for each of us, from our own subjective standpoint, to experience pain and suffering, and to receive whatever benefit that experience delivers.

It is worth entertaining, at this stage, the possibility of God's being omniscient while lacking knowledge of what it is like for each of us, subjectively, to have experiences both good and bad. This kind of knowledge, one might argue, lies beyond the scope of omniscience, and is the kind we should not expect God to have. There are parallels here with other attributes of God, such as omnipotence. It is well known that some of the tasks we limited beings can accomplish lie beyond what God, an omnipotent being, can. We can commit sin, for example, and bring about our own destruction, whereas God can do neither of these. Similarly, while I can know what it is like, subjectively, for me to have the experiences I have, I should not believe it necessary that an omniscient God has the same knowledge that I have (as opposed to knowledge of His own experiences). If I cannot know what it is like for you to have your experiences, then maybe God cannot know what it is like for us, or anyone at all but Himself. If so, then all attempts to show that God must have the kind of knowledge in question are pointless, at least insofar as a defence of God's omniscience is concerned.

But not everyone agrees. There are arguments for the view that, in order to be omniscient, God must know exactly what I know, from my own subjective standpoint, in virtue of having the experiences I have. One such argument has been advanced by Linda Zagzebski (2008),

who believes that '[a]n omniscient being would have to have the deepest grasp of every object of knowledge, including the conscious states of every creature' (p. 231). She includes in omniscience what she calls the sub-property of 'omnisubjectivity' – of 'consciously grasping with perfect accuracy and completeness the first-person perspective of every conscious being' (p. 232). I would argue that this view is right, and for two reasons. First, an omniscient being must know at least whatever we limited beings know (even if He cannot do all that we can do) and we know perfectly well what it is like, subjectively, to have experiences good and bad. And second, as already noted, 'omnisubjectivity' affects God's omnibenevolence as well as omniscience. A God who failed to know what it is like for us to have experiences, good and bad, will also fail to know whether the cost in terms of human pain and suffering for the benefits ensuing is one worth paying. An omnibenevolent God would need to know that those benefits were 'good value for money'. For these reasons at least, we must try and explain how it is possible for God to know, subjectively from the inside, what it is like for us to have experiences, especially of pain and suffering.

Perhaps we could begin on a positive note. In consulting Scripture, there are several references to God's having a most intimate knowledge of us. To sample just one such reference, these are the opening lines of Psalm 139 (vv. 1-6):

> O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!
> Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up;
> thou discernest my thoughts from afar.
> Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
> And art acquainted with all my ways.
> Even before a word is on my tongue,
> lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
> Thou dost beset me behind and before,
> and layest thy hand upon me.
> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
> it is high, I cannot attain it. (RSV)

According to what is stated here, God must know what it is like for me to experience pain and suffering as well as other things, for He has searched me and knows me, and can discern my thoughts from afar. I believe that the truth of this depends on how we conceive God, ourselves as God's creatures, and the relation between us. I will be investigating three conceptions, and argue that God's having adequate knowledge of the human condition is possible only on the third. I will refer to these as the 'traditional', the 'idealist', and the 'pantheistic' conceptions respectively.

On the traditional conception, God is an incorporeal or purely spiritual being while human beings are corporeal or physical in nature – we, unlike God, have material bodies. Despite this difference, theists believe that interactions of various kinds occur between God and ourselves. If God has such intimate knowledge of us, then it would be by means of such interactions (empathetic, imaginative, spoken, even sensory) that He would acquire it. Without denying that interactions of these kinds occur between God and ourselves, I will argue that none will provide Him with the knowledge we are attempting to attribute to Him.

The idealist conception is traditionalist in many respects, the key differences are that on this conception, both God and ourselves are incorporeal, or purely spiritual beings, and that all other real existences – houses, mountains, rivers, and human bodies – are simply ideas or mental constructs in the minds of God and ourselves. This is the conception held by George Berkeley. As far as God's knowledge of our condition is concerned, idealists can seem able to account for it in a more compelling way than the traditionalist can, but their account still faces difficulties.

It is the third, pantheistic, conception that provides the account we are after. On this conception, God is no longer thought of as purely spiritual, but as a being among whose many attributes is that of corporeality. God has a physical body and comprises all finite things; He is sometimes regarded as the only possible substance, and we are modes of that substance. In this sense, God is the whole of which we and all finite things are parts. On this conception, whatever knowledge we have of ourselves – from experiencing pain and suffering to dining at the Ritz – is present in God's mind also simply in virtue of the whole-part relation between us. This is the way Spinoza conceived God and the world. The problem facing an acceptance of it is that pantheism is regarded as an alternative to traditional theism, and not just a different way of expressing it. God is omniscient, and as such must know everything knowable. If human pain and suffering are knowable, as they surely are, then it is essential that God knows what it is like for us to experience pain and suffering in order to remain omniscient. Perhaps if it is only on the pantheistic conception of God that the attribution of this knowledge to God is possible, then we should depart from the traditional conception of God and embrace the pantheistic one. Such a move is not unknown. Children who discover that their Christmas presents are delivered to their homes by an Amazon courier need to ditch their conception of Father Christmas and replace it with another. But accepting the pantheistic notion of God and the world is slightly different. This would be possible for many traditional theists only if pantheism (specifically, Spinozistic pantheism) was able to support many of the central beliefs those theists already hold. Part of my discussion of the pantheist conception will be an attempt to reconcile that view with traditional theism in the hope of making pantheism more attractive to the traditionalist than he might otherwise think, and hence more of an acceptable form of theism.

Below I will divide the rest of this paper into four parts. In the first part, I examine the traditional conception and explore five different routes the theist might follow to attribute to God knowledge of the human condition. None of the routes examined prove entirely satisfactory although the last one has some prima facie appeal. The second part covers the idealist conception which appears to offer more promise than the previous conception, but difficulties remain. In part 3 we turn to the pantheistic conception which accounts for God's having the appropriate knowledge. As noted, a task I undertake is rendering this conception as close as possible to the traditional conception so that the traditional theist might be willing to embrace it.

5.1 The traditional conception

As stated already, on this conception God is a spirit while human beings are physical (material) bodies. Some theists would insist that while human beings *have* bodies, essentially they too are spirits, able to survive the annihilation of their physical bodies. In this part I will suppose that human beings are just physical bodies, postponing a discussion of spirits to part 5.2. In any event, the traditional conception is of a duality of kinds: spirit and physical bodies (whether such bodies be sentient or, like tables, not). God, as a spirit, creates and sustains the physical world but is in some sense remote from and not identical to it. Although remote from the world, God nevertheless interacts with it and is therefore able to show, among other things, moral concern for His creatures.

Those are some of the key features of the traditional conception. I will now examine five accounts of how, on this conception, the theist could try to attribute to God knowledge of the human condition. I say 'five accounts' without suggesting that this number is exhaustive. The ones I have chosen to examine seem to me the more obvious ones to investigate further.

5.1.1 God's having knowledge of our condition by means of the imagination

An important question is whether God can know what it is like to be a physically embodied human being capable of having experiences that seem inaccessible to non-embodied beings. God's power of imagination might provide Him with such knowledge. On this, William J. Mander writes:

> If God has not *experienced* such things as sounds and tastes, might He not *imagine* what they are like? For is this not what determines our own differing capacities for sympathetic understanding, our varying abilities to imaginatively project ourselves into the lives of others, their experiences, their joys and sufferings? We find fellow feeling, for example, with the homeless by trying to imagine what it must be like to be so cold and hungry and tired. (2002, pp. 431-2)

What the imagination does is to allow us to transcend experience and create for ourselves ideas of things we have never encountered – such as golden mountains, and unicorns. But as promising as our imaginative powers might appear, they are able to work on only those ideas which experience has already supplied. And this creates problems for us imaginatively to place ourselves in another's situation. This is well illustrated by Thomas Nagel who invites us to imagine what it is like for a bat to navigate through the dark by use of bat sonar. He writes:

> Bat sonar, though clearly a form of perception, is not similar in its operation to any sense that we possess, and there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine. This appears to create difficulties for the notion of what it is like to be a bat. (1974, in Hofstadter and Dennett (eds.), 1982, p. 394)

I can imagine what it is like *for me* to be a bat, but not what it is like for a bat to be a bat. No part of my experience tells me what navigating through the dark by means of sonar is like. Nor can I have an adequate imaginative idea of what it is like to be another person or to have

their experiences. If I attempt to imagine what it was like for you to have suffered a migraine yesterday, my imaginative resources are restricted to my own past experiences. Unable to access your experiences, the best I can imagine is what it would have been like for *me* to have suffered a migraine yesterday. Mander is right in saying that we can sympathetically understand others' experiences but what we are imagining are experiences of our own. To greater or lesser effect, we place ourselves in the position of others rather than *become* them (more about this later). And the same applies to God: however great His imaginative powers surpass my own, what He imagines is *Himself* having such-and-such an experience, not *me* having it. Consequently, the imagination alone proves inadequate for God's knowing the human condition.

5.1.2 God's having knowledge of our condition by means of the Incarnation

According to Christian theism, Jesus Christ and God are co-substantial. God became physically embodied in the form of Christ when Christ existed on Earth. Prima facie, this was God's opportunity to know 'from the inside' what it is like to be a human being, just as I know 'from the inside' what it is like to be me. God would experience all of Christ's joys and sufferings along with him.

But there are problems with this idea, one of which is highlighted by Peter Drum (2010). The problem Drum notes – the so-called Nestorian problem – has to do with the alleged absurdity of regarding Jesus Christ as both man *and* God: one person yet two, as it were. This supposedly absurd idea was rejected by the Council of Chalcedon, and since then various proposals have been made to resolve what the Council considered to be absurd. One proposal considered by Drum, which is relevant to our purpose, is that in Jesus Christ there were not two *persons* but two individual consciousnesses. In essence, the proposal is that physical

persons are separated from mental subjects. Although he was one physical person, Jesus Christ was two, yet unrelated, conscious subjects. He was aware of and introspected his own consciousness while being unaware of and unable to introspect God's. And correspondingly, God was equally aware of and introspected *His* own consciousness, but not Jesus Christ's. This may explain the sense in which Jesus Christ was 'two-in-one'; but if so, God would not, after all, know 'from the inside' what it is (or was) like to be Jesus Christ – to have the experiences Christ enjoyed and endured here on Earth, for those experiences were not accessible to God's consciousness. The consequence is that God could not have the kind of knowledge we are trying to attribute to Him, even in respect of a person with whom He is co-substantial.

But even if, contrary to the above proposal, God could access and introspect Jesus Christ's consciousness and thereby know what it is like 'from the inside' to be that person (that is, a human being), that would not go far enough in providing God with the knowledge we believe He should have. For one thing, God would have relevant knowledge of only one human being, which would not be sufficient to afford Him knowledge of any other human being. As mentioned in my first paper, we each have a subjective point of view regarding our experiences, including those of pain and suffering. What causes a painful experience in me may not cause one in you. You might have congenital analgesia and feel no pain at all, or you might have a higher tolerance to it than I have. If God is to know what it is like for all of us to experience pain and suffering, and thus be equipped to weigh the costs of those experiences against personal benefits, it is not enough for such judgements to be based on a sample of one. Furthermore, human beings existed long before Jesus Christ. If God had patiently to wait until the Incarnation in order to know what human pain and suffering are like, He could not be morally justified in causing or allowing those experiences until that knowledge had been

acquired. And there has been much pain and suffering since the time of Christ. So even if Christ's existence afforded God some knowledge of the human condition, the amount of knowledge so-afforded would hardly seem adequate to the task.

5.1.3 God's having knowledge of our condition by means of testimony

Much of our knowledge is acquired through testimony – via the spoken word, books, the internet, television, etc. We know the Earth is round because we have been told. We don't need to discover it for ourselves as Magellan did when he set out in 1519. If God were able to receive testimony from us (for example, via spoken prayer) then perhaps He could acquire knowledge of our experiences without the need of any other means. He could know that I am in pain by my telling Him so. And if I am detailed enough in what I convey, God could know how severe my pain is, how troubled I am by it, how long I have had it, and so on. But is linguistic communication sufficient for God's having adequate knowledge about me and my pain experience? This is what Wittgenstein says in *Philosophical Investigations*:

> For how can I go so far as to try to use language to get between pain and its expression? (in Anscombe (transl.), 1984, §245, p. 89e)

> In what sense are my sensations *private*? Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it. In one way this is wrong, and in another nonsense. If we are using the word "to know" as it is normally used … then other people very often know when I am in pain. Yes, but all the same not with the certainty with which I know it myself! It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean – except perhaps that I *am* in pain? (*loc. cit.*, §246)

These passages make two points: (a) that it is not only me who can know I am in pain, for others can 'surmise' it too, and (b) that it is nonsense for me to say (as I might to God) that I *know* I am in pain; I just *am* in pain. Regarding (a) anyone who sees me hold my hand in

scalding water and then scream out loud will know (surmise) I am in pain. I don't need to tell them, of course not, but only in virtue of the fact that my spectators have had pain themselves and know about pain behaviour by means of their own. But suppose the spectators were immune to pain. How could they know what it is like to have pain and behave appropriately? Surely, they could not, and this applies to God, too, for He is also immune to pain (at least, He has no physical body in which to have a pain). It is therefore likely that if God saw my hand in a flame and heard me scream out loud, He would have little idea (be *unable* to surmise) what state I am in.

Alternatively, if (b) is true, then the question 'Can God know I am in pain?' is meaningless since it presupposes, mistakenly, that when I am in pain I am in possession of an item of knowledge. And according to (b) there is no such item, and hence no such item God could possess with respect to my pain. So on this understanding, it is nonsense to ask whether God could have *knowledge* that I am, or others are, in pain. But that is not the question. We want to know whether God can know, not that I am in fact in pain, but what it is like, from the inside, for me to *be* in pain. These matters are distinct, as Nagel's case shows. The bat may well not be in possession of a certain item of knowledge as it navigates through the dark by means of sonar: it just navigates. But 'what it is like' to navigate in a bat-like fashion *is* an item of knowledge the bat could have. There must be a true proposition that describes what it is like, even if the bat alone can know what that proposition is (if it can know propositions at all). So, if there is something that it is like, from the inside, for me to be in pain, I am thereby in possession of an item of knowledge. But it is not an item God could have by means of my testifying to the fact.

5.1.4 God's having knowledge of our condition by means of observing human behaviour

Can God literally observe human behaviour? Can He hear and see? According to the psalmist, He can. In Psalm 94 (RSV, vv. 9) the psalmist asks 'He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?' These rhetorical questions beg an affirmative answer. Of course, without God's having a physical body or sense organs, such an answer is doubtful. But let us imagine it is right. Suppose, then, that God hears and sees the goings on at, say, the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 and observes thousands of people writhing, making jerky movements and strange noises. Wouldn't it be just obvious to Him that these people were in states of severe pain and suffering?

Probably not. There are well-known problems associated with determining conscious states by means of behavioural analysis alone. For all God knows, what He observes people doing at the site of the earthquake is being acted (perhaps for an epic movie). Or how might God distinguish between people's behaviour at the earthquake from that at a typical rock festival? But overt behaviour is not all there is to behavioural analysis, for dispositions to behave in certain ways count as well. A person might have the virtue of fortitude, and stoically tolerate pain and suffering without manifesting any behaviour at all. Their pain and suffering may be as real as any, but by observing behaviour alone, God could not know that this person was in such a state. So at best, behavioural analysis is an unreliable means of knowing that others are in pain or suffering. More importantly, even if such analysis could be carried out successfully and reliably, nothing could be learned from it about what it is like, from the inside, for others to be in a state of pain and suffering. That is different from knowing that they are in such a state. So the behavioural route is not one that successfully solves the problem we are dealing with.

5.1.5 God's having knowledge by quasi-remembering human experiences

Knowledge of all our experiences (except of those currently occurring) is contained in and accessible through memory. Patients with advanced dementia or acute amnesia have little, if any, knowledge of their past experiences, or what it was like to have had them. But for those without such conditions, knowing that they have had an experience yesterday and what it was like for them to have had it is given in memory. The ability to remember past experiences and know what it was like to have had them relies on the existence of a causal connection between conscious states at the time of the experience and those at the later time when the experience is remembered. The inability of dementia and acute amnesia patients to remember past experiences and what it was like to have had them is explained, at least in part, by an absence of this causal connection.

It is also the existence of this causal connection between earlier and later conscious states that allows me to know of my past experiences and what it was like to have had them, and prevents me having the same knowledge about your past experiences and what it was like for you to have had them. I know through remembering the migraine I had yesterday what it was like, from the inside, to have had it. Similarly, I can know through remembering that you experienced a migraine yesterday. I can even know what it was like for you to have had that experience (because you told me or I saw you nursing your head), but only 'from the outside'. In fact, I may know, through remembering, the past experiences of any number of people. But I can know what it was like to have had experiences from the *inside* only in my own case.

So even if God could know, through remembering, that you and I experienced a migraine yesterday, He could know only from the outside what that experience was like for the two of

us. And the same would apply in all cases of knowledge through remembering: that what it is like for each and every one of us to have experienced pain and suffering (or anything else) could be known by God only from the outside.

That, at any rate, is how the 'standard account' of remembering goes, and it is the account with which we are most familiar. On that account, it seems impossible that through remembering, God could know what it is like, from the inside, for each of us to have had experiences. There is, however, a 'non-standard account' of remembering that, prima facie, creates optimism for the idea of God's having knowledge of the human condition. I have borrowed this account from the work of some recent philosophers, the topic of whose concern has been personal identity. As far as I know, they haven't touched on the question of God's knowledge, but what they have to say certainly seems relevant to it.

To offer a little background to their work, John Locke had argued that memory (along with other psychological states) constitutes personal identity. What Locke had in mind is a *principle of identity* according to which my remembering a past experience *from the inside* means that the remembered experience was mine – that in virtue of remembering it from the inside I necessarily identify myself as the person whose experience it was. A consequence of this principle is that there is no possibility of *you* remembering from the inside a past experience of mine. Any experience you do remember from the inside will be your past experience, not anyone else's. Another consequence of this principle is that God is in the same position as you, and so unable to remember from the inside a past experience of anyone but Himself.

Now, Joseph Butler (1736) raised an objection to Locke's view. Butler argued that rather than constituting personal identity, memory presupposed it, and could not, therefore, be the criterion Locke thought it was. What Butler's objection depends upon is that the principle of identity expresses a necessary truth. Derek Parfit and Sidney Shoemaker, in questioning Butler's objection, have argued that the principle is at best contingently true, for there may be cases in which it is false. In those cases, memories of past experiences do not presuppose the identity of the rememberer. It is cases such as these that are relevant to this part of our investigation.

So, what are these cases? There may be actual cases, but typically they are (in our own times) the stuff of science fiction. For example, fans of *Star Trek* will have seen Mr. Spock transfer into his mind the memories of others' experiences by placing his fingertips on their skulls. By this means, Spock comes to know what it was like *from the inside* for his subjects to have had the experiences he himself is now remembering. There is also the case of the 'divided brain' which Beebee and Dodd (2007) conceive as follows: *A*'s brain is removed from his skull, bisected, and each half is placed in the empty skulls of *B* and *C*. *A*'s body, meanwhile, has been destroyed. The result is that, without memory loss, each of *B* and *C* is psychologically continuous with *A*: each remembers *A*'s earlier life as well as *A* would, and equally share *A*'s previous desires, plans, and so on (p. 12).

The question of identity here is moot. Neither *B* nor *C* is identical with *A* for they are different persons from *A* and, for the same reason, different from (and non-identical with) each other. What matters is that both *B* and *C* remember what it was like, from the inside, for *A* to remember his past experiences. In that regard, both *B* and *C* are in the same epistemic position as Mr. Spock was. Importantly, these cases, if plausible, show that in each one the

principle of identity is false, for neither Mr. Spock nor *B* and *C* can be identified with the person or persons whose past experiences they are remembering. Both Parfit and Shoemaker refer to the memories obtained by Mr. Spock, and *B* and *C*, as 'quasi-memories' or just 'q-memories'. Parfit, for example, says:

> I am q-remembering an experience if (1) I have a belief about a past experience which seems in itself like a memory belief, (2) someone did have such an experience, and (3) my belief is dependent upon this experience in the same way (whatever that is) in which a memory of an experience is dependent upon it. (1971, cited in Beebee and Dodd, (eds.), 2007, p. 22)

If it is plausible that *B* and *C* can q-remember *from the inside* the past experiences of *A* (and Mr. Spock of his subjects), then maybe God can q-remember, say, my experience of having had a migraine yesterday, and in exactly the same way as I remember that experience. Now Shoemaker:

> If I remember a past pain from the inside – i.e., remember the pain itself, or remember having the pain, as opposed to remembering seeing someone manifest pain behaviour – then the pain must have been mine. But the fact that I *quasi*-remember a pain from the inside will be no guarantee that the pain was mine. Any quasi-memory claim to have been in pain on some past occasion … will be subject to error through misidentification. (1984, pp. 27-28)

By 'subject to … misidentification' Shoemaker means subject to the principle of identity's being false, and it certainly seems to be false in cases of q-remembering. So does this mean there is an affirmative answer to the question, 'Can God know what it is like, from the inside, for me (or anyone) to have had (or remember having had) an experience of pain and suffering?' Yes, but the answer is not entirely satisfactory, for problems lurk in the wings.

One is the problem of causal connections. Memory is a causal notion. For any act of remembering to be possible, a causal connection must exist between the awareness of an

experience occurring and the later remembering of it. We know that where such a connection is missing, remembering doesn't occur, as in the case of advanced dementia and amnesia patients. In the divided brain case, the connection is preserved in each half of *A*'s brain when bisected and transplanted into the empty skulls of *B* and *C*. Even in the case of Mr. Spock, the connection has a physical explanation, perhaps in terms of electrical memory signals passing from his subjects' brains and then, through finger contact, into the brain of Mr. Spock. There is nothing mysterious about connections of this sort. However, in the case of God's q-remembering my past experiences, it isn't at all clear what sort of connection there could be between us. I am a physical, embodied being with electrical signals travelling along nerves throughout my body to my brain (and vice versa). God, on the other hand, doesn't have a body, so there is nothing physical in nature about God that I (or my brain) could connect to. That doesn't mean there is no explanation whatsoever of this connection. Cartesians could insist a connection exists, as between physical body and incorporeal mind, even though it functions in a mysterious way. Alternatively, Humeans could explain the connection, not in any substantive sense, but in terms of a constant conjunction of states or events. Let us suppose, at any rate, that a connection of an appropriate kind exists, even if we cannot yet explain it. To that extent, therefore, q-remembering remains a possibility. But even so it faces yet more problems.

To see what the next one is we need to revisit the principle of identity. Let us agree with Parfit and Shoemaker that the principle of identity is false in cases of q-remembering. To our advantage, the possibility of q-remembering affords an explanation of how God can know what it is like, from the inside, for you or me to remember our past experiences of pain and suffering, and without identifying Himself as the one whose past experiences are being q-remembered. Now, here is Parfit again:

If I knew that I could q-remember other people's experiences, these beliefs would come to me in a more guarded form: for example, "Someone … did that." I might have to work out who it was. (1971, in Beebee and Dodd, (eds.), 2007, p. 23)

The key phrase is 'I might have to work out who it was [that I am q-remembering]'. Some working out is required because of the possibility of 'error through misidentification' as Shoemaker has put it, or the falsity of the principle of identity when q-remembering is involved. Suppose that I was the only created person and God wanted to q-remember what it was like 'from the inside' for me to have suffered a migraine yesterday. He wouldn't have much working out to do, for if the q-memory wasn't God's, then it could be only mine. But I am not the only created person. There are billions of persons, not just me, and many of whom have had past experiences of pain and suffering. If God is to q-remember the past experiences of all those persons, and if the principle of identity is false in cases of q-remembering, how could God know whose past experiences He is q-remembering are whose? A God who is unable to identify individual sufferers would be unable to treat them with loving compassion, or distinguish between those in desperate need of His comfort from those who are not. He would be like the CEO of the Ford Motor Company who knows that thousands of cars need to be recalled for a major manufacturing fault to be corrected, but is likely to misidentify every one.

These, then, are two problems associated with God's q-remembering our past experiences: the causal connection problem and the misidentification problem. I now want to discuss the problems of memory content versus experiential content, and concepts, and how these bear on God's knowledge of our condition. We have been trying to show that by means of q-remembering what humans remember of their past experiences, God is able to know what it is like, from the inside, to have had those experiences, including those of pain and suffering. By way of putting the problem in a real-life context, I want to begin with the following case:

Susan Pollack was born in Felsogod, Hungary, in 1930 to a loving Jewish family. Some years later, as the Nazi's final solution to the Jewish question advanced, Hungarian Jews were forced out of their homes and made to congregate in ghettos where they could easily be rounded up if necessary. Eventually, Susan and her family found themselves being transported to Auschwitz concentration camp. Unlike members of her family, Susan survived the incarceration and now lives in London. For *The Guardian* newspaper (26 January, 2015) Susan was asked to note some of what she remembers of her Auschwitz experience, and this is part of what she wrote:

> From the moment I arrived in Auschwitz with my mother and brother in May 1944, the terror of it just invaded my whole being. My mother was immediately taken away and I later learned that she had been gassed. I only recently discovered that my father had been there too…
>
> The process of losing any kind of hope was a very gradual one. We were transported in cattle wagons in which many babies and children suffocated, in what it turned out was the last transport of Hungarians. We had no water, no food, there was no hygiene. That diminished our hope and increased the feeling of being trapped.

The problem of content for q-remembering is that there is an obvious difference between contents of the memory of an experience and of the experience itself as lived through. In particular, there are features present in the experience that are absent from the memory of it, some of them phenomenological in character. To take a simple example: the content of a child's experience of falling off a bicycle in the company of his friends includes feelings of humiliation and pain. Although the child may later remember *having been* humiliated and in pain during that experience, clearly, neither the humiliation nor the pain are features of his memory in the same way as they were in the experience itself. Roughly speaking, we might say that memory contains the facts pertaining to the experience, but not the feelings (memory itself may evoke certain feelings, of course, which would be accessible to a q-rememberer

since they are part of that memory content; but such feelings may, in terms of intensity, vividness, and effect on the human spirit, be different from feelings associated with the original experience).

Now, what Susan writes for *The Guardian* is the content of her memory regarding her Auschwitz experiences: that her mother had been forcibly snatched from her, that people suffocated in transit to the camp, that there was a lack of hygiene, and so on. Her memory recalls the facts relating to her experiences, but not feelings that were, in part, phenomenological features of them; features that are not part of her memory content. So even if God were able to q-remember what Susan now remembers, He would miss out on those key absent features of Susan's experiences she is now remembering and testifying to. Of course, Susan might have described in greater detail what her feelings were, so that her testimony painted a richer picture of the time she spent in Auschwitz. But that would be only to add more facts to her testimony. God needs more than mere facts if He is to know what it was like for Susan to undergo the experiences she remembers. And, in any case, feelings are not learned by description but by being felt. If q-remembering another's past experiences is no more than learning facts, then q-remembering is not a means of learning precisely what it was like *from the inside* to have those experiences.

God's q-remembering our past experiences faces yet another difficulty concerning concepts. If, via q-remembering, God's acquiring knowledge of our past experiences consists in learning facts (which it surely does, even if *not only* facts) these could be meaningful to God, or any other q-rememberer, only on condition that relevant concepts had been acquired beforehand. Concepts are the building blocks of our knowledge and understanding, and presumably the same is true for God. In asking whether God knows what it is like to be me,

William Mander (2002) acknowledges that the problem we face in providing an affirmative answer is one of concept acquisition on God's part. God would need to have concepts that we obtain from experiences of the world, associated with being frail physically embodied beings with limited capacities. If God shared some of our characteristics, such as physical embodiment, ascribing relevant concepts to Him might be less problematic. But according to traditional Judaeo-Christian theism, God has no body and, unlike ourselves, is unlimited. After exploring various routes towards attributing relevant concepts to God, Mander concludes that 'the lesson we learn is that it is only an insuperable problem that God should know what it is like to be me if we think of God as a being *ontologically separate* from us' (2002, p. 442).

Returning to Susan Pollack's case, in order to grasp just the *meaning*, let alone the full richness and depth, of her related experiences, we need already to possess the concepts needed for the task. Susan relates to us a profound sense of loss, of suffocation, extreme hunger and thirst, being trapped, and discovering the death of her beloved parents at the hands of the Nazis. It was Susan's past experiences that enabled her to acquire the concepts necessary for *her* fully to understand the meaning of her memories. Many of us, though, have not had the relevant sort of experiences, and therefore not the relevant sort of concepts, that Susan has. Of course, we have concepts that allow us to have a *sense* or an *approximation* of what she relates to us. Many of us have travelled on a crowded train and have suffered hunger and thirst, and so understand what it means to be in a crowded situation and to be in need of food and drink. But, most likely, the concepts we acquire in these situations hardly equal those acquired by Susan. Our experiences of crowded trains tend not to end in tragedy as Susan's did, and our feelings of hunger and thirst are mild in comparison with hers, and are far more easily satisfied. But when we turn to God, it is hard to see how He could have such

concepts at all. God has never travelled on a train, let alone a crowded one, or experienced hunger and thirst. He has no mother and father, let alone a mother and father snatched from Him and mercilessly put to death. The lack of appropriate concepts means that if, through God's q-remembering Susan's past experiences as she relates them, He can know anything at all about what it was like from the inside for Susan to have endured those experiences, it could not be deemed adequate knowledge at all.

The doubts we have raised about God's inability to possess the concepts necessary for q-remembering our past experiences in order to know what it is like for us (including Susan) to suffer, presupposes the notion of 'concept empiricism' – that the possession of certain concepts depends entirely on some past relevant experience. However, Yujin Nagasawa (2008) takes issue with this. One of his concerns is to defend God's omniscience (and existence) against objections based on this notion. God's omniscience may be defined as 'for all *p*, if *p*, then God knows that *p*' and is what Nagasawa terms 'omniscience *simpliciter*' (2008, draft, §1.4, pp. 21-22). It is objected that in order to possess omniscience *simpliciter*, God must fully understand among other things what *fear* is. To have this understanding, God must (according to concept empiricism) experience fear. But God is omnipotent and could never be in a situation that causes Him fear. Hence, God cannot fully understand what fear is, and without that understanding He cannot be omniscient *simpliciter*. And if so, then God cannot exist. Nagasawa, as I understand him, has negative and positive aims as far as this is concerned. The negative aim is to argue against proposals to the effect that experience is necessary for God fully to understand fear, three of which are offered by, for example, Torin Alter (2002). The positive aim is to advocate 'concept possession' as opposed to 'concept empiricism' and to argue that God can possess the concept of, for example, *fear*, in the absence of any relevant experience. The argument for this is based on the idea that God's

knowledge is not discursive: He has no need to infer an item of knowledge from other things that He knows. What God knows about fear (among other things) could be known intuitively; that is, known without any requirement to experience fear or find Himself in a fearful situation (Nagasawa, (2008), draft, §4.4, p. 136).

Nagasawa falls short of claiming that his account of God's intuitive knowledge or understanding is true. The account is, he says, just speculative, although he sees no reason to reject it. However, even if it is true, the concepts God intuits, as of fear for instance, would aid Him in understanding only what it would be like for *Him* to be in a fearful situation, and not what it would be like for you or me. This isn't necessarily a problem for Nagasawa for his concern is not ours but rather to defend God's omniscience by showing that He doesn't lack concepts, including that of fear, that seemingly are acquired only via experience. But this may not give God what He needs to know about the human condition. After all, my concept of being thirsty and hungry may be very different from that of an Auschwitz survivor, and God's might be very different again.

In summary, the q-remembering route, although seemingly promising at first, has its difficulties. It is questionable whether q-remembering our past experiences of pain and suffering allows the q-rememberer to grasp the richness and depth of our experiences; whether it is possible for q-rememberers to identify the one whose experiences are being q-remembered; and questionable moreover whether God has the necessary concepts to have adequate understanding of our experiences.

It is time to move on to the next conception which claims that God and ourselves are not ontologically distinct.

5.2 The idealist conception

Below, the focus will be on the form of idealism argued for and defended by George Berkeley. His idealism is conspicuously theistic in the traditional sense. Some forms, or relatives, of idealism are not essentially theistic at all, just as phenomenalism isn't, although they share some of the ideas that Berkeley incorporated in his own metaphysical system. I will not be concerned with any of these forms. Berkeleian idealism takes the radical step of banishing from the world all matter or material substance, leaving in its place only spirits (minds) and their ideas. Since human beings (as well as other kinds of being, such as angels and devils) are spirits, this removes the problem of God and ourselves being ontologically dissimilar, as discussed in connection with the traditional conception. In particular, it removes the difficulty of explaining how interaction is possible between substances (minds and physical bodies) of different natures. There is the question of how substances of similar nature – in particular spiritual substances – can interact, but this may be understood analogically. We know how the interaction between material substances may be explained – how one billiard ball can cause motion in another upon impact – and there may be a corresponding account to be given for the interaction of spiritual substances, even if we are less familiar with its nature. However that relation might be conceived, idealism certainly incorporates it. One reason for discussing idealism is that Berkeley explicitly gives an affirmative answer to the question of whether God has knowledge of the human condition, and in particular of human pain and suffering. It is unfortunate that the answer Berkeley gives is merely asserted and, therefore, without supporting argument. My task, below, will be to discover in Berkeley's writings what support, if any, he could have provided. I believe support is present, even though some spade-work is needed to reveal it. The conclusion for which I will argue is that idealism provides *an* account of God's knowledge of the human condition, but questions remain over the adequacy of that knowledge, and, as in the case of

the traditional conception, the possibility of misidentification is ever present. First, I offer a brief account of Berkeley's metaphysical system, and the attraction it holds for those wishing to defend traditional theism.

For the most part, the system is set out and defended by Berkeley in two of his works: *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* and the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1710 and 1713, respectively, in Warnock, 1985). Berkeley claimed that his system of spirits (minds) and their ideas and the absence of material substance was positively theistic, and one which effectively eliminates religions, scepticism, and atheism. John Locke had argued that the world contains material objects that cause our sensory (or perceptual) ideas. According to him, material objects have powers to cause in us ideas that both represent and resemble those objects. In his view, what we are immediately aware of in perception are ideas. We have only a mediate awareness of their causes, which we possess via inference from what we are immediately aware of. But since we cannot step beyond our ideas to confirm that this inference is justified, scepticism arises over whether there are material objects at all. And it arises, too, over God's existence. On Locke's materialist system, God is not a necessary feature of reality as we understand it. Our sensory understanding of the world would be just the same regardless of whether we suppose the existence of God. The world is simply a materialistic machine operating like clockwork under its own powers. For all we know, God created the world and subsequently left it to its own devices, or it came into existence completely without the aid of a creator at all.

Berkeley had none of that. The very notion of material substance, he argued, is incoherent. All we require are ideas and something that causes them. That cause must be God. Objects like trees, houses, mountains and human bodies, that Locke supposes to be composed of

matter, are (for Berkeley) nothing but ideas. God has archetypal ideas of objects in His mind which, when He so wills, cause in us ectypal ideas of the same objects. Whereas we can be sceptical about material objects being the cause of our ideas of sense, there is no room for scepticism with regard to ideas themselves. Human beings as perceivers of those ideas are not material, but purely spiritual beings just as God is. And it is God that plays a central role in Berkeley's idealism. On this, James Spiegel writes:

> [Berkeley conceived his system] as a way of inspiring his readers with a "pious sense of the presence of God" and thus as a bulwark against atheism, agnosticism, and religious skepticism … the strength of his case for theism hangs especially on the plausibility of his idealist thesis. This is because of the diverse ways that idealism enhances a theistic perspective, such as by enhancing our understanding of divine action in the world, offering a more parsimonious ontology, and providing a more compelling perspective on the laws of nature and the nature of miracles, vis-à-vis nonidealist brands of theism. In short … an idealist perspective offers a number of conceptual benefits that enrich a theistic worldview. (Cowan and Spiegel (eds.), 2016, p. 11)

Offering conceptual benefits that enrich a theistic worldview is certainly Berkeley's wish. The full title of his *Principles* is *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge wherein the Chief Causes of Error and Difficulty in the Sciences, with the Grounds of Scepticism, Atheism, and Irreligion, are inquired into.* And in defence of God's adequately knowing as much about us as we know of ourselves, Berkeley affirms that God is fully aware of what it is for His creatures to suffer. This affirmation is given in *The Third Dialogue* as follows:

> HYLAS: And now I warrant you think you have made the point very clear, little suspecting that what you advance leads directly to a contradiction. Is it not an absurdity to imagine any imperfection in God?
>
> PHILONOUS: Without doubt.

HYLAS: To suffer pain is an imperfection.

PHILONOUS: It is.

HYLAS: Are we not sometimes affected with pain and uneasiness by some other being?

PHILONOUS: We are.

HYLAS: And have you not said that being is a spirit, and is not that spirit God?

PHILONOUS: I grant it.

HYLAS: But you have asserted, that whatever ideas we perceive from without, are in the mind that affects us. The ideas therefore of pain and uneasiness are in God; or in other words, God suffers pain: that is to say, there is an imperfection in the Divine Nature, which you acknowledged was absurd. So you are caught in a plain contradiction.

PHILONOUS: That God knows or understands all things, and that He knows among other things what pain is, even every sort of painful sensation, and what it is for His creatures to suffer pain, I make no question. But that God, though He knows and sometimes causes painful sensations in us, can Himself suffer pain, I positively deny … Such a being as this can suffer nothing, nor be affected by any painful sensation, or indeed any sensation at all. (in Ayers, 1980, p. 190)

If true, these claims appear to confirm that God has the kind of knowledge we want to attribute to Him. But, as noted, Berkeley gives no argument, or at least no explicitly direct argument, in support of them. Indeed, immediately following this part of the dialogue, Berkeley moves on to a different matter altogether. Unless arguments can be unearthed elsewhere in Berkeley's writings, the assertions he makes in the dialogue should be ignored. Fortunately, I think an argument can be unearthed, although, as noted, we need to do some digging around to discover it. Let us first be clear about the claims Berkeley is making in *The Third Dialogue*. There appear to be three of them:

(a) Whatever God knows about pain does not imply imperfection in Him,

(b) God knows what pain is, even every sort of painful sensation, and

(c) God knows what it is for His creatures to suffer pain.

Regarding Berkeley's first claim, (a), he has to address the problem Hylas raises about ideas of pain being in us *and* in God. Just as our (ectypal) idea of a tree is caused in us by God who has an (archetypal) idea of the tree, our idea of pain and uneasiness (or 'suffering') is caused in the same way. But, Hylas remarks, 'The ideas therefore of pain and uneasiness are in God; or in other words, God suffers pain: that is to say, there is an imperfection in the Divine Nature'. Wanting to avoid attributing imperfection to God, Berkeley says that it is the uneasiness, or suffering, of pain that implies imperfection, not the idea of pain itself. God has the idea but does not suffer because of it: He feels no uneasiness. In my earlier paper on the evidential problem of evil (paper one) I noted the distinction between the idea of neat pain and the suffering of pain. Hick referred to this distinction in terms of pain sensations and pain experiences. Those having an idea of neat pain (a pain sensation) don't suffer pain in the way those having pain experiences do (Hick, 1985). In this sense, the idea of neat pain is as innocuous as the idea of redness. Berkeley is, in effect, drawing the same distinction in claiming that God knows every pain sensation but does not *suffer* pain. Pain sensations (ideas of 'neat' pain in God's mind) being no less innocuous than ideas of redness, do not imply that God is imperfect. Only if God *suffered* pain, just as we do, would imperfection be implied.

According to (b), God knows every kind of painful sensation, or all possible ideas of 'neat' pain. As we are told, our ideas are caused in us by God, but how are God's ideas caused in Him in the first place? His ideas are not sensory like ours, so they must be the product of His imagination. Thus, God has imaginative pain, but is this 'genuine' pain as we know it – pain worthy of the name? Imagining is a process of synthesis, putting together old ideas to form new ideas. Some things that are synthesised are genuine, and others aren't. Synthesised iron

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oxide is as real as that found on my old car, but synthesised cream isn't real in the same sense. Is God's pain more like synthesised iron oxide or synthesised cream? It is difficult to see how that question could be answered. In order to approach the question, we would need to compare the two and then decide. But we are in no position to enter into God's imagination and make such a comparison. Nor is God any better off. He could compare His idea of pain only with His idea of pain, which wouldn't provide Him with a suitable answer.

The third claim, (c), is that God knows what it is for His creatures to suffer pain. Berkeley isn't explicit about how God could have this knowledge, but from what he says, there are two possibilities. Either there is an epistemic connection between God's knowing (imagining) every sort of painful sensation and *thereby* knowing what it is like for His creatures to suffer pain. Or it could be that God knows the latter independently of anything else He knows. If Berkeley means the latter, he offers us no reason to accept (c) other than that it is a mystery how God could have such an independent item of knowledge. So we are left with the first alternative which, *prima facie*, has more merit. If I can imagine the pain I would feel having a tooth extracted without anaesthetic, perhaps I am far along the road towards knowing what pain would be like for you under the same circumstances.

There is, however, a problem with this proposal. Peacocke (1985, in Foster and Robinson, (eds.), 1988, pp. 19-35) argues that in imagining x one places oneself in a phenomenologically distinctive state with respect to x. First, Peacocke presents 'a plausible General Hypothesis' of imagining, whereby 'to imagine something is always at least to imagine, from the inside, being in some conscious state' (p. 21). This contributes towards a further principle which unites acts of imagining with a first-person perspective of thinking of oneself. He writes:

> It seems that for each person, his imaginings always in a sense involve imagining something about himself … You may imagine what it is like for someone who sits in the front row watching you give a lecture. Here you imagine something about yourself in the sense that you yourself are seen from the point of view imagined … The sense in which your imaginings always involve yourself is rather this: imagining always involves imagining from the inside a certain (type of) viewpoint, and someone with that viewpoint could, in the imagined world, knowledgeably judge '*I'm* thus-and-so', where the thus-and-so gives details of the viewpoint. (1988, p.21)

On my understanding of this, to imagine an object relates the imaginer to that object in a way that precludes the imaginer relating to it from another's point of view, or being in another's state of consciousness. For Peacocke, this is a conceptual truth entailed by the General Hypothesis and the idea that for me as an imaginer, the belief that I am *not* the person in that conscious state is epistemically impossible.

Now, in Berkeley's view, my being in a conscious state of suffering pain is a result of God's causing me to be in that conscious state, my conscious state (or 'idea') being the ectype of God's archetype. For God to imagine what it is like from the inside for me to be in that state would be, according to Peacocke, impossible, for all God would be able to imagine is what being in my conscious state is like *for Him*, not me. And this is not what Berkeley wants. He wants God to know what being in that conscious state is like *for me*, not Him. But if Peacocke's principles hold true, such a thing is beyond the bounds of possibility.

Perhaps we can approach the problem of God's knowledge from a different angle. When God imagines (has the archetypal idea of), say, a tree, and causes me to have (an ectype of) that idea, I am presumably in exactly the same epistemic state as God with respect to the tree because our ideas are supposedly similar. My being in that state with respect to the tree depends on a flow of ideas from God to me, or a chain of causes originating in God's mind

and terminating in mine. Putting this in reverse, for God to know what it is like for me to suffer pain depends on a flow of ideas from me to God. This time, where the causal chain originates in me and terminates in God, we should both be in exactly the same epistemic state with respect to my suffering pain. Apart from the change in direction causes have taken, the only difference would be that *my* idea (of suffering pain) would be the archetype, and God's the ectype.

This seems a straightforward explanation of how, on Berkeley's principles, God may come to know what it is for His creatures to suffer pain. For, just as it is necessary and sufficient for us to perceive a tree that God causes the idea in our minds, so it would be necessary and sufficient for God to know what it is for His creatures to suffer pain that they cause the relevant idea in His mind. If, in the above dialogue, Hylas had pressed Philonous for an explanation of how God may acquire His knowledge, this is an explanation Philonous (Berkeley) could have offered. And he might well have done were it not for his refusal to accept the doctrine of occasionalism as held by Malebranche. According to Malebranche, my act of will to move, say, my leg, does nothing *directly* to cause my leg to move, as though my mind acted on my body. Rather my act of will is directed to God's mind which, in response, causes my leg to move for me. Here, there is a flow of ideas from me to God of the kind Berkeley needs. But he gives two reasons why he finds occasionalism not acceptable. First, he thought that his metaphysical system of minds and ideas stood in no need of such a hypothesis. One reason Malebranche held it, was because he believed it solved the mind-body interaction problem that so beset the Cartesians. On Berkeley's system that problem doesn't arise because, apart from ideas, there are only minds (spirits), and, therefore, no material bodies for there to be an interaction between. The second reason is that finite minds can create their own ideas, as in imagining and willing, and can create an (imaginary or

willed) idea of a leg moving without any need to implicate God. In *Philosophical Commentaries*, for instance, Berkeley writes: 'We move our Legs our selves. 'tis we that will their movement. Herein I differ from Malebranch [sic].' (1707-1708, *Notebook A*, in Ayers, 1980, p. 304)

What must Berkeley mean by 'We move our Legs our selves'? On his principles, human legs no less than trees, houses, and mountains, are ideas, not parts of material human bodies. So when my leg moves I have the idea of it moving, which must be caused by me. Likewise, if I have the idea of *your* leg moving, either you are the cause of my idea or I am. However, that you or I should be the cause of my idea is inconsistent with Berkeley's view of God's pervasive activity in the world. As Berkeley says:

> … whereas some one finite and narrow assemblage of ideas denotes a particular human mind, whithersoever we direct our view, we do at all times and in all places perceive manifest tokens of the divinity: everything we see, hear, feel, or any wise perceive by sense, being a sign or effect of the Power of God; as is our perception of those very motions, which are produced by men. (1710, I, §148, in Ayers, 1980, p. 124)

And again:

> For it is evident that in affecting other persons, the will of man hath no other object, than barely the motion of the limbs of his body; but that such a motion should be attended by, or excite any idea in the mind of another, depends wholly on the will of the Creator. He alone it is who *upholding all things by the Word of his Power*, maintains that intercourse between spirits, whereby they are able to perceive the existence of each other. (*op. cit.,* §147, pp. 123-124)

Rather than supressing God's causal activity in the production of our ideas, as was Berkeley's intention in rejecting occasionalism, these passages only emphasise it. For if you or I were the causes of our ideas, especially our sensory ideas, there would be no need to involve God

in their production at all, and that is the very thing Berkeley wants to avoid. So the conclusion to be drawn is that Berkeley is much closer to occasionalism than he admits. And there is further support for this conclusion. In the *Tractatus*, section 6.374, Wittgenstein remarks that were our desires to be granted, only fate would account for the fact since there is no logical connection between what we will and the world. (1922, in Ogden, (transl.), 2005, p. 181)

With this remark and Berkeley in mind, Taylor (in Foster and Robinson, (eds.)) writes:

> Substitute 'God' for 'fate' and this gives an exact description of the situation of human beings in Berkeley's metaphysical system. That system allows no role whatever for human agency, i.e., the production by human beings of changes in the external world. The nearest human beings can approach to acting is by exercising their imaginations and by wanting things to happen; but what actually makes anything happen is not the exercise of any finite will but always an act of the Divine will. To adapt Davidson's dictum 'All we ever do is move our wills: the rest is up to God'. (1988, p. 211)

This is Berkeley's preferred position, and following Taylor's lead, if we substitute 'Malebranche' for 'Berkeley' we have as close an account to occasionalism as we might wish to meet. At any rate, a preference for, or commitment to, this account means that Berkeley would likely endorse this proposition:

(P) On occasions when human being *H* wills *x* (for example, that a leg moves) that act of will causes an idea in God's mind to which He responds by causing the appropriate idea (of a leg moving) in *H*.

If (P) is true, then a flow of our ideas to God is clearly implied. Of course, (P) mentions only ideas in the form of acts of will, but if one kind of idea flows from us to God then there is no reason why other kinds should not, such as ideas of human pain and suffering. Hence on

Berkeley's principles we see progress towards the possibility of attributing to God knowledge of the human condition. However, progress is limited because we are left with two difficulties to overcome.

The first difficulty concerns the proposed similarity between archetypal and ectypal ideas. Berkeley's belief is that when we perceive, say, a tree, our idea is exactly similar to God's idea because only then would we be in the same epistemic position as God with respect to the tree. However, there is room for doubt that this relation of similarity obtains, and it is a doubt Berkeley raised himself, not with his own view, but in connection with Locke's theory of perception.

Locke had argued for the existence of mind-independent physical objects that cause in us perceptual ideas that both represent and resemble those objects. Berkeley's objection to this argument was that since we can know only our ideas and cannot step beyond them to gain knowledge of their cause, we are in no position to claim that the two resemble one another. The very same objection can now be raised against Berkeley himself. In the case of pain and suffering, we know only our ideas of these and cannot step beyond them to gain knowledge of their effects – that is, ideas caused by us in God's mind. Hence we are in no position to claim that the two ideas resemble one another. For all we can know, therefore, our ideas of pain and suffering might be different from ideas of these that we cause in God. We may go so far as to say that God has ideas of what it is like for us to experience pain and suffering, but not so far as to say that His ideas are true to their cause. Hence, we cannot safely affirm that God's knowledge of our condition is adequate.

The second difficulty once again concerns misidentification, but it is even more of a difficulty for Berkeley than it was for the traditional theist when dealing with q-remembering. Recall that, in Parfit's words, in order for a q-rememberer to know whose memories were being q-remembered, some 'working out' was necessary. But we may not rule out entirely the possibility that such working out (on God's part) could be successful. In Berkeley's case, where there exist only spirits (minds) and their ideas, the difficulty is much more acute. The reason for this is that, for Berkeley at least, spirits (unlike material bodies) are difficult if not impossible to individuate and identify. So while God may have ideas (adequate or not) of what it is like for you and me to suffer a migraine and a toothache respectively, there is no obvious way He could discern which of us was suffering what. In a word, God would seem to be in no position to tell one human being (or spirit) from another.

Why so? Berkeley is confident enough in telling us that each human being is a spirit, yet he finds himself unable to tell us what a spirit is like, or like enough, to be identifiable. This inability has nothing to do with Berkeley's having limited human faculties, as though the searchlight of his understanding lacked the power to penetrate beneath his ideas to illuminate the spirit in which they inhere and by which they are supported. Not even with God's unlimited faculties would one be better placed to know more than Berkeley knows. As Berkeley says, 'to expect that by any multiplication or enlargement of our faculties, we may be enabled to know a spirit as we do a triangle, seems as absurd as if we should hope to *see a sound'* (1710, in Ayers, 1980, p. 122). The absurdity in expecting to know a spirit is explained by the fact (as Berkeley sees it) that to know anything is to have an idea of it; but there can be no idea of a spirit, for a spirit is what supports ideas and that in which they inhere. Ignorance of a spirit is, therefore, a state in which all minds, regardless of their

power, must remain, for seeking knowledge of spirit is, effectively, seeking knowledge of the unknowable.

These problems have a negative effect on an idealist answer to our question. We reached the point at which our ideas of pain and suffering existing in God's mind provide an explanation on Berkeley's principles, but those same principles cast doubt on the adequacy of the ideas we convey to God, and also on God's ability to identify those of us experiencing pain and suffering. In turn, this inability (if accepted) casts doubt on the possibility of God's showing compassion and support for those in need. If He can't identify the ones in need, then His compassion and support cannot be forthcoming. In this sense, God would be like a motor mechanic who knows that a vehicle has a fault, but can have no idea how to identify it. It is time to leave idealism and move on.

5.3 God's knowledge of the human condition on a pantheist conception of reality

There are several forms of pantheism and, in this part, the form I will focus on will be Spinoza's. Spinoza is well known for giving detailed arguments for his form of pantheism, and equally detailed arguments for God's existence and of God's nature as he saw it. So when I speak of pantheism in this part, I mean, in particular, 'Spinozistic pantheism'.

Now, according to the two previously-discussed conceptions, such knowledge that God might have of the human condition has been explained in terms of 'indirect acquaintance'. Our knowledge of the human condition, by contrast, is explained in terms of 'direct acquaintance' since it is knowledge given to us immediately through our own experiences. On the above conceptions, God's knowledge (if He has it) is mediate while ours is *im*mediate. In a sense, our knowledge is 'first-hand' and God's, 'second-hand', obtained by 'tapping into' human

states of consciousness. None of this is true according to pantheism because human conscious states are concurrently in God directly and immediately. Because of this, God has the same knowledge of our condition as we ourselves have and, moreover, is perfectly able to identify us as individuals for we are a part ('mode') of Him, enabling Him to know whose pain and suffering is whose and where (analogously, I know the pain is in my foot because my foot is part of me). Given that, our quest to attribute this kind of knowledge to God would seem to have reached a satisfactory conclusion. Nevertheless, a problem lurks in the wings again. Many advocates of, and commentators on, 'Spinozistic pantheism' explicitly deny that the term is another name for traditional theism, but tend to affirm the position as an alternative to it, although an alternative also to atheism. Michael Levine writes:

> Theism is the belief in a "personal" God which is in some sense separate from (i.e. transcends) the world … Where pantheism is considered an *alternative* to theism and atheism, rather than compatible with either, it involves a denial of at least one, and possibly both, central theistic claims. (2014, p. 2)

If pantheism is merely an alternative to, but not identical with (or incapable of supporting certain key aspects of), traditional theism, then the promise it holds for God's knowledge of the human condition is not worth our pursuing, for our quest is to see whether such knowledge is possible only on a traditionalist understanding of God, who is among other things both personal and transcendent, as Levine states. In order that we should pursue pantheism further, therefore, there must be hope that pantheism and traditional theism are not to be viewed as alternatives but as positions that are compatible, or much closer together than might be thought. Levine has made it clear that in order for this hope to be fulfilled, it must be shown that the God of pantheism (or of Spinoza in our case) has the properties of being a person, and also of having an existence independent of whatever else exists – that He is a God that transcends the universe. These may be minimal requirements, of course, but I will

argue that the God of Spinoza may indeed have these properties. In which case there is reason to expect that (Spinozistic) pantheism and traditional theism are compatible, at least insofar as those two key properties are concerned.

I will proceed as follows: first, I will offer a brief outline of Spinoza's metaphysical system followed, second, by Spinoza's account of how God's knowledge of the human condition is possible. Third, I will discuss issues concerning the compatibility or otherwise of pantheism and traditional theism. I then argue, fourthly, for the personhood and transcendence of Spinoza's God. And before taking stock, I will briefly consider the question of whether the traditionalist, or indeed anyone, could accept Spinozistic pantheism as their personal religion.

5.3.1 A brief outline of Spinoza's metaphysical system

Spinoza's metaphysical system is set out chiefly in Part 1 of his *Ethics* (in Elwes, (transl.), 1955). A key feature of this system is that human beings are not substances but modes of the one substance, which Spinoza refers to as God (or 'Nature'). God has infinitely many attributes, and modes are expressions of and conceived under God's two attributes of thought and extension. There are not two systems in the world, of minds and bodies, as Descartes believed, but a single system in which minds and bodies are two aspects of the same thing. Although God has infinitely many attributes, only the two we have mentioned are known to us. The following statements from the *Ethics* Part 1 are an effective summary of the system:

1. 'Not only does an infinite number of things flow forth from the divine nature, they comprise 'all things which can fall within the sphere of infinite intellect' (Part 1, Proposition XVI, *Note*, in Elwes, 1955, p. 59), such that there is never anything possible that at some time does not exist. And '…from God's supreme power, or infinite nature, an infinite number of

things … have necessarily flowed forth in an infinite number of ways, or always follow from the same necessity; in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows ... that its three interior angles are equal to two right angles'. (Proposition XVII, *op. cit.,* pp. 60-61).

2. 'God is the indwelling [immanent] and not the transient cause of all things.' (Proposition XVIII, *op. cit.,* p. 62)

3. '[A]ll things are conditioned to exist and operate in a particular manner by the necessity of the divine nature.' (Proposition XXIX, *op. cit.,* p. 68)

4. Spinoza identifies God with nature. God is conceived as *natura naturans* and nature as *natura naturata*. That is, God is the active power that conserves nature in existence, and nature is that to which the power is applied. (Proposition XXIX, *op. cit.,* p. 68)

5. 'Things could not have been brought into being by God in any manner or in any order different from that which has in fact obtained.' (Proposition XXXIII *op. cit.,* p. 70)

6. 'Things have been brought into being by God in the highest perfection, inasmuch as they have necessarily followed from a most perfect nature.' (Proposition XXXIII, *Note* II, *op. cit.,* p. 71)

These passages reveal some of the key features of Spinozistic pantheism to which we will need to refer later. They include, notably, that nothing in the world is contingent because everything that exists, and the behaviour of everything, is necessary. Also, God is immanent to the world, not remote from it. Everything God conceives exists, and is as perfect as it could

be since it follows from an absolutely perfect nature. And finally, God is identified with nature, both as the power that produces and conserves it, and that to which that power is applied.

5.3.2 God's knowledge of the human condition

This is what Spinoza says in *Ethics* concerning God's knowledge of ourselves, with reference to the human mind:

> [T]he human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God; thus when we say, that when the human mind perceives this or that, we make the assertion, that God has this or that idea, not in so far as He is infinite, but in so far as He is displayed through the nature of the human mind, or in so far as He constitutes the essence of the human mind. (Part II, Proposition XI, Corollary, in Elwes, 1955, p. 91)

And also,

> Whatsoever comes to pass in the object of any idea [in the human body], the knowledge thereof is necessarily in God … in so far as he is considered as affected by the idea of the said object, that is, in so far as he constitutes the mind of anything. Therefore, whatsoever takes place in the object constituting the idea of the human mind [in the human body], the knowledge thereof is necessarily in God, in so far as he constitutes the nature of the human mind. (Proposition XII, Proof, *loc. cit.*)

This is how Timothy Sprigge (2008) interprets these passages: 'the sensations of different sounds and colours are a summary way in which [God] notes that certain gross physical processes are going on within me, while feelings of pleasure and pain (and all emotions derivative from these) will simultaneously be used by Him to give an overall characterization of an increase or decrease in the perfection of my body' (p.78). There is no limitation on what God can know about us. Through direct acquaintance, God knows what it is like, from the inside, for each and every one of us to experience pain, suffering, and every possible kind of experience. He is able to identify you, me, and each of us as the bearers of experiences

because we, as modes, are parts of God. It is as if I identify a pain in my foot in virtue of the foot being a part of me.

5.3.3 Compatibility issues concerning Spinozistic pantheism and traditional theism

Given the advantage Spinozistic pantheism has over the two previously-discussed conceptions regarding their ability to account for God's knowledge of the human condition, we need to address the issue of whether Spinozistic pantheism would be acceptable to the traditional theist as a personal religion. We need to see whether the two positions are, in fact, compatible. There are aspects of both that suggest compatibility is unlikely. To begin with, both conceptions agree with a claim expressed in Acts 17:28: that it is in God that we live and move and have our being. This claim approximates to what Spinoza states in *Ethics* Part I, Proposition XV – that 'Whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived' (in Elwes, 1955, p. 55). Thereafter, however, grounds for incompatibility arise. Frederick Copleston notes that the traditionalist could accept this proposition if it meant only that we depend on God for our being. What they would struggle with is the idea that we are modes of God, the unique substance, and that nature as a whole is not distinct from God for the two are identical (1976, p. 217).

The reason for the struggle is that traditionalists don't identify God with nature but believe He transcends it; He has an independent and distinct existence from finite, created things, or nature. As Levine says, the traditionalist's God transcends nature, and that, in part, is why Spinozistic pantheism is not (or not obviously) theism as conceived by traditionalists. Some pantheists (not including Spinoza) conceive the God/nature relation to be equivalent to that of a whole to its parts, such that there is no entity that exists over and above those parts. In the *Short Treatise* (in Wolf, 1910, p. 34) Spinoza discusses, in dialogue form, God's nature. His

interlocutor, Desire, argues against Spinoza's view that God has an existence independent of and distinct from finite things ('modes'), a view based on the belief that the whole is something other than its parts. Desire says: 'Methinks I see a very great confusion in this argument of yours: for it seems you will have it that *the whole must be something outside of or apart from its parts*, which is truly absurd. For all philosophers are unanimous in saying that "*whole*" *is a second notion, and that it is nothing in Nature apart from human thought.*'

Desire appears to believe that wholes, being nothing in nature, are merely mental constructs, and the names we give to them are merely convenient ways we have of referring to them. In this sense, wholes and their names are fictions, albeit useful ones. On this view, the Amazon Rainforest, unlike the individual trees comprising it, exists not in nature but only in the human mind. It is, as it were, a convenience of human invention that picks out a certain group of things. And, according to Desire, the same is true of God. The term 'God' is just a convenient way of referring to the totality of finite things, or modes.

Arguably, Desire holds too narrow a view of the nature of wholes, for it is evident that some wholes are distinct from their parts insofar as they bear properties that their parts don't, and have different functions. Hadrian's Wall, for instance, is a whole whose parts are the many stones comprising it, and has properties that none of the parts have, including coming into existence in AD 120, functioning as a fortified defence against invasion, having a great length, and so on. Furthermore, the wall would continue to exist even if some of its parts didn't or were replaced. If God, in relevant respects, is thought of more as the wall than the forest, then He would appear to have an existence distinct from any part, or mode. But this doesn't get us quite as far as giving God has an *independent* existence. While it is true that Hadrian's Wall has certain properties and functions that none of its parts have, it is

nevertheless not an entity that is independent of its parts. If the parts were entirely to disappear, so would the wall, and presumably the same reasoning applies to God – at least on the whole-part account. For the traditionalist, this won't do, for there is no reason to suppose that God is dependent for existence on other things existing, such as the world and ourselves within it. On the contrary, God enjoys an existence wholly independent of anything else in existence. If there were no human beings and no world for them to exist in, then God would exist all by Himself. If the whole-part relation described by Spinoza in the *Short Treatise* holds true of God and the world, then this is effectively a rejection of the traditionalist's belief.

Having considered an argument against compatibility, let us now look at three arguments for it. First up is Robert Oakes' argument for the possibility that traditional theism entails pantheism. The remaining two arguments, as indicated above, are to the effect that the God of Spinoza is a personal God, and that God may enjoy an existence distinct from and independent of all finite things, or modes. If any of these arguments succeeds, then we are at least that much closer to bringing traditional theism and pantheism together, thus offering some justification for accepting a pantheist account of God's having knowledge of the human condition.

Robert Oakes (1983) argues for the compatibility between pantheism and traditional theism based on the idea that human beings (as well as every other finite thing) are modifications ('modes') of God, and that the God-mode relation is implied by a 'non-negotiable element of traditional theistic metaphysics' (p. 105). 'I hope to show', Oakes continues, 'that traditional theists have ample justification for embracing the view that every one of us is an aspect or modification of God' (pp. 105-6). Although Oakes does not explicitly address Spinoza's

pantheism, what he says applies just as well to it as to other forms of pantheism that incorporates the God-mode relation. According to that relation, modes (including human beings) could not exist independently of God's causal activity. As Spinoza states in *Ethics* Part I, Proposition XXIX, *Note*, God is that which conserves nature (modes) in existence; these could not be conceived without God. (in Elwes, 1955, pp. 68-69)

This relation is echoed in the 'non-negotiable element of traditional theistic metaphysics' to which Oakes refers, which is the doctrine of divine creation and conservation. According to that doctrine, the world is both created and conserved in existence by God's continuing causal activity. The possibility Oakes raises is that if such a relation is a non-negotiable aspect of one's religious belief, then one is committed to upholding a 'substance-mode' metaphysics, which is precisely what Spinozistic pantheism upholds. In this sense, traditional theism entails pantheism.

Although I have referred to Oakes' argument as favouring compatibility, there are reasons why the traditionalist might be deterred from accepting it. First, any persuasiveness of the argument rests on the claim that traditional theism and pantheism have a feature in common – namely, the conservation doctrine which entails, among other things, that 'it is in God that we live and move and have our being'. There is nothing remarkable enough about the sharing of a feature that makes the argument especially persuasive. Many rival views share common features, but that need not serve to make them compatible, or such that one implies the other. For example, mind-body dualism and mind-body physicalism share the common feature that human beings have bodies. They are compatible to that extent, but this does not mean that that if we accept one, we must by implication accept the other. Second, the traditionalist could accept that all natural things, including ourselves, are aspects or modifications of God

without feeling any commitment to the view that God is identical to and nothing but those things. My hand is an aspect or modification of me, but I am not identical to or nothing but my hand.

Our purpose is not, however, to reject Oakes' argument on the basis that any traditionalist would find it entirely unacceptable. It is acceptable insofar as, for example, it provides an explanation of how the closeness ('immanence') of God to the created world is possible, which is a possibility cherished by traditionalists as well as pantheists. The argument, in order to gain traditionalists' support, needs to incorporate at least the two features mentioned, above, by Levine: that, despite God's immanence to creation, He is also transcendent from it, and is, moreover, a personal God. If it can be shown that these features belong to the God of Spinoza, then Spinozistic pantheism and traditional theism would appear more compatible than might be thought. And if they are, we have a clear explanation of how God can have knowledge of the human condition. It is time to consider further whether Spinoza's God might indeed have the features of transcendence and personhood. We will consider transcendence first.

5.3.4 The transcendence of Spinoza's God

The traditionalist believes that God is transcendent from the world in the sense that He is distinct from and independent of it. There is some scriptural support for this. For example, in Isaiah 55:9, God declares 'As the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' A problem with God's being transcendent in this sense is that there may be no interaction between Himself and the world, meaning that God may have no part to play in the running of the world or in relating to ourselves as His creatures. It would be as if God first created the world and thereafter

disinterestedly left it and ourselves completely to our own devices. Believing that God does relate to the world and acts within it, traditionalists have tried to explain how a God who is transcendent from the world is also and simultaneously immanent to it, such that these two apparently contradictory properties are compatible after all. Our problem is quite the opposite, for we have to begin with God's immanence, not transience (transcendence), as Spinoza has explained in *Ethics* Part I, Proposition XVIII (quoted above, p. 221): 'God is the indwelling [immanent] and not the transient cause of all things.' (in Elwes, 1955, p. 62)

Prima facie, our position is as problematic as the traditionalist's, for we are both attempting to render compatible the seemingly incompatible. But despite what Spinoza claims in Proposition XVIII, there is a case to be made on his principles for God's having both immanence and transcendence, if by the term 'transcendence' is meant God's enjoying an existence distinct from and independent of creatures, or modes. This is so even though, according to Spinozistic pantheism, God is identified with modes.

There are several ways of characterising what it would be for God to have the property of transcendence; that is, an existence distinct from and independent of finite things. One way is to claim ontological dissimilarity. If *a* is ontologically dissimilar from *b* then *a*'s existence is distinct from and independent of *a*. This is exemplified in the form of traditional theism we examined at the beginning of this paper, according to which God is a spirit and finite things are physically embodied. Ontological dissimilarity might, however, be a sufficient condition for transcendence but not a necessary one, as we saw in the case of Berkeleian idealism. According to that conception, both God and ourselves are ontologically similar, both being spirits. Yet God is nevertheless distinct from and independent of us according to Berkeleian idealism. A condition that appears necessary is that there is no relation of identity between

God and whatever else exists, a condition satisfied by the traditional (including idealist) view, but not obviously by the Spinozistic pantheist, view. Alternatively, a condition that appears both necessary and sufficient is that there is a possible world in which only God exists; a world containing no finite (that is, created) beings of any kind, only God. Can this condition be satisfied on Spinozistic pantheism? On the face of it, it cannot because God is identified with the totality of finite things. However, while such an identity relation might exist, I don't believe it is a necessary relation, even on Spinozistic pantheism. There are certain passages in Spinoza's *Ethics* and correspondence that are relevant to the possibility of God's independently existing. Three of these passages are as follows:

Ethics Part I, Definition III:

> By *substance*, I mean that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself: in other words, that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception. (in Elwes, 1955, p. 45)

Ethics Part I, Definition VI:

> By *God*, I mean a being absolutely infinite – that is, a substance consisting of infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality. (*op. cit.,* pp. 45-46)

Ethics Part I, Proposition XVI:

> From the necessity of the divine nature must follow an infinite number of things in infinite ways – that is, all things which can fall within the sphere of an infinite intellect. (*op. cit.,* p. 59)

The fourth passage is from a letter (LXVI) Spinoza wrote to his correspondent, Tschirnhausen:

> [Regarding thought and extension] It is therefore plain, that the human mind or the human body neither involves nor expresses any attributes of God save these two … I therefore conclude, that the human mind cannot attain knowledge of any attribute of God besides these … With regard to your question, whether there must be as many worlds as there are attributes, I refer you to *Ethics* II.vii., note. (in Elwes, 1955, p. 399, with reference to Note on pp. 86-87)

The reference Spinoza makes in the letter is to his claim that whatever God conceives is thereby brought about, and that whatever is brought about is identical to God's conception of it. Spinoza's example is of a circle, God's conception of which, and one actually existing, are the same. On a grander scale, God's conception of a world expressed under the attributes of thought and extension and a world actually existing under those attributes are identical. But, as Spinoza explains in his letter, thought and extension are only two of God's infinite attributes that we can know about. God has only to conceive worlds under His other attributes (or combinations thereof) and that would be sufficient to ensure that those worlds exist, for they would be identical to God's conceptions. If God conceives those worlds in addition to our world, then creation consists not of *a* world (namely, ours) but a multi-world or multiverse, conceived as a whole under each and every attribute God has. This appears to be what Spinoza means when he writes 'from the necessity of the divine nature must follow an infinite number of things in infinite ways – that is, all things which can fall within the sphere of an infinite intellect' (Proposition XVI, referred to above).

It may seem, nevertheless, that in accordance with this passage, in each of the multiverse's constituent universes (or worlds) one or more of God's attributes is expressed, such that while God exists in each of them, there is more in existence than an independently existing God – namely, whatever is expressed by those attributes. But in none of those universes would God enjoy an existence distinct from and independent of the modes in existence, for

on a pantheistic understanding, He would form an identity with the totality of those modes. On the other hand, Spinoza says that God creates all *possibilities* – that is, 'all things which can fall within the sphere of an infinite intellect'. If there was a list of every possibility that fell within that sphere, appearing on the list would have to be the possibility of God existing and nothing else, for that is a conceivable possibility. It is a possible situation in which none of God's attributes is expressed in a *created* world, but they are in God Himself. And if this is indeed a possible situation, then there must be a possible world in which only God exists, which (we have suggested) is a necessary and sufficient condition for God's having an existence distinct from and independent of all finite things, or modes. And that, in turn, means that Spinozistic pantheism is one step closer to being acceptable to the traditionalist, for whom (as Levine has pointed out) God's transcendence is a necessary element of their belief.

According to Levine, there is a further necessary element of traditional theism that pantheism supposedly lacks, which (in part) renders the latter unacceptable to the traditionalist, and that element is a God conceived as a person. Is it true that Spinozistic pantheism cannot accommodate this element?

First, regarding the personhood of God, Richard Swinburne (1977) writes:

> That God is a person, yet one without a body, seems the most elementary claim of theism. It is by being told this or something that entails this (e.g. that God always listens to and sometimes grants us our prayers, but does not have a body) that young children are introduced to the concept of God. (p.99)

Human beings are persons and whatever we attribute personhood to is derivative from what we understand of ourselves as persons. The notion of personhood is notoriously vague, for

there isn't a definitive list of the characteristics persons must possess, or a sharp line marking off persons from non-persons. If God is a person as we understand the term, then He must have at least some of the characteristics of personhood we find in ourselves. For our purpose, we might, like Swinburne, be less concerned about what these characteristics are and more about how they are expressed in action. Such an action, using his example, is showing concern for others and by granting prayers. We would expect this sort of action to belong to persons rather than non-persons like tables and chairs that are incapable of such an action. For God to hear and respond to our prayers, theists must maintain that He can at least *hear* those prayers, and be in a suitable physical location in order to do so. As we have seen above, the psalmist states that the inventor of ears and eyes can indeed hear and see, for it would seem odd if that was not possible. But Grace Jantzen (1984) is not convinced that the psalmist is right. In her book she argues at length for the idea of God's corporeality, and with reference to prayer she writes:

> It is sometimes suggested that the experience of prayer is the key to our learning about God's incorporeality: he can hear and answer prayers of many people in different places simultaneously. But it is not so frequently noticed that the doctrine of incorporeality also raises enormous difficulties for the experience of prayer … How is prayer factually possible if God does not have a body? Without sensory apparatus, how can he hear our prayers? If he is incorporeal how can he be near us when we pray? How can he be *anywhere*? If he has no body, how can he act in response? (1984, pp. 73-74)

Jantzen asks several rhetorical questions here to which all answers are negative, and to those answers something positive emerges, that in order to respond to our prayers – to hear them and be located in a suitable place to do so – God needs to be embodied, and it is being embodied rather than incorporeal that allows us to say that God is a person, or at least in responding to our prayers, He behaves as a person would behave. Moreover, there is a particular reason for attributing personhood to Spinoza's God, for human persons are

modifications of God, or parts of Him. In that sense, God cannot help but have personal characteristics.

Assuming it is possible that the God of Spinozistic pantheism can properly be called a person, and also be transcendent (in the sense explained) from created modes, then pantheism so understood is close to traditional theism as far as those two qualities are concerned. But our investigation has been essentially a philosophical one involving metaphysical and epistemological ideas. There is more to be said about God and His relation to the world besides such ideas, for there are other issues, to do with our emotions and expectations of religious belief, that must come to bear on any claim to Spinozistic pantheism's being acceptable to the traditionalist as a religion on a personal as well as philosophical level with which s/he can fully engage. With this in mind, Timothy Sprigge (2008, p. 70) sets out four conditions that Spinozistic pantheism must satisfy in order to meet the traditionalist's needs of being a personal religion. It could do so if:

It contained a great deal of truth.

It encouraged certain emotions which were 'religious' in a broad sense.

Its ethical message was good, well grounded and practicable.

It offered some kind of salvation.

Let us consider these in turn. It is difficult, first of all, to see how we could know that a particular religion contains 'a great deal of truth', or indeed any at all. Maybe one could call upon evidential justification for its truth, such as prayers being answered, the existence of miracles, feelings of a relationship with the divine, and so on. Alternatively, evidence may be available retrospectively. This is what John Hick refers to as eschatological verification

(Hick, 1983, p. 100); that is, verifying a truth in the afterlife following the event. But there is the possibility that some religious beliefs, regardless of how steadfastly they are held, are in fact false, just as many beliefs can be. What we have tried to establish, above, is something less demanding than truth, namely, consistency; the consistency of traditional theistic belief and Spinozistic pantheism. This, even if achieved, is not itself a guarantor of truth, of course, for many hypotheses can be consistent with one another without any of them being true. But consistency is at least a positive start in the direction we wish to go. The question of whether Spinozistic pantheism contains a great deal of truth is, I think, a topic for another paper.

Regarding the second condition, there is no reason why supporters of Spinozistic pantheism should not have any religiously-inspired emotions and feelings: those of gratitude towards God for our existence; awe and wonder at the world's beauty and majesty; and a feeling that 'the divine' is a proper object of worship and praise. Such emotions and feelings would seem to be the rightful property of pantheists no less than traditional theists.

Sprigge himself refers to the third condition, remarking that a modern Spinozist would observe the need to control irrational emotions and strive to act in ways required by an intellectual love of God (2008, p. 70). And it is this love and understanding of God that satisfies Sprigge's fourth condition, for it is through that love and understanding, once attained, that salvation is possible.

If what we have said about Spinozistic pantheism concerning the transcendence and personhood of God, and if the four conditions that Sprigge sets out can be satisfied, then there are reasons for supposing that this form of pantheism is consistent with traditional theism, and could be accepted by traditionalists as their personal religion. There may, however, be

reasons why traditionalists would be reluctant to embrace Spinozistic pantheism in the way suggested. One is that the traditional view is the more familiar one which, no doubt, many theists have held since childhood. It is a view they have been taught and led to accept. Consequently, there may be emotional and/or non-rational reasons why abandoning the traditional view or replacing it with another would be problematic for some. On the other hand, we might wish (as Spinoza did) to allow reason to prevail. If we wish to attribute to an object the properties of a cube we should abandon the concept of its being a sphere, regardless of how emotionally and/or non-rationally attached we might be to that conception. Similarly, if we wish to attribute to God the property of having knowledge of the human condition as well as transcendence and personhood, then perhaps we should abandon the traditional concept of an incorporeal God, regardless of our desire to keep it, especially if that concept won't allow the attribution of the property we have in mind.

The central concern of this chapter has been to establish whether, on the three different theistic conceptions investigated, God can have knowledge of the human condition, understood especially as knowledge of what it is like, from the inside, for each of us to have experiences of pain and suffering. The investigation reveals that it is only the last conception that affords an adequate account of how such knowledge is possible. Since our investigation concerned only the God of traditional Judaeo-Christian theism, the next task was to establish whether Spinozistic pantheism could be accepted by the traditionalist as a religion s/he believes in. By way of justifying such an acceptance, we explored the possibilities of Spinozistic pantheism's accommodating two crucial beliefs of the traditionalist, which are, according to Levine, God's transcendence and personhood. I have argued that these possibilities are, as it were, 'live'. The conclusion to be drawn with respect to this accommodation is that the traditional theist, in accepting Spinozistic pantheism as his

personal religion, can affirm (if I am right) that God has the properties of personhood and transcendence and, importantly, that God knows perfectly well what the human conditions of experiencing pain and suffering are like. Doubts about accepting pantheism as a personal religion are likely to focus on whether I am right about those two properties of personhood and transcendence. If I am mistaken, then pantheism may appear far removed from what the traditionalist wishes to say and believe of God, making pantheism difficult to accept as the equivalent (or close enough equivalent) of her traditionalist position. However, if my arguments are correct, so that, on Spinoza's principles, God has the properties of transcendence and personhood, the result is that Spinoza may be a panentheist, not a thorough-going pantheist. Panentheism is a hybrid of pantheism and theism according to which, while there is an identification of God and nature, nature does not comprise God's entire being. Nature is only a proper part of God, and God enjoys an existence, in part, independent of and distinct from nature. Of course, Spinoza is widely regarded as a pantheist, but if he is committed to panentheism, then that could make his view more attractive to the traditionalist as a personal religion than pantheism alone might. Panentheism would have a wider appeal, especially for those maintaining that God has an intimate knowledge of the human condition. Ultimately, it rests on individual traditionalists to decide whether Spinozistic pan(en)theism is appropriate for them as a personal religion.

I wish, finally, to turn to the problem of evil and summarise the effect the above accounts have on it.

5.4 Relating our investigation to the problem of evil

The problem of evil raises questions about God's perfect goodness (and hence His existence) in the face of the intensity and pervasiveness of human pain and suffering. For, if God is

perfectly good and is morally concerned for us, why does He cause or allow so much pain and suffering to exist? Theists have responded to the problem in various ways, perhaps most notable among which are that pain and suffering entail the existence of outweighing goods that could not exist otherwise, or that God allows those evils to exist in order to preserve some outweighing good already in existence, such as the good of human free will. Either way, the underlying assumption is that God knows perfectly well that, in each and every case of human pain and suffering, the costs they impose upon us are worth paying for the ensuing benefits we receive that outweigh them. For that to be true, God must know what it is like for each of us to endure the pain and suffering He causes or allows in order to determine that the balance between them and the benefits tips in the right direction.

5.4.1 The traditional conception and the problem of evil

Within this conception, of the five possible approaches to attributing to God knowledge of the human condition only the fifth – the 'q-remembering approach' – seemed promising. To an extent, that promise was fulfilled, but difficulties remained. One was that of misidentification, according to which even if God obtained, through q-remembering our past experiences of pain and suffering, adequate knowledge in this regard, it is difficult to see how He could know whose pain and suffering was whose. But there were also the problems of q-remembering hidden content and concept acquisition that cast doubt on the adequacy of the knowledge God could obtain. Finally, q-remembering, if a plausible route to God's knowledge at all, relies on the assumption that a purely spiritual being can causally interact with physically-embodied beings such as ourselves. It is by no means certain, however, although we provisionally allowed it, that such an interaction is possible: that processes in material substances (human bodies and brains) are communicable by causal processes to an immaterial substance, or God. If not, then the anti-theist can cite the costs of pain and

suffering against any benefits ensuing, and claim that, owing to God's ignorance in this regard, far from minimizing those costs, He allows us to pay them with impunity. If this claim is justified, then anything the theist says in response could not stand on firm ground. The story of Job seems justification enough, for not only did God allow a human being to suffer inordinately, He did so for a highly questionable reason, namely, merely to test Job's faith. Had God been in a position to know as well as Job what that suffering was going to be like, He would surely have refrained from causing it in the first place.

5.4.2 The Berkeleian idealist conception and the problem of evil

I have found a couple of references to the problem of evil in Berkeley's *Principles* and *Three Dialogues* – God's knowledge of pain and suffering being one, and we have examined that already; and the other is a reference to the guilt incurred upon us for our sins being placed squarely at our feet and no one else's, including God's. Sin is simply a consequence of 'the internal deviation of the will from the laws of reason and religion' (in Ayers, 1980, p. 187). Presumably he would, therefore, explain God's permission of pain and suffering in terms of the Free Will Theodicy. If so, then God would not be concerned with all individual cases of costs and benefits, but with the costs we must collectively bear in order to keep the benefit of free will. It is then incumbent upon God to understand what those costs and benefits are, as well as the balance between them, and to allow sin to exist as long as the balance swings in the right direction.

If this is the view Berkeley would support, then the Free Will Theodicy could be his response to the problem of evil. As I have argued, God cannot know, or at least be certain of, what it is like from the inside for you or me in particular to suffer, not because of the mind/body interaction problem besetting the traditional conception because on idealism there are only

minds, but because of the difficulty of identifying individual souls (the problem of 'error through misidentification'). But if it is not necessary that God has this knowledge, but knowledge only of costs and benefits *in aggregate* through the flow of ideas from us to Him, and also knowledge of the balance between them, then God's permission of human pain and suffering could be explained in terms of the preservation of human free will. Of course, whether that explanation is sound is another matter, and I have argued in paper three that it is not. But it is one, nevertheless, which Berkeley could have argued for had he found a need to do so. However, the question of God's knowing what it is like for *you* to suffer and for *me*, as well as each and every one of us, remains one which Berkeley's view is unable to answer.

5.4.3 The pantheist conception and the problem of evil

Of particular relevance to our investigation is Spinoza's account of God's having adequate knowledge of the human condition; of what it is like, from the inside, for each and every one of us to suffer. On that account, God has as intimate a knowledge of relevant costs and benefits to each of us as we do. Spinoza explains at length why this is possible. The attention he pays to the problem of evil, however, is brief. He could have argued that, given God's knowledge, we can be certain that a favourable balance between costs and benefits is always maintained, or that the costs are always worth paying for the benefits they entail, or something along those lines. What he says in connection with evil is found in the Appendix to Part 1 of the *Ethics*, where he is plainly dismissive about the problem on account of its being, in his view, misconceived:

> If all things follow from a necessity of the absolutely perfect nature of God, why are there so many imperfections in nature? such, for instance, as things corrupt to the point of putridity, loathsome deformity, confusion, evil, sin, &c. But these reasoners are … easily confuted, for the perfection of things is to be reckoned only from their own nature and power; things are not more or less perfect, according as they delight

or offend human senses, or according as they are serviceable or repugnant to mankind. To those who ask why God did not so create all men, that they should be governed only by reason, I give no answer but this: because matter was not lacking to him for the creation of every degree of perfection from highest to lowest; or, more strictly, because the laws of his nature are so vast, as to suffice for the production of everything conceivable by an infinite intelligence. (in Elwes, 1955, p. 81)

Those who raise the problem of evil assume, as a minimal condition of its success, that God has the free choice between causing or allowing pain and suffering to exist. Since these do exist, the claim that follows is that God has chosen in a way an unsurpassable being ought not to choose, and hence an unsurpassable being – or God – cannot exist.

By contrast, if it is assumed that God's actions are necessitated by the forces of His own nature, and God is not, therefore, free to make choices, then the problem of evil, as explained, does not fly, or else appears in a different guise. This is the position Spinoza takes with regard to God's actions. God has a necessarily perfect nature and whatever follows from it is necessarily as perfect as it could be, given that its own nature and powers follow from an absolutely perfect being. Moreover, not only do created things derive their perfection from God, but also their actions and modes of behaviour. If God has, of necessity, created a universe or indeed a multiverse in which all of His attributes are exemplified in various combinations, there is no solid basis on which the problem of evil could be founded, for there is no room for any improvement, or a greater amount of perfection, in the created universe or multiverse than already exists.

If this is how Spinoza would have it, then why do we find in our universe 'things corrupt to the point of putridity, loathsome deformity, confusion, evil, sin, &c'? While we do indeed find such evils all around us, we should resist the temptation to regard them as evidence that an absolutely perfect God does not exist. Failing to resist this temptation is, according to

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Spinoza, to commit an error of judgement: the error of judging things according only to how they affect *us* as delightful or repugnant, offensive or serviceable to mankind. This error is avoided if we judge things, correctly, according to their own perfection, nature and power. And if we stick to making judgements in this way, we will come to see that the problem of evil is misconceived and should be dismissed.

Or so Spinoza would have us believe. Let us consider such a judgement to see how plausible it is. At the moment the world's population is severely threatened by the coronavirus, COVID-19, and following Spinoza's recommendation we should judge the virus not as an evil just because it is unserviceable to mankind, but as a thing perfect in itself according to its own God-given nature and powers. If the virus was less effective, leaving those who had it completely unharmed, we would have to judge it as imperfect because it did not function according to the nature and powers it ought to have had. Another example would be the judgements we make about sinners. By Spinoza's reckoning, sinners are not evil because, like the virus, they are acting only according to their own perfection, nature and powers. Hence, we should not judge them as 'sinners' in the sense that they deliberately commit evil acts, but as beings that do only what their created constitutions require of them. In terms of benefits, the world, when reason is applied to it, affords us knowledge that everything is as perfect as it could be and that is what we should be satisfied with. The cost of being satisfied is forcing oneself to reject any form of judgement that focuses on things only insofar as we happen to be affected by them.

Spinoza, then, makes clear his distinction between improper and proper judgements, but it is difficult to see how or why we should take seriously his advice about making only the 'proper' kind. Perhaps it would be only through a super-human exercise of will, being placed

under deep hypnosis, or something of that sort, that this would be achievable. When a virus infects us, we experience pain, suffering, discomfort, weakness of body and spirit, and a general decline in our state of well-being. It is only natural that we judge the virus as evil, given these harmful effects. What else could we reasonably do? It would be strange if, only in our imaginations, we were to award the virus a gold medal for succeeding to accomplish what its perfection, nature and powers demand of it, and be grateful that we were not infected by an imperfect virus instead whose perfection, nature and powers were limited so that no harm was done.

What Spinoza is recommending is, in effect, a 'top-down' type of judgement. Accordingly, we begin with an idea of the perfection of God and look downward from that idea to see that perfection reflected in the world through an appreciation of the natures and powers of created things. The 'improper' way of judging the world is to assume a 'bottom-up' approach to judging both the world and God. We begin with an idea of perceived imperfections in the world and look upward from that idea to implied imperfections in God. Such an approach is what the problem of evil is all about, for only the bottom-up approach to our judgements gives rise to the problem. What Spinoza advocates is an abandonment of that approach and an acceptance of the one he recommends, however difficult that acceptance may be.

But in advocating the top-down approach Spinoza appears to be begging the question by assuming beforehand that there exists a perfect being that legitimises the approach. Moreover, given the evil that this being is supposed to sanction, the idea of there existing such a being, one that acts from the necessity of its own nature, and of which we are modes, has seemed outrageous to some, including Bayle. This is F.M. Barnard's comment on Bayle's view:

> Bayle described Spinoza's philosophy as "the most absurd and monstrous hypothesis that can be envisaged, contrary to the most evident notions of our mind." Bayle's antagonism to Spinoza's philosophy arose primarily from his dissatisfaction with monism as a solution to the problem of evil. That such an extreme evil as war could exist among men who are but modes of one and the same infinite, eternal, and self-sufficient substance seemed particularly outrageous to him. (Barnard, 1967, cited in Levine, 2014, p. 210)

And as Levine goes on to say, Bayle's view is that it is a strange God indeed (a psychopathic God) who performs atrocities against both us *and* Himself. If God's performance of those atrocities was freely chosen, then we would have to call God a masochist as well as a psychopath, enduring the pain He causes Himself through the identity with modes. On the other hand, God acts of necessity, or according to the laws of His nature. So understood, perhaps God is as much to be pitied as held to be some kind of ontological lunatic, for He is trapped by His own essence into necessitating the existence of modes that, through their own conditioned behaviour, cause Him as well as them untold harm.

As far as the problem of evil is concerned, there now appear to be two problems rather than one. There is the original problem of why a perfect being causes us to experience suffering, and also the problem of why this being causes Himself to have the same experiences. Spinoza addresses the first problem advocating the top-down thesis and rejecting the bottom-up thesis, leading him to suppose that he has offered an adequate solution. This leaves us with the second problem to address.

But is it as much of a problem as might be supposed? Perhaps not. If we think again of costs and benefits, then the cost of God's suffering is the price to be paid for His having knowledge of our condition of suffering, always allowing that such knowledge is available only through

God's having relevant experiences – namely, those we have ourselves. On this, Grace Jantzen (1984) writes:

> [w]hen we think of the things that are really important to us – long-term struggle against depression, or chronic severe discomfort – it becomes far more significant that God should understand our feelings, not just in the sense of knowing about them from some lofty untouched plane like an eternal bystander, but really sympathising, 'feeling with us'. God's understanding of us, his intimate sharing of our joys and pains, is more credible to us on the model of the world as God's body … than on the model that God is a spirit, utterly removed from ever feeling anything analogous to our suffering. (p. 83)

The moral of this is that God *must* feel what we feel if He is to know us intimately, just as a parent must once have felt something like her child feels when upset so that the parent can both empathise with and comfort her child in the moment of need. And as for whether God's feeling what we feel when we suffer is detrimental to God's own well-being, Jantzen claims that God can bear much more than we can, such that while suffering might overwhelm us, it would not overwhelm God (*op. cit.*, p. 84).

A further point of Jantzen's, which serves to make traditional theists rethink their ontology of a material world and an immaterial God, is the theistic advantage of maintaining that God has a body or, as we would have it, the God of traditional theism is, in fact, the God of Spinozistic pantheism. It is remarkable, Jantzen says, that with regard to Christian teaching about God's love for and involvement with finite persons, theists have been so careful to avoid claiming that God can feel our pain. She sees the immaterial God as a figure standing remote from His creatures and wholly insensitive to their pain and suffering. Such a figure, she says, is alien to Christian belief for it is a figure lacking all association with suffering and misery. The idea of an embodied God, as upheld by Spinoza, able to feel His creatures' feelings, is much closer to the traditional theistic religion than the idea of a God ontologically unlike anything we experience in the material universe (1984, p. 85).

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These thoughts from Jantzen touch on the problem of evil but serve also to highlight the importance of God's having adequate knowledge of the human condition, and how this knowledge is possible once the ontological distinction between ourselves and God implied by 'cosmic dualism', as she puts it, is removed. The importance lies in the theist's belief that God has intimate knowledge of us, passages alluding to which, including Psalm 139, are oft-repeated in Scripture. But in order for the theist to justify this belief, certain changes must be made to the concept of God as traditionally maintained. Sometimes alterations in concepts have actually been made when known facts, or new beliefs, don't fit the original concept. In science there are many examples of this going on, as when the concept of a flat Earth didn't fit the fact of circumnavigation, and was substituted for the concept of a spherical Earth. Likewise, if the fact (if it is a fact) of God's having adequate knowledge of the human condition doesn't fit the concept of an incorporeal being, then the theist needs to exchange that concept for one that fits better, which may be the concept of a corporeal God. This, at least, is the conclusion of our investigation, and also one that Janzen herself has drawn. A remaining question is whether the traditional theist is prepared to accept this finding.

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