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Potentials, Actuals, and the Logical Problem of Evil

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Potentials, Actuals, and the Logical Problem of Evil

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Philosophy

by

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Abstract

J.L. Schellenberg has recently formulated a new logical problem of evil that is claimed to avoid Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defence. I begin my argument against this new formulation by analyzing the grounding for some of God's maximal perfections. God's maximal moral perfection, for example, is grounded in virtuous potentialities that are disposed to the actualization of virtuous actions. From this account, I argue that Schellenberg's logical problem of evil fails due to one of the following two reasons. First, some good actualizations of good potentialities require evil but compose the best worlds. Second, both (1) good actualizations that require evil; and (2) love that is directed at the flourishing of individuals, which requires that their potentials become actualizations, some of which require evil; are morally sufficient reasons for allowing at least small amounts of evil.

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I. Introduction: The Logical Problem of Evil

A. Plantinga's Free Will Defence

Since Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defence,¹ many philosophers of religion have taken the logical problem of evil (LPE) to be solved.² Plantinga argues that there is at least one broadly logically possible world in which God and evil coexist. He claims that in order for creatures to have morally significant freedom, it must be possible for them to do what is right and it must be possible for them to do what is wrong. This is a libertarian conception of free will, so if God were to prevent creatures from erring, they would no longer have morally significant freedom. If it were no longer possible to err, creatures would no longer be free. Thus, if there are free creatures in a world, they might go astray. Because, according to Plantinga, a world in which there are creatures who have morally significant freedom is better than a world in which creatures do not have that, God's creation of a universe in which there are free creatures who might go astray is a morally sufficient reason for God to allow evil. Morally significant freedom is valuable. God makes creatures with it. They might go astray to *some* degree.³

An objection arises. J.L. Mackie points out that it is broadly logically possible for creatures to have morally significant freedom and never to go astray. If a creature genuinely has morally significant freedom, then it could choose what is good on any given occasion. However, if it could choose to do good on any given occasion, and if it has morally significant freedom, it could also choose to do what is good on another given occasion. Why, then, could it not always

¹ Alvin Plantinga, "God, Evil, and the Metaphysics of Freedom," *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 164-195.

² J.L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, first edition, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 34.

³ Alvin Plantinga, pp. 165-167. Because Plantinga is discussing the LPE, he does not need to consider the variety, extent, or horrendousness of the evils of the actual world. He only needs to find one possible world with some evil in it, however small that evil might be. So, going astray might entail one creature committing a small amount of evil.

choose to do what is good? There is no impossibility for morally free creatures always to do what is right. Why, then, did God not make *that* world?⁴

Plantinga responds by claiming that God, while maintaining that creatures have morally significant freedom, cannot actualize just any possible world. What happens in any given world is largely dependent upon what those free creatures would do in certain states of affairs in that possible world. They have morally significant freedom after all. Thus, God cannot just actualize any possible world in which morally significant creatures always do what is right. He⁵ has to work with the counterfactuals of freedom – that is, the counterfactuals of how a given free creature would act in certain circumstances – that are present within a possible world.⁶

Moreover, because Plantinga is answering the LPE, all he has to find is one broadly logically possible scenario in which God and evil coexist. So, he continues. It is possible that every possible being that could be created suffers from transworld depravity. Transworld depravity is a condition in which “no matter *what* circumstances [God] places [a given being] in, so long as he leaves him significantly free, he will take at least one wrong action.”⁷ Because God cannot actualize just any world without impinging upon morally significant freedom, God has to work with what free creatures will do in given circumstances. Yet, it is possible that every creature that God could create, when given morally significant freedom, will go astray at least once. On this possibility, God cannot create creatures with morally significant freedom without also actualizing a world in which there is some sort of evil. Whether transworld depravity

⁴ J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955), p. 209.

⁵ Some philosophers have argued that it is equally accurate to characterize God as feminine as it is to characterize God as masculine. For ease of writing and to avoid confusion, I use capitalized masculine pronouns throughout this thesis to designate God. See Michael Rea, “Gender as a Divine Attribute,” *Religious Studies* 52, no. 1 (2016), pp. 97-115.

⁶ Alvin Plantinga, pp. 169-184.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186, emphasis in the original.

actually extends to all people or not is irrelevant to the fact that this is at least a possibility.⁸

Thus, it seems that Plantinga has answered the LPE.

B. Schellenberg's New Logical Problem of Evil

In recent years, the LPE has received new attention with some philosophers attempting to revive it. J.L. Schellenberg, for example, has presented a new formulation of the LPE, which he believes avoids Plantinga's Free Will Defence.⁹ He claims that the transition from "God *without* evil *prior* to creation – 'prior' here may be taken logically or temporally or in both senses – to God *with* evil *after*" is not metaphysically possible.¹⁰

Given three traditional theistic assumptions, Unsurpassable Greatness, Ontological Independence, and Prior Purity, it seems to follow that God and evil cannot coexist. Schellenberg defines these theistic assumptions as follows:

Unsurpassable Greatness (UG): God is the greatest possible being.

Ontological Independence (OI): No world created by God (or any part thereof) is a part of God.

Prior Purity (PP): Prior to creation (whether "prior" be taken logically or temporally) there is no evil in God of any kind.¹¹

From UG and OI, Schellenberg claims:

(G) Prior to creation *all goods are already contained in God*.¹²

⁸ Ibid., pp. 184-190.

⁹ J.L. Schellenberg, pp. 34-48. In this article, he presents two new LPEs, the modeling approach and the motives approach. To save space, I will focus on the former. However, the arguments in this paper can be used to address the latter argument. I leave such a task to the reader.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 34., emphases in the original.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 35-36. I follow Jerome Gellman in his abbreviations of these claims, which do not appear in Schellenberg's original piece. See his response to Schellenberg, "On a New Logical Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2015), pp. 439-452.

¹² J.L. Schellenberg, p. 36, emphasis in the original. I use Gellman's abbreviation here as well.

This does not mean that God has every good-token, but every good-type. For example, God does not token kindness to a child by nursing it as a mother does. Nevertheless, God does display kindness toward the helpless in a similar fashion, though not physically.¹³ So, he clarifies what he means:

(G1) For every possible good, among the distinguishable good-types it tokens or instances is at least one instanced in God.¹⁴

Were (G1) not to be true, God would not be the greatest possible being. There would be some possible being who tokens every good-type that God tokens, but who would also token good-types God does not token.

Additionally, it should be noted that, because God is the greatest possible being, any instancing in God of a good-type is better than any instancing not found in God.¹⁵ From this and (G1), he concludes:

- (1) Every possible non-Divine good is greatly exceeded by a good of the same type existing in God prior to creation.¹⁶

Because of OI, he concludes:

- (2) Every good *in a world* is greatly exceeded by a good of the same type existing in God prior to creation.¹⁷

Given PP, we can conclude:

- (3) All goodness found in God prior to creation is pure goodness: goodness-without-evil.¹⁸

From (2) and (3) follows (4), from which (5) can be concluded:

¹³ Jerome Gellman, "On a New Logical Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2015), p. 440.

¹⁴ J.L. Schellenberg, p. 37. I use Gellman's abbreviation here as well.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

- (4) Every good in a world is greatly exceeded by a *pure* good of the same type existing in God prior to creation.
- (5) Every worldly good *that permits or requires evil* is greatly exceeded by a pure good of the same type existing in God prior to creation.¹⁹

Schellenberg then introduces his conception of modeling goods: “any good that purely resembles or images or mirrors or reflects a pure good in God we might think of as *modeling* that good.”²⁰ From this, he concludes:

- (6) If every worldly good that permits or requires evil is greatly exceeded by a pure good of the same type, existing prior to creation in God, then any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God.²¹

It should be noted that Schellenberg does not mean that these worlds with modeling goods have modeling goods *but could also have evil-involving-goods* – that is, goods that permit or require evil. What he means is that these worlds with modeling goods *have no evil-involving-goods whatsoever*. He says elsewhere that these worlds “are by definition greater than and so *distinct* from ‘any world permitting or requiring evil’”.²² These worlds with modeling goods are supposed to be pure worlds.

Continued, from (5) and (6):

¹⁹ Ibid., emphases in the original.

²⁰ Ibid., emphasis in the original. Because Schellenberg uses the language of “reflects” and other relational words, this seems to suggest that he is using value-laden words to indicate final value, not intrinsic value. X is intrinsically valuable iff x has intrinsic properties that make it valuable. X is finally valuable iff x is valuable for its own sake (or as an end), as opposed to valuable for the sake of something else (or as a means). X is extrinsically and finally valuable iff x is valuable for its own sake, but is valuable because of extrinsic properties. For example, a rare object is valuable because of extrinsic properties (namely, its rarity), but it might be valuable for its own sake. Modeling goods, then, are valuable not intrinsically, but extrinsically, as they relate to God’s goodness by, say, mirroring it; and they are finally valuable. See Francesco Orsi, *Value Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 25-44. Unless otherwise specified, I will use value-laden words to indicate final value.

²¹ J.L. Schellenberg, p. 39.

²² J.L. Schellenberg, “A New Logical Problem of Evil Revisited,” *Faith and Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (2018), p. 467, emphasis in the original.

- (7) Any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God (call the latter a “greater world”).²³

Schellenberg continues. As a finite world improves, it becomes more like God. It approaches what is of supreme value, on the assumption that UG holds. Given PP, the closer one gets to God, the less evil there is. Surely God is able to create *some* such greater world in which there is no evil and the goods within that world reflect pure goods of God. There are infinitely many possible worlds, and, presumably, there are many greater worlds. Why could He not create at least one of these worlds? So, Schellenberg concludes:

- (8) God can ensure the existence of greater worlds, and can do so limitlessly.²⁴

Jerome Gellman responds. He says that (8) is equivalent to:

- (E) God can *ensure* the existence of any world in which there is no evil.²⁵

If this equivalence holds, then Schellenberg’s argument does not avoid Plantinga’s Free Will Defence. It is possible that God was dealt a hand in which all possible creatures will go astray at least once if created. Were God to desire morally significant freedom, God would not be able to actualize a world without evil in it. So, Gellman claims that Schellenberg’s argument does not avoid the Free Will Defence.

However, Schellenberg’s argument is more sophisticated than Gellman lets on. He responds to Gellman by pointing out that (8) is not equivalent to (E). It might be that God cannot ensure the existence of *certain* worlds without evil, on the assumption that creatures have morally significant freedom, but why does that require (8) to be false? There are two types of

²³ J.L. Schellenberg, “A New Logical Problem of Evil,” p. 39.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 40. It is not clear whether Schellenberg intends for (8) to mean that God can ensure the existence of *some* greater world or *all* greater worlds. However, no issues seem to arise from this distinction. Foreshadowing premise (9), if there is *some* greater world that God can create, in which there is no evil, why would God create a lesser world with evil?

²⁵ Jerome Gellman, p. 442, emphasis in the original.

worlds without evil: greater worlds and non-greater worlds that happen not to have any evil within them. Greater worlds, says Schellenberg, are distinct from worlds that have no evil by virtue of free creatures always choosing the good. Greater worlds are worlds that do not permit evil whatsoever. It might be that (E) is false because God cannot ensure just *any* world without evil, such as non-Greater worlds that happen to have no evil within them. But it might that (8) is true because God can ensure that (some) *greater worlds* come into existence, which, by definition, exist independently from worlds that permit or require evil but happen not to have evil in them.²⁶

The free will defender might fire back: But a world with morally significant freedom is a better world than a world without morally significant freedom. However, if morally significant freedom is understood in a libertarian respect, and if God does not have libertarian freedom on the assumptions that He is necessarily good²⁷ and that PP is true, God will not have morally significant freedom.²⁸ So, as we approach God's level of goodness, there will be less morally significant freedom. So, the worlds (and goods) closest to God's goodness will not have morally significant freedom.²⁹ So, there will always be possibilities for God to create even better worlds without the existence of morally significant freedom.

²⁶ J.L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil Revisited," p. 467. Another objection to Gellman is that even if worlds with morally significant freedom are greater worlds, (8) only requires that God be able to make *some* greater worlds, not all of them. See footnote 24.

²⁷ See Thomas Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002; originally published Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), pp. 51-64.

²⁸ God might make choices that are indeterminate that have no moral significance, such as choosing to place a tree in one spot, as opposed to one inch to the north of it. All I am saying here is that, with regard to moral actions, God cannot choose to do evil, so He does not have morally significant freedom, at least of the kind that allows Him the possibility of committing evil.

²⁹ Worlds here should not be understood as including God's goodness. If God's goodness were included in a world, then God's goodness would be included in the evaluation of a world's goodness. But, if so, God's goodness would be the standard for judging a world with God's goodness in it, in which case, no increase in value, beyond the value of a world with God's goodness alone in it, would make the world better. The total value of a world can increase beyond God's goodness due to valuable things being added to the value of a world in which God's goodness is also present. If God's goodness is the standard for judging worlds, we will think the additional goods to be excessive, by virtue of the fact that the worlds in which they exist go beyond God's level of goodness. This should not be. We

In other words, if approaching God's greatness is what it is for a world (or a good) to become better, then it is better for God to create a world in which there is no morally significant freedom in the libertarian respect, on the assumption that God has no morally significant freedom in the libertarian respect. After all, having morally significant freedom in the libertarian respect will be less like God than not having morally significant freedom in the libertarian respect. God either acts according to compatibilistic morally significant freedom (whatever that might mean) or has no morally significant freedom whatsoever. If so, and if UG holds, then better worlds will have less morally significant freedom of the libertarian variety.³⁰ It is not the case, contrary to what Plantinga claims, that a world in which there are creatures who have morally significant freedom is better than a world in which creatures do not have that.³¹

Therefore, surely God can create at least some greater world. Worlds that allow morally significant freedom of the libertarian variety are not greater worlds, and so Schellenberg does not need to worry about the Free Will Defence. Instead, he has us imagine greater worlds being worlds with an eternal progression of "awareness, experience, and embodiment of the Divine Person, from the least fully formed and moving up the ladder infinitely, with each finite person *growing* from there infinitely."³² God need not create a world with libertarian freedom. He can create a world of pure, complete, and utter bliss in the enjoyment of God's greatness for all

should be able to add goodness to a world beyond the value of a world in which God alone exists. Because God's goodness is the standard for all value judgments of things that exist independent from God's goodness, evaluating a world should not be done with God as a member of it.

Additionally, we need not say that the value of a world is *intrinsic* value. All value outside of God, like modeling goods, might only be extrinsically and finally valuable as they participate in or model God's goodness. This maintains the classical theistic belief that God is the ground for all good things.

Finally, this does not impinge the argument against the Free Will Defence being presented here. People either have libertarian free will or not. But having libertarian free will is worse than not having it, by virtue of the fact that God does not have it and God is the standard of goodness.

³⁰ J.L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," pp. 43-44.

³¹ Alvin Plantinga, p. 166.

³² J.L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," p. 40, emphasis in the original.

creatures in a given world. Because of this, it is no problem for Schellenberg to conclude that (8) is true.

At this point, Schellenberg argues for a new premise:

- (9) If any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God and the existence of greater worlds can limitlessly be ensured by God, then for any world X that requires or permits evil, there is some world Y that models pure goodness in God such that God has no good reason to create X rather than Y.³³

To defend this premise, Schellenberg provides three arguments. First, he points out that evil causes a natural disappreciation. Not only will a world with evil be *less appreciated* than a world without evil, but a world with evil will also procure *disappreciation*. Second, when UG and PP are taken seriously, “the good of finite beings in a world including God is bound up with growing more fully into a multifaceted awareness of God, and this... evil could only hinder.”³⁴ In other words, because God is the greatest and purest form of goodness, in whom there is no evil whatsoever, evil would only hinder finite creatures from coming into a greater appreciation and experience of His goodness.

Third and finally, Schellenberg walks us through a thought experiment. Suppose that there are two divine beings, both of whom are of equal value, though one has some evil that has been turned to good within him. It seems right to say that the being with no evil is better than the one with evil, even if it is evil that has been turned to good. God would be less pure were He to have some evil within Him. Presumably, what he is getting at is an analogy. Suppose that there are two worlds, both of which are of equal value. If one world received its value from evil that

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

had been turned to good, and the other simply had good, we would choose the latter. It matters that evil is present. We do not just consider the final value of a world.³⁵

From (7), (8), and (9), we may conclude:

- (10) For any world X that requires or permits evil, there is some world Y that models pure goodness in God such that God has no good reason to create X rather than Y.³⁶

Additionally, he claims that the following is a necessary truth:

- (11) If for any world X that requires or permits evil there is some world Y that models pure goodness in God such that God has no good reason to create X rather than Y, then God has no good reason to permit evil in the world.³⁷

It follows from (10) and (11) that:

- (12) God has no good reason to permit evil in the world.³⁸

Finally, because God needs justification to allow evil in a world:

- (13) If there is evil in the world, then God has a good reason to permit it.³⁹

It follows from (12) and (13) that:

- (14) There is no evil in the world.⁴⁰

Because there is evil in the world, we must reject one of our original assumptions or give up our belief in God. Thus runs Schellenberg's new LPE. Note here that, as Gellman points out, the conclusion of the argument is that the existence of God is inconsistent with *any* evil.⁴¹

Schellenberg's argument is highly intuitive, but there are holes in it. I begin by evaluating what it means for God to be the greatest possible being, after which I attack premise (6). Soon

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 40-42. Though Schellenberg presents other arguments in defense of (9), these are the best three.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Jerome Gellman, p. 439.

after that, I will move to attack premise (9). Let us, now, evaluate what it means for God to be the greatest possible being.

II. Maximal Perfection

Both UG and perfect being theism claim that God is the greatest metaphysically possible being.⁴²

But what exactly does this entail? If God is the greatest possible being, how should we understand His properties? The following section seeks to show that some of God's maximal perfections, specifically God's maximal moral and intellectual perfections,⁴³ are not grounded in outward actualizations, such as a person actually doing benevolent deeds; and, thus, are grounded in certain inward virtuous potentialities (or, "potentials" or "virtues"⁴⁴ for short).⁴⁵ A virtuous potentiality is good trait of a person, whether moral or intellectual, that is so embedded in a person that it disposes him or her to acting or expressing himself or herself in certain good ways. However, virtuous potentialities are not merely dispositions. They also include inner capabilities. For example, God might have the potentiality of mercifulness. This indicates that He has (1) the capability of being merciful, and (2) the disposition to be merciful.

There are two reasons why I include both capacities and dispositions in the description of a virtuous potentiality – that is, again, a "potential" or "virtue" for short. First, the language of "potentials" is regularly used merely to indicate capacities. However, if God's maximal perfections are grounded in His inner fullness, we cannot merely say that God has a capacity to

⁴² See Yujin Nagasawa, *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 9-10.

⁴³ What I mean by "moral perfection" is the moral property of God that adds to His greatness. For example, if God's moral perfection is grounded only in His virtuous potentialities, then, though He does moral actions (moral actualities), the actions do not add to His greatness. Only the virtuous potentials add to His greatness. "Maximal" qualifies the degree of greatness that God has as being at the highest level of perfection. Similarly, by "intellectual perfection" I mean the intellectual property of God that adds to His greatness. "Maximal" qualifies the degree of greatness that God has as being at the highest level of perfection. Additionally, I do not use the language of "omniscience" because the word technically means "all-knowing," which I do not believe adds any greatness to God, as will be argued in part B.

⁴⁴ Because this paper focuses primarily upon morality, I use "virtue" primarily to refer to the moral virtues, as opposed to the intellectual. Thus, please note my custom for this paper. If I talk about a virtue without qualifying the type, I am speaking of a moral virtue. If I qualify it by saying "intellectual virtue," I am speaking of an intellectual virtue.

⁴⁵ Unless otherwise specified, I will use "potential," "virtue," and "virtuous potentiality" interchangeably. If I need to designate a non-virtuous potentiality or an incapable virtue, I will make a note of it. See the following paragraphs.

do what is good (whether morally or intellectually). For example, God might have the capacity to think well, but if He has no motive to do so, then He will never think well (except, possibly, by accident). If God's maximal perfections are grounded inwardly, the inner fullness needs to be maximal. So, God, at least, needs to be motivated to think well. But, being motivated to think well every now and then is still not as good as being motivated to think well all the time. Thus, I include dispositions in my description of a virtuous potentiality. If God's perfections are grounded inwardly, then He is so disposed to doing what is good (either morally or intellectually) that He will always do what is good when a relevant situation arises that allows for Him to do what is good according to His virtuous potentiality.⁴⁶

The second reason to use the language of "virtuous potentiality" is because it is plausible to suppose that virtues are merely good dispositions, not necessarily capacities.⁴⁷ Someone who is completely disabled (or paralyzed) and unable even to perform a benevolent action might be incapable of acting benevolently, though disposed to it.⁴⁸ Additionally, a person might have good thinking dispositions, but not be capable of acting on them because he or she does not have the cognitive power to work through difficult problems.⁴⁹ In both of these situations, the person

⁴⁶ There is a debate among virtue ethicists whether virtues should be understood as "global, robust character traits" or as "local, situation-specific traits, such as honesty in taking exams" (Bonnie Kent, "Dispositions and Moral Fallibility: The Unaristotelian Aquinas," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2012), p. 141). If we determine that God's virtues ground His moral perfection, we should speak of them as global traits because having global traits, presumably, is better than having local traits. See Nafsika Athanassoulis, "A Response to Harman: Virtue Ethics and Character Traits," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (2000), pp. 215-221. For a motivation-based account of virtue ethics, see Linda Zagzebski, "The Virtues of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (1998), pp. 538-553.

⁴⁷ Many regard virtues as having dispositions. See Linda Zagzebski, p. 541. See also Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 19. If a virtue is not a disposition but merely a character trait of lesser power that motivates imperfectly, because we are speaking of God's *maximal* perfection, we should, nevertheless, regard His virtuous potentialities as dispositions, according to which God *will* act according to His disposition whenever a relevant situation arises.

⁴⁸ Linda Zagzebski might be willing to embrace something like this. To her, motives are the primary components of virtues (Zagzebski, p. 539). A disabled person might be motivated to be benevolent, but he might also be unable to act benevolently.

⁴⁹ See Keith E. Stanovich, *Rationality and the Reflective Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 29-46.

seems virtuous, but incapable of acting according to his or her virtue. So, if God's maximal perfections are grounded inwardly, He needs to have the capacities as well, not just the good dispositions. He would, otherwise, not be maximally perfect from an inner greatness that always produces good actions when a relevant situation arises.⁵⁰

Our question, nevertheless, of this section is whether some of His perfections are grounded in His virtuous potentials or in the actualizations of His (not-necessarily-virtuous) potentials.⁵¹ The reason for this is to establish that God actually has virtuous potentialities that require evil for actualization. If God's maximal perfections are grounded in His actualizations, there is no reason to think that God has the virtuous potentiality of, say, mercy, which requires evil for actualization. Because God's greatness will already be established on account of His actualizations, He will not have to be inwardly maximal. And if He does not have to be inwardly maximal, He does not have to have the virtuous potentiality of mercy.

One might think that, because we are discussing the LPE, all we need is the possibility of God having virtuous potentialities. This correct. All I need to proceed is the possibility of God having virtuous potentialities that require evil. However, there is no reason to suppose that it is even possible for God to have virtuous potentialities that require evil, if God's actualizations ground His greatness. If God, before creation, was maximally great (given UG), and if His greatness was entirely grounded in His actualizations, then, given PP, His actualizations, before creation, must have been pure and of the highest good. Nothing could surpass them. This entails,

⁵⁰ According to Bonnie Kent, Aristotle took virtues to be, in part, developed capacities (Kent, pp. 144-146). If a virtue is a developed capacity, that is compatible with my position. I am simply making clear what I mean by a virtuous potentiality in this paper. I intend for them to indicate good capacities with good dispositions. In part C, I will argue that dispositions have complex conditions surrounding their actualization, such that, all the conditions must be met before a potential can be actualized. The capacity to actualize seems to be one of these conditions.

⁵¹ Remember potentials can sometimes indicate mere capacities. If God's maximal perfections are grounded in His actualizations, it might be that God does not need to be inwardly maximal. Indeed, in the following sections, I argue that God cannot have maximal moral or intellectual actualizations, so He must be maximal inwardly, which is the exact reverse of God having maximal actualizations and a non-maximal inner state.

given that God is the standard for goodness, that all goods external to God's maximal greatness, including all (virtuous) potentials (of God or creatures) and modeling goods, must be evaluated according to how they relate to His maximally great and pure actualizations that existed before creation.

Take modeling goods as an example. If God's perfections are grounded in actualizations, modeling goods, which model God's greatness, will be pure and good actualizations (or something in near relation to pure and good actualizations, such as pure and good potentialities). If a modeling good is not pure, given the inherent repugnance of evil and given that God can make a greater good without any evil, as it more nearly approaches God's maximally great and pure actualizations, I see no reason why God would allow such a modeling good.

Similarly, if God's greatness is grounded in His actualizations, and if God's greatness is the standard for goodness, (virtuous) potentials (of God or creatures) will only be good insofar as they relate to those pure and good actualizations that existed in God prior to creation. Suppose that a potential produces something other than pure actualizations (such as mercy, which requires evil). Given the inherent repugnance of evil and given that God can make a greater good that does not require evil, as it more nearly approaches God's actualizations that were pure and maximally great prior creation (during which "time" there was no mercy), why would God choose for (either a divine or creaturely) person to have it (that is, the potential that produces actualizations that require evil)? What reason would there be for God to want it as opposed to another good that more nearly aligns with God's actualizations, such as a potential that only produces actualizations that do not require evil and are more nearly associated with the maximal actualizations that existed in God without evil prior to creation?

Indeed, even if God can infinitely expand the goods of the universe, I see no reason why God would allow in any “spot,” as it were, an evil-involving-good (or a potential whose actualization requires evil). For any time, for any space, for any character trait, for any thing whatsoever, God could fill it with a good that does not have the inherent repugnance of evil (or the disposition to produce an actualization that requires evil) and that more nearly approaches the maximally great and pure actualizations that existed in God prior to creation.

This is the exact reason why the Free Will Defence fails. Morally significant freedom might be a good – indeed, it might be a very great good – but it is an arbitrary good that can always be exceeded. By “arbitrary good” I mean a good that has no real association with or grounding in God’s maximal greatness. Because it is arbitrary and because it allows evil, which causes natural disappreciation, there is no reason why God would choose for it to fill a “spot” in the world, as opposed to another good, which more nearly approaches God’s goodness and does not require evil. Schellenberg would claim that it was not possible for God, who is maximally morally perfect, to choose to embrace morally significant freedom. Once you embrace that it is possible for a maximally morally perfect being to choose morally significant freedom, the LPE is solved on account of Plantinga’s Free Will Defence. However, as it stands, there is no reason to posit that it is even possible, given that God would have no good reason to choose to allow morally significant freedom.

So too, with regard to God’s virtuous potentials, if they are not directly associated with or grounded in God’s actualizations, they will be arbitrary goods. And, as I will argue in section III, virtuous potentialities yearn for and desire actualization. If God’s maximal perfection is grounded in His pure and maximal actualizations, then there will be no reason for God to choose to allow Himself to have virtuous potentials that require evil for actualization. Their

actualizations are not as great as other actualizations, but they also require evil, which naturally produces disappreciation. God will have no reason to choose to fill a “spot” of goodness with any of these actualizations, as opposed to some other actualization. And if He does not want the actualizations, and if unactualized potentials lead to desires that are unmet, why would God allow Himself (or others) to have virtuous potentials whose actualization requires evil?

If God’s greatness is grounded in His pure actualizations, He has no need for the potential whose actualization requires evil in order for Him to be maximally great. Given that there can always be pure and better actualizations, He has no need or want for that potential’s actualization. Additionally, He has no desire to have unmet desires from potentials that add nothing to His greatness and do not lead to acceptable actualizations. So, what need or want would He have for the potential itself? If God’s maximal perfections are grounded in His actualizations, there is no reason to posit that it is even possible for God to have virtuous potentialities that dispose Him to actualizations that require evil. There is no possible world in which He, a morally and intellectually perfect being, would choose to have potentials that require evil for actualization, if His greatness is grounded in pure actualizations.

The reason Schellenberg’s argument is so powerful is because it challenges the initial assumption that such “goods” (e.g., morally significant freedom) are actually good. To simply assert that it is possible for God to have virtuous potentialities begs the question. Is having, say, a merciful potentiality a thing that God would ever allow? On the assumption that God’s actualizations ground His greatness, God would neither need nor want such a potential.

Therefore, this section is added to establish that God actually has virtuous potentialities that require evil for actualization. If we are able to establish that God’s perfections are grounded in His potentialities, then we must embrace that God has the maximal array of virtuous

potentialities, including, but not limited to, virtuous potentials that require evil for actualization (e.g., mercy). From this I will be able to proceed in my argument against Schellenberg by arguing that it is good for God to actualize His virtuous potentials, even if they require evil.

A. Maximal Moral Perfection

Because nothing can exceed God in greatness, most philosophers will take UG to mean that God is, among other things, maximally morally perfect. This is one of His more important properties, if not His most important property.⁵² Taking from William Rowe, I argue that God's maximal moral perfection must be grounded in His virtuous potentialities.

If God's maximal moral perfection is unsurpassable, and if this property is outwardly grounded in certain instances of God's actions, then God will always do what is morally unsurpassable, lest He be surpassable in moral greatness by not doing that which is unsurpassable at some moment. So, to determine whether God's maximal moral perfection is

⁵² See Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by James Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981); in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), p. 947. He said:

There is no possibility of thinking of anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be regarded as good without qualification, except a good will. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and whatever talents of the mind one might want to name are doubtless in many respects good and desirable, as are such qualities of temperament as courage, resolution, perseverance. But they can also become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good (GMM, 393, emphasis in the original).

See also Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008). He notes how moral goods are necessary for the happy life: "Let us even join with the Pleasures of the external Senses, the Perceptions of Beauty, Order, Harmony. These are no doubt more noble Pleasures, and seem to enlarge [sic] the Mind; and yet how cold and joyless are they, if there be no moral Pleasures of Friendship, Love, and Beneficence" (Hutcheson, p. 164)? Later, he says, "Where there is no Virtue, there is nothing worth Desire or Contemplation" (Hutcheson, p. 165). Finally, and more importantly, Hutcheson claims that virtue is the highest good: "we are indeed determin'd to judge Virtue with Peace and Safety, preferable to Virtue with Distress; but that at the same time we look upon the State of the Virtuous, the Publick-spirited, even in the utmost natural Distress, as preferable to all affluence of other Enjoyments" (Hutcheson, p. 166). Soon thereafter, he says it even more succinctly: "Virtue is the chief Happiness in the Judgment of all Mankind" (Hutcheson, p. 167).

For further discussion on the primacy of God's maximal moral perfection, see Eric Funkhouser, "On Privileging God's Moral Goodness," *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2006), pp. 409-422.

grounded in potentialities or in actualizations, we might evaluate whether the following conditional is true or false: If God is maximally morally perfect, then He will always *do* (not be) what is morally unsurpassable.⁵³

If the conditional is true, then more work will need to be done to prove the claim that God's maximal moral perfection is grounded in potentialities. It might be that God's maximal moral perfection is grounded in virtuous potentialities that always give rise to actualizations (e.g., benevolent actions) that are unsurpassable; but it might also be that God's maximal moral perfection is grounded in actualizations by virtue of always doing what is morally unsurpassable. However, if I can show that the conditional is false, we will have proven that God's maximal moral perfection is not grounded in actualizations because there will be instances in which God does not do what is morally unsurpassable, yet nevertheless is morally unsurpassable. If God sometimes does not do what is morally unsurpassable, yet is morally unsurpassable, God's maximal moral perfection must be grounded in potentialities.⁵⁴

Let us begin, then, to evaluate the conditional by considering Rowe's argument against the maximal moral perfection of God. He points out that if God created the world, He is not a

⁵³ Always doing what is morally unsurpassable is not intended to mean that God does *some* instance of an individual, morally unsurpassable action, if that is even possible. Though I doubt it is possible, let us suppose that within a certain action-type (e.g., bestowing grace) there is a maximum to what can be done (e.g., there is a limit to how much grace can be bestowed). The consequent of our conditional is not intended to mean that God always does some instance of an unsurpassable action (e.g., bestows grace to the maximum extent), according to what the maximum is within a certain action-type. No, what I mean is that God does, at every moment, a set of actions that cannot be surpassed in greatness, all-things-considered. The entire set of actions, what God could possibly do, at any moment, which could be several actions at the same time (e.g., bestowing grace and creating), is what is under consideration. If there is an all-things-considered, morally unsurpassable set of actions at time *t*, then no other set of actions could possibly be better for God to do at *t*. The idea is that, if God's maximal moral perfection is grounded outwardly, at every moment there is absolutely no actualization – neither a singular action, nor several actions – that could possibly be better than what God does, lest He be surpassable in what grounds His moral perfection, preventing Him from being *maximally* morally perfect. The above description is filled with temporal language, but this should be no problem. If God is timeless, then God will eternally engage in one action. This one action must be unsurpassable if God's maximal moral perfection is grounded in actualizations.

⁵⁴ Similarly, God's maximal moral perfection could not be grounded in both potentialities and actualizations. If God's maximal moral perfection is grounded in both, then God will be surpassable by a being who has all of God's potentialities, but who also has better actualizations.

maximally morally perfect being because, for any world any being creates, it would have been possible for there to have been a being who created a morally better world, given that there is no best possible world and given that worlds are value commensurable in such a way that there is an infinite chain of better possible worlds. Rowe, then, concludes that God is not maximally morally perfect.⁵⁵

Let us modify this so that general action is the center of focus, not just creation:

- (15) If God is maximally morally perfect, then He will always *do* (not be) what is morally unsurpassable.⁵⁶
- (16) Given that there is an infinite number of possible (sets of) actions, all of which are value commensurable on an infinite scale of better and worse (sets of) actions, for any (set of) action(s) that God does, because it is not as good as could have been done, it is not unsurpassably great.
- (17) So, God is not maximally morally perfect.

Thus runs Rowe's argument against the maximal moral perfection of God.

However, we are arguing neither for God's maximal moral perfection, nor against Rowe's argument. Yet, Rowe's argument provides a good launching point for an argument to determine that the conditional of part A ("If God is maximally morally perfect, then He will always *do* (not be) what is morally unsurpassable.") is false. We are trying to evaluate the truth-value of this conditional, and Rowe happens to use it within his argument as a premise.

Additionally, because UG states that God is the greatest possible being, and because God's

⁵⁵ William Rowe, "Can God Be Free?" in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, sixth edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), pp. 115-116.

⁵⁶ He embraces this when he says, "we should say that the degree of goodness an omniscient being possesses is reflected in the degree of goodness in the world it creates. And what this reasoning leads us to is the conclusion Leibniz reached: An unsurpassably good, omnipotent, omniscient creator will create an unsurpassably good world" (Rowe, "Can God Be Free?" p. 123).

maximal moral perfection is one of the central perfections of God's nature, we have already assumed that God is maximally morally perfect and that the conclusion of Rowe's argument is false.

Given these considerations, we can perform a G.E. Moore shift:⁵⁷

- (18) God is maximally morally perfect.
- (19) Given that there is an infinite number of possible (sets of) actions, all of which are value commensurable on an infinite scale of better and worse (sets of) actions, for any (set of) action(s) that God does, because it is not as good as could have been done, it is not unsurpassably great.
- (20) So, it is not the case that if God is maximally morally perfect, then He will always *do* (not be) what is morally unsurpassable.

Notice that in both (15) – (17) and (18) – (20), premises (16) and (19) are the same. So, we have two mutually exclusive, possible conjunctions that can be accepted if (16) and (19) are true:

- (21) God is maximally morally perfect, and God does not have to do what is unsurpassably great to be maximally morally perfect.
- (22) God must do what is unsurpassably great to be maximally morally perfect, and God is not maximally morally perfect.

On our assumption that God is maximally morally perfect (from UG and from the fact that one of God's central properties is His moral goodness), (21) must be true.

However, we may ask, are (16) and (19) true? I agree with Rowe that they are. There are three possibilities. At any given moment, either (1) there is exactly one best and unsurpassable possible (set of) action(s), or (2) there is not. If (2), then either (2a) there are a number of

⁵⁷ For more on G.E. Moore shifts, see William Rowe, "The Inductive Argument from Evil Against the Existence of God," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, sixth edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), pp. 311-312.

possible (sets of) actions God could do, each of which is morally unsurpassable, or (2b) there is no unsurpassable possible (set of) action(s).⁵⁸ Though (1) and (2a) might initially seem plausible, because God can always add to the quantity of goods, there is no cap on the value of actions. So, there is no morally unsurpassable (set of) action(s) whatsoever. (1) and (2a) are false. Let me explain this point further.

Before creating,⁵⁹ God can choose to create one person, or two people, or three people, and so on, *ad infinitum*. And if it is better to have two people than one person, and three people in the world is better than two, there really is no unsurpassable possible world, and so no unsurpassable possible action with regard to creation. For any possible world, God can always add to it by creating more good things. And if the quantity of goods in a world can always be increased, God can always do better actions. Instead of creating n number of good things, He can always create $n + 1$ good things. The latter action would be better than the former. As these actions increase in greatness *ad infinitum*, there cannot be a cap on how great actions can be.

But creating is not the only type of action. Maybe in a given state of affairs in which everyone is evil, God can display grace to one person, or to two people, or to three – and we are off on the same train of thought again. The action of showing grace to one person is exceeded in greatness by the action(s) of showing grace to two people. Just like with creation, showing grace to someone can always be exceeded by some other (set of) actions. Because increasing the number of beneficiaries that receive grace can increase *ad infinitum*, actions can increase *ad infinitum*.

⁵⁸ William Rowe, “The Problem of Divine Perfection and Freedom,” in *Reasoned Faith*, edited by Eleonore Stump (Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 231. Though Rowe was talking about possible worlds, the same idea can be applied to actions.

⁵⁹ This act of creation does not necessarily have to be the first act of creation, but could be an act of creation after the initial act of creation.

Even if we suppose that God cannot do better for some parts of the universe, presumably God can do better for other parts of the universe. And even if we suppose that all of our universe cannot be increased in greatness, presumably God can create another universe that is causally separate from our universe, increasing the total amount of goodness that there is in reality. God can always do something that makes reality better. And if God can always do something more to make reality better, then there will always be a better moral (set of) action(s) that God can do.⁶⁰

If this is true, then (16) and (19) are true, in which case, because God is maximally morally perfect, we must infer that our conditional is false. It is not the case that if God is maximally morally perfect, then He will always do what is morally unsurpassable. At the very least, there is one (set of) action(s) that God has done that is not as great as could have been done, namely when He created this world. He could have made a better world, which entails that He did not do what was morally unsurpassable at that moment, which would make the conditional false. Nevertheless, there is *no* unsurpassable (set of) action(s) whatsoever in any respect.

Because God does not do what is unsurpassable, yet remains maximally morally perfect, God's maximal moral perfection must not be grounded in actualizations. If so, it must be grounded in potentialities. Rather than actualizations, there must something deeper that

⁶⁰ If there is no value commensurability whatsoever, then talk of God doing the (un)surpassable is philosophically inappropriate because (un)surpassability requires value comparison. However, it does seem that at least some version of value commensurability is true. If *overall* value commensurability, according to which every action can be measured against every other action – if this is not true, then we can weaken the commensurability claim to every action being measurable against at least some other action of the same action-type, and the argument seems to run the same. A rejection of overall value commensurability does not entail that *nothing* is value commensurable, only that some things cannot be compared to certain other things. If so, then, though we might not be able to compare God's actions of action-type x to actions of action-type y, we might be able to say that one action within action-type x is better than another action of action-type x. And, presumably, for some action-types, there are an infinite number of increasingly better actions. For example, though we might not be able to compare God's creation of a world to God's bestowal of grace, within the action-type of creating a world, there are infinitely better worlds God could create; and within the action-type of bestowing grace, all things being equal, bestowing grace to person p and p' seems better than bestowing grace only to p. See Yujin Nagasawa's similar comments concerning the radial and linear models of God's greatness in *Maximal God*, pp. 40-76.

constitutes His goodness, something that is immutable, unchanging, and unsurpassably great, something like His character, His virtuous dispositions, or His moral potentialities.⁶¹

We can see this conclusion further when we evaluate the following scenario. Consider Sally, a benevolent young woman. She is completely disposed to loving others, such that, if a person were to come into contact with her, she would dedicate her time, energy, and resources to helping that person or making that person's life better. However, let us suppose that there is no one else alive where she lives. Maybe she lives in a desert or on deserted island, or maybe God brought her into a universe by herself. Nevertheless, she never meets another person to be benevolent towards, and, because of this, she never actualizes her benevolent potentiality. If actualizations ground moral goodness, she would not be a morally good person (at least, with regard to being benevolent), even though she had a benevolent virtue. This seems wrong. My intuitions tell me that she would be a morally good person. Her moral goodness, grounded in her character, simply was unable to be exercised.

Going further, let us suppose that, all-things-being-equal, Sally one day comes into contact with someone, and she actualizes her potentials. "Finally," she says, "there is somebody to love." Would we thereby conclude that her moral goodness was established by virtue of now having her potentials actualized? My intuitions tell me that there would be no difference in her moral goodness. She would still be the same morally good person that she was prior to having met someone and having actualized her potentials. The only difference would be that, by actualizing her potentials, she was finally able to express her inner goodness.

A similar scenario can be depicted, according to which there are two women, identical in moral character, living slightly different lives, such that one of them, by pure happenstance, actualizes her potentials just a bit more than the other. I would not conclude that one was morally

⁶¹ See Yujin Nagasawa's similar argument in *Maximal God*, pp. 32-33, 107-108, 156-157, 203-204.

better than the other. Yet, we would have to conclude that one was morally better than the other if actualizations ground moral goodness. One of the women might have performed more morally good deeds than the other, but they both had equal moral worth.

At this point, one might ask: Why do we regard actualizations as so important when evaluating the moral goodness of a person if they do not ground anyone's moral goodness? The reason is because actualizations are the only *epistemic* means through which we can evaluate a person's inner moral worth. David Hume said it best:

'Tis evident, that when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produc'd them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper. The external performance has no merit. We must look within to find the moral quality. This we cannot do directly; and therefore fix our attention on actions, as on external signs. But these actions are still consider'd as signs; and the ultimate object of our praise and approbation is the motive, that produc'd them (*Treatise*, 3.2.1.2).⁶²

Hume understood that actions are epistemically necessary to evaluate the moral goodness of a person. They are not necessary for a person actually to be morally good. And, of course, because there is no unsurpassable (set of) action(s), God's surpassable actions are unreliable signs of His inner unsurpassable moral greatness.

Therefore, given everything that has been said, we should conclude that God's maximal moral perfection is grounded in His inner virtuous potentialities.

B. Maximal Intellectual Perfection

Through an examination of one of God's other maximal perfections, we can support the argument presented in part A. In doing so, we will be able to see the distinction between the

⁶² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 307. Of course, having a singular motive is not as good as having a virtuous disposition that disposes one to do what is good in all relevant situations.

result of God's potentialities and the potentialities themselves, and to say that the greatness of God is not grounded in the results of but in the possession of the virtuous potentialities.

Take God's maximal intellectual perfection. One might try to say that maximal intellectual perfection is having an unsurpassable bank of knowledge. However, similar to the above, if we evaluate maximal intellectual perfection by how much knowledge God actually has, then there will always be another being who could have had more than He. For any given world, there is always another world that allows God to have more knowledge. For example, let us suppose that the actual world W has n number of grains of sand. From this, there is clearly another possible world W' in which there is $n + 1$ grains of sand. Though this might be trivial, and though this might not add to the *value* of the world, it still increases God's *knowledge* bank. And because this can be done infinitely many times, God's knowledge can expand infinitely.

One response to this is that there is an intrinsic maximum to God's knowledge. For example, we might say that the intrinsic maximum of perfect knowledge is: "For any proposition, [a maximally intellectually perfect] being knows whether it is true or false."⁶³ Though this might be true, it is irrelevant to the comparison between God's greatness in the actual world and the greatness of some other being in a possible world if maximal intellectual perfection is grounded in the possession of knowledge. Suppose that it is true in W that, for being G , for any proposition, G knows whether it is true or false, and that there are n grains of sand. Suppose further that it is true in W' that, for being G' , for any proposition, G' knows whether it is true or false, and that there are $n + 1$ grains of sand, all else being equal. Though both beings might satisfy the above claim of what is required (not necessarily sufficient) to be

⁶³ Louis Pojman and Michael Rea, "The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, sixth edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), p. 138. See footnote 43 for my reason concerning why I exchange "a maximally intellectually perfect" for "an omniscient".

maximally intellectually perfect, if maximal intellectual perfection is grounded in the possession of knowledge, we can still say that G' is more knowledgeable and, so, intellectually greater than G because G' possesses more knowledge by virtue of that one extra grain of sand that is known.

Indeed, the same could be said for those with infinite knowledge. Presumably, an infinite can be expanded and increased. For example, the set of all natural numbers is a greater infinite than the set of all natural numbers that are only even. Because of this, G in W might have infinite knowledge, yet G' in W' might also have infinite knowledge. However, because of the increased number of propositions that can be known (and are known) within W' compared to W, G' is greater in knowledge than G.⁶⁴

At this point, we would surely not want to say that God's maximal intellectual perfection is grounded, at least purely, in the actual possession of knowledge, lest there be a possible being who is more knowledgeable and, thus, a greater possible being than God in the actual world. No, what we should say is that maximal intellectual perfection is at least partially grounded in something more than the actual possession of knowledge. In other words, we ought not to say that God's greatness is grounded in merely extrinsic properties of God that can fluctuate as the world around Him changes, such as the number of propositions that can be known. To some degree, we need to regard His greatness in terms of something else. A good possibility is that He has intellectual virtues that ground part of His value.

What the above definition of maximal intellectual perfection ("For any proposition, [a maximally intellectually perfect] being knows whether it is true or false.") might have been trying to convey was something along the following lines: x is maximally intellectually perfect

⁶⁴ It might be that the two infinite banks of knowledge are actually equal in size, given that they can be placed in one-to-one correspondence with one another. I assume that one-to-one correspondence does not entail the sameness of size. For more on the concept of infinity, see Paul Draper, "A Critique of the Kalām Cosmological Argument," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, sixth edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), pp. 172-178.

iff x has the property such that x will directly, immediately, and unfailingly⁶⁵ know the truth-value of any proposition. Suppose that there are n grains of sand at time t and that God knows at t that there are n grains of sand. Suppose further that He creates n' grains of sand in addition to n at $t + 1$. At $t + 1$, He will know that there are $n + n'$ grains of sand because His intellectual virtues provides Him this knowledge, by whatever process that might be.

Indeed, God's maximal intellectual perfection might be mainly grounded in the continual exercise of one of His powers. Thomas Senor thinks something similar to this. He says, "X is [maximally intellectually perfect] iff X has fully-exercised maximal cognitive power."⁶⁶ Whatever it is, God having the property of maximal intellectual perfection is not grounded *purely* in the number of proposition God actually knows, but also in the never-failing and virtuous ability to know the truth-value of any proposition. God's knowledge is not fully grounded in the actual possession of knowledge, but also in the potential possession of knowledge through having the virtuous ability to come to know directly, immediately, and unfailingly whatever may come to pass.

Yet, we run into the same issue as before. Potentially, there are two possible beings, both of which have fully-exercised maximal cognitive power, but one has more knowledge than the other because it lives in a world with more propositions than can be known. The only way to maintain that God is the greatest possible being is to say that God's maximal intellectual perfection is not *at all* grounded in the possession of knowledge, an extrinsic property of God that is dependent upon factors external to Him, namely how many propositions can be known,

⁶⁵ "Direct" indicates that God does not require a medium to come to know anything. For example, He does not require someone telling Him that y to know that y . "Immediately" indicates that knowing y happens at the moment in which y can be known. "Unfailingly" indicates that no failure occurs in the acquisition of knowledge, either (1) in falsely believing a proposition, (2) in not knowing a proposition, or (3) through a cognitive mechanism messing up.

⁶⁶ Thomas Senor, "Omniscience and the Problem of Foreknowledge and Freedom," unpublished work provided for his Fall 2018, Philosophy of Religion class (University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas), p. 3. See footnote 43 for my reason concerning why I exchange "maximally intellectually perfect" for "omniscient."

and that it is *only* grounded in an inward virtuous potentiality of God that produces knowledge as its actualization.

This is not to say that God does not know all things that can be known or that God could possibly be ignorant of certain things. No, all I am claiming is that God's maximal intellectual perfection is not itself grounded in His knowledge. His perfect knowledge is the effect of His maximal intellectual perfection being actualized. Whenever there is something to be known, God comes to know it directly, immediately, and unfailingly.⁶⁷

C. Summary and Objections to God's Maximal Perfections Being Grounded in Potentials

To summarize, let us transition back to God's maximal moral perfection. At every moment, we can imagine God doing one more caring act. Even actions that can be done fully (just as one can know all things fully), such as obeying all duties one has or maintaining the laws of nature, can be exceeded. Even though we normally think of a person either fulfilling all of his duties or not, we can always imagine another world in which he fulfills one more duty by virtue of having one more duty to fulfill and by obeying it.⁶⁸ Even though we normally think of God as either fully maintaining the laws of nature or not, we can always imagine another world in which there is one more law of nature, such that, in that other world, God does better by maintaining more laws of nature.

⁶⁷ Note the similarity with moral dispositions. Nafsika Athanassoulis said the following: "Full virtue requires that one is kind and compassionate in all circumstances where this is the appropriate behavior, no matter how difficult it is to do so, and that one should act effortlessly, no matter how many temptations there are to do otherwise" (Athanassoulis, p. 219). Just like moral virtues, which ground God's maximal moral perfection, *will lead* to virtuous action whenever a relevant circumstance arises in which virtuous action can take place; so too God's intellectual virtues, which ground His maximal intellectual perfection, *will lead* to knowledge whenever a relevant circumstance arises in which intellectual exercise can take place. I will talk about this more in the upcoming section.

⁶⁸ This is not to say that God has duties that He fails to fulfill. This only means that God has more duties in another possible world, such that, though, for every possible world, God fulfills all duties that He has, He fulfills more duties in another possible world than He does in the actual world, assuming that He has some duties in the actual world.

Thus, God's maximal moral perfection is not grounded in the *actual* performance of morally good actions at all, but only in the *potential* performance of morally good actions. In other words, God has all the virtuous character traits, all of which are good to the maximal extent, having both the capacity and the disposition to do what is good, such that, whenever a relevant situation arises in which the virtuous potential can be actualized, God actualizes it. He is fully just, He is fully merciful, He is fully gracious, and He is fully loving. He is wholly virtuous, possessing the maximal array of virtues, each of which is fully capable of actualization and fully disposes God to actualization. These virtuous character traits, in addition to God lacking any vice – that is, any bad disposition, inclination, character trait, or potentiality (such as being unjust or cowardly)⁶⁹ – are the sole sources of God's maximal moral perfection. God's maximal moral perfection is not grounded in His actions, but in His virtues; in His potentialities, not in His actualizations. From these potentialities, moral actualizations flow.

It should be noted here that there is a similarity and difference between God's moral and intellectual actualizations. At every moment, there is a *practical* cap (not a metaphysical cap) for intellectual actualizations, in that, in a given world, God can know all things that can be known in *that* world, but He cannot have more knowledge while in that world because there are only so many propositions that can be known in a given world. Even though God's intellectual actualizations do not ground His perfection, due to the fact that there is always another possible world with another piece of knowledge that can be known, such that there is always another

⁶⁹ René Descartes said that the ability to deceive is a good, but the will to deceive is an evil. If so, we can modify my claim to say that God has no ill will, even though He possesses the capacity to do what is evil. See his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, second edition, edited by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 43 (AT 53). I embrace that God is necessarily good and, thus, in a way, incapable of doing evil. However, this incapability might be derived from God never having the will, not from God lacking the inner capacity. See Thomas Aquinas, "Is God's Power Limited?" in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, sixth edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), p. 88. See also the debate between Eric Funkhouser and Thomas Senior. The former's article is "On Privileging God's Moral Goodness," and the latter's article is "God's Goodness Needs No Privilege: A Reply to Funkhouser," *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2006), pp. 423-431.

being with more intellectual actualization than He; in any given world, there is a cap for how much can be known in *that* world. God's virtuous intellectual potentialities always produce full and complete knowledge regarding what can be known in whatever world God exists. Similarly, there is a practical cap (not a metaphysical cap) on how much one can obey obligations. Even though God's moral actualizations do not ground His perfection, due to the fact that there is always another possible world in which there is another duty to obey, such that there is always another being with more duties fulfilled; in any given world, there is a cap for how much one can obey in *that* world. In other words, for any given world, regarding His knowledge and obligations, God can do what is maximally great in *that* world. His maximal perfections cause Him to do what is practically maximal.

However, God's moral actualizations differ from His intellectual actualizations, in that God cannot do, within any given world, a maximal amount of non-obligatory good deeds. For example, He could create one person, or two people, or three people – and so on, *ad infinitum*. Thus, though, when a relevant situation arises, God's potentials always cause Him to do what is practically maximal in a given world when such a practical maximum can be reached, with regard to the things in a given world that He cannot practically do to a maximal extent (such as doing non-obligatory good deeds), His moral potentials do not cause Him to do what is maximal. In other words, when there is no maximal actualization, His moral potentials dispose Him to do *something* that is good in every relevant situation, but the good thing will not be maximally good. In any given situation, His maximal perfections cause Him to do what is maximal when there is a maximal that can be done in *that* given world, but when there is no maximal for a given set of actions, His potentials cause Him to do something that is (non-maximally) good.

Additionally, I do not think that God's inability alone to choose what is maximal justifies God in choosing a world with evil-involving-goods. One might think, *Well, the LPE is solved because God simply has to choose some good world, right?* However, evil is naturally repugnant, and God can always choose a better world without such evil, something that is more closely aligned with His pure maximal greatness. For any "spot" of goodness there is, God has no reason to choose anything less than a good intimately grounded in His pure nature, even though there might be infinite spots of goodness. What we need is something fundamental to God's goodness that, as it were, calls out for a world with evil, such that, the highest and purest good that could possibly be, demands of God that He make a world in which evil exists. In this, God would not be choosing an arbitrary evil-involving-good – that is, an evil-involving-good with no real connection to God's goodness. God would be choosing an evil-involving-good that is intimately grounded in His own fundamental goodness. Potentialities, as I will argue in section III, create within virtue-bearers yearnings for actualization, even if the actualizations require evil.

Nevertheless, someone might object to God's maximal perfections being grounded in virtuous potentialities by pointing out that there is no limit, for example, to how just or merciful one can be. Presumably, any potentiality can grow in strength *ad infinitum*, which would make potentialities just as susceptible to the above critique as actualities are. Why, for example, could God not be exceeded in justness by having a virtue of justness that is of greater strength? Why, for example, could God not be exceeded in intellectual greatness by having a potentiality that is of greater strength, either in disposition or in capability?

However, this objection does not work on God's maximal intellectual perfection at least, in which God's cognitive facilities always produce perfect knowledge. I cannot imagine a being having more intellectual strength than a being who has the potentiality such that He directly,

immediately, and unfailingly comes to know all things that there are to know. How could His intellectual “strength” be greater? It produces knowledge of necessity when it is actualized. So, even if we cannot rescue God’s moral potentialities, at the least we have one potentiality that is not susceptible to the same critique that actualities are.

Yet, someone might point out that overdetermination is possible. Maybe there is a being who directly, immediately, and unfailingly comes to know all things through the possession of *two* separate powers, each of which produce knowledge directly, immediately, and unfailingly. And, the number of mechanisms in the mind of a divine being is subject to the same actualization problem presented above. God could have one faculty that produces knowledge directly, immediately, and unfailingly, but another possible being could have two faculties. Another could have three. And we are off on the same train of thought as before.

But, I struggle to see how this argument concerning overdetermination provides any ground for rejecting my theory. On the assumption that potentials ground perfection, having more faculties that do the same thing is not a good that can add to any being’s greatness. It is useless if the only thing that it does is overdetermine a divine being having knowledge. Why would a useless mechanism be a great-making property? It might be a property that decreases greatness! After all, it is useless, and why would a perfect being (one who is regularly thought to be utterly simple)⁷⁰ have a useless mechanism? One might think that it can act as a “backup” in case one of God’s mechanisms fails, but God is not thought of as having mechanisms that can fail in the sense of them ceasing from working as they are intended. So, properties that overdetermine do not add to the greatness of a being in any way, on the assumption that perfection is grounded in virtuous potentialities.

⁷⁰ Thomas Morris, *Our Idea of God*, pp. 113-118.

This is different from the actualization of knowledge, which is actually a good. Let us assume that actualizations ground perfection. Because knowledge can grow infinitely, and because it is a good, if actualizations ground the perfection of God, there will always be a greater possible being, such that there will always be a being who can surpass God in greatness. The difference is manifest. If actualizations ground perfection, unless we arbitrarily include some actualizations and exclude others, we cannot ignore any actualization. If potentials ground perfection, unless we arbitrarily include some potentials and exclude others, we cannot ignore any potential. But when we include every actual in our calculation of greatness, there will always be another possible being who can be greater than God by virtue of the fact that certain actualizations, such as knowledge, can add greatness *ad infinitum* to a being as the knowledge increases. But overdetermined faculties do not add greatness to a being – and possibly decrease a being’s greatness due to it being a useless faculty – so even if we include them in our calculation, they will not cause any problem for my theory due to the fact that they cannot cause an infinite increase in greatness. So overdetermination is not a problem.⁷¹

But, what can be said regarding God’s maximal moral perfection? Unlike God’s intellectual potentials, which directly, immediately, and unfailingly produces their effects, an objector might think that moral virtues are different. One might think that they do not always produce their effects. A just and merciful judge, for example, might act in one case justly by sentencing a criminal to a full and fair sentence, but in another case he might temper his justice with mercy. A judge who is just does not always sentence according to perfect justice, and a merciful judge does not always sentence according to perfect mercy. So, the response made for God’s maximal intellectual perfection does not work for His virtues. They do not always produce directly, immediately, and unfailingly. One can increase in strength to overcome another.

⁷¹ Keep this idea in mind. In section III, I will use the idea of uselessness to object to Schellenberg’s argument.

However, this misunderstands virtues. Virtues are dispositions in which the possessor of a virtue *will act* virtuously in given circumstances.⁷² If they are not, at least God, being maximally morally perfect, has maximal dispositions, such that they always give rise to good actions in relevant circumstances.⁷³ Nevertheless, the problem is that dispositions are rather vague. Classic examples of dispositions initially seem to be straightforward, but are not as simple as they first appear. For example, glass is usually thought of as having the disposition to break when struck. Whenever the situation arises in which glass is struck, the glass will break.⁷⁴

Yet, not every instance of a piece of glass being struck will lead to it breaking, which is a problem if dispositions always produce certain effects in certain circumstances. For example, it might be the case that a piece of glass has packing material around it, preventing the striking of the glass from causing it to break. We must add more detail to our description of the disposition if we are to ensure that the effect will arise. We might say (1) that glass without packing material around it has the disposition to break when struck or (2) that glass has the disposition to break when struck and when packing material is not around it. Yet, if dispositions require that their effects are produced in certain circumstances, as is normally thought,⁷⁵ then dispositions will continually get more specific to avoid counterexamples. For example, in order to avoid the glass not breaking after being struck when the laws of nature are not constant or when a supernatural

⁷² See footnotes 47 and 67. See Nafsika Athanassoulis, pp. 215 and 218. See Bonnie Kent, pp. 141, 149-150. Kent claims that Aristotle embraced that “virtues are one-sided, with choice built into them... We cannot choose contrary to our own moral dispositions because choice is itself the effect of our moral dispositions” (Kent, p. 150). Though Aristotle’s position might be disputable, this seems correct for God at least. See the rest of this paragraph and footnote 73.

⁷³ Linda Zagzebski says, “God’s motives are perfect, and his success is perfect as well. God is, therefore, not just reliable, he is perfectly reliable. A divine virtue, then, is the combination of a perfect motive with perfect success in bringing about the end of the motive” (Zagzebski, p. 545). Though in an endnote she hesitates to analyze exactly what this means, it seems clear that, if God is fully motivated to do an action, and if God is fully reliable in bringing about what He intends, His virtues will never fail to give rise to relevant action in relevant situations.

⁷⁴ Jesse R. Steinberg, “Dispositions and Subjunctives,” *Philosophical Studies* 148, no. 3 (2010), pp. 323-325.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

force intervenes, we will have to add to the above disposition description for glass that the laws of nature stay the same and that no supernatural force prevents it from breaking when struck.⁷⁶

If virtues are dispositions, and if dispositions always produce their effects in certain circumstances, it is not clear exactly how we are to supplement the description of virtuous dispositions to make it the case that they always produce their effects.⁷⁷ Why was it that the judge acted, say, justly, instead of mercifully? I am not sure, but it probably has something to do with a mixture of his motives, desires, values, and beliefs. The conditions for mercy, whatever those might have been, were simply not met. The judge had the disposition of mercy; it simply remained dormant in the given scenario. We have to be aware that virtues, just like all other dispositions, have certain conditions surrounding their actualization.

If there are complex circumstantial constraints on every virtue, then virtues genuinely are direct, immediate, and unfailing at producing action that is virtuous in relevant situations. They never fail to produce their effects. They simply have complex circumstantial constraints. If so, I am not sure how God could have “stronger” virtues. His virtues of necessity produce their effects when certain conditions arise. How could God have a stronger virtue when His virtues already produce directly, immediately, and unfailingly? Similarly, having two dispositions toward justice will simply overdetermine God. A second virtue of justness will be useless when He already has the virtue of justness that causes Him directly, immediately, and unfailingly to act justly in certain circumstances. This does not add any greatness to God. Thus, all of God’s potentialities discussed in this paper are not subject to the actualization problem.

The above account leads to a second objection. Why regard God as *fully* just if He has certain conditions surrounding His virtue of justice? To this I point out that there are conditions

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 325-328.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 326-328.

surrounding God's other dispositional perfections as well. God's potentialities do not simply actualize on their own. Certain conditions must be met. There must be something to be known for His intellectual potentials to be actualized. Without a new fact to be known, God's intellectual powers do nothing. This does not remove them from being present. God still has His cognitive powers and His intellectual dispositions, but He might not be exercising them at a particular time. Why is the same not true for God's moral virtues? There are certain conditions that lead to the actualization of a virtuous potentiality, and there are other conditions that do not lead to the actualization of a virtuous potentiality.

However, the objector might continue. Okay, sure, God might have certain conditions that must be met before His potentials are actualized, but the condition for *full* potentials to be actualized is simply being in a situation in which it is *possible* for the potential to be actualized. For example, a fully disposed cognitive power will produce knowledge whenever there is a context in which it is *possible* for it to produce knowledge. So, if God is supposed to be *fully* just, God will act justly in every context in which it is possible for a just action to be done; and if God is *fully* merciful, God will act mercifully in every context in which it is possible for a merciful action to be done. But, this cannot be because sometimes justice and mercy conflict in situations in which it is possible for one to be either just or merciful.

To this I have three responses. First, as is customary among perfect being theists, we can simply maintain that God has the greatest possible array of *compossible* great-making properties.⁷⁸ Because there are sometimes conflicts between the two virtues (both of which are great-making properties), it might be that God is simply not fully just or not fully merciful. He might be fully just and almost fully merciful so that in situations in which justice and mercy conflict, He will act justly. Or, He might be fully merciful and almost fully just so that in

⁷⁸ Thomas Morris, *Our Idea of God*, p. 35.

situations in which mercy and justice conflict, He will act mercifully. This would maintain the thesis that potentials provide a maximum in which God's maximal greatness can be grounded, but would not cause any conflicts.

Second, why think that there is only one condition surrounding the actualization of full potentials, namely it being possible for the potential to be actualized? The objector states that in every situation in which one could possibly be just, one will be just. However, why can we not include in the conditions for a full disposition to be actualized – why can we not include that there is no conflict with another full disposition?

For a simplistic example, suppose that there is a stone that is being held. Stones have the disposition to move downward when possible, such that, whenever it is possible for the stone to move downward (e.g., it is not being held or prevented from moving downward by a solid object), it moves downward. Yet, we would be remiss if we did not also consider that there might be an opposing force that pulls the stone upward. Maybe the stone is being held exactly between two equidistant planets. So, once the person lets go of the stone, the gravitational force keeps it where it is. It would not move downward simply because it was possible.

Of course, the stone is not a person with choice, whereas God is. When there is conflict between full dispositions, it might be that what is done comes down to personal choice. So, I see no reason why we cannot say that full dispositions automatically actualize when it is possible for them to be actualized and when there is no conflict with another full disposition, but that when there is conflict, choice matters.

Third, it might be that a just virtue is only a virtue when supplemented by virtues that are merciful. It might be that there is a meta-virtue upon which (all) other virtues are dependent in such a way that, unless one is disposed according to its (the meta-virtue's) mean, one cannot be

virtuous in other capacities. For example, if one breaks the meta-virtue by, say, having too much justness, then any non-meta-virtue, such as mercifulness, ceases from being a virtue; or, if one breaks the meta-virtue by having too much mercifulness, then any non-meta-virtue, such as justness, fails to be virtuous. Virtues might become vices when not balanced with other virtues.

Indeed, this echoes a thought that Aristotle had concerning the reciprocity of the virtues:

“nobody can have any moral virtue without practical wisdom, nor can anyone have practical wisdom without *all* the moral virtues.”⁷⁹ If so, then one can be *fully* just and *fully* merciful without any conflict. The meta-virtue requires a balance between the two.

Recall that the objector claimed that full justice always leads to just action when it is possible for one to act justly; and that full mercy always leads to merciful action when it is possible for one to act mercifully. There are two ways my meta-virtue theory answers this objection. First, the balance between justness and mercifulness might entail being disposed more to justice than mercy, or vice versa. Whenever there is conflict between justice and mercy, though a person might be fully just and fully merciful by virtue of being in balance, if the balanced ratio of justness to mercifulness entails that one has, at is were, more justness than mercifulness, then he will act justly when there is conflict.

⁷⁹ Bonnie Kent, pp. 141-142, emphasis in the original. See also Mark Timmons, *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, second edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), pp. 276-277. It should be noted that Timmons distinguishes between two unity theses. The first is what he calls the reciprocity of virtues, according to which, whenever a person has one virtue, she also has all the other virtues. The second is the single-virtue thesis, according to which all virtues are the same. Though I do not embrace the single-virtue thesis (given that justice and mercy conflict), I do embrace that there is a central or supreme virtue. I take this to be (wise) love. This might be the grounding for the meta-virtue of justice and mercy. Because love acts in different ways at different times as the circumstances demand, a just and merciful judge might be able to act with full and pure justice in one instance, but full and pure mercy in another instance. Indeed, Francis Hutcheson maintained that morality is grounded in benevolence, which suggests that he is operating from a virtue ethical framework. Yet, because, according to Hutcheson, universal benevolence aims at maximizing the greatest happiness for the greatest number, there might be situations in which acting justly is better than acting mercifully, and vice versa, depending upon which action leads to more happiness. See Hutcheson, pp. 116 and 125. For the single-virtue thesis, see Mark Timmons, p. 277. For care ethics as a version of virtue ethics, see Mark Timmons, pp. 282-288. See also Margaret A. McLaren, “Feminist Ethics: Care as a Virtue,” in *Feminists Doing Ethics*, edited by Peggy DesAutels and Joanne Waugh (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

The second way to avoid the objection, and the answer I prefer, is by noting that the meta-virtue might require the descriptions of the dispositions of justness and mercifulness to have an extra condition for actualization. Without this condition, a person will have too much justness or too much mercifulness, making them vices. So, to be (virtuously) fully just or fully merciful, each virtue must have an extra condition for actualization, in addition to the condition that one is in a situation in which it is possible to act on the virtue. More specifically, the meta-virtue might require for the virtue of, say, justness to have the following dispositional condition: Act justly only if, in balance, either one has acted, is acting, or will act mercifully. It might be that the meta-virtue requires that full justice let mercy take over at times, and it might be that the meta-virtue requires that full mercy let justice take over at times. They might be in balance, not by pure motivational force, but by allowing the other virtue to act.

By this, I am not necessarily claiming that every action is both just and merciful. In other words, my meta-virtue theory does not say that when a person acts justly, she does not fully exercise justice in order also to have some mercy within the action; or that when a person acts mercifully, she does not fully exercise mercy in order also to have some justice within the action. I am simply saying that when the virtues of justice and mercy are in balance, they each have an extra dispositional condition that requires also acting in balance in some respect. Sometimes a just and merciful judge will sentence a man to bear his punishment fully and fairly. That criminal will bear his crime in perfect justice. And other times that same judge will act from mercy by either not sentencing a criminal at all or lessening his sentence. In the former case, the judge will act in perfect mercy, whereas in the latter he will act both from partial justice and partial mercy. I am not claiming that the meta-virtue requires people to act from partial justice and partial mercy at all times. I am claiming that the meta-virtue requires some sort of balance in action, which

might entail acting partially from justice and partially from mercy, or acting sometimes according to full justice and other times according to full mercy.

Is the meta-virtue ad hoc? I think not. First, this follows the virtue ethical traditions of the doctrine of the mean and the reciprocity of the virtues. The only issue is that justice and mercy sometimes conflict, so they cannot both be acted upon fully at every moment. I see no reason why we cannot say that one person must have the disposition of justice and the disposition of mercy in such a balance that sometimes she acts from justice and other times from mercy.

Second, even if my account is not from a virtue-ethical tradition, it makes sense. Both justice and mercy are genuine moral goods, and we should not have a world without both. Each is a necessary condition for a good world. Indeed, even if justice is better than mercy, or mercy better than justice, we need both for the best worlds. A world only with justice or only with mercy is not as good of a world as a world with both justice and mercy in balance. Similarly, a person, not just a world, needs both, in balance, whatever that balance might be. It might be that the mean for the meta-virtue requires justice or mercy to take priority. That is fine, as long as everything is in balance. It might be that the mean requires justice and mercy to be of equal share but with an extra dispositional condition on actualization. That is fine, as long as everything is in balance. So, because we are already operating from a virtue ethical (or theoretical) standpoint, it seems right to propose a meta-virtue that demands balance between the two. If so, God can be perfectly and fully just and perfectly and fully merciful, even though they conflict, given that they are in balance. Without this balance, He would cease from being just and merciful.

III. Objection to (6)

Let us now turn to evaluate Schellenberg's argument. For a reminder, (6) reads as follows: If every worldly good that permits or requires evil is greatly exceeded by a pure good of the same type, existing prior to creation in God, then any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God. As logic demands, to make (6) false, we must find a possible situation in which the antecedent is true and the consequent is false. There are two approaches to refute (6). First, we can refute (6) if we do not assume that modeling goods are better than all evil-involving-goods – that is, goods that permit or require evil. Second, even if we assume for this, we can refute it by analyzing what are necessary conditions for the best worlds. Let us begin with the first approach.

A. God's Evil-Involving-Goods Are Better Than Modeling Goods in Creatures

Because of the infinite ladder of better (sets of) actions, if God's maximal moral perfection is grounded in actions or in the outward expression of moral behavior, God will be surpassable in moral greatness. This cannot be. God's maximal moral perfection is grounded in the inward possession of virtuous potentials to the maximal extent. Similarly, God's maximal intellectual perfection is not grounded in the actualization of knowledge, but in the dispositional potentials to bring about knowledge. If this is true, God's maximal greatness is not entirely made up of the actualization of certain properties, but in their potentiality. Though God might have some of His attributes entirely actualized, such as His beauty, His greatness is not entirely made up of actualized attributes.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ It is plausible to suppose that, technically, beauty is not an actualization. Actualizations, in the way I have been speaking of them, arise from potentials. Yet, beauty is not from any sort of potential beauty. Nevertheless, beauty is an actual, in some respect, even though there is no potentiality that gives rise to it. Because of this, and to keep things simple, I refer to beauty here as an actualization.

Note here that if some of God's maximal perfections are potentialities, these potentialities are greater goods than the actualizations of the attributes. For example, the virtuous disposition of courageousness will be better than the actualization of acting courageously in a given context.⁸¹ The reason for this is because God is the greatest possible being and because His greatness is grounded in His potentials. Nothing can surpass His greatness, so nothing can surpass His potentials. Schellenberg says the same thing: given UG "the instancing in God of the relevant type of good is *far better* than any other possible instancing."⁸² God's good potentials, because they ground His maximal perfection, are far greater goods than any other good there is. Thus, God's potentialities are greater goods than His actualizations.

This does not mean that the actualizations are finite in number. Some might think that if actualizations can infinitely increase in greatness, then they will eventually reach the point in which the greatness of potentialities rests. But this is not true. There are different qualities to goods. As Mill said, "some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others."⁸³

Roger Crisp has a wonderful example to illustrate this point.⁸⁴ Suppose that you have the choice between two lives, one as a composer and one as a sophisticated oyster. If you choose to be a composer, you will have great success, live in great honor, and experience great pleasure for

⁸¹ It might seem paradoxical to some for God to have courage. If courage entails bravery in the midst of fear, and if God cannot be afraid, then God cannot be courageous. Linda Zagzebski notes this very thing. However, Zagzebski also notes that Aquinas claimed that God contains all virtues. Zagzebski goes further by asking how God could have all the virtues, including things such as courageousness, given that God cannot fear. Her answer is that the incarnation of God allowed Him to have courageousness (Zagzebski, p. 548).

Even so, let us suppose that God did not become incarnate. Because potentialities do not necessarily have to be actualized, God could still have the potentiality of courageousness that is just never actualized. *If* God were to be afraid, *then* He would be courageous. He is simply never afraid.

If these two points are unpersuasive, I ask the reader to ignore comments about courageousness and to substitute in comments about, say, mercifulness. The purpose of mentioning courageousness is merely to provide a wide variety of virtuous potentialities that require evil for actualization.

⁸² J.L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," p. 37, emphasis in the original.

⁸³ John Stuart Mill, "Hedonism," from *Utilitarianism* (1863), in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, second edition, edited by Russ Shafer-Landau (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 259, emphasis in the original.

⁸⁴ Roger Crisp, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Mill on Utilitarianism* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 23-25.

several years. Eventually you will die at a ripe, old age, though not too old. If you choose the oyster, however, you will have infinitesimal pleasure for a much longer period of time.

Eventually, if there is no difference in the quality of these good lives, the life of the oyster, if lived long enough, will surpass in greatness the life of the composer. This seems wrong. The quality of any given good matters when evaluating how good it is. By analogy, potentialities, which make up some of God's perfections, are better than actualizations because they are higher quality goods, though there is an infinite progression of actualizations. God's potentials are such great quality goods that no matter how many actualizations are present, they will never reach the greatness of God's potentials, just like an oyster's life will never reach the greatness of the life of the composer, even if it is lived for eternity.

Nevertheless, there are (at least) two types of lesser goods outside of the good potentials that God has: the good actualizations of good potentials, and modeling goods. Because God's maximal moral perfection is grounded in His virtuous potentialities, a modeling good might be that some people have virtuous potentialities.⁸⁵ And the associated actualization of virtuous potentialities (in either God or creatures) is a good itself. But certain actualizations require evil to come into existence. For example, acting courageously requires evil that can be courageously faced.⁸⁶ So, some actualizations are evil-involving-goods – that is, goods that permit or require evil.

⁸⁵ See Linda Zagzebski, p. 544, 547-549.

It should be noted that because not all of God's goodness is necessarily grounded in potentials, creatures might not be the only things that can model God's goodness. For example, the Grand Canyon, though not a creature, might be able to model God's beauty. To keep things simple, I talk primarily of *creatures* modeling God's goodness by modeling His potentials.

⁸⁶ It might be that people can be courageous in the midst of *perceived* evil. However, even if the thing a person is afraid of is not actually evil, the (undesired) fear itself seems to be an evil, and the false perception of evil also seems to be an evil.

God, of course, knows all things, so He will not perceive things falsely. If He acts courageously (or actualizes some potential that requires evil for actualization), because He cannot be mistaken, the evil must actually be there.

Other instances of actualizations require evil. For example, the actualization of *forgiveness*, from the virtuous potentiality of *being* forgiving, requires something to forgive. This entails that some sort of evil has happened to the victim, such that there is need for forgiveness. If there is no evil, why call it forgiveness? At least, forgiveness is done for those who have accidentally caused hardship for the victim. This hardship is, to some degree, evil.

However, this sort of forgiveness, according to which victims excuse accidents, is not how we normally think of forgiveness. Forgiveness is normally understood as the forgiveness of sin. Pamela Hieronymi argues that when we forgive, we must be able to maintain that the action was a genuine moral wrong. When we reject such a judgment, we are not really forgiving; we are only excusing. By maintain that the person did not intend to do wrong, and by maintaining that the harm was an accident, we excuse the action and thereby release him from blame. Nothing wrong was done. If anyone was at fault, it was Fate. We do not think that there is anything to forgive when we conclude that a person has done no moral ill. Forgiveness is more substantive, requiring us to maintain the beliefs that the action was wrong, that the wrongdoer was a member of the moral community, and that we did not deserve it.⁸⁷ Sin, thus, is required for forgiveness.

Why, then, do we say that we are sorry when accidents occur? This seems to be an expression of condolence. For example, when a relative of a friend passes away, we might tell her that we are sorry to hear about her relative dying. When she accepts the “sorry,” this is not an instance of forgiveness, but an instance of accepting the condolence and acknowledging that we are sympathetic toward her sorrow. Unless we were involved in the death of her relative, we have no blame. There is nothing to forgive. So too, with regard to accidents in which we are involved, if the victims genuinely *accept* them as accidents, there is no forgiveness. Accepting

⁸⁷ Pamela Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62, no. 3 (2001), pp. 529-531.

our apologies is only accepting our condolences and acknowledging that we are sympathetic toward their sorrow. Forgiveness, though, requires someone to be (perceived to be) at fault.

Furthermore, *salvation*, from the moral potential of *being* a savior, requires something to be saved from, which entails evil of some sort.⁸⁸ *Compassion*, additionally, from the potentiality of *being* compassionate, requires that certain others be in unfortunate circumstances, such that one can be compassionate towards them. Finally, at the least, *mercy*, from the virtue of mercifulness, requires sin, such that the wrongdoer is not forced to undergo a fully just punishment that they deserve. In all of these instances, and possibly many others, certain actualizations require evil.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ See Alvin Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism or 'O Felix Culpa,'" in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, edited by Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 1-25.

⁸⁹ The list could be continued. We might be able to add steadfastness, fortitude, endurance, resilience, perseverance, and so on. It suffices to say that some actualizations require evil. But, even if all of them do not require evil, *substantive* actualizations of these attributes require evil. (Remember that actualizations can increase in greatness *ad infinitum*.) Thus, if a reader is unmoved by certain actualizations requiring evil, I ask him or her to consider substantive actualizations. For example, though grace might not in itself require evil for actualization, given that it is undeserved favor and that no creatures deserve God's favor, more substantive grace does require evil. See J.L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," p. 41. Another example might be God's wise contrivance, which does not require evil to be actualized, but might require evil if substantively actualized. Finally, justice, which might be exercised with those who are good in a world, does not in itself require evil for actualization, but more substantive justice, in the face of evil (as a judge before sin), does require some evil.

If the idea of substantive actualization works, this is what might bring my account from answering the LPE to the evidential problem of evil. As potentials enter more substantive circumstances, more substantive actualizations arise, resulting in better and better worlds. Thus, God might allow substantive evil so that actualizations might be substantive. Defending the evils of our world is a different and harder task than the one presented in this paper, so I leave that to the side for now.

Additionally, if substantive actualizations do not work, we might be able to offer an alternative: Some different *kinds* of exercises of His attributes require evil, and the exercise of attributes in *different ways* is a great good. For example, though God might be able to exercise His justice plainly and simply, it is also a great good to have different kinds of exercises of justice. Thus, instead of God merely giving to people what they deserve in a positive respect (e.g., rewards), God also gives people what they deserve in a negative respect (e.g., punishments). See Jonathan Edwards, Miscellany #553, "End of Creation," *The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. 501-832)* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 18), edited by Ava Chamberlain, accessed March 29, 2019, <<http://edwards.yale.edu/research/misc-index>>. He says, "'Tis true that there was from eternity that act in God within himself and towards himself, that was the exercise of the same perfection of his nature. But it was not the same kind of exercise: it virtually contained it, but there was not explicitly the same exercise of his perfection. God, who delights in the exercise of his own perfection, delights in all the kinds of its exercise."

Finally, though Schellenberg's argument itself need not make the distinction between moral and natural evils, three things should be noted. First, forgiveness and mercy require moral evils, whereas salvation and compassion can be responses to natural or moral evil. Second, substantive actualizations, such as exercising justice against moral evil, might entail God's creation of natural evil for punishment, natural evils being responses from God to sin. Third, on Edwards's account, according to which exercising attributes in different ways is a great good, having compassion

Going on from there, let us assume that the antecedent of (6) is true: every worldly good that permits or requires evil is greatly exceeded by a pure good of the same type, existing prior to creation in God. The evil-involving-goods that are the actualizations of God's potentialities are greatly exceeded by their corresponding dispositions that give rise to them. These dispositions are pure goods, and they existed in God prior to creation. These actualizations and their corresponding potentials are of the same good-type.⁹⁰ Further, when the antecedent says, "worldly good," Schellenberg seems to mean any good that is distinct from the goodness of God that existed in Him prior to creation. The evil-involving-goods that are actualizations of God's potentials did not exist prior to creation, given PP. So, these actualizations of God's potentials can rightly be called worldly goods that permit or require evil. And, finally, every creaturely evil-involving-good is greatly exceeded by a pure good of the same type existing in God prior to creation, possibly by being actualizations of potentials that model God's potentials.

However, from this it does not follow that *any* world with evil-involving-goods is thereby exceeded by a world with modeling goods. Why think that modeling goods in *creatures* are greater goods than the actualizations of *God's* potentials? So, why think that worlds with modeling goods in creatures but without the evil-involving-goods of the actualizations of God's potentials are able ever to exceed a world with the actualizations of God's potentials? Just like God's potentials are of such a great quality that actualizations can never exceed them in value, it might be that God's actualizations are of such a great quality that they can never be exceeded by any creaturely good. Yet some of God's actualizations are evil-involving-goods, such as saving

toward those who have committed (or who have been the victims of) moral evils is one kind of good, but having compassion toward those who are pained due to natural evil is a different kind of good, and having both is a much greater good than merely having one.

⁹⁰ Types are hard to classify. Presumably, though, if (G1) is correct, according to which, "For every possible good, among the distinguishable good-types it tokens or instances is at least one instanced in God," evil-involving-goods that are the actualizations of God's potentialities would have to be a part of some good-type that is instanced in God. The best thing to say, then, is that the actualizations and the potentials share the same good-type.

and forgiving those who have sinned. The antecedent of (6) only says that all evil-involving-goods are exceeded by pure goods *of God*. It does not say that all evil-involving-goods are exceeded by modeling goods *in creatures*. So, even if the antecedent of (6) is true, why think that the consequent is true?

At best, Schellenberg needs more defense of (6). But, I think that he is actually wrong. A world with the actualizations of *God's* potentials is a better world than a world only⁹¹ with *creatures* having modeling goods of God's potentials. This is due to the fact that God's actualizations are actually better than creaturely potentials. Not all goods in God are greater goods than creaturely goods. For example, God's knowledge that $2+2=4$ is not as great as a creature loving another creature. But, with regard to God's actualizations, they are better than every creaturely good. It is deeply good for God to flourish as God through the exercise of His nature, which is partially made up of His potentialities. It is deeply good for God's potentials to be exercised so that God can be who He is. It might be good for creatures to have modeling goods, many of which are potentials, but *God* flourishing as a forgiving *God* in the face of sin seems like a much greater thing than *creatures* having modeling goods. If God's virtuous potentialities are good, it is good for them to be exercised.

Think of it from the perspective of non-evil-involving-actualizations. I doubt that anyone would seriously say that it would not be good for God to exercise, say, His knowledge. Instead of God's intellectual potentials remaining forever dormant, it is a great good for Him to exercise

⁹¹ By "only" I merely mean to indicate that evil-involving-goods are not present in the world, not necessarily that modeling goods are, strictly speaking, the only goods whatsoever. God might have an actualization that does not involve evil, such as exercising His maximal intellectual perfection, and this might be in some worlds that have (1) modeling goods and (2) no evil-involving-goods. I ask the reader to keep this in mind throughout this thesis. In part B, I will argue that it is bad (or not good) for any potential to lie dormant, which indicates that all of God's potentials will be actualized in the best possible worlds. If so, to keep things simple we should posit that both worlds with evil-involving-goods and worlds with modeling goods have some of God's actualizations that do not require evil. So, when I say "only," I am indicating that the world with modeling goods does not have evil-involving-goods. That is what discussion of premise (6) is really about, so let us not get bogged down in unnecessary details.

them and to display His cognitive capacity. It seem like a great good for God to allow complex and challenging states of affairs to exist so that He can exercise His wise contrivance in solving issues. Though this does not necessarily entail evil, it is but a little step to say that it is good for some of God's moral potentials to be exercised, some of which do require evil. Just as it is good for God to exercise His potential for artistic creation, so too is it a great good for God to exercise His divine forgiveness and salvation, both of which require sin.

It should be noted here that this avoids the critique of the Free Will Defence because morally significant freedom seems to be an arbitrary good. Again, by this I mean that, though it might be a good, it has no real grounding in the supreme greatness of God. It is utterly disconnected from God's maximal greatness. This is why Schellenberg's argument gets around the Free Will Defence. As we approach the goodness of God, less morally significant freedom is found, if this is understood as entailing libertarian free will. And, if God's greatness is what should be striven for and what makes up the best possible worlds, there seems to be no reason why God would want creatures to have morally significant freedom as opposed to something more intimately connected to His greatness, such as creaturely modeling goods.

Similarly, this avoids the argument made to show that, on the assumption that God's greatness is grounded in actualizations, God does not having potentialities whose actualizations require evil. If God were to have potentials whose actualizations require evil, He would have arbitrary goods that have no real connection at all with the highest and purest goods of God's actualizations that existed in Him prior to creation. Because His maximal actualizations would be pure, He would have no reason to want an actualization that requires evil, as opposed to another that more nearly approaches God's goodness. And, given that unactualized virtuous potentialities have unmet desires (to be discussed more in part B), God would not desire for Himself to have

virtuous potentialities whose actualizations require evil. Though they might be goods, they have no real connection at all with what grounds God's maximal greatness. Creatures modeling God's actualizations would be of much greater value than God having arbitrary potentials that do nothing but create within God desires that are never met.

However, the actualizations of God's attributes are as grounded in the maximal greatness of God as modeling goods are. If anything, the actualizations of God's attributes are *more fully grounded* in His potentialities than modeling goods, given that they *actually arise from* His potentials. If God is to actualize any world other than a world in which He does absolutely nothing,⁹² a world in which He actualizes His attributes will be the best and most natural choice, and one that is not arbitrarily good, but one that is completely and utterly grounded in the maximal greatness of His potentials that were already present within Him before the creation of the world. Yet, some of God's actualizations require *some* sort of evil, though not necessarily evils of great quality or quantity, as might be present within the actual world. So, not only is (6) in need of more defense, but also it is outright false. If so, Schellenberg's argument is unsound.

B. Evil-Involving-Goods Are Necessary for the Best Worlds

Schellenberg might respond by rejecting the claim that some evil-involving-goods are better than modeling goods. Let us assume that he is right. Even so, does this entail that *any* world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God? I think not.

It is possible that each evil-involving-good is exceeded in greatness by pure goods in God and by modeling goods, but this does not mean that evil-involving-goods are no longer *necessary*

⁹² Because dispositions have conditions that must be met before they can be actualized, God might never be in a situation that causes His potentials to become actualized. In such a world, there would be no evil, and there would be no actualizations of God's potentials.

conditions for the greatness of the best worlds.⁹³ The *parts* of a world might individually be worse than the *parts* of another world, but this does not mean that some parts that are not as good as other parts are no longer necessary for the great good of a world on the *whole*. Why could it not be that *some* parts of X (not necessarily all) have greatness level 1, whereas every part of Y has greatness level 2, but, when put together, X is greater than Y? Even though some of X's parts are not as good as all of Y's parts, it does not thereby follow that X is not as good as Y. X could be better than Y.

Let's assume that each woman is better than each man. So, in a community, every woman would be better than every man. But it does not thereby follow that a community with *only* women would be better than a community with women *and* men. It is very plausible to say that men are necessary conditions for a flourishing society, though each individual woman is better than each individual man. Similarly, take an army as an example. It might be that generals are more valuable than their foot soldiers. But why think that thereby an army only with generals is better than an army with foot soldiers *and* generals? It is very plausible to say that foot soldiers are necessary conditions for a flourishing army. So, why think that evil-involving goods, which are exceeded by pure goods in God prior to creation and by modeling goods, are thereby unnecessary for the best worlds? It is possible that in order to have one of the best worlds, one must have evil-involving-goods, not just modeling goods.

⁹³ Because (6)'s consequent claims that all evil-involving-goods are surpassed by some world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God, let us ignore all worlds that are independent from both of these two world-types and which might exceed both in greatness (these two world-types being (1) worlds with evil-involving-goods, and (2) worlds modeling the corresponding pure goods in God). Including such worlds simply complicates things, and is unnecessary to argue for or against (6), given that (6)'s consequent claims that worlds with evil-involving-goods can be surpassed by worlds modeling the pure goods in God. So, by "best worlds," I mean to indicate that evil-involving-goods are necessary for the worlds that are the best among the possible worlds *within the two possible world-types*. Further, note that "best worlds" is also meant to indicate here that some worlds with evil-involving-goods are better than all worlds with modeling goods. This does not mean that, within the worlds that have evil-involving-goods and are not surpassed by worlds with modeling goods, there is a best. It might be that these worlds continually increase in greatness, such that there is no best among these worlds. But among these worlds, they are all included in the category of the "best worlds," given that they surpass all worlds with modeling goods.

However, someone might respond by pointing out that the analogy is weak. Though the two sexes need each other for reproduction, and though a general needs foot soldiers to carry out his orders, there is a metaphysically possible sex that reproduces asexually and there is a metaphysically possible general who is fully capable of carrying out his own orders. We are not talking about what is *practically* necessary, such as men and women needing one another for reproduction. No, what is needed to prove the consequent false (“any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God”) is a claim that there is some metaphysically possible world with goods permitting or requiring evil that is not exceeded by a world only modeling the corresponding pure goods in God. This would mean that it is metaphysically necessary for the best worlds to have evil-involving-goods, such that no world only with modeling goods would ever be able to exceed these worlds. But, continues the objector, why think that evil-involving-goods are metaphysically necessary for the best worlds?

The reason for thinking this is that worlds in which potentialities are present but in which there is no actualization of these potentialities are worlds that are always surpassed by worlds with actualizations. This is not *necessarily* to say that worlds only with potentials are bad worlds, but it is to say that all worlds only with potentials are surpassed by worlds with actuals and potentials.⁹⁴ We can see this when we consider three points. First, without the actualization of all of a being’s potentialities, that being is unable to flourish (fully) as the being it is. Second, when potentialities lie dormant, they are unused, but it is better for them to be exercised. Similarly, in a world without any opportunity for the actualization of a potential, potentials become useless. Third, beings who have potentialities or know of potentialities in others tend to long for the

⁹⁴ I do think that a world only with potentials is a bad world, but I do not need that for this paper. All I need is to demonstrate that worlds are better with actualizations.

exercise of these potentialities, such that, when one potentiality is unable to be exercised, longings are unable to be satisfied.

First, good potentialities, *both in God and in creatures*, lying dormant do not make for a world that is *excellent* because the actualization of potentials is necessary for personal flourishing. This is apparently what Aristotle understood.⁹⁵ Naturally, other philosophers have taken similar views. For example, Richard Taylor argues that the flourishing life is one in which we exercise our function, which, for Taylor, was creativity. He says the following: “If we think of happiness as fulfillment, then it must consist of the fulfillment of ourselves as human beings, which means the exercise of our creative powers. For we are, among the creatures of the earth, the only ones possessed of such power.”⁹⁶ Here, Taylor is using “happiness” and “fulfillment” in the same way that Aristotle used *eudaimonia*,⁹⁷ which is also regularly translated as “flourishing.”⁹⁸ We must function properly.⁹⁹ Without the exercise of our potentials, we are not

⁹⁵ See Thomas Hurka, “Virtuous Act, Virtuous Dispositions,” *Analysis* 66, no. 1 (2006), p. 72. He claims that Aristotle “held that the prime contributor to flourishing is the active exercise of virtue, found in occurrent virtuous acts, desires, and feelings”. He cites, in part, the following passage:

First, our account agrees with those who say happiness [or flourishing] is virtue [in general] or some [particular] virtue; for activity in accord with virtue is proper to virtue. Presumably, though, it matters quite a bit whether we suppose that the best good consists in possessing or in using – that is to say, in a state or in an activity [that actualizes the state]. For someone may be in a state that achieves no good – if, for instance, he is asleep or inactive in some other way – but this cannot be true of the activity; for it will necessarily act and act well. And just as Olympic prizes are not for the finest and strongest, but for the contestants – since it is only these who win – the same is true in life; among the fine and good people, only those who act correctly win the prize (Nicomachean Ethics, Bk. I, Ch. 8, 1098b30-1099a7).

This can be found in: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, second edition, translated by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000); in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), p. 261. The second, third, and fourth sets of brackets are found in the text. Of course, my claim is that the best goods are potentials. I am simply claiming that flourishing through the actualization of potentials is an additional good that is necessary for the best worlds. The rest of this paragraph explains why I add the first set of brackets.

⁹⁶ Richard Taylor, “Virtue Ethics,” in *Happiness: Classical and Contemporary Readings in Philosophy*, edited by Steven Cahn and Christine Vitrano (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 232.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁹⁸ Russ Shafer-Landau, “Introduction to Part XI,” in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Russ Shafer-Landau (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 611.

⁹⁹ Richard Taylor, p. 231.

functioning as we should. This applies both to God and to creatures. When either God or creatures do not exercise their potentials, they are not functioning properly.

Without actualizations, you are missing a massive component of what makes a being's life great. Consider that potentialities make up the nature of a person. When we say, for example, that a person is morally good, we are indicating that she has a morally good character from which morally good actions flow. She naturally acts in morally good ways. This seems to indicate that her nature is composed of certain virtuous potentialities that naturally give rise to virtuous actions. But if she does not have the ability to actualize a potential of hers, and if her potentials make up her nature, she would not be able, as it were, to actualize her nature. She would be unable to exercise her very being.

Even if she were to be able to exercise *some* of her potentials, if some of them are left unactualized, she is not completely flourishing as ought to be the case. Yet, some of these attributes, such as courageousness and forgivingness, require evil for them to be actualized. So, for people who have the potentiality of forgiveness, if they are in a world without evil, they will never be able to flourish as forgiving people because they will never have the ability to act on their very nature.

Before creation, each attribute within God would have been perfect, such that no worldly good could have surpassed any good in God. Truly, God would have satisfied UG, PP, and OI. Because God would have been the only being in that world, that world would have been perfect. But this does not mean that He was flourishing without the actualization of His potentials. His actualizations might not be as good as His virtues or as good as modeling goods within creatures, but this does not mean that His actualizations were not things that were missing from His life on the whole. It would have been better for God *Himself*, for Him to actualize His dispositional

traits. It is only a natural step to say that without the actualization of His potentials, something would have been missing from the *world* on the whole, not just His life, to make it the case that that world is not as good as a world with the actualizations of His potentials. Worlds without actualizations are not as good of worlds as worlds with actualizations.

Second, there is something about having wasted talents that is not excellent. When a potential is unused, it is not a good thing. When intelligent people are offered the opportunity to go to college or to enter into an activity that exercises their intelligence but choose to sit at home and do nothing, we find this bad at least partially because their gifted intelligence is not being used as it could be. Those who are not intelligent might think to themselves, *If only I were smart and had the opportunity to go to college!* The reason we find slothfulness bad might partially be because it prevents people from being productive members of society, but it also is thought of as bad because people are wasting their lives.

An even stronger claim is that potentials are useless without the possibility that they are actualized. A world in which there is no need or use for mercy is a world in which mercifulness is useless, unneeded, and unnecessary. So, were God or creatures to have mercifulness as a potential, their potentials would be useless, unneeded, and unnecessary. That does not seem like a *best* world. This is one reason why the overdetermination of potentials is not a good thing and is quite possibly a bad thing. Uselessness should be avoided.

Third, many people long and yearn for the actualization of their own potentials and the potentials of others. For example, a gracious and rich man might seek out opportunities to give to others. Were he to fail to find anyone who needed help, he might

return home happy, knowing that others were not in need of his help, but there is a likelihood that he would feel some discomfort, knowing that he himself was unable to be of any help. Similarly, we can imagine volunteers who help at a soup kitchen. If no one comes in, they might, just like with the rich man, be happy that no one was in need of their food, but they might think to themselves that they missed out on the good of serving others. Or, for another example, we can imagine a courageous and brave man wanting to fight for what is right. He might long for the day in which he is able to serve his country with honor and to do great deeds on the battlefield. Were there no battles into which he could enter, though he might be happy to know that he did not have to fight, due to the belief that the end for which he fought had already been won; he might still long for the day in which he is able to act upon his virtues. We long, not merely to have moral virtues, but also to act upon them. Virtues without expression regularly cause turmoil within the virtuous. We want to flourish as the beings that we are by acting on our virtues. So, a world without actualizations is not as good as a world with actualizations.

Indeed, the reason why (maximal) virtuous potentialities are dispositions is because they contain motivational force that is so powerful that virtue-holders naturally act when relevant situations arise. They are so inclined toward a particular action that they cannot help but to act accordingly.¹⁰⁰ Virtuous potentials are not mysterious properties of people that force them to act against their will. Virtues have desires within them that drive people to act. Thus, virtuous potentials, which have dispositions within them, are really only very strong desires that are ever present, such that one will act

¹⁰⁰ See Linda Zagzebski, pp. 539 and 545.

accordingly whenever one can.¹⁰¹ The same motivational force that drives us to act whenever any relevant situation arises is the same force that causes us to yearn for actualization. But if this is the case, anyone with virtuous potentialities necessarily has desires, which, if his potentials remain unactualized, go unmet.

In my own personal life, I can only guess at how many times I have fantasized about being virtuous in the face of evil. I constantly imagine myself in various scenarios, hoping that I will be able to rise to the level of a moral giant. I imagine, for example, someone trying to rob or to mug me. I revel in the thought of being able to remain steadfast, wise, and gracious in such a situation. I imagine, for another example, a future child of mine crying out in fear of the dark. I revel in the thought of being able lovingly to comfort her heart. And, in many ways, I yearn for such things to take place, though I do not desire the actual evil states of affairs in themselves. If I were never to have the chance whatsoever to exercise my virtuous dispositions – how horrible a life that would be! The thought of the actualization of these potentialities produce in us a certain idealization about the good life, and we cannot help but yearn for these actualizations, including those actualizations that require evil.

One reason we take delight in stories is due to our own potentials being actualized during the telling of the story. For example, a Sherlock Holmes novel might thrill us as we exercise our reason, trying to solve the case before the great detective does. Or, a Shakespearean tragedy might thrill us as we delight in the compassion we are able to feel towards those who endure unfortunate life events. Indeed, not only do we delight in the compassion we are able to express during tragedies, but we also seek out such

¹⁰¹ See David Hume, p. 265-268 (2.3.3). The Humean theory of motivation roughly states that all motives have some sort of desire grounding or constituting them.

compassion! We want to experience the actualization of our compassionate potentials, so we watch tragic movies.

Another reason why we love stories is due to the actualization of *other* people acting on their potentials. When we know of the potentials of another person, we want to experience them actualizing their potentials. It is not excellent merely for a bunch of people to sit around being virtuous and wise. No, we long for the actualizations of their potentialities and want to experience them. When a character in a story is said to be wise, we do not want merely to know this; we want to see them express it. Without actualization, the longings of both God and creatures are left unsatisfied. This makes for a world that is not as good as a world with the evil-involving-goods of actualizations.

We can see these themes in one of Jonathan Edwards's major works, *The End for Which God Created the World*. He says the following concerning what God *actually* did, not merely what God logically could do, concerning the reason for which He created our world:

It seems a thing in itself proper and desirable that the glorious attributes of God, which consist in a *sufficiency* to certain acts and effects, should be *exerted* in the production of such effects as might manifest his infinite power, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, &c. If the world had not been created, these attributes never would have had any *exercise*. The *power* of God, which is a sufficiency in him to produce great effects, must for ever have been dormant and useless as to any effect. The divine *wisdom* and prudence would have had no exercise in any wise contrivance, any prudent proceeding, or disposal of things; for there would have been no objects of contrivance or disposal. The same might be observed of God's *justice*, *goodness*, and *truth*.¹⁰²

Edwards understood that there is a certain kind of goodness associated with the exercise of God's attributes in creation, and we want to avoid them being useless. Because of this, it is desirable for God's potentials to be actualized.

¹⁰² Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, in John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), p. 147, emphases in the original.

Going a bit beyond what Edwards said, were God simply to refuse to exercise His attributes, He would remain perfect, but the *world on the whole* would not be one of the best worlds. God created (partially) in order to actualize His attributes, some of which, such as forgiveness and salvation, could not be exercised without evil. The best worlds include God actualizing His magnificent attributes, some of which require evil. His potentials would otherwise be useless.

It should be noted here that I am answering the LPE, not the evidential problem of evil (EPE). It might be that certain evils (found in the actual world) that are discussed in the EPE are not necessary conditions for the best worlds – indeed, they might be sufficient conditions for the worst worlds – but this does not mean that there are not *some* evils, maybe evils of incredibly small quantity or quality, that are necessary for the best worlds so that God or creatures might actualize their potentials. For example, though a deer suffering in extreme agony for days on end after a wildfire¹⁰³ might not be necessary for the best worlds, a small spider bite, let us say, which causes slight discomfort, might be necessary in a world to allow the potentiality of God’s healing or the potentiality of a creature’s bravery to be actualized. A small sin might be necessary in the best worlds so that merciful creatures might display mercy and forgiveness. All I need is that the best worlds have *some* sort of evil in them, and the LPE has been solved. And I think some sort of evil is necessary for the actualization of these potentialities and that the actualization of these potentialities is what makes for the best worlds. The potentialities otherwise lie dormant, which makes the world insufficient for being amongst the best worlds.

Finally, worlds that only model *some* of God’s pure goods can always be surpassed by worlds that model *all* of His pure goods. Because some of His pure goods are potentialities, any

¹⁰³ William Rowe, “The Inductive Argument from Evil Against the Existence of God,” in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, sixth edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), p. 309.

world that models all of God's pure goods, models all of God's pure potentialities. But all worlds with both God and creatures having potentials without actualization, can be surpassed by worlds with both God and creatures having potentials with actualization. Yet some of the actualizations of these potentials, such as forgiveness and salvation, require evil, so these worlds with the actualization of potentials will require evil. So, there is at least one world with evil-involving-goods that cannot be surpassed by a world only with modeling goods. The world in which God has potentials, in which creatures model all of God's perfections, some of which are potentials, and in which these potentials are actualized, some of which require evil – this world surpasses (given the enumerated points above) the worlds only with modeling goods, in which God has potentials and in which creatures model all of God's pure goods, some of which are potentials, but neither God nor creatures actualize all their potentials. Whenever a world has potentials that lie dormant, there is a corresponding world that has the actualization of these potentials. All-else-being-equal, that world with actualizations will be better than the world without them. (6) is false. In fact, the consequent of (6) should read: any world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God is exceeded by a world with goods permitting or requiring evil.¹⁰⁴

C. Objections and Replies

An objector might respond. Goods that model God's potentials need not be potentials themselves. Schellenberg notes that he understands modeling goods broadly.¹⁰⁵ Maybe when a creature models a potentiality of God, it has an *actualization* of a potentiality, not a potentiality

¹⁰⁴ Potentials do not require actualization to be good. They are good on their own. Indeed, they ground the fundamental goodness of God. But, (1) when conditions have been met to satisfy the requirements for actualization, they naturally give rise to actualization; and (2) it is good for them to be actualized. For example, God might have the virtuous potentiality of mercifulness. In a world without evil, His potential would be unactualized and would produce within God a natural desire to be fulfilled. Yet, the good potentiality, even though unactualized, would still be part of the grounds for God's maximal moral perfection. When suitable circumstances arise that allow for God to be merciful, God naturally acts mercifully, and this is a good thing.

¹⁰⁵ J.L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," p. 38.

itself. In other words, modeling goods might mirror God's potentialities by being manifested, not as potentialities, but as actualities.

However, if that is so, many modeling goods simply collapse into evil-involving-goods, in which case evil will be present in the world. To put it differently, for God's potentiality of forgiveness, creature C might model this potentiality by having the actualization of forgiving another being, but this requires evil of some sort. If C does not model by actualization, he has the potentiality, and the argument above runs the same. And, even if this is not the case, God still has potentialities. This alone makes it good for Him to actualize His potentialities, some of which require evil.

A second, and more substantive, objection is this. Talk of God not flourishing before the actualization of His attributes makes creation and evil necessary for God's flourishing. If God's flourishing requires all of God's actualizations (so that potentials do not lie dormant), and if some of God's actualizations require creatures and evil (as in God's forgiveness), then God's flourishing requires creatures and evil. This seems to make God's happiness and flourishing dependent upon things that they should not be dependent upon, namely creatures and evil.

Three responses can be made to God requiring creation and evil to flourish. First, there might be degrees of flourishing. Because of God's greatness, He might flourish simply by being. He does not need to do anything. He can simply be. But, there is a greater kind of flourishing, in which God is able to live a better life, when He actualizes His attributes. Thus, creation and evil are not necessary for God to flourish, plainly and simply, but they are necessary for God to flourish to even better extents.¹⁰⁶

Second, it is not even clear that God requiring creation and evil for His flourishing is a bad thing. There are two reasons for this. First, creation and evil being logical necessities does

¹⁰⁶ See footnote 89.

not entail that God's flourishing is *grounded* in creation or evil. Grounding is different than logical necessity. For example, for x to love y, it is logically necessary for both x and y to exist. But it is hardly appropriate to say that either x's existence or y's existence *grounds* x's love. X loves y for reasons (both internally and externally) quite independent from x existing or y existing. Their existences simply happen to be logical requirements for x's love of y. I see no problem, then, with saying that *God's* love for me requires creation, not because my existence grounds God's love, but because I have to exist for Him to love me.

Similarly, God's flourishing having a necessary condition of creation and evil does not entail that God's flourishing is grounded in creation and evil. God's flourishing is grounded in God's actualizations, which are grounded in His potentials. His actualizations simply have required conditions surrounding them, and these conditions happen to be creation and evil. God does not receive anything from the creation, nor from evil; there is no "metaphysical juice," as it were, that is transferred from the creation or from evil to the actualization. Indeed, the existence of all things is still dependent upon God. Creation and evil simply are logically required means *through which* certain potentials must be actualized. This is why actualizations are *good*, not evil. They get their "metaphysical juice," as it were, from potentials that are also good.

We can see this point more clearly when we consider the difference between *by* and *through*. Suppose that there is a tunnel that many commuters take to work every morning. It would be correct to say that the commuters commuted *by* means of their cars, but *through* means of the tunnel; and to mean different things by these words. *Through* indicates a passageway, but *by* indicates what propels the cars through the passageway. God's actualizations are not made *by* creation or evil. They do not propel Him. But God's actualizations are made *through* them, as necessary passageways through which potentials may be actualized. So too, God's actualizations

are formed *by* His potentials, not *through* His potentials. His potentials are what drive Him to actualization. So, God's actualizations are formed *by* His potentials, but *through* creation and evil. Thus, there seems to be no real issue with saying that creation and evil are necessary conditions for God's flourishing.

The second reason why it should not be problematic to say that God and evil are required for God's flourishing is that flourishing is different from God's greatness, God's happiness, and God's blessing. A being can be great, but not flourish, if they have a certain amount of value, but never act *qua* who they are. Similarly, a being can flourish without being great. For example, a dog, which does not have substantive value, can flourish as a dog as it acts *qua* dog. Because of this disconnection between greatness and flourishing, I see no reason to suppose that God would increase in value when flourishing. Flourishing and greatness are independent from one another. God is not made more valuable when flourishing. He simply lives a better life.¹⁰⁷

Further, a human H might be incredibly happy and live a blessed life. But, if we suppose that humans are fundamentally rational beings, and if we suppose that H is not very intelligent and does not exercise his limited intelligence very often, H might not flourish *qua* H (or *qua* a human), even though H might still live a wonderfully great life, filled with honor, pleasure, riches, and delight. All of these things (namely, greatness, happiness, and blessing) are distinct from flourishing; yet it is still a good thing for h, in addition to H's already great life, to flourish *qua* H.

The idea is this. Flourishing is not merely having a good life. Flourishing might require having a good life (as it might require many things), but it also requires expressing or acting

¹⁰⁷ Something that might help to clarify this point is that God's own greatness is grounded in His potentials. The greatness of His life is grounded (at least partially) in His actualizations. God *Himself* is maximally valuable, great, and perfect; but this does not entail that His *life* is maximally valuable, great, or perfect. His life can always increase in value, just like actualizations can always increase in value, but His metaphysical value is constant and unsurpassable.

upon who we are fundamentally. Hitler might fundamentally be evil. For Hitler to flourish *qua* Hitler, he would need to act upon who he fundamentally is. This flourishing would, of course, be evil, due to it arising from an evil nature, but God has a fundamental nature that is good, from which good flourishings arise.¹⁰⁸ Though God might have been happy, blessed, and of great value before either creation or evil came about, He was not *flourishing qua God* until creation and evil arose. God, who is fundamentally a merciful being, might have lived a good and wonderful life before creation and evil, but He was not flourish *as a merciful God* until there was something to be merciful towards. I see no issue with this.¹⁰⁹

Third,¹¹⁰ even if we must embrace that God does not need creation or evil for flourishing, at the least God's potentials (and creaturely potentials) form within Him (and them) a desire for actualization.¹¹¹ Because of this, even if God flourishes before actualizing His potentials, the world is still made better when God fulfills His longings for actualization (and when creatures fulfill their longings for actualization).¹¹²

Finally, I conclude this section and introduce the next section with the following objection. What if all worlds can be surpassed? I claimed that any world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God is exceeded by a world with goods permitting or requiring evil. This is not inconsistent with the consequent of (6). It is possible that any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by *a* (or some, not necessarily *every*) world modeling the

¹⁰⁸ It should be noted here that there is at least one possible world in which creatures only have good fundamental natures, possibly by modeling God's goodness.

¹⁰⁹ Remember, the argument I am presenting is that flourishing is necessary for the best worlds. Even if happiness, blessedness, and greatness are better goods than flourishing, flourishing still adds a lot of good to the world, such that, without it, we can always imagine a better world, namely one in which the creatures within it are flourishing.

¹¹⁰ I am here returning to the list of three responses to the objection that God needs creation and evil to flourish.

¹¹¹ If one worries that desires entail a need or a lack, one might be able to say that God does not *desire* but *prefers*. Desires might indicate a need, whereas preferences might not.

¹¹² If a reader is so inclined to reject my responses to the objection that God's flourishing requires creation and evil, I ask that the reader keep this paragraph in mind throughout the rest of this paper. I will continue to speak of flourishing as being a great good that requires actualization. However, one may substitute "flourishing" for "fulfilling good desires for actualization," which is also a great good that requires actualization. Indeed, I take the fulfillment of strong desires to be necessary for flourishing, as will be discussed in Section IV, part C.

corresponding pure goods in God; and it is possible that any world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God is exceeded by *a* (or some, not necessarily *every*) world with goods permitting or requiring evil. World-types (e.g., worlds with evil-involving-goods, and worlds only modeling the corresponding pure goods in God) might eternally go back-and-forth between exceeding and being exceeded as they progress into infinite greatness *ad infinitum*. Indeed, *both* pure modeling goods *and* the actualization of potentials are intimately grounded in God's fundamental maximal greatness, and because there are infinite "spots" of goodness, given that God can continually add more to a world, presumably both world-types exceed and are exceeded by one another as more "spots of goodness" are filled by goods intimately grounded in God's goodness.

Though I think it is quite intuitive, given what has been said, to think that the best worlds are those with God's actualizations, let us give as much room as possible. Let us assume that world-types continually surpass one another. I move now to my objection to premise (9).

IV. Objection to (9)

Even though I take the above argument to be fairly convincing, some still might not be convinced by it. Yet, even if God's actualization of potentials does not create a *best* world that cannot be surpassed by worlds only with modeling goods, at the least it creates a state of affairs that provides God with a morally sufficient reason to create it.

Part A of section IV briefly enumerates some assumptions concerning duties and obligations grounded in Divine Command Theory. Part B defends the claim that God has a morally sufficient reason for creating a world with evil-involving-goods by virtue of the fact that the actualization of God's potentialities is a very good thing, though it might not be amongst the best things. After this, I will argue in part C that love provides God with another morally sufficient reason for creating a world with evil-involving-goods. In part D, I address some potential concerns. All of this takes aim at premise (9), which claims that if any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God (the consequent of (6) is true), and if God can ensure the existence of greater worlds, then God has no good reason to create a world with evil-involving-goods rather than a world that only models God's goodness.

Given the last objection provided in part III, section C, let us assume that the first conjunct of the antecedent is true. Let us also assume that God is all-powerful in such a way that He can ensure the existence of both worlds with evil-involving-goods and worlds only with modeling goods. This makes the antecedent's second conjunct also true. But is the consequent thereby true? No, it is not.

A. Divine Command Theory Assumptions

The rest of this paper assumes that God has no duties.¹¹³ I would like to flush this out. I do not have space in this thesis to defend Divine Command Theory, so I will assume for it, as many theists are already inclined to do,¹¹⁴ and list some facts that make it plausible and direct our attention to the topic of this paper.

First, Divine Command Theory has famously been subject to the Euthyphro Dilemma. Either something is moral because God commands it, in which case morality is arbitrary and God's goodness has little foundation; or God commands something because it is moral, in which case God is not the ground or basis for all things. Both horns of the dilemma are undesirable to many theists, and so we must modify our account. Because of this, we should say that goodness is grounded in the nature of God. As has been argued above, God has all manner of virtues. These can plausibly be the ground for morality. God's moral nature in having these virtues is what we are striving to mirror when we strive to be morally good. This avoids both horns of the dilemma. Morality is not arbitrary, God's goodness has a strong foundation, and God is the ground for morality.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, goodness and obligation (or duty) are different from one another. In a world in which there are many actions that are morally good, some might be morally obligatory, though some might not be. It might be a morally good thing to give one's life in defense of another, but this is not obligatory. Why *must* a person give his life in defense of another? When we consider the idea of obligation, we think of something that *has to be done*. There is no wiggle room. If one

¹¹³ If God's only duties are for Him to be virtuous, then the subsequent arguments that follow will still work. I am talking about God not having extra duties *in addition to any duties concerning the possession of the virtues*.

¹¹⁴ See, for instance, Robert M. Adams, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (1979), pp. 66-79.

¹¹⁵ Mark Linville, "On Goodness: Human and Divine," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1990), pp. 143-152. See also William Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, edited by Michael Beaty (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 267-272.

has an obligation to ϕ , then one must ϕ .¹¹⁶ But what of the good actions that are non-obligatory? Sometimes actions are good but not obligatory because they go beyond our duties.

Supererogatory acts are things worthy of pursuit, but no one is required to pursue them.

Independent from supererogation, another way actions can be good, but not obligatory, is by there being an obligation to do one of several actions, but not being obligated to do any particular one of them. For example, I might have an obligation to love my neighbor. Indeed, I might have an obligation to love all of my neighbors. But when am I obliged to help one as opposed to another? If I have two neighbors and limited resources, I might only be able to help one of them. In this situation, it would be good to help both, but I might only be obligated to help one. Maybe I have a passion for helping starving children across the world, and so I strive to serve them, though by doing so, I ignore the needs of those in my home country. This seems morally justifiable as long as I am loving them all. Helping those in my home country might be good, but it is not obligatory.

This is where God's commands come into the story; hence, "Divine *Command* Theory." God commands certain things of certain people, and this takes an action that is morally good and makes it morally obligatory.¹¹⁷ The reason for this is because God has a rightful authority to command certain things. And He might command something because He wants to ensure that certain actions are done or that certain people are cared for. Either way, God's commands bring us (and are the only things that bring us) from what is morally good to what is morally

¹¹⁶ William Alston, p. 258.

¹¹⁷ God's commands similarly might make it obligatory to have a virtue. Indeed, how we distinguish virtues from other character traits within God might be by His commands that He gives to us.

obligatory.¹¹⁸ Why, for example, we have an obligation to help others is because God has commanded us to help.¹¹⁹

But if God's commands bring an action from being merely morally good to what is morally obligatory, then presumably God need not command certain things of Himself. God need not command many things. Indeed, it is possible that God never commands anything.

This argument against God having obligations is distinct from other forms. William Alston, taking from Immanuel Kant, for example, argues that God has no duties because duties are only practical guidelines to keep us on track in abiding by what is good. But, because God never goes astray, God does not have moral obligations.¹²⁰ Thomas Morris argues that God has no moral obligations because He is necessarily good, which impedes Him from having morally significant freedom, a necessary condition for having moral duties.¹²¹ Both of these authors think that God acts according to what *would have been* moral duties for God, had He not been essentially good. But my account of God not having moral obligations does not require God to act according to what would have been obligatory for Him were He not to have been essentially good. My account says that God need not ever obligate Himself whatsoever. I believe that God *can* obligate Himself or take upon Himself a duty, maybe in the making of a covenant, but God does not *have to* obligate Himself or take upon Himself any duty of any kind. Indeed, He could command others to ϕ , but not command Himself to ϕ , just like a king might command his servants to do certain chores, though he himself does no such thing.

¹¹⁸ See Mark Timmons, *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, second edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), pp. 30-33.

¹¹⁹ I am thinking of commands broadly. "Commands" might be strictly understood, in which God directly demands that we ϕ . Though this might happen some of the time, I allow for the possibility of God assigning rights to people, which indirectly demand of us that we abide by what God has willed. Either way, the main idea is that God considers what is morally good and then acts in some respect to bring it from a moral good to a moral obligation.

¹²⁰ William Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," pp. 256-265.

¹²¹ Thomas Morris, *Our Idea of God*, pp. 51-64.

Therefore, because we are talking about the LPE, let us suppose from now on that God has no moral obligations. Note here that this does not automatically solve the LPE. God still is good, and we must determine whether His nature of virtuous goodness would require Him to prevent evil. All this section does is note that we need not worry about obligations.

B. Actualization as a Morally Sufficient Reason for Evil-Involving-Goods

Now that we have established that it is possible that God has no obligations, let us see whether God has any good reason for choosing a world with evil-involving-goods. Because there are no best worlds, and because God has no obligations to prevent evil, I see no reason why God would not be perfectly justified in creating a world that actualizes His or His creature's attributes, even though it might not be amongst the best worlds.

In section III I argued that it is a great good for God and creatures to actualize their potentialities. But I finished that section with an objection concerning the eternal progression of better worlds: "World-types (e.g., worlds with evil-involving-goods, and worlds only modeling the corresponding pure goods in God) might eternally go back-and-forth between exceeding and being exceeded as they progress into infinite greatness *ad infinitum*." If so, there are no best worlds, and there is no best world-type. But, at least, there are some worlds with evil-involving-goods that are, on the whole, very good worlds due to the actualization of potentials.

If God does anything other than simply remain alone and do nothing,¹²² He will have to choose some sort of world to actualize. But what world is God justified in actualizing? If God has no obligations, in which case, God is not obligated to choose a world without evil; if there are no best worlds and if there is no best world-type, in which case, no matter what God chooses,

¹²² There is at least one possible world in which God chooses not to remain alone and to do nothing.

His chosen world will be able to be surpassed in greatness; and if God chooses a very good world; God will be perfectly justified in actualizing that world.

No doubt, an omnipotent, virtuous agent might not prevent an evil if the evil allows a greater good that is intimately grounded in God's fundamental goodness to arise, or if the evil prevents a greater evil. And is not the actualization of God's potentials a great good that surpasses, say, a small sin that allows God to exercise His disposition toward forgiveness? Is not the actualization of creaturely potentials a great good that surpasses, say, the evil of a small bite by a small spider that causes slight discomfort in such a way that creatures are able to act bravely in the face of it? Actualizing potentials (whether the potentials are the potentials of God or the potentials of creatures modeling God's potentials) is a great good that is intimately grounded in God's pre-creation perfection and that provides God with a very good reason for allowing evil.

If so, the consequent of (9) will be false, even though the antecedent will be true, on our assumptions that God is omnipotent and that my previous argument for the falsity of the consequent of (6) is wrong. This makes (9) false. Thus, if my objection against (6) works, Schellenberg's argument fails. If my objection against (6) does not work, Schellenberg's argument fails at premise (9).

C. Love as a Morally Sufficient Reason for Evil-Involving-Goods

I think it is very clear that God has good reason to allow evil. It allows Him to actualize His potentialities, and it allows others to actualize their potentialities. This seems like a great good to me. However, some still might worry that these actualizations are not great enough goods in and of themselves to warrant evil. I now turn to answer how God's perfectly virtuous nature might

still allow for the existence of evil, even though the actualizations of potentialities are not in themselves morally sufficient for the allowance of evil.

Universal love, the chief virtue,¹²³ which is sometimes directed at one's own flourishing, and other times at the flourishing of others, can sometimes produce states of affairs that have evil within them.¹²⁴ Given the complexity of the *actual* world, even virtuous actions that are aimed at the good of others sometimes lead to evil. For example, we can imagine virtuous aid workers sending provisions to starving children in foreign countries. But we can also imagine that their actions of sending aid are significant contributions to climate change because they send planes back and forth from remote villages to where the provisions are being stored. Even if they know that their actions will lead to climate change and great evil, they might be so concerned for the lives of those in these foreign countries that they continue in their efforts. But this seems virtuously loving nevertheless. All of the actions of loving people are causal components in a causal chain that leads to good and evil down the (infinite) road of the future. Thus, acting lovingly sometimes leads to good and sometimes to evil states of affairs in the actual world.

Nevertheless, out of an abundant love for the creatures of a world, God might simply allow evil so that they might flourish. In section III, I argued that it was a great good for creatures to flourish as themselves. Though this flourishing itself through the actualization of potentials might not be a necessary condition for the best worlds, and though this might not itself be a morally sufficient reason for God to allow evil, God's *love*, which aims at allowing

¹²³ See footnote 79.

¹²⁴ One might wonder whether God could love Himself and others without aiming for His and their flourishing. However, I have no idea how love could aim at anything less than the loved object's flourishing. It seems almost analytically true that if x loves y, then x is disposed to pursue the flourishing of y. Love is more robust than merely maintaining a person's life. Love actively pursues the loved object's best life. Additionally, if it is still thought that a being can flourish without actualization, an easy modification can be made to the argument in this section. Instead of love aiming at the flourishing of individuals, we could say that love aims at the fulfillment of the desires of individuals, to some degree at least, given that love does not merely maintain a loved being's life. Because potentials naturally produce the desire for actualization, this modification should be no problem.

creatures to flourish in accordance with their potentialities that model God's goodness, is a morally sufficient reason to allow evil.

This is a subtle point. The flourishing of creatures might not itself be a morally sufficient reason for evil (though I think it is, as was argued in section IV, part B), but God's *love* is. Acting from the supreme virtue of universal love justifies the action of allowing evil.¹²⁵ There is a possible world in which, in abundant affection for His creatures, knowing that their potentials model His great goods, He allows a small amount of evil so that they can actualize their potentials and flourish as themselves. I see no issue with this. Remember, we are arguing against the LPE, not the EPE. Allowing just a small amount of evil for the flourishing of His creatures through the actualization of their potentials seems like a good.

However, universal love is not purely directed at others. If love is universal, it is directed at all things that can be loved. God can be loved. So, universal love is directed at God as well. Not only is God loving toward His creatures by allowing some evil in the world, but He is also loving of Himself by allowing some evil into the world. The rest of part C will defend this claim.

Susan Wolf has expressed sentiments regarding the good of pursuing one's own interests. Indeed, she argues that being a moral saint is not a good thing. She defines a moral saint as one whose "life [is] dominated by a commitment to improving the welfare of others and of society as a whole."¹²⁶ The moral saint "pays little or no attention to his own happiness in light of the overriding importance he gives to the wider concerns of morality."¹²⁷ Wolf claims that the saint does not fulfill our ideal conception of a person because they have to give up who they are for the good of others. We want our heroes not merely to do what is morally good, but to live a good

¹²⁵ See footnote 79. I take it that if a being loves *all* creatures, he will usually act according to justice. However, this need not be the case. Arguing this point would take me well outside the scope of this paper.

¹²⁶ Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, second edition, edited by Russ Shafer-Landau (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 200.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

life, to cultivate non-moral virtues, and to have non-moral, good life experiences. The life of the moral saint, says Wolf, disturbs us, not because their life highlights our moral weaknesses, but because it evidences a lack of a personal self in the saint, who is forced by an overriding concern for others to abandon their desires.¹²⁸

I sympathize with Wolf's sentiment. The moral saint, as described by her, is not an ideal person. Nevertheless, I want to maintain that it is ideal for us to pursue utter moral perfection. To integrate (1) the notion that it is ideal to be morally perfect, and (2) the notion that it is not good to give oneself over to a complete and utter life of self-sacrifice, we can maintain that it is morally good for one to love oneself.

One objection to utilitarianism is that it is too demanding of persons always to maximize the good, which might get in the way of personal development and growth. Though there are responses to this, as there are responses to nearly everything, what seems right to say, nevertheless, is that the virtue of love sometimes is justifiably extended to the advancement of one's own person, though this might not maximize happiness. I ought to love myself. If I neglect my own good, this is not bad primarily because it prevents me from giving aid to others as a means to maximizing the good. Though it might be bad to some degree because of this inability, it is incorrect to say that it is wrong primarily due to this inability. It is bad mainly because I fail to love myself. In Kantian terms, I fail to treat myself as an end.¹²⁹

Moreover, a benefit of care ethics, according to which we ought to love, care for, or care about certain people, is that it accounts for family ethics.¹³⁰ Hard-nosed ethical theories such as

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 202-204. See also Michael Rea, "Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, sixth edition, edited Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), p. 271-274.

¹²⁹ In part D, I address the issue of using humans as mere means.

¹³⁰ Mark Timmons, pp. 282-288. See Margaret A. McLaren, section "Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics, or Why Not Virtue?" paragraph three. See also Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L.

utilitarianism seemingly demand of humans, duties that neglect the love people share within relationships in the interest of ethical impartiality. For example, a utilitarian might demand of humans that we flip the switch in the classic trolley problem, killing one to save the five. It does not matter who the people on the tracks are; they are equal in value and should be treated as such. However, care ethics demands that we pay special attention to our loved ones. If we have the option of giving to the poor or giving to our family, the virtue of love would demand in many situations that we give to our family as opposed to the poor. This does not mean that we should never give to the poor, but it definitely entails that one of our focuses should be on those with whom we are in relationship.

But notice that this allows for personal care and for personal love. Just like we ought to strive for the betterment of our families because we are deeply connected to them, we ought to strive for our own betterment because we are more closely connected to ourselves. There is nothing wrong with seeking after our own good and flourishing.

Historical ethicists have embraced this same idea as well. Adam Smith, for example, said that people ought primarily to take care of themselves because they are most fit to take care of themselves: “Every man is, no doubt, by nature, first and principally recommended to his own care; and as he is fitter to take care of himself than of any other person, it is fit and right that it should be so” (II.ii.2.1).¹³¹ Smith says this in the context of also saying that people, in the pursuit of their own good, can neither “disturb [their neighbor’s] happiness merely because it stands in the way of [their] own” (II.ii.2.1),¹³² nor bring ruin upon others. Thus, we may maintain that it is morally acceptable for people to strive for their own good, but we must determine the extent to

Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), pp. 142-143 (III.3.13-14). Smith claims that we ought to care for our families more than we care for others.

¹³¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), p. 82.

¹³² Ibid.

which we may do this. The following examples seek to show that it is good, at times, to pursue one's own good, even though (1) in doing so, we fail to prevent evil from coming upon others, and (2) in doing so, we cause evil to come upon others.

First, a financially well-off and universally loving¹³³ person might choose to spend money on fine wine for a relaxing night at home instead of giving that money to the poor. Even if we suppose that a relaxing night is the prevention of some evil, namely having a relaxing night prevents the person from not having a relaxing night, we can still say two things. First, his failing to have a relaxing night is a lesser evil than the evil the poor suffer. Second, he does not have to buy wine for a relaxing night, let alone *fine* wine.

Second, another universally loving person might fail to jump onto a live grenade, even though doing so might lead to the preservation of the lives of several other soldiers in the room. Even if we suppose that failing to jump on the grenade is a good, namely by preserving one's own life, the evil prevented by him jumping on the grenade is much greater than the good sustained through him not jumping on the grenade.

Third, we can imagine a businesswoman employing a worker who is not very good at his job, and because of this, the business is bleeding money. Let us further suppose that if she fires this worker, the worker will not have enough money to pay for his apartment and will have to live on the streets. My intuitions tell me that even if the businesswoman universally loves, she might still fire the man, and there would be nothing wrong with this. In this situation, the loving woman does not merely fail to prevent evil; her actions bring about evil.

¹³³ It might seem impossible for a human creature to have universal love. To this, two things can be said. First, because we are talking about the LPE, we can simply assume that creatures in these thought experiments have the cognitive and affective capacities to love everyone. Second, we might want to make a distinction between loving impersonally all of humanity and loving personally each human; and we might want to say that we are obliged only to the former. In other words, every person might be obliged to love *humanity* (the general category of all humans), such that, whenever a specific human is in close causal or relational proximity, we are obliged to love that person personally, though we are not obliged to love every person personally due to our limited capacities. For a slight modification of this point, see Mark Timmons, p. 284.

Fourth, a universally loving introvert might prefer to live out in the country, where fewer people are, and choose to do so. Yet, by doing this, let us suppose, she has to drive into and out of town every day for work. She knows that this contributes significantly to climate change, as opposed to living in town and being able to walk, bike, ride the bus, or drive only a few minutes to work. Even if we suppose that living in the country is a good, her actions contribute to and cause something that is, presumably or potentially, far worse.

In all of these cases, universally loving people can still buy fine wine for a nice night, can still refuse to jump on grenades for their brothers in arms, can still fire those who are causing their businesses to bleed money, and can still live in the country. The reason for this is because the virtue of love is not solely directed outwardly. Yet, there are conflicts that arise between the good that is sought for oneself and the good that is sought for others. Sometimes our concern for ourselves conflicts with the concern we have for others, but it is still perfectly acceptable to act according to self-love. But if it is a moral good for *humans*, who are not of very great value when compared to God, to seek after their own good and flourishing out of universal love, how much more will it be morally good for an infinitely greater God to seek after His own good and flourishing from universal love?

But, what do I mean by the flourishing of God? This was discussed in section III, yet it is good to discuss it briefly here and to supplement it. First, I take it that one must actualize one's potentialities to flourish. As has been argued above, a potentiality remaining merely potential within a person is not a good thing. Thus, straightforwardly, a loving God who is inclined toward Himself to some degree, ought to strive for the actualization of His potentials. Because God need not obligate Himself, there is a possible world in which He is morally allowed to actualize His

dispositions. So, I see no reason why it would not be good in those possible worlds for God to go ahead and actualize His virtues, some of which require evil.

Second, if God has non-bad (that is, either neutral or good) desires of the heart, these desires must be met to some degree in order for God to flourish. What is meant by a “desire of the heart” is “a desire which is at or near the centre of the web of desire for” a given person, which is to say that a person’s desire of the heart holds up all her other, interconnected desires.¹³⁴ Yet, if Eleonore Stump is correct that some “suffering stemming from unfulfilled or frustrated desires of the heart”¹³⁵ is itself an evil that needs justification, God having unmet desires of the heart is a great evil. But there is at least one possible world in which the desires of God’s heart are for the great goods of actualizing His potentials.¹³⁶ So, in that world, it would be a great evil for Him not to actualize His potentials. In God’s universal love, it is justifiable for Him to allow evil so that He Himself might meet some of the desires of His own heart.

This account of God’s flourishing allows us to step in front of a potential objection. God is more powerful than humans. Because of this, one might wonder whether God could simply love both Himself and others without allowing evil. The examples I provided that illustrate that it is right for people to look after their own good, even though it might conflict with the good of others, were depictions of situations with limited humans and limited resources. God is not

¹³⁴ Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil and the Desires of the Heart,” in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, sixth edition, edited Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), p. 371.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 380. Of course, Stump was not using the idea of the desires of the heart to advocate for my position, but to show that the unmet desires of the heart for humans also need justification when answering the problem of evil. Nevertheless, she says the following: “And so, although no particular thing valued as a desire of the heart is essential to a person’s flourishing, human flourishing is not possible in the absence of the desires of the heart” (Stump, p. 380).

¹³⁶ I take it that God has different desires in different possible worlds. If He did not, no world would ever be different. In actualizing our actual world, He had the desire for particular tree T to exist at moment M at location L. But if every desire in God is the same for every possible world, there is no possible world in which God actualizes T existing at M at L + 1 millimeter to the west.

bound by such limitations, so why could He not look after Himself and others without allowing evil into the world?

The answer is that divine flourishing, which results through the actualization of God's potentials and through the satisfaction of the desires of His heart that arise from His potentials – this flourishing necessarily requires evil. God could not have aimed in love for Himself for own His flourishing without intending for evil to be allowed into the world. If looking after His own good happened to conflict with the good of others, God could do nothing about it. It was good and right for Him to look after Himself, and He did.

Does this mean that God never does what is good for others? This implies no such thing. God has love for Himself, but He also has love for people other than Himself. It might just happen that some evils arise because some of God's actions are not directed at others but at Himself, as love demands. God should not be purely self-oriented, but He cannot just give up His deep desires. Yet sometimes these deep desires conflict with the deep desires of others.

Remember, we are not solving the EPE, but the LPE. The quality and quantity of the evil does not matter. We are asking whether *any* evil whatsoever is consistent with the existence of God. And it seems that it is. This evil could be a small, white lie, after which moment God will be able to forgive the liar. Or, maybe God allows a little bit of pain so that He can heal. This seems perfectly fine to me.

To summarize, let us assume that any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God (the consequent of (6) is true), and let us assume that the existence of greater worlds can limitlessly be ensured by God. Even so, because God has a loving nature that is inclined both toward His own good and the good of others, and because there are no best worlds, and because God has no moral obligations,

it is not the case that for any world X that requires or permits evil, there is some world Y that models pure goodness in God such that God has no good reason to create X rather than Y. His good reason is that, in love, He desires the flourishing of His people, which requires evil as they actualize their potentials; and He desires the flourishing of Himself, which requires evil as He actualizes His potentials. Thus, premise (9) is wrong.

D. Concerns and Replies

Let us consider four matters of concern.

One matter of concern is whether we can distinguish between being selfish and being self-interestedly virtuous. Surely a good ethical theory will not entail that people can be selfish while virtuous. If so, what makes one person selfish and another person self-interestedly virtuous? The answer I suggest is as follows. We proposed before the idea of a meta-virtue. It might be that love directed at oneself is only a virtue when supplemented by love directed at others. It might be that we ought to care for everyone, including others and ourselves, but we must be in balance between the two. We must meet the mean of loving ourselves and loving others.¹³⁷

A second concern is this: Even if one can love oneself justifiably, and even if one ought to love oneself, should one not still love others more than oneself? Or, we might ask a somewhat different but related question: Even if virtuous agents ought to look after their own good, is looking after the good of others not a greater good, such that a virtuous agent ought to act for others first and then for oneself? I respond to this in three ways.

¹³⁷ Again, I do not necessarily embrace that *each action* must be loving of oneself and loving of others. One action might flow purely from self-love, and another action might purely flow from the love of others. But, nevertheless, there needs to be some sort of balance between the two. We cannot have a world without self-love, and we cannot have a world without love that is directed at others. Both are necessary for the best worlds and for the best people.

First, I am inclined to ask very simply: Why think this? Remember, this theory is built on the assumption that God has no obligations. This argument would not work if we were to suppose that God, say, had a duty to save His people from some disaster, in which case, God would be morally obligated to do such a thing. But, if God really has no duty, why would He not be able to act according to His own self-interest, which might conflict with the prevention of evil? By not having a duty, God does not have to privilege one virtuous action over another. He would be just as virtuous acting according to His self-love as He would if He were to act from His others-oriented love.

Second, let us grant the point and say that God ought to love others more than Himself. Even so, why does that make one difference to the theory? We might say that a virtuous person ought *primarily* to give himself over to helping the poor, but, as noted earlier, I doubt that anyone would say that he ought to neglect any and all self-oriented actions except those that keep him functioning as an aid worker. Surely we will grant that it is good at least some of the time for him to do what is in his own interest, even though it might not prevent harm from coming to others or it might cause harm to others. But if God can act lovingly *some* of the time toward Himself, there is at least one possible world in which God acts for Himself by actualizing His potentialities that require evil.

Third, one significant aspect of loving others is helping them to flourish. So, even if God must love others more than Himself, we are still driven to the same conclusion: God would allow evil into the world (whatever quality or quantity that might be) to facilitate the flourishing of His creatures.

The third matter of concern is that someone might respond by saying that my argument entails that God uses humans as mere means for the fulfillment of His own desires.¹³⁸ God, says the critic, uses humans as a means of obtaining the actualization of His own potentials by allowing them to commit evil. Because the existence of evil is a necessary condition for some of God's actualizations, humans enduring evil (either by committing them or by being the victim of them) is a necessary condition for some of God's actualizations. For God to allow evil so that actualizations might arise is God using humans. This is not morally permissible.

In response to this, I point out three things. First, the creatures in any given possible world need not be rational. It might be that God uses non-human, non-rational, and non-autonomous agents as mere means. This is not the EPE, but the LPE. The creatures being used as mere means so that God might actualize His potentials need not be humans, so God need not use *humans* as mere means.

Second, it might be that in these worlds God does not use anyone as *mere* means. The Kantian principle does not state that humans cannot be used as means *at all*, but as mere means. This suggests that if God treats humans (or whatever rational creatures there are in a given possible world) also as ends, then God is not guilty of any moral wrongdoing (in this capacity at least) because He is not treating them as *mere* means. Yet, part of God's intention in allowing evil might be for *creaturely* actualization and flourishing because, by virtue of His love for them,

¹³⁸ See Marilyn McCord Adams, "Plantinga on 'Felix Culpa': Analysis and Critique," *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2008), pp. 123-140. By pushing the Kantian principle that it is immoral to use humans as mere means, she argues against Plantinga's *felix culpa* theodicy, according to which God allows evil into the world so that incarnation and atonement might be made. See Plantinga's "Supralapsarianism or 'O Felix Culpa,'" pp. 1-25. My account is similar, but different, in that incarnation and atonement are not directly related to any *person's* individual good, but are more in line with being *global* goods; whereas actualization is required for both divine and creaturely flourishing, making it more of a personal good, which also increases the good of the world on the whole. See Marilyn McCord Adams, p. 129.

He values *creatures* as ends.¹³⁹ In allowing evil so that *creatures* may flourish, God treats *creatures* as Kant required. In this, God can then pursue His own actualization because He treats humans as ends and not merely as means. In summary, then, God might first love His creatures, which causes Him to value them as ends, which causes Him to treat them as ends by allowing evil so that they may flourish as the beings that they are as they model God's goodness; and once this is done, this morally allows God also to use humans as means for His own actualization.

An objector might respond by pointing out that the above argument misunderstands the Kantian principle by assuming that if *ever* God treats humans as an end, then God is thereby forever off the hook and is able to use humans as means after that however He wishes. Suppose that God exists, creature C exists, and creature C' exists. If God allows C' to commit a moral evil so that God Himself and C might actualize potentials, God is using C' *in this particular instance* as a mere means. Though God might treat C' as an end *in other instances*, say, by allowing a small amount of danger so that C' can flourish as a courageous being; *in this instance*, God is not using C' as an end. Thus, though God might allow evil so that creatures may flourish, those who endure an evil E but do not flourish through E, are not treated as ends in God's allowance of E.

However, there are two responses to this. First, because we are discussing the LPE, not the EPE, we need not consider *two* creatures existing in a possible world, such that one is used as a mere means, while the other is treated as an end. Let us simply suppose that C exists, not C'. Even in this world, there are some actualizations that require evil, such as courageousness, endurance, and perseverance. These do not require moral evil, so they do not require a second creature who is used merely as a means. God could put a singular person into a slightly

¹³⁹ In other words, when x loves y, x values y as an end and aims for y's own good. Though y might not actually have any value, love makes the lover esteem the object of love as an end.

dangerous situation to let her be brave and resilient in the face of trials. Natural evil, at least, could be used for flourishing. And this is all we need to disprove the LPE.

Second, the fair distribution of allowing all humans to commit moral evil treats all humans as ends by virtue of the fact that each human could agree to be both the victim and the perpetrator of moral evil. Taking from the accounts of justice argued for by Thomas Hobbes and David Hume, we can see that fairly allowing moral evil for moral evil is a good that is in everyone's self-interest, something that every rational person would choose.

Thomas Hobbes's account of justice begins with the claim that no one wants to remain in a state of nature, in which there is "continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (*Leviathan*, Pt. I, Ch. XIII, 9).¹⁴⁰ Because of this, rational creatures do not want to live in a state of nature. So, reason dictates to all people that they are to lay down their rights and to pursue peace, so long as others do the same (*Leviathan*, Pt. I, Ch. XIV, 4-5).¹⁴¹ David Hume, taking from Hobbes, said, "I observe, that it will be for my interest to leave another in the possession of his goods, *provided* he will act in the same manner with regard to me" (*Treatise*, 3.2.2.10).¹⁴² When everyone embraces such a convention to abstain from one another's property, justice is thereby established and is conducive to society at large (*Treatise*, 3.2.1-6).¹⁴³ In summary, then, it is rational to endure a little inconvenience (namely, I do not take from others without their permission, nor do I strive to take advantage of others) so that (1) my own life may go well, and (2) everyone's lives may go well.

We can apply this same thinking to the above issue. What does God do when He is presented with the fact that His creatures are unable to flourish without actualization, and with

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan with Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, edited by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), p. 76.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁴² David Hume, p. 315, emphasis in the original.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 307-342.

the fact that they cannot actualize their potentials without moral evil? He sets up a system of justice, as it were. He, in interest of creature C flourishing, allows creature C' to commit evil. Knowing that it would be unfair, something that C' would not agree to if C' were the only one committing evil, God also allows creature C to commit evil so C' may flourish.¹⁴⁴ Of course, God cannot sin, given PP and His necessary goodness. So, the only beings that can be perpetrators of evil are creatures. Thus, it is possible for God to allow evil into the world, distributed fairly to all people, except for Himself, so that everyone is both a perpetrator of moral evil and a victim of moral evil, so that humans might be able to flourish fairly as they actualize their potentials. Each person takes upon himself or herself a little inconvenience (namely, committing evil) so that (1) he or she may flourish, and (2) so that everyone else may flourish.¹⁴⁵

By allowing C' to commit evil so that C may flourish, God is respecting both C and C', in that He is respecting what they *would* both agree upon (namely, that they both commit moral evil and both become victims of it), were they to make an arrangement. At the least, were C and C' to be informed that God *had* (in the past) distributed moral evil fairly between them for their own flourishing, they would make a *retroactive* agreement.

We can see this further by considering what representatives of humans would agree upon. Suppose that representatives meet to discuss rules of justice. Were there to be impartial, unbiased judges trying to determine what was fair and good for two separate creatures, they would determine that both of them committing moral evil and being the victims of moral evil is the best

¹⁴⁴ Of course, neither creature could know about this. If both C and C' were actually to agree to commit evil against one another for their own good and for the good of one other, I doubt that their actions would actually be evil. Their motives would not be malevolent. This might explain why God keeps us ignorant of the reason for evil in the actual world. I thank Warren Herold for a recent discussion concerning treating humans as mere means. His comments formed the basis for this footnote. For those concerned about this, see the next three paragraphs and footnote 146. Additionally, consider that C and C' could both make the agreement that they would each commit moral evil and be the victims of moral evil, and they could also, at that same time, agree to be made (by God) ignorant of the agreement after it has been made so that they may genuinely commit moral evil.

¹⁴⁵ Remember, this is the LPE, not the EPE.

and most fair path. Each representative would strive to get what was best for those whom they represent, which would be their flourishing. But people can flourish only if there is moral evil also present. Of course, the representatives would not agree to allow evil if evil would overwhelm the flourishing of those whom they represent, but because we are discussing the LPE, we can posit that the evil is small. So the representatives would agree that every person should commit moral evil, lest fairness be violated, so that the people they represent might fairly flourish.¹⁴⁶

Thus, flourishing in conjunction with fairness, which representatives would agree upon, entails that everyone commits moral evil. But because these representatives are treating those they represent as ends, I struggle to see how God, who represents every creature by loving them impartially and seeking to do what is in their best interests, would be in violation of any Kantian principle. In other words, when I say that God treats creatures as ends by allowing evil into the world so that they may flourish, the evil spoken of here is a *fairly distributed* evil, according to which all humans become both victims and perpetrators of moral evils so that they may all flourish without inequality.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ This is similar to John Rawls's famous original position. See his *Justice as Fairness* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 14-18. However, Rawls's representatives are supposed to be *modified versions* of the people they represent – that is, x' represents x, and x' and x are similar in all respects, except that x' is ignorant of certain biasing factors that x knows, and x' is fully rational whereas x might not be. The representatives are not *independent people* who are fully rational but ignorant of certain factors concerning the people they represent – that is, y represents x, and y is ignorant of certain biasing factors that x knows, and y is fully rational whereas x might not be. I thank Warren Herold for discussion of this point. Nevertheless, this thesis does not require Rawls's original position. Let us simply posit a slightly new way of analyzing the rules of justice, according to which representatives, who represent the good of independent people, decide rules of justice. Because the *representatives* are agreeing to the rules, the worry of footnote 144 is avoided. It is not that people agree to commit evil themselves, which seems impossible if actions are wrong due to, say, malice. It is their *representatives*, who act for the good of those they represent, that agree to it. All humans, then, commit moral evil, according to the agreement set forth by their representatives. This is possible given that the people do not know about the agreement their representatives have made. Yet, it is good and fair because the representatives, each of which was aiming for the good of those they represent, have agreed upon it.

¹⁴⁷ Each person being both the victim and the perpetrator of moral evil does not entail that each person commits the same amount of evil and is a victim to the same degree. Though there is a possible world with such a perfect balance, which is all that is needed to answer the LPE, my account here does not require a perfect balance. All I am saying is that each person commits evil *to some degree*, and each person is a victim of evil *to some degree*.

Third, even if the above account does not work to prove that God is not using humans as mere means, it is not clear that Kant's principle is correct in the first place. Love and benevolence are the supreme virtues. Francis Hutcheson, former Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow in the eighteenth-century, embraced similarly that benevolence is the ground for all moral action.¹⁴⁸ However, he also believed that all benevolence aims at the happiness of others. Because universal benevolence is the best version of benevolence, as opposed to selective benevolence, the maximally virtuous person will aim at "that Action [which] is best, which procures the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers".¹⁴⁹ If we modify this to make it clear that the maximally virtuous agent – that is, the universally benevolent or loving person – aims at the maximal amount of *flourishing* in the world, then we get right back to where I was. God aims at maximal flourishing because He is maximally loving. Kant's principle, if it demands that we reject what universal love pursues, is simply wrong.¹⁵⁰

The fourth matter of concern is addressing Schellenberg's arguments in favor of premise (9). He has three arguments in favor of it. Let me take them in order. His first argument is that evil causes a natural disappreciation. I do not deny this, but when evil is a necessary condition for such a great good as the actualization of God's potentialities and the potentialities of His creatures, God would have a very good reason to choose a world with evil-involving-goods. Why would it be wrong for God to desire a world with such great actualizations?

Second, Schellenberg says that because God is the greatest and purest form of goodness, in whom there is no evil, evil would only hinder finite creatures from coming into a greater

¹⁴⁸ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), p. 116.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁵⁰ This universal love need not entail that love is equally distributed to every person. It might be good and right to love oneself more than others, or to love others more than oneself. I refer back to the meta-virtue. Because of this, a universally loving being might not *maximize* flourishing, but favor the flourishing of certain individuals (e.g., himself or his own family) more than others.

appreciation and experience of this goodness. My first response is that God might allow some evil due to self-love, not others-oriented love. Evil might prevent creatures from coming into a greater appreciation of Him, but that does not make self-oriented evil-involving-goods no longer great or desirable. Even so, my second response is that I see no reason why evil would prevent creatures from coming to know His greatness more. Indeed, evil is the condition in which God is able to exercise His perfect potentialities, sometimes directly for the good of the creature in the forgiveness of their sins! And, finally, my third response is that evil is a necessary condition for creatures exercising *their* modeling goods, which are potentials that reflect *God's* perfecting potentials, making creatures see to greater extents the greatness and value of the perfections of God. In love, not in contrast to love, does God allow evil so that creatures might more fully know Him by experiencing the actualization of His potentials and their own potentials that model His.

And, third and finally, Schellenberg claims that evil matters in our consideration of which world should be chosen. We do not just consider the final value of a world. In response, I admit that I agree. We care whether there is evil in a given world. However, this, in many respects, merely repeats his first argument. God does not desire the evil for its own sake, but merely to facilitate and to allow Him and His creatures to exercise their potentials. Evil matters in our consideration, sure, but so too must God consider, when determining what world to make, the flourishing of Himself and His creatures through the actualization of their potentials and through the fulfillment of their desires. God should not merely consider whether a world has evil or not.

Therefore, Schellenberg's arguments are unsuccessful at establishing (9), whereas my arguments presented above seem to refute this very premise.

V. Concluding Remarks

We have seen that Schellenberg's argument fails at premise (6). If we reject that argument, we must reject premise (9). Thus, Schellenberg's LPE does not succeed.

I would like to conclude this thesis with some short remarks on related material, namely the EPE. We might be able to solve the EPE through the same reasoning presented in this paper. I think this paper is a slam-dunk case against the LPE, but the EPE is harder to answer. So, I briefly offer the following two considerations.

First, the actualization of divine and creaturely potentials continually through creation is not only a good, but also a great good. This alone seems to me to be a morally sufficient reason for all the evil that is in the world, as long as each evil is associated either with God's actualizations or his creatures' good actualizations. And, if either God or creatures actualizing their attributes is not itself a morally sufficient reason, God acting in *love* to achieve His and His creatures' flourishing and to fulfill their good desires for actualization is in itself a morally sufficient reason.

Second, as circumstances surrounding the actualization of a potentiality grow in substance – that is, as the context grows in significance – so too does the substance of the actualization. As the evil grows darker, the salvation grows brighter.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ I thank Thomas Senor for his comments and advice throughout the writing process of this thesis.

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