

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

**ScholarWorks@UARK**

---

Graduate Theses and Dissertations

---

8-2023

## A Calvinistic Divine Glory Defense

Stephen Thomas Irby

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>



Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Other Philosophy Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Irby, S. T. (2023). A Calvinistic Divine Glory Defense. *Graduate Theses and Dissertations* Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/4827>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [scholar@uark.edu](mailto:scholar@uark.edu), [uarepos@uark.edu](mailto:uarepos@uark.edu).

A Calvinistic Divine Glory Defense

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

by

Stephen Irby  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, 2014  
University of Arkansas  
Master of Arts in Philosophy, 2019

August 2023  
University of Arkansas

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

---

Thomas Senor, Ph.D.  
Dissertation Director

---

Richard Lee, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Jacob Adler, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

## Abstract

Calvinists, because they embrace the view that God ordains whatsoever comes to pass, cannot appeal to libertarian free will while trying to defend theism against the problem of evil.

However, they can appeal – and, in fact, some have appealed – to God’s desire to be glorified to account for why He has ordained the evils of our world. This is the divine glory defense, and my dissertation aims to develop a version of it. After spending some time framing my defense in the context of the rest of the literature on the problem of evil, an account is provided of what divine glory is. Next, an examination is made of various moral views that will undergird the rest of my dissertation. Then, with the material in the previous chapters in mind, I argue that it is plausible that God, if He exists, will pursue His own glory. Finally, in light of this conclusion, a story is presented in which God, if He exists, ordains the evils that we see in our world.

©2023 by Stephen Irby  
All Rights Reserved

## Acknowledgements

Thanks are due, first and foremost, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who has, by His ordinary providence, guided the writing of this dissertation, and who has worked in me both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Second, thanks are due to the faculty and staff of the University of Arkansas, especially those in the Department of Philosophy. The library staff (primarily those processing interlibrary loans) helped tremendously with research, and the department's faculty helped refine my philosophical abilities through the years, culminating in what you see before you. A big thanks is due to Thomas Senor who put up with my countless philosophical shenanigans and has been a great advisor through both my MA and PhD programs.

Third, thanks are due to my church community. Their insights have helped me to see more clearly many of the ideas expressed in this work, and their encouragements have helped me along the way. Here are some of them, alphabetized by last name: Daniel Cadiz, Camden Gilmore, Evan Long, Jesse Mast, Micah Reed, Luke Reimer, and Ted Wenger.

Fourth, thanks are due to my family, Tim Irby and Judy Kerr especially. They put me through a Christian school system that, no doubt, influenced much of my thinking, and they have consistently encouraged me through graduate school and the writing of this dissertation. I could not have finished either without them.

## Dedication

To the triune God and to His saints, especially those saints of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in  
Siloam Springs, AR

## Epigraph

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:36

## Table of Contents

I. Introducing the Divine Glory Defense .....	1
A. Formulations of the Problem of Evil.....	3
B. Some Initial Defenses.....	10
C. Defenses Compatible with Theological Compatibilism.....	28
D. The Aim of My Dissertation .....	43
E. Summary of Chapter I .....	49
II. An Exposition of Divine Glory .....	50
A. God's Internal Glory .....	51
B. God's External Glory: Consequences of the Eternal Expressions of God's Attributes .....	59
C. God's External Glory: Creation Mirroring God.....	67
D. God's External Glory: Humanity Bearing the Spiritual Image of God .....	77
E. Summary of Chapter II.....	89
III. The Moral Underpinnings of the Divine Glory Defense .....	91
A. Divine Command Theory.....	93
B. The Perfect Love of God: The Nature of Perfect Love.....	105
C. The Perfect Love of God: The Hierarchy of God's Love .....	115
D. The Perfect Justice of God: Respecting Rights.....	124
E. The Perfect Justice of God: Equality .....	134
F. Summary of Chapter III.....	146
IV. God's Passion for His Glory.....	148
A. Preliminary Material .....	148
B. Next-Best Things Related to God's Own Good.....	170



C. Next-Best Things Related to God’s Union with Himself .....	179
D. Supporting Arguments .....	195
E. God’s Love for His People .....	202
F. Summary of Chapter IV .....	212
V. The Divine Glory Defense .....	215
A. The Ordination of Evil .....	217
B. The Nightmare Objection .....	256
C. Extending the Defense .....	270
D. Summary of Chapter V .....	280
E. Concluding Remarks for This Dissertation .....	281
Works Cited .....	284
Appendix .....	296

## I. Introducing the Divine Glory Defense

According to perfect being theism, God exists and is the greatest metaphysically possible being.<sup>1</sup> This is usually thought to entail that God is (at least) maximally powerful, knowledgeable, and good. However, evil also exists. More than that, horrendous evils seem to be all too common. Were one to read of the horrors experienced by those who survived the Holocaust,<sup>2</sup> one would naturally wonder how God could exist. This is the problem of evil, and it is the aim of this dissertation to offer an explanation of why God, if He exists, allows the evils we see in our world. Specifically, I want to offer a version of the divine glory defense.

For now, however, we are only in Chapter I, the aim of which is to introduce the divine glory defense by placing it within the context of the literature on the problem of evil. Section A is dedicated to an explanation of the various ways in which the problem of evil can be formulated, and section B surveys some initial responses. After rejecting many of these responses because of my commitment to theological compatibilism, I move on, in section C, to a discussion of how the theological compatibilist might respond to the problem of evil, one of which is the divine glory defense. Section D is dedicated to laying out in greater detail the aim of this dissertation. Finally, Section E briefly summarizes the chapter we are currently in.

Now, before we get into any details, it should be noted from the outset that I am assuming that, if God exists, the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), and the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) are all largely, though perhaps not entirely, correct.<sup>3</sup> All of them are Christian documents, and they will form the

---

<sup>1</sup> Yujin Nagasawa, *Maximal God* (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 9-10. From now on, unless otherwise specified, when I speak of theism, I will be referring to perfect being theism.

<sup>2</sup> For a particularly vivid and powerful firsthand account by a Holocaust survivor, see Elie Wiesel, *Night* (Hill and Wang, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Why do I assume that these documents in particular are largely, though perhaps not entirely, correct? The Presbyterian Church in America, to which I belong, has officially adopted them. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (after the 49th General Assembly, which took place between June 21 and June 24,

theological background in front of which I will philosophically analyze the problem of evil.

Three major ideas that will be employed in this work are that God ordains all contingent things (external to Him), that God is *a se* (that is, He exists entirely from Himself), and that God is utterly simple. But, because I cannot defend every view extensively in a finite work, I assume that these ideas, if God exists, are correct, and I feel entitled to my assumption because the WCF claims that they are correct (WCF 2.1-2, 3.1-2, 5.1-2). Further, because the WCF, the WLC, and the WSC are all from the Reformed or Calvinistic tradition,<sup>4</sup> I am framing this dissertation

---

2022,) states in its preface: “The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America, which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word Of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, together with the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Book of Church Order*, comprising the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline and the Directory for Worship; all as adopted by the Church” (*The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2022)).

<sup>4</sup> Here is part of John Frame’s summary of the Westminster Confession of Faith:

The Westminster Assembly (so called because of its meeting place) was summoned by the English Parliament in 1643. Its mission was to advise Parliament in restructuring the Church of England along Puritan lines. ... Different views of church government were represented, presbyterianism being the dominant position. On theological matters, however, there was virtual unanimity in favor of a strong Calvinistic position, unequivocally rejecting what the assembly saw as the errors of Arminianism, Roman Catholicism, and sectarianism.

The assembly’s Confession of Faith, completed in December 1646, is the last of the classic reformed confessions and by far the most influential in the English-speaking world. Though it governed the Church of England only briefly, it has been widely adopted (sometimes with amendments) by British and American Presbyterian bodies as well as many Congregational and Baptist churches. ... Notable elements are: ... (2) The mature formulation of the Reformed doctrine of predestination (chs. III, V, IX, XVII). It is noncommittal on the debate between supra- and infralapsarianism but teaches clearly that God’s will is the ultimate cause of all things, including human salvation. It teaches the doctrine of reprobation in very guarded terms (III. vii. viii.). It is careful to balance this teaching with a chapter on human freedom (IX) (John Frame, s.v. “Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, second edition, edited by Walter Elwell (Baker Academic, 2001), pp. 1271a-1271b).

Regarding the Westminster Catechisms, Frame says,

After the Westminster Assembly completed its work on the confession, it focused its attention on preparation of a catechism. Its early attempts were frustrated, and a consensus developed that two catechisms would be needed, “one more exact and comprehensive, another more easy and short for new beginners.” The Larger was intended for pulpit exposition, while the Shorter was intended for the instruction of children. These were completed, the Shorter in 1647 and the Larger in 1648. Both function as official standards of doctrine in many denominations today within the Reformed tradition. The Larger has, to a considerable extent, fallen into disuse, while the Shorter has been greatly used and loved, though many have found it too difficult to be an effective teaching aid for children.

squarely within that tradition, and, thus, my defense of theism against the problem of evil should be seen as a Reformed or Calvinistic defense, even though much of what I say can probably be appropriated by non-Calvinists.<sup>5</sup> Finally, because my main aim will be to advance a *divine glory* defense, all within this Reformed or Calvinist tradition, the topic of this dissertation is a Reformed or Calvinistic divine glory defense.

With that said, let us explain some formulations of the problem of evil.

#### A. Formulations of the Problem of Evil

To begin this introduction, we should look in greater detail at the problem of evil itself, of which there are various versions. Two primary types are the logical and evidential formulations. Daniel Howard-Snyder has a good way of differentiating the two. He says, “So-called ‘logical’ arguments from evil<sup>6</sup> have a premise that says theism is incompatible with some known fact about evil; so-called ‘evidential’ arguments do not.”<sup>7</sup> J.L. Mackie presents the most famous example of the logical problem of evil. He claims that the following three propositions (in conjunction with a couple premises) are incompatible with one another: God is omnipotent, God

---

The theology of the catechisms is the same as that of the confession. (John Frame, s.v. “Westminster Catechisms,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 1270b-1271a).

<sup>5</sup> Note that, though I affirm (for the most part) the WCF, the WLC, and the WSC, if the reader wants, we could think of the material being presented in this work as remaining neutral on whether the Reformed tradition is correct, yet asking whether it can handle the two problems of evil that will be presented in section D of this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> One further differentiation, to which I will pay little attention, is the distinction between aporetic and atheological problems of evil. “In the former case, the problems are presented as challenging human reason to think more deeply about the nature of God and his causal relation to the world,” says Michael Hickson, whereas “In the latter case, the problems are presented such that evil is explicitly offered as strong evidence against the very existence of God” (Michael Hickson, “A Brief History of Problems of Evil,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 3). The latter are “arguments from evil.”

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Introduction,” in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. xvi. He echoes this in: Daniel Howard-Snyder, “The Logical Problem of Evil: Mackie and Plantinga,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 19.

is wholly good, and evil exists. Because evil exists, God (or, at least, an omnipotent and wholly good God) cannot exist.<sup>8</sup>

The two most famous evidential problems of evil are from William Rowe and Paul Draper. Rowe claims that, though he cannot *prove* it, the following proposition is reasonable to maintain: there exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. Because, says Rowe, an omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse, there does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.<sup>9</sup> Even though Rowe's argument claims that the existence of God is incompatible with some fact about evil, because this fact cannot be known with (relative) certainty, Rowe's problem of evil counts as evidential.<sup>10</sup>

Draper's problem of evil, on the other hand, does not even have a premise that says that the existence of God is incompatible with some fact about evil. It, therefore, counts as evidential as well.<sup>11</sup> He presents two hypotheses. The first is the Hypothesis of Indifference: neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by nonhuman persons. The second hypothesis is theism. He goes on to argue,

---

<sup>8</sup> J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955), pp. 200-201. A more recent formulation of a logical problem of evil is by J.L. Schellenberg. See his "A New Logical Problem of Evil," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), pp. 34-48.

<sup>9</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 2-5.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Introduction," p. xiv; and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The Logical Problem of Evil: Mackie and Plantinga," p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Introduction," pp. xiv-xvi; and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The Logical Problem of Evil: Mackie and Plantinga," p. 19.

making no claim of inconsistency, that the Hypothesis of Indifference explains the facts of pain and pleasure much better than theism does.<sup>12</sup>

A further distinction is between the abstract and concrete problems of evil. Marilyn McCord Adams notes that evil can be understood abstractly, so as “to refer to some evil or other, or ‘concretely’ [so as] to refer to evils in the amounts and of the kinds and with distributions of the sort found in the actual world.”<sup>13</sup> Mackie’s logical problem of evil, as discussed above, is abstract. The existence of God is supposed to be incompatible with the mere existence of evil. Additionally, J.L. Schellenberg’s new logical problem of evil is also formulated abstractly.<sup>14</sup> As Jerome Gellman points out, the conclusion of Schellenberg’s argument is that the existence of God is inconsistent with *any* evil.<sup>15</sup>

A concrete formulation, in contrast, might appeal to, for example, “the fact that innocent children suffer agonizing deaths, or that animals suffer, or that animals did so before there were any persons to observe their suffering, or that the suffering that people undergo apparently bears no relation to the moral quality of their lives, or that it bears a rather clear relation to the wealth and medical knowledge of the societies in which they live.”<sup>16</sup> It is to evils such as these that Rowe and Bruce Russell appeal. When Rowe has us imagine a fawn suffering for days on end,

---

<sup>12</sup> Paul Draper, “Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists,” in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 12-29.

<sup>13</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 13-14. Though Adams cites Michael Tooley in her explanation of the distinction between abstract and concrete formulations of the problem of evil, Tooley’s understanding is slightly different from Adams’s. Tooley includes under the heading of abstract problems of evil not only appeals to the mere existence of evil, but also appeals to the quantity of evil (Michael Tooley, “The Argument from Evil,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5, Philosophy of Religion (1991), pp. 91-93). Adams ignores this when she includes under concrete formulations appeals to “the amounts” of evils in the world. My view is that concrete and abstract problems of evil are, most likely, on a spectrum, with one side being fully concrete and the other side being fully abstract. Because of this, there probably is no hard and fast line to separate abstract and concrete problems of evil.

<sup>14</sup> J.L. Schellenberg, “A New Logical Problem of Evil.”

<sup>15</sup> Jerome Gellman, “On a New Logical Problem of Evil,” *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2015), p. 439.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Tooley, “The Argument from Evil,” p. 91.

he is appealing to a concrete evil.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, when Russell describes a real case in which a five-year-old girl was severely beaten, raped, and strangled to death, he is formulating a concrete problem of evil.<sup>18</sup>

Note here that the distinction between the logical and evidential problems of evil is not the same as the distinction between the abstract and concrete problems of evil. This is why Gellman notes, “The logical argument from evil aims for the conclusion that there is a logical contradiction between the existence of God and either any evil, or horrendous evils, or the amount of evil there is in the world.”<sup>19</sup> Though Mackie originally formulated his logical problem of evil abstractly, and, therefore, logical problems of evil can be abstract, he seems perfectly fine with falling back to a concrete formulation if push comes to shove.<sup>20</sup> Further, Marilyn McCord Adams’s entire book is a response to a logical problem of evil that looks at horrendous and, therefore, concrete evils.<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, though Rowe’s evidential problem of evil looked at concrete evil, and, therefore, evidential problems of evil can be concrete, someone could create an evidential problem of evil that says that the mere existence of evil is much more likely on some hypothesis other than theism. This seems to be what David Hume offers when he says the following:

There may *four* hypotheses be framed concerning the first causes of the universe: *that* they are endowed with perfect goodness, *that* they have perfect malice, *that* they are opposite and have both goodness and malice, *that* they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the two former unmixed principles. And the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seem to oppose the third. The fourth, therefore, seems by far the most probable.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” pp. 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Russell, “The Persistent Problem of Evil,” *Faith and Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (1989), pp. 123-125.

<sup>19</sup> Jerome Gellman, “On a New Logical Problem of Evil,” p. 439.

<sup>20</sup> See J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” p. 205.

<sup>21</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, pp. 13-16, 26.

<sup>22</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, in *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, edited by Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 86 (Part 11, paragraph 15), emphases in the original.

The mere existence of evil, in combination with the mere existence of good and the uniformity of nature,<sup>23</sup> makes theism implausible.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the logical-evidential and abstract-concrete distinctions are different and should not be confused.

Finally, our last distinction is between the global and local problems of evil. Peter van Inwagen discusses the distinction: “The premise of the global argument from evil is that the world contains evil, or perhaps that the world contains a vast amount of truly horrible evil. ... Local arguments from evil are arguments that appeal to *particular* evils”.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the global argument looks at the fact that the world on the whole has been infected with evil, either abstractly or concretely, but the local argument looks at particular instances of evil. Mackie’s

---

<sup>23</sup> One might object by saying that this is not a fully abstract problem of evil. The fact that Hume appeals to mixed phenomena and the uniformity of nature, not just the mere existence of evil, adds some concrete information into the argument. In response, I am somewhat moved by this objection, but I am not very interested in semantics or taxonomy. If the objector wants to put this case under concrete problems of evil, that is fine with me. As already noted, there is probably a spectrum of problems of evil, with one side being fully concrete and the other side being fully abstract. I don’t particular care where on the spectrum we say a “true” abstract argument begins. The point here is that Hume is appealing largely to the mere existence of evil as evidence that God does not exist, even though it is combined with further facts (namely, that good also exists and that nature is uniform).

<sup>24</sup> Another objection, much more to the point than what was mentioned in the footnote immediately above, is that Hume is talking about natural evils in the quoted portion. See David Hume, pp. 80-87 (*Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Part 11, paragraphs 5-16, especially 12 and 16). Because the distinction between natural and moral evils is real and important, the argument seems to be substantively concrete, not abstract. In response, note what Hume says in the paragraphs *immediately following* the selected portion:

What I have said concerning natural evil will apply to moral, with little or no variation ... [S]o long as there is any vice at all in the universe, it will very much puzzle you anthropomorphites, how to account for it. You must assign a cause for it, without having recourse to the first cause. But as every effect must have a cause, and that cause another; you must either carry on the progression *in infinitum*, or rest on that original principle, who is the ultimate cause of all things (David Hume, p. 87 (*Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Part 11, paragraphs 16-17)).

Thus, even if, technically speaking, the original portion was about natural evils and was, thus, concrete, the general argument Hume is presenting (whatever it is precisely) is not about either natural or moral evils in particular. *That general argument* is abstract in nature, even if it takes more concrete forms.

Note also that Hume thinks that the concrete details of moral evils don’t ultimately matter. Hence, he uses the language of “[S]o long as there is *any* vice at all in the universe” (emphasis added). The same could probably be said for natural evils, given that he uses the language of “Mixed phenomena”, which has no concrete details implicit within it, other than, perhaps, the fact that evil exists alongside good. (See the footnote immediately above.)

My interpretation, then, is that the general argument Hume is presenting says that the first causes, if there are first causes, are most likely neither perfectly good nor perfectly evil because they have given rise to both good and evil, *whatever those goods and evils might be*. Given that the various parts of the universe are uniform, the first causes can’t be both good and evil. Thus, they are most likely neither good nor evil.

<sup>25</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 8, emphasis in the original.



argument is global. It looks at the fact that there is evil in the world. This contrasts with the local problem of evil that van Inwagen discusses. He presents the true story of a man brutally mutilating a woman, raping her, and leaving her to die. He then proceeds to ask how God could allow *this particular evil*.<sup>26</sup>

Now, global arguments, as already noted, can be either abstract or concrete. It is perfectly fine to ask why the world has some evil or other in it. This is what Mackie does. It is also perfectly fine to ask why the world in general has so many horrendous evils. This is what van Inwagen discusses when he looks at the global argument from evil.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, global arguments can be either logical or evidential. One could make an argument to the effect that the existence of God is inconsistent with the known fact that the world in general has evil in it, as presented by Mackie. And one could also make an argument to the effect that the world in general, with all its pain and sorrow, is much more plausible on some competing hypothesis when compared to theism, as presented by Draper.

Conversely, local arguments seem, by their very nature, to be primarily (if not inherently) concrete, which might be why I know of no local, abstract argument from evil that has been advanced by anyone. Local arguments ask why particular evils exist, which seems usually to preclude any abstraction. When van Inwagen discusses the case of a mutilated and raped woman, he is looking at a local, concrete problem of evil. Still, one might be able to make an abstract argument in the following way. Suppose that we have answered a global argument from evil by saying that God, aiming to show that something has gone wrong in the world as a result of free will, chose to actualize a world in which there are many instances of evil. But suppose, contrary

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-98.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-89.

to van Inwagen, we do not consider how horrible these evils are.<sup>28</sup> We might, then, ask why *this particular evil* (whatever that evil might be) exists when it could have been eliminated by God without losing the good of showing, by virtue of there being many instances of evil, that something is wrong in the world. That is, God could eliminate a particular instance of evil and still have many evils to show that something has gone wrong in the world by virtue of free will. Why, then, did He allow *this particular evil*? Such a question is, ultimately, getting at a local problem of evil. Nevertheless, we might only consider that particular evil *as an instance of evil*, without considering any concrete information about it. This makes for an abstract problem of evil.<sup>29</sup> Thus, local arguments can be either abstract or concrete, though they are primarily concrete.

Additionally, local arguments can be either logical or evidential. It is easy to formulate an argument that says that *this particular known evil* is inconsistent with theism. One such example could be generated from the purported logical incompatibility of theism and the existence of Hell, as Marilyn McCord Adams argues.<sup>30</sup> And it is also easy to formulate an evidential

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 95-98. Also, one might, again, object by saying that this is not a *fully* abstract argument. The reason why we asked for justification for God allowing that particular instance of evil was because it was surrounded by many other evils, such that God could have eliminated it without thereby losing the good He aimed to achieve in allowing many evils. This, some might say, is concrete in nature. And, again, I will note that I'm not particularly interested in classifications, especially given that there is a spectrum for concrete and abstract problems of evil. If the objector wants to count this as concrete, fine, let him count it is concrete. Perhaps, then, there is no local, abstract problem of evil.

<sup>30</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," in *Reasoned Faith*, edited by Eleonore Stump (Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 301-305.

Three things should be noted here. First, I am thinking of Hell as an instance of evil. Adams has the same view (Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell," p. 302). This does not *automatically* entail that, because Hell is evil, God has committed injustice if He sends people there. No, it could be that all instances of retributive justice – and Hell seems to be an instance of retributive justice – involve causing someone to experience evil. For example, if a judge justly sentences someone to prison for a crime that they have committed, it seems right to say that the criminal is experiencing evil when locked in prison, even though the sentence is just.

Second, Adams ultimately thinks that we should give up belief in the existence of Hell (Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell," p. 302). Thus, technically, she is not presenting a logical problem of evil. Instead of arguing from some known fact about evil to the non-existence of God due to the logical incompatibility of that fact about evil and God, as is done in the logical argument from evil against the existence of God, she is arguing from theism to the non-existence of Hell, employing the claim that God and Hell are logically incompatible with one

argument that looks at a particular evil. This is what Rowe does when he presents his famous case of a fawn suffering for days on end. This is a particular evil, and it is presented in the context of an evidential argument.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, we have multiple types of formulations of the problem of evil. Even further, each type can be tokened in unique ways. Mackie presents an abstract, global, logical problem of evil, but so too does Schellenberg, and they are not at all the same.

## B. Some Initial Defenses

Solutions to problems of evil take two primary forms. Using van Inwagen's terminology, theodicies address a particular problem of evil (a type or a token) by proposing God's actual morally sufficient reasons for allowing the evil under discussion. This is doctrinal in nature, seeking to explain the real reasons behind God's actions. It, therefore, more than likely, will require much theological and Scriptural analysis. A defense, on the other hand, merely defuses or undermines a particular problem of evil (a type or a token) by presenting reasonable doubt, thereby cutting off the inference from evil to the non-existence of God.<sup>32</sup> This does not require

---

another. Because the WCF embraces the existence of Hell (WCF 32.1 and 33.2), I am assuming that Hell exists. Thus, a suitably modified argument would count as a logical problem of evil.

Third, one might wonder whether the evil of Hell is too general for an argument to appeal to it and count as a local argument from evil. After all, it seems that *many* people go to Hell, not just one. How, then, does this argument count as local, looking at a *particular* evil? In response, it should be pointed out that, just like with the abstract-concrete distinction, there probably also is a spectrum for global and local arguments from evil. Appealing to one murder might constitute part of a local argument, but does one event in which there are *two* murders constitute part of a local argument or part of a global argument? I'm not sure, but just like with the abstract-concrete distinction, I'm not particularly interested in classifications. Thus, if the objector classifies this argument as global, that is fine with me. All I'm trying to do is give examples of how the argument from evil might be constructed. Even so, we can construct an argument revolving around the fact that one person was cast into Hell, whether others were as well or not.

<sup>31</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," pp. 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> As I sit here, meditating upon what I have written, I wonder: does reasonable doubt sufficiently defuse an argument? Even if we have presented reasonable doubt, can't we still say that a particular argument succeeds *most likely*? For example, suppose that reasonable doubt has been presented, such that a particular key premise in an argument is, say, only 75% likely to be true, even though it initially seemed to be certain. Have we sufficiently defused the argument at this point? I'm not sure. What degree of reasonable doubt is sufficient for defusing an

much theological or Scriptural analysis, but only requires the defender to present enough reasoning to show that the particular problem of evil under discussion does not succeed.<sup>33</sup>

Many defenses against problems of evil have been proposed. There are two primary types. The first primary type challenges a particular version of the problem of evil by saying that one or more of its premises lack sufficient grounds for believing. That is, certain premises do not have enough evidence for the argument to succeed. By showing that there is not sufficient reason to embrace some of the premises of the argument, the defender will have provided grounds for reasonably doubting the soundness or cogency of the argument. Skeptical theists take this route. As Michael Rea conceives of it, skeptical theism's central thesis is: "No human being is justified (or warranted, or reasonable) in thinking the following about any evil *e* that has ever occurred: there is (or is probably) no reason that could justify God in permitting *e*."<sup>34</sup> In other words, suppose that an argument has been presented that has as one of its premises the claim that God has no morally sufficient reason for allowing an evil *e*. Skeptical theism says that no one is justified in thinking that this claim is correct.<sup>35</sup>

---

argument? Whatever the answer is, the more reasonable doubt, the stronger the defense. Therefore, the theistic defender should aim to provide as strong of a defense as he can.

<sup>33</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 5-8, 65-68. See also Richard Swinburne, "Some Major Strands of Theodicy," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 46, footnote 2. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 192.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Rea, "Skeptical Theism and the 'Too Much Skepticism' Objection," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 483. Note that skeptical theism can be used to defend theism against both logical and evidential arguments from evil. See Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. 40-43, 49-50.

<sup>35</sup> Rea's account of skeptical theism is limited only to evils that have occurred. It "leaves open the possibility that an evil might someday occur about which we can justifiably think that it is gratuitous," says Rea, even though he immediately follows this up with, "Obviously enough, however, any decently principled defense of [skeptical theism] will imply that, if the world carries on pretty much as it has to date, with more or less the same sorts of evils continuing to occur, human beings will never be in a position to think justifiably about some evil that it is gratuitous" (Michael Rea, "Skeptical Theism and the 'Too Much Skepticism' Objection," p. 483).

The motivation for skeptical theism revolves around ignorance. Humans have cognitive limitations, especially when it comes to the things of God.<sup>36</sup> Stephen John Wykstra points out that, given our finiteness and God's infiniteness, humans trying to discern God's reasons for allowing evil could be compared to a one-month-old human infant trying to discern his parent's reasons for causing him to suffer.<sup>37</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder presents two more arguments. The first is the progress argument. Knowledge progresses over time. We periodically discover new things about reality. This strongly suggests that there are still things that will be discovered in the future. But, because a future discovery implies present ignorance, it is likely that there are things of which we are ignorant *right now*. But, given this, it would not be surprising, then, if there are goods yet to be discovered, of which we are currently ignorant. And these goods may well be the goods that justify God in allowing evil. The second is the complexity argument. Sometimes the greatest goods are also complex. Given that there are horrendous evils in the world, God would need very great goods to be justified in His allowance of evils. But that might mean that the goods that justify His actions are very complex. And if they are very complex, they might be beyond our grasp.<sup>38</sup> Thus, because of our ignorance, especially about the things of God, we should not embrace an argument from evil, even if it seems right as far as we can see.

When we add the Moorean switch to skeptical theism, the defense becomes even more powerful. Rowe pointed out that the theist can employ the same sort of strategy that G.E. Moore employed when dealing with external world skepticism. Moore noted that if the skeptic's

---

<sup>36</sup> See William Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 103-104, 109, 116-120.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen John Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 139. See also Michael Rea's discussion of divine transcendence and how this should lead us to humility about expectations when looking at the problem of divine hiddenness: Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 29-62.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 301.

principles are correct, then he cannot know of the existence of his pencil. Both he and the skeptic were able to agree on such a premise. At that point, the question became this: should we employ *modus ponens* or *modus tollens*? Should we say that the skeptic's principles are correct and conclude that Moore cannot know of the existence of his pencil? Or should we say that Moore can know of the existence of his pencil and conclude that the skeptic's principles are incorrect? Moore rightly noted that it is more rational to take the latter approach. Taking from this, Rowe said that the theist can say the same sort of thing for the problem of evil. Both the theist and the atheist can agree that if God exists, there are no gratuitous evils. At that point, the question becomes this: should we employ *modus ponens* or *modus tollens*? Should we say that God exists and conclude that there are no gratuitous evils? Or should we say that there are gratuitous evils and conclude that God does not exist? The theist can say that the former approach is more rational.<sup>39</sup>

To put it differently, appealing to things like the *sensus divinitatis* (the sense of divinity), the Bible, the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit,<sup>40</sup> the various arguments for the existence of God,<sup>41</sup> or even perhaps the presuppositional apologist's indirect approach, according to which the presupposition of (Christian) theism is the only presupposition that can make sense of the world,<sup>42</sup> the theist can say that we have good reason to think – or, perhaps, even *know* – that God exists. Because of this, he can also say that we have good reason to think that there are no

---

<sup>39</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," pp. 5-8.

<sup>40</sup> See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 170-175, 243-244.

<sup>41</sup> Two particularly powerful arguments for the existence of God are the teleological argument and the argument from miracles. For the former, see Robin Collins, "The Teleological Argument: An Exploration of the Fine-Tuning of the Universe," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 202-281. For the latter, see Timothy McGrew and Lydia McGrew, "The Argument from Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 593-662.

<sup>42</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, second edition, edited by William Edgar (P&R Publishing, 2003), pp. 20, 57-58, 128-134, 141, and so forth.

gratuitous evils. So, when we come to arguments from evil that appeal to evils that appear, as far as we can see, to be gratuitous, we can say to ourselves, “I have good reason to think that God exists, so I have good reason to think that these evils cannot be gratuitous. Thus, I have good reason to think that these arguments do not succeed. I just can’t see how. Perhaps the reason is because I am too finite to understand the infinite God’s reasons for allowing evil.”

I think that both plain skeptical theism and the skeptical theism that adds on the Moorean switch have their place. For the former, most theists will have to appeal to mystery at some point or other as they critically evaluate the things of God. Simply trying to understand the nature of God boggles the mind.<sup>43</sup> Trying to discern His reasons for allowing evil might be as difficult. Appealing to mystery as a defensive strategy, thus, seems quite natural and appropriate for the theist who rightly appreciates God’s transcendence. So, I think that it probably successfully defends theism against most, if not all, forms of the problem of evil. Regarding the latter, there is, in my view, pretty good reason to think that God exists, and it would be silly to ignore this fact when evaluating arguments from evil. A neutral spectator, coming to an argument from evil, already knowing that there is good reason to think that the infinite God exists, will hardly be convinced by an argument that appeals to the finite experience of finite humans.<sup>44</sup> Thus, both defenses successfully defend theism.

That said, I am less interested in the first type of defensive strategy in this dissertation, so let us turn to the second major type of defense. Whereas the first type would say something like, “You do not have enough evidence for thinking that premise P is true,” the second type would say something like, “There is evidence to think that P is false.” This second type challenges the truth of one (or more premises) by providing reasonable grounds for thinking that the premise is

---

<sup>43</sup> For example, consider the doctrines of divine simplicity, the Trinity, and the Incarnation.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 37-55.

false, thereby providing reasonable doubt concerning the soundness or cogency of the argument.<sup>45</sup> Take a logical problem of evil as an example. As noted above, it will have as one of its premises the claim that theism is incompatible with some known fact about evil. The second type of defense might<sup>46</sup> try to attack this premise. If it attacks this premise, it will try to find a possible world in which God and the known fact about evil both exist. If such a world exists, then theism is compatible with that known fact, and the premise is false. If, on the other hand, we are discussing the evidential problem of evil, there might be a premise that says that theism is improbable on some known fact about evil.<sup>47</sup> Again, the second type of defense might try to attack this premise. If it attacks this premise, it will try to show that there is a very real possibility that God, if He exists, would allow the known fact about evil. If there is a very real possibility that God, if He exists, would allow the known fact about evil, then theism is not improbable on that known fact.<sup>48</sup>

Defenses of this second sort are various, but there is one that pops up time and time again: an appeal to free will. More specifically, libertarian free will – that is, free will that is incompatible with determinism – is regularly employed to answer problems of evil. While

---

<sup>45</sup> Skeptical theism that adds on the Moorean switch is a mixture of both the first and second types of defenses. Skeptical theism on its own is of the first type, but the Moorean switch on its own is of the second. The Moorean switch, by itself, argues from the existence of God to the claim that one of the premises in the argument from evil must be wrong. This, in effect, means that the existence of God provides evidence or reasonable grounds for thinking that one of the premises is false. On its own, it, therefore, counts as the second type. I introduce it alongside skeptical theism for two reasons. First, they fit neatly together, complementing one another. Second, I will not focus upon it in this dissertation, just like I won't focus upon skeptical theism in this dissertation.

<sup>46</sup> The defender employing the second style of defense might attack the aforementioned premise, or he might attack some other premise.

<sup>47</sup> Remember that the evidential problem of evil can take at least two forms. Thus, another possible premise might be the following: theism is incompatible with some speculative but (highly) likely fact about evil.

<sup>48</sup> "A very real possibility" is inspired by Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 65-68. This does not mean that it is more likely than not. It could be less than 50% likely and, arguably, even less than 25% likely. Instead, all this is getting at is that there is some plausible (or, at least, not implausible) explanation for why God, if He exists, has allowed the evil under discussion. It should be noted that much of the language of probability is vague, but this should not worry us because, in line with footnote 32 of this chapter, I will aim to provide a relatively powerful defense. We want to lower the improbability of theism on the known fact about evil as much as possible.



defending theism against Mackie's abstract, global, logical problem of evil,<sup>49</sup> Alvin Plantinga employs the concept of libertarian free will. He says that there is a possible world W in which both theism is true, and evil exists. W is a world in which God has decided to grant significant freedom (sometimes) to creatures. According to Plantinga, such a world is more valuable, all things being equal, than a world containing no creatures with significant freedom, in which case God is perfectly justified in actualizing such a world. However, a being B has significant freedom in circumstance C if B is free in C both to do what is right and to do what is wrong. But, says Plantinga, "If a person S is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain; no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not. It is within his power, at the time in question, to perform the action, and within his power to refrain."<sup>50</sup> Thus, Plantinga is thinking of freedom in a libertarian sense. Therefore, because God in W has justifiably decided to grant significant freedom (sometimes) to creatures, and because significant freedom is incompatibilistic and indeterministic freedom with respect to an action it would be right to perform and wrong not to perform (or vice versa), W is a world in which free creatures might well choose to do what is wrong, yet God is perfectly justified in actualizing W. And, as it happens, some of the free creatures within W did do what was wrong. Thus, it seems right, says Plantinga, to hold that God can coexist with evil.<sup>51</sup>

Mackie famously objects by pointing out that one possible world that God could have actualized is a world in which God grants significant freedom (sometimes) to creatures but in which no free creature ever goes astray. After all, if a creature really has significant freedom in

---

<sup>49</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 164-167.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp.165-166.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 165-167.

circumstance C, then it could choose to do what is right in C. But that means that, for any situation in which God has granted a creature significant freedom, it could choose to do what is right. If so, why couldn't it choose to do what is right on every occasion in which it has significant freedom? Surely, then, it is at least possible for such a world to exist in which creatures with significant freedom never go astray. Why didn't God bring into existence *that* world?<sup>52</sup>

Plantinga's response is that, given that God has granted creatures significant freedom, God cannot just actualize any possible world. What happens in any given world is largely dependent upon what free creatures do. Thus, God cannot just *create* a world in which creatures with significant freedom always do what is right. That would violate their freedom. God has to work within the confines of what free creatures would do in particular circumstances. That is, He has to work with the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.<sup>53</sup>

Further, because Plantinga is addressing the abstract, global, logical problem of evil, He is looking for one possible world in which God and evil coexist. And he can (seemingly) identify one. It is a possible world in which all possible creatures suffer from transworld depravity, which 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."<sup>54</sup> That is, there is a possible world in which the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom happen to be such that every possible creature, if given both existence and significant freedom, will perform at least one wrong action. In this possible world, if God decides to grant any possible creature both existence and significant freedom, they will go astray at least once. But given the value significant freedom

---

<sup>52</sup> J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," p. 209.

<sup>53</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 169-184.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186, emphasis in the original.

adds to a world, God would be justified in bringing such a world into existence. Therefore, there is a possible world in which both God and evil coexist, namely the world in which God creates some creature C and justifiably grants to them significant freedom, even though He knows that all possible creatures are transworld depraved, such that C eventually does what is wrong at least once. Therefore, according to Plantinga's free will defense, Mackie's abstract, global, logical problem of evil fails.<sup>55</sup>

Peter van Inwagen also appeals to libertarian freedom in his defense against the (or, at least, a)<sup>56</sup> concrete, global, evidential problem of evil.<sup>57</sup> He provides a story that is supposed to have a very real possibility. In it, God granted libertarian freedom to humans. Initially, they lived in harmony with God and in great blessedness. There was no harm, and there was no death. But, eventually, they abused their freedom and separated themselves from God. This led to truly horrific consequences. They were then subject to harm, to death, to chance, and to a selfish frame of mind that perpetually led them to all manner of wickedness. Seeing this, God, filled with love, set in motion a rescue operation to restore humanity to Himself. But He did not want to impose His love upon them. He wanted them to cooperate freely in His rescue operation. Because humans will cooperate freely in a rescue operation only if they know that they need to be rescued and are motivated to seek rescue, God allowed the world to be filled with horrors so that humans would know what it means to be separated from Him, which is to live in a world of horrors and to be the playthings of chance, and so that humans would be motivated to cooperate with Him in His rescue operation. Even so, God was shielding humanity from many evils that would have

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 184-190.

<sup>56</sup> Defending theism against a general type of problem of evil (in this case, *the* concrete, global, evidential problem of evil) is a big task. It entails defending theism against every token of that general type. Is van Inwagen really trying to provide a general answer to the general type that is sufficient to defend theism against every token of that general type? To give him the benefit of the doubt, I add "(or, at least, a)."

<sup>57</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 56, 68.

been natural consequences of their rebellion and separation from God. Further, these evils will one day come to an end, and all wrongs will be made right. If anyone chooses not to cooperate with God's rescue operation, then God will allow that person to exist forever in a state of elected ruin, in a state of separation from God, which is Hell.<sup>58</sup> Thus, once again, libertarian freedom is employed to defend theism against a problem of evil. It is used to explain how we became separated from God and why God allows horrors.

And the list goes on. Richard Swinburne also appeals to libertarian freedom in his contribution to the defense against the (or at least a) concrete, global, evidential problem of evil.<sup>59</sup> He says, "It is good for any agent to have a free choice [of the libertarian variety], for that makes him an ultimate source of the way things happen in the universe. He is no longer totally at the mercy of forces from without, but himself an autonomous minicreator."<sup>60</sup> Being responsible for the way the world turns out is valuable, which is why we grant our children responsibility as they grow up. Further, a choice merely between two alternative goods is not as valuable and not as significant as a choice between good and evil. Thus, God grants humans libertarian free will with the ability to choose between good and evil. Sometimes, however, agents go astray and choose to do what is wrong.<sup>61</sup> Swinburne summarizes his position: "God, like a good father, has reason to delegate responsibility. In order to allow creatures a share in creation, he has reason to allow them the choice of hurting and maiming, of frustrating the divine plan."<sup>62</sup>

So prevalent is libertarian freedom in the literature that John Hick even employs it while developing his soul-making defense against the (or at least a) concrete, global, evidential

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-72, 75-78, 84-91.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Swinburne, "Some Major Strands of Theodicy," pp. 30-31, 37-39.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 37. Swinburne explains that he is speaking of libertarian freedom in endnote 10, p. 47.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-39.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

problem of evil.<sup>63</sup> Hick presents the idea that the creation of man is a two-stage process. The first stage is the creation of a being who is personal, rational, responsible, and autonomous – or, more simply, a being who exists as an image bearer of God. This was accomplished already, by the omnipotent God, through the evolutionary development of *Homo sapiens*. But, says Hick, this is not the entirety of the creational process. There is a second stage, in which *Homo sapiens* become spiritual likenesses of God, in which they fulfill God’s purpose for humanity and become children of God. (Hick notes that Irenaeus distinguished between the image of God and the likeness of God.)<sup>64</sup> However, according to Hick:

[T]he second stage of the creative process is of a different kind altogether. It cannot be performed by omnipotent power as such. For personal life is essentially free and self-directing. It cannot be perfected by divine fiat, but only through the uncompelled responses and willing co-operation of human individuals in their actions and reactions in the world in which God has placed them. Men may eventually become the perfected persons whom the New Testament calls ‘children of God’, but they cannot be created ready-made as this.<sup>65</sup>

This is supposed to be a libertarian conception of freedom.<sup>66</sup> God, therefore, cannot just, as it were, snap His fingers and automatically bring into existence, by divine fiat, perfected humans. How, then, can He create them? *Homo sapiens* are made into perfected persons (in part) by the trials, the tribulations, the pains, the sufferings, and the evils of this world. This evil world’s purpose is soul-making, not (primarily) pleasure.<sup>67, 68</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 3-6, 12-14, 365-371.

<sup>64</sup> This type of distinction is not uncommon. See both Paul Ramsey’s footnote 4 in Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989), p. 529; and Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 255.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 271-277.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 253-261.

<sup>68</sup> A good summary and analysis of both Swinburne and Hick can be found in Daniel Speak, “Free Will and Soul-Making Theodicies,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), pp. 205-221.

One major problem, however, is that defenses that appeal to libertarian free will run contrary to any theological or philosophical system that embraces theological determinism, where *theological determinism* is the idea that facts about God ensure or determine every other fact, including facts about what humans do.<sup>69</sup> Thus, because I embrace theological determinism, I cannot embrace any of these defenses that appeal to libertarian free will. Contrary to Swinburne, it seems to me, only God is the ultimate source of the way things happen in the universe. God determines all things outside of Him. Therefore, there is no such thing as libertarian free will. Indeed, libertarian free will is not even metaphysically possible. One philosophical motivation for theological determinism can be abstracted from what Jeffrey Brower says, and it seems to be applicable in all possible worlds. Let us consider it briefly.

God is *a se* – that is, He exists entirely from Himself – and is utterly independent of all things outside of Him. This is the doctrine of aseity. Perfect being theism suggests this doctrine because “*dependency on another* is always an imperfection, and hence must be excluded from our conception of God.”<sup>70</sup> This doctrine is so traditional that Aquinas even conceives of God in terms of creation and aseity. He is the first and ultimate cause of all things outside of Him, dependent upon no external thing.<sup>71</sup> As the Westminster Confession of Faith states, “God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creature which he hath made... He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things” (WCF 2.2). This radical

---

<sup>69</sup> Compare this with Heath White’s definition in his “Theological Determinism and the ‘Authoring Sin’ Objection,” in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 79. Note that I will momentarily define what it means for God to ordain something.

<sup>70</sup> Jeffrey Brower, “Simplicity and Aseity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 107, emphasis in the original.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107 and 123, and note 31. Alexander Pruss tries to bridge the gap from the claim that there is a first cause to the claim that there is a being who has all the traditional attributes of God. See his “The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 90-98.

independence even has implications for His knowledge: God's knowledge is "independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain" (WCF 2.2).

But given the above, we must now ask how God knows certain things. Suppose that God knows some contingent or necessary fact *F*.<sup>72</sup> How does God know *F*? Suppose that God does not determine that *F* is true. Perhaps it is a brute, contingent fact, or, perhaps, God grants someone libertarian freedom, after which they freely perform some action. Or perhaps it is a necessary truth that just exists. God, then, as it were, "comes along" and, seeing the truth of *F*, comes to embrace *F*. He knows *F because F* is true. The problem, though, is that, on this account, *F* (a fact that ultimately exists independently of God)<sup>73</sup> ultimately determines what God knows, and God's knowledge is ultimately dependent upon *F*. That is, the ultimate reason why God knows *F* instead of not-*F* is because of the truth of *F* that ultimately exists independently of Him, in which case God's knowledge of *F* is ultimately dependent on the fact of *F* and not on anything within God. More than that, given the doctrine of divine simplicity, which seems to follow straightforwardly from the doctrine of divine aseity, as will be discussed in the next chapter,<sup>74</sup> God's knowledge is identical with God Himself, in which case God Himself, not just His knowledge, is dependent upon and determined by *F*. Thus, our supposition violates the doctrine

---

<sup>72</sup> Brower's primary aim is a discussion of contingent divine knowledge, but I see no reason why we can't extend this to necessary divine knowledge as well. It might be that necessary truths (e.g., the truths of logic) are determined by God's nature, instead of His will. For some discussion of this, see Brian Leftow, "God and Abstract Entities," *Faith and Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (1990), pp. 193-217.

<sup>73</sup> Even if God does not determine *F*, *F* might still depend on God to some extent. For example, if a person *P* has libertarian freedom with regard to action *A*, and if *P* chooses to perform *A*, the fact that *P* chooses *A* instead of not-*A* does depend on God to some extent, merely by virtue of the fact that God had to create *P* and sustain *P* in existence while *P* chose *A*. But the fact that *P* chose *A* instead of not-*A* is *ultimately* up to *P* and independent of God. Why *A* was chosen instead of not-*A* is *ultimately* not due to anything in or from God. The facts that (1) Swinburne calls creatures with libertarian freedom "ultimate source[s] of the way things happen in the universe" and "autonomous mini-creators" (Richard Swinburne, "Some Major Strands of Theodicy," p. 37.), and that (2) Marilyn McCord Adams says that free will defenses claim that "God endows us with free will, makes us thereby imitate Divine aseity" (Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, p. 32), suggest that there is some substantive independence in libertarian freedom, beyond the mere fact that creatures with libertarian freedom depend on God for their existence. This type of independence is what I am talking about.

<sup>74</sup> Jeffrey Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," pp. 107-108.

of divine aseity and will not work. Thus, God determines F. Thus, the doctrine of divine aseity seems to entail the doctrine of divine determinism.<sup>75</sup>

Note that this argument probably should be understood as applying only to facts external to God. That is, we probably should understand the argument as claiming only that God determines all facts that are outside of Himself. If God determines *all* facts without exception, two seeming problems arise. Our first seeming problem is as follows. Consider the fact that God exists. If God determines this fact, then God both determines His own existence and exists (logically or explanatorily) prior to His own existence. This seems to be incoherent, in the same way that self-creation is incoherent. Thus, it seems that God doesn't determine that He exists. Our second seeming problem is as follows. If God were to determine all facts without exception, then the very fact that God both determines His own existence and exists (logically or explanatorily) prior to His own existence, would itself have to be determined by God; and the fact that it would have to be determined by God would also have to be determined by God; and the fact that *the fact that it would have to be determined by God would also have to be determined by God* would have to be determined by God as well. More broadly, if God determines every fact without exception, then God must also determine the fact that God determines every fact without exception, and this fact must itself be determined, and that fact as well. Thus, an infinite regress is generated. This seems to be a problem, but, ultimately, I am unsure whether this infinite regress is vicious. Nevertheless, to avoid these two seeming

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 121-123. See also Thomas Flint's discussion of this point in his *Divine Providence* (Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 85. See also Paul Helm, *Eternal God*, second edition (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 129-130. Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, p. 420.



problems, it is probably best to say that the argument speaks only about facts external to God, not internal to Him.<sup>76</sup> Thus, we can conclude that God determines all facts external to Him.

And the thing is, this reasoning seems applicable to any fact in any possible world. Whatever the world is, if God does not determine some particular fact F, God's knowledge of F will be ultimately dependent on the fact of F and not on anything within God, in which case God's aseity is violated. Therefore, on the doctrine of divine aseity, which, as already noted, is firm in the tradition, theological determinism is true in every possible world, and libertarian free will is a metaphysical impossibility, in which case we cannot even employ it to defend theism against the logical problem of evil.

Notice that this conclusion is in line with the fact that, as Mark Murphy points out, God is sovereign over all things. He says the following:

Among the perfections typically ascribed to the Anselmian being<sup>77</sup> is *sovereignty*. The Anselmian being's stance with respect to the world is active rather than reactive: the Anselmian being is fully in charge, such that all facts about creation are ultimately to be explained by God and facts about God. Sovereignty involves *dependence upon* and *control by* that which is sovereign. That what exists depends on God and its features are controlled by features of God seems central to our conception of God as sovereign.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, we should not be surprised that God determines all things. He is completely sovereign (and necessarily so).

---

<sup>76</sup> Is it possible that God determines some of the properties within God but does not determine other properties within God, such as His own existence? If God is utterly simple, then it might be that there really is only one attribute of God's that is identical both to God Himself and to every other attribute of God's. If so, then God can't determine some properties within Himself and not determine others within Himself because they are all ultimately the same. If God determines one, He determines them all; and if He doesn't determine one, He doesn't determine them all. However, as I discuss in footnote 20 of the next chapter, we might be able to make a distinction between some attributes within the utterly simple God by logical priority. If so, then it might be that God can determine some of His attributes and not determine others. I leave this an open question. To err on the side of caution, I will say that the argument currently under discussion in the main text only claims that God determines all facts outside of Himself.

<sup>77</sup> An Anselmian being is an absolutely perfect being (Mark Murphy, *God's Own Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 9). God is an Anselmian being.

<sup>78</sup> Mark Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, p. 71, emphases in the original.

With that said, we need more precision. Theological determinism is true iff facts about God ensure or determine every other fact. But, putting the doctrine of divine simplicity to the side, this is consistent with God's nature, not God's will, determining every fact that is outside of God.<sup>79</sup> Thus, we need another term to indicate that God's will is at play. I will say that God ordains fact F iff (i) God chooses F and (ii) God's choosing of F ensures or determines F.

Now, as Murphy points out, "one might also think that the Anselmian being exhibits greater sovereignty to the extent that the Anselmian being has *discretion*, that the Anselmian being is free to settle by that being's own choices the way that the world will be."<sup>80</sup> I agree. Thus, because having more discretion adds to one's sovereignty, and because having more sovereignty adds to one's perfection, and because God is the greatest metaphysically possible being, being absolutely perfect, we should say that God has maximal discretion. But if theological determinism is correct, such that facts about God ensure or determine every other fact, and if God has maximal discretion, it seems likely to me that God ordains at least all contingent things (external to Him),<sup>81, 82</sup> and this conclusion is in line with the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF 3.1-2, 5.1-2). The following seems unambiguous:

God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass... Although God

---

<sup>79</sup> As said, I will later argue for divine simplicity. Thus, I do not think that there is a distinction between God's nature and God's will. But, see footnote 20 of the next chapter for a complication.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, p. 71, emphasis in the original.

<sup>81</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>82</sup> Putting divine simplicity to the side, such that God's nature and will could be different, is it possible for God to non-volitionally make something the case? Suppose that something derives from God of necessity. Could God lack a will concerning its existence? I am unsure, but I am inclined to say that God wills to exist all things that exist, including necessarily existing things. Whatever the case may be, as will be discussed in the next chapter, God is utterly simple. Thus, if facts about God ensure or determine every other fact, then facts about God's *will* ensure or determine every other fact. This might explain why some definitions of theological determinism focus upon God's will. Heath White's is the following: "(i) the facts about God's will wholly determine every other contingent fact, and (ii) the facts about God's will explain every other contingent fact" (Heath White, "Theological Determinism and the 'Authoring Sin' Objection," p. 79). James Anderson's is the following: "For every event E, God decided that E should happen and that decision was the ultimate sufficient cause of E" (James Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson. (Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 204).

knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions (WCF 3.1-2).<sup>83</sup>

Hence, I will assume that God ordains (and, therefore, determines) at least everything that is contingent (and external to Him), including, but not limited to, the evil of this world, and that He determines everything else (external to Him) some way or other.

Does theological determinism exclude freedom and/or moral responsibility? I don't see why it must. There is a difference between theological hard determinism and theological compatibilism. Both positions affirm theological determinism. Theological compatibilism says that theological determinism is correct and is compatible with creaturely free will and/or moral responsibility, whereas theological hard determinism says that theological determinism is correct and is incompatible with creaturely free will and/or moral responsibility. Because the Westminster Confession embraces the view that humans are free and morally responsible (WCF 3.1, 5.2, 5.4, 6.1-6, 9.1), I will also embrace that they are free and morally responsible. But, if God determines all things, and if God ordains all of contingent reality, and if humans are free and morally responsible, then theological compatibilism is true.

One of the best ways to understand theological compatibilism, I have found, is from the authorial model of providence.<sup>84</sup> On this model, God is like an author of a novel. Authors ordain (at least) every contingent thing within their novels. So too, God ordains (at least) every contingent thing within history and determines in some way or other every necessary thing.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Notice that the WCF is also against Molinism. Molinism claims that there are brute, contingent facts about what libertarian free creatures would do in various circumstances. God, then, places those creatures in certain circumstances, after which they perform the free actions that God saw that they would freely perform. The WCF says that God "hath [] not decreed anything because he foresaw it... as that which would come to pass upon such conditions."

<sup>84</sup> See James Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," pp. 204-210. See also Heath White, "Theological Determinism and the 'Authoring Sin' Objection," pp. 80-82.

<sup>85</sup> Two things should be noted. First, by "history" I mean to indicate everything past, present, and future. Second, though the analogy should be clear, I do wonder whether authors ordain *every* contingent thing within their novels.

But, just like characters within a novel have freedom and moral responsibility, so too do creatures have freedom and moral responsibility in the actual world. Taking an example from Daniel Johnson,<sup>86</sup> George Lucas (let us suppose) ordained every contingent thing that happened within the *Star Wars* universe, but Anakin Skywalker still had freedom and was still morally responsible for killing the children in the Jedi Temple. The same is true for God's providence. In fact, it might even be that, within history, creatures have libertarian freedom. That is, it might be that nothing *within history* determines me to do what I do. But that is consistent with God still having ordained all contingent things that come to pass, including the things that I do.

Intramundane determinism, according to which all things are determined by events in history, is different from theological determinism, which claims that all things are determined by God.

Going back to our *Star Wars* example, even if Lucas authorially determined Anakin to kill the children in the Jedi Temple, Anakin very well might not have been determined to do what he did by anything within the *Star Wars* universe.

Nevertheless, the point is this. For the most part, *every* theist is going to hold that God could have prevented evil if He wanted. The question, then, is why He ultimately chose to allow it. Those who reject theological determinism can say that the ultimate reason why God chose to allow evil is because He decided to grant us ultimate libertarian freedom – that is, libertarian freedom that is incompatible with all forms of determinism, including theological determinism – and we happened to use this freedom to sin. But the theological compatibilist cannot say the

---

Composers compose their works of music, but those who perform their music have a serious aesthetic role in the interpretation and performance of the musical work. I wonder whether the same is true for novels. It might be that authors write a general story, sometimes with more, sometimes with less, detail, but that some of the details are ordained by the readers of the novel as they interpret it. If this is true, then authors do not ordain *every* contingent thing within their stories. Readers also have a serious aesthetic role to play in the creation of the story. Still, as said, the analogy should be clear. For more on this issue, see J.O. Urmson, "Literature," in *Aesthetics*, edited by George Dickie and R.J. Sclafani (St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 334-341.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," pp. 29-30.

same. He rejects ultimate libertarian free will, even though he might well affirm that we have intramundane libertarian freedom, and he is committed to the claim that God could have determined every human being always to freely choose to do what is good and right. Why, then, didn't He ultimately do this? Or, to put it more in terms of the authorial model of providence, why did God, as it were, write a story in which Adam and his progeny sinned, when He could have written a story in which they never sinned at all? Given that theological compatibilism is correct, we must now look at what the theological compatibilist might say by way of defense against the problem of evil.

### C. Defenses Compatible with Theological Compatibilism

One way in which the theological determinist, whether a theological hard determinist or a theological compatibilist, can get out of the problem of evil is by appeal to skeptical theism. Derk Pereboom,<sup>87</sup> Nick Trakakis,<sup>88</sup> Daniel Johnson,<sup>89</sup> and Matthew Hart<sup>90</sup> think this is a good strategy for the theological determinist to take. As already noted, I think that this sufficiently defends theism (on its own, and especially with the Moorean switch), but I am interested in offering a defense of the second variety, in which we challenge the truth of one (or more premises) within an argument from evil by providing reasonable grounds for thinking that the

---

<sup>87</sup> Derk Pereboom, "Free Will, Evil, and Divine Providence," in *God and the Ethics of Belief*, edited by Andrew Dole and Andrew Chignell (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 77-81, 88

<sup>88</sup> Nick Trakakis, "Does Hard Determinism Render the Problem of Evil even Harder?" *Ars Disputandi* 6, no. 1 (2006), paragraphs 44-45.

<sup>89</sup> Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," pp. 49-52. Johnson's main aim is to explore ways in which the Calvinist might answer the problem of evil, so I'm not sure whether he actually embraces the use of skeptical theism. Still, he presents skeptical theism as a viable option for the Calvinist to take.

<sup>90</sup> Matthew Hart, "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 252. Hart only says, "[The Calvinist] could appeal to skeptical theism [when it comes to answering the problem of hell] ... I see no reason for this sort of response to be any less successful here" (p. 252). Admittedly, then, it is not clear whether he thinks skeptical theism is a *good* strategy, at least by itself, especially since he states in footnote 14, "I happen to think the Calvinist should not stop [with skeptical theism]" (p. 252).

premise is false. So, how can the theological compatibilist offer a defense of the second variety?

Three defenses come to mind: contrast, soul-making, and divine glory.<sup>91</sup>

A contrast defense, as Trakakis points out,<sup>92</sup> can be understood either metaphysically or epistemologically. The metaphysical defense says that goodness itself, by virtue of its very nature, requires evil. There must be evil for goodness even to exist. Therefore, if God desired for there to be goodness in the world, He would have been constrained by metaphysical necessity to allow evil. How exactly this defense goes, of course, will depend upon how exactly the problem of evil being addressed has been formulated. We will have to consider whether it is logical or evidential, whether it is concrete or abstract, whether it is local or global, and what the specific premises being employed are. In broad terms, though, if we are addressing the concrete, global, logical problem of evil, we might be able to say that there is some possible world in which tremendous goodness itself, by virtue of its very nature, requires horrendous evils.

That said, tremendous goodness does not itself, by its very nature, require horrendous evils, at least in the actual world. God is tremendously good, yet God did not have to create.<sup>93</sup> In a world in which God decided not to create, God would have existed, in which case a

---

<sup>91</sup> This list is not meant to be exhaustive. I mention the divine glory defense for obvious reasons: I will be advancing it in this dissertation. The other two are mentioned because I need to explain some non-divine glory defenses that the theological compatibilist could use, and these have some plausibility. They also prompt good commentary to introduce the divine glory defense.

<sup>92</sup> Nick Trakakis, "Does Hard Determinism Render the Problem of Evil even Harder?" paragraphs 7-8.

<sup>93</sup> There is, it should be noted, a big debate concerning this point. See, for instance, Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" in *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 208-228. William Rowe, looking at the matter from an atheistic perspective, has written an entire book dedicated to the question of whether God is free: William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (Oxford University Press, 2004). For a good response to Rowe, see Thomas Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, Volume I, edited by Jonathan Kvanvig (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 168-195. When the WCF states that God is "most free" (WCF 2.1) and that He, "from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass" (WCF 3.1), it seems to be embracing the view that God did not have to create or ordain that the world came to be. I will assume that this is correct.

tremendously good thing would have existed, even though no evil thing would have existed.<sup>94</sup> Justin McBrayer adds to this argument: “[M]any theists are committed to the view that the world as it was initially created by God was perfectly good and without evil.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, the metaphysical contrast defense can only do so much. Even if the defender could say that there is some very distant possible world D in which tremendous goodness requires horrendous evils, such that in D, if God wanted to exist Himself, He would have had to allow horrendous evils, such that theism is, strictly speaking, consistent with the existence of horrendous evils, he cannot say this either for the actual world or for nearby possible worlds. In other words, *in this neighborhood of possible worlds*, God did not have to allow horrendous evils in order for tremendous goodness to exist. Thus, all the atheologian has to do is limit his concrete, global, logical problem of evil to this neighborhood of possible worlds, and the defense will fail. To put it differently, all the atheologian has to do is say that the known fact that there are horrendous evils in our world is inconsistent with the existence of God in our neighborhood of possible worlds in which God, if God exists, is free to create or not to create. Or, perhaps more simply, the atheologian can say that one further known fact is that God, if God exists, did not have to create. The metaphysical contrast defense will not be able to defend theism here.

The epistemological contrast defense, on the other hand, claims that, in order for someone to (experientially) know goodness (fully) – and God wants people to (experientially) know goodness (fully) – they must also (experientially) know evil. Or, if we want, we could say

---

<sup>94</sup> See both Justin McBrayer, “Counterpart and Appreciation Theodicies,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 197; and Daniel Howard-Snyder, “God, Evil, and Suffering,” in *Reason for the Hope Within*, edited by Michael J. Murray (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 87. Both McBrayer and Howard-Snyder offer similar arguments, though they are not exactly the same as what I have presented above. Still, their words have inspired the above argument.

<sup>95</sup> Justin McBrayer, “Counterpart and Appreciation Theodicies,” p. 197.

that (fully) appreciating goodness requires an (experiential) knowledge of evil.<sup>96</sup> Again, how exactly this defense is formulated will depend on the specific problem of evil that is being addressed. But, in broad terms, this defense has some initial plausibility, and we might be able to use it (or something very similar to it) as part of a general defense against the concrete, global, evidential argument from evil. The biggest problem with this defense will be addressing the following question: why couldn't God simply send humans nightmares to give them the knowledge and the appreciation of the good, instead of making them to endure real evils? A similar objection will be leveled against my divine glory defense in section B of Chapter V and answered soon thereafter. I will ask whether God could have actualized within humans a knowledge and appreciation of *God* through giving them nightmares, instead of through them experiencing real evils. I leave discussion of the nightmare objection for then.<sup>97</sup>

Second, the theological compatibilist could advance a soul-making defense without Hick's usage of libertarian freedom. As Johnson points out, "The key claim of the soul-making defense, that character traits which are developed through hard choices made during trial and tribulation are intrinsically better than comparable character traits created directly by God, is available to the compatibilist just as much as it is to the libertarian."<sup>98</sup> In other words, perhaps it is better, in and of itself, for a person to acquire perfection through trials, tribulations, and struggles instead of simply being given perfection from the start. It is valuable, says this defense, for "human goodness [to be] slowly built up through personal histories of moral effort",<sup>99</sup> to be

---

<sup>96</sup> Nick Trakakis, "Does Hard Determinism Render the Problem of Evil even Harder?" paragraphs 7-8.

<sup>97</sup> Given that, as will be discussed in the next chapter, God is Goodness Itself, a knowledge and appreciation of *goodness* is a knowledge and appreciation of *God*. Thus, explaining why God chooses to make humans to endure real evils instead of just nightmares in order to give them a knowledge and appreciation of God will be the same explanation as to why He chooses to make humans to endure real evils instead of just nightmares in order to give them a knowledge and appreciation of goodness itself.

<sup>98</sup> Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," p. 52.

<sup>99</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 256.



“hard-won through actual moral experience.”<sup>100</sup> But this value does not require libertarian freedom, and it is completely available to the theological determinist, whether he is a compatibilist or a hard determinist.<sup>101</sup> It is perfectly consistent for the theological determinist to say that it is valuable for humans to acquire perfection “from a lifetime of struggle and the investment of costly personal effort”.<sup>102</sup>

Once more, this defense will vary depending upon which specific argument from evil is being addressed. But, in broad terms, it does, at least from an initial glance, seem to constitute a plausible defense that can be used to address some concrete, global, evidential arguments from evil. It does help us to see that, *prima facie*, there is a very real possibility that God, if He exists, would allow some of the evils we see in our world. I am, thus, somewhat moved by it overall. In fact, at least one part of my divine glory defense can probably properly be counted as some version of, or at least very similar to, a soul-making defense. One human perfection that my divine glory defense will emphasize is the (complete) knowledge of God, and this requires, so it will be argued, the experience of certain evils in order to be acquired.<sup>103</sup> Still, I have at least one major worry.

My worry is that the soul-making defense appeals to a good that is just not good enough to justify many of the evils of our world. The problem of evil is as powerful as it is because the world is filled with baffling evils that astonish the soul and stop the tongue and fill the heart and mind with horror. When we contemplate the case of the man brutally mutilating a woman, raping

---

<sup>100</sup> Daniel Speak, “Free Will and Soul-Making Theodicies,” p. 209.

<sup>101</sup> Nick Trakakis discusses the soul-making defense in the context of theological hard determinism (Nick Trakakis, “Does Hard Determinism Render the Problem of Evil even Harder?” paragraphs 3, 13-16), whereas Johnson discusses it in the context of theological compatibilism (Daniel Johnson, “Calvinism and the Problem of Evil,” pp. 20-24, 52).

<sup>102</sup> Nick Trakakis, “Does Hard Determinism Render the Problem of Evil even Harder?” paragraph 16.

<sup>103</sup> Again, I am less interested in taxonomy. If this shouldn’t be counted as a soul-making defense, that’s fine. I’m merely pointing out the similarities.

her, and leaving her to die, or the case of the five-year-old girl who was severely beaten, raped, and strangled to death, we are dumbfounded. Horrendous evils leave us aghast and dismayed. If these evils are to be swallowed up, there must be, it initially seems, some good that is greater in comparison to these evils, a good that (positively) shocks us and leaves us in awe and in wonder,<sup>104</sup> and I just don't think that "a hard-won perfection" is that good. It does not leave us in awe at all. We are not (positively) baffled at hard-won perfection.<sup>105</sup> Unless some argument is made, it seems that we need something *wondrously* or *awesomely* good if we are going to offer a sufficient defense, and a hard-won perfection just doesn't cut it.

If this does not immediately strike you as obvious, consider the following. The *perfection* of a human is probably a very good thing, but I see no reason why the "*hard-won*" *qualifier* is also a very good thing. That is, though I can see how perfection itself is very valuable, in which case a sufficient defense might be able to be crafted from it, I don't know why we should think that the fact that this perfection was *hard-won* is also very valuable. Let's grant that the "hard-won" qualifier is good, and let's grant that it is better, all things being equal, for humans to have hard-won perfection than for humans to be created perfect *ab initio*. Still, it is hard to see how the "hard-won" qualifier could be *very* good or *awesomely* good, good enough to swallow up horrendous evils. Is hard-won wisdom really that much better than being wise naturally? Is hard-won strength really that much better than being strong by nature? It doesn't seem so.

This brings us to the divine glory defense, which Calvinists should especially appreciate. They tend to emphasize divine glory.<sup>106</sup> Most famously, the WSC states, "Man's chief end is to

---

<sup>104</sup> As will be discussed later, perfect love entails partiality. It might be, then, that God's love for *some* entails that He allows horrendous evils to come to *others* so that a lesser-in-comparison good comes to His *beloved*.

<sup>105</sup> I am making a normative claim here, not a descriptive claim. That is, I am *not* claiming that, as a matter of fact, we are left or not left aghast or in awe at certain things. I'm claiming that we *should* be left aghast at horrors and that we *should not* be left in comparable awe at hard-won perfection.

<sup>106</sup> See, for instance, Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*.

glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” (WSC 1). In fact, the WLC explicitly states that all things have been foreordained by God for the glory of God: “God’s decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will, whereby, from all eternity, he hath, *for his own glory*, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time, especially concerning angels and men” (WLC 12, emphasis added).<sup>107</sup> Thus, given my assumption that the WLC is largely, though perhaps not entirely correct, the divine glory defense should be taken seriously.

So, what exactly is the divine glory defense? Again, we will have to modify the defense depending upon which specific argument from evil is being addressed, but we can say the following in broad terms. In the literature, there have been two primary formulations. First, the (full) external expression of God’s attributes is a very great good that requires evil. Second, creatures acquiring the epistemic goods of (experientially) knowing and appreciating God (completely) is also a very great good that requires (experiencing) evil. More specifically, God’s attributes of mercy and retributive justice (perhaps among others) both require evil for their expression. If, therefore, it is a very great good for God to express who He is (fully), then, it is a very great good for God to express His mercy and retributive justice,<sup>108</sup> which both require evil for their expression. Thus, God might allow evil so that He might be able to express Himself in these ways. Or, if it is a very great good for creatures to (experientially) know and appreciate God (completely), then it is a very great good for creatures to (experientially) know and appreciate God’s attributes of mercy and retributive justice.<sup>109</sup> God, then, might allow evil so that He might be able to express His mercy and retributive justice before creatures so that they might

---

<sup>107</sup> For more, see the WLC 13, 18, 19, 45.

<sup>108</sup> Or, even if it is not a very great good for God to express His mercy and retributive justice, God’s expression of these attributes is at least *part of* a very great good, namely the full expression of who God is.

<sup>109</sup> Again, even if it is not a very great good for creatures to (experientially) know and appreciate God’s attributes of mercy and retributive justice, creatures (experientially) knowing and appreciating these divine attributes is at least *part of* a very great good, namely the full (experiential) knowledge and appreciation of God.

be able to (experientially) know and appreciate these attributes of God. The first formulation is advanced by Daniel Johnson and (perhaps) by Jonathan Edwards. The second version is advanced by Daniel Johnson, Jonathan Edwards, Christopher Green, and Matthew Hart.<sup>110</sup>

Before explaining specific formulations of the divine glory defense, note here that neither version requires libertarianism to be true. It is perfectly coherent to say that God sovereignly ordains that the evils of our world exist so that either He might express His glorious attributes, or His creatures might (experientially) know and appreciate His glorious attributes. Thus, this defense is fully available to the theological compatibilist.

Let us now explain some specific formulations of the divine glory defense. Johnson advances the divine glory defense (seemingly) as an answer to the (or at least a) concrete, global, evidential argument from evil.<sup>111</sup> He presents the first version in the following way.<sup>112</sup> The excellent deeds of God that express the internal excellencies of God “are tremendously good—an activity expressing an excellence is itself excellent.”<sup>113</sup> Because the excellence of the action “seems to be proportional to the greatness of the being whose excellence is being expressed”,<sup>114</sup> and because God is the greatest possible being, the state of affairs in which He acts to express His character seems to be the greatest possible state of affairs. But, some of these actions expressing divine excellencies require evil: “God cannot express His mercy and forgiveness

---

<sup>110</sup> As Johnson points out, the *felix culpa* defense has the ring of a divine glory defense (Daniel Johnson, “Calvinism and the Problem of Evil,” p. 47). In it, God allows sin so that the great good of atonement might be made (Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, edited by Peter van Inwagen (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 1-14). Through the atoning work of Christ, the attributes of God are both exercised and on full display. (See also Nick Trakakis, “Does Hard Determinism Render the Problem of Evil even Harder?” paragraphs 12, 24-32.)

<sup>111</sup> See Daniel Johnson, “Calvinism and the Problem of Evil,” pp. 40-43, 48.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47. As already noted, Johnson’s main aim in his paper is to explore various ways Calvinists might answer the problem of evil, so I’m not sure whether he actually embraces either divine glory defense. I will assume that he does.

<sup>113</sup> Daniel Johnson, “Calvinism and the Problem of Evil,” p. 46.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

without sin to forgive and undeserving sinners to whom mercy can be shown, and God cannot express His justice by punishing wrongdoers without wrongdoing to punish.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, God might allow evil for the great good of expressing His glorious attributes.<sup>116</sup>

Moving on, Johnson also presents the second type of divine glory defense.<sup>117</sup> He argues that the epistemic goods of knowing, appreciating, and becoming acquainted with the excellence of God is tremendously good and may even be both the chief end of humanity and a central component of human flourishing.<sup>118</sup> But, says Johnson, this may involve more than mere propositional knowledge: “Perhaps there is a kind of *acquaintance* with God’s character that cannot be had without God actually expressing that character in response to real evil, and perhaps there is a kind of deep *understanding* of God that cannot be had without this sort of acquaintance.”<sup>119</sup> In effect, because God is merciful and retributively just, and because knowing God experientially is better than knowing God merely propositionally, God wants us to experientially know His mercy and retributive justice. Thus, God allows the evil of our world in order to manifest His mercy and retributive justice to the human mind so that humans might experientially know Him and His mercy and retributive justice.

Green also advances the second version of the divine glory defense.<sup>120</sup> He says that, because the theological compatibilist can’t appeal to libertarian free will to defend theism, “[his]

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>116</sup> In a footnote, Johnson has a candid confession that deserves attention:

I will confess that the good of divine glory often does not seem good enough to me to outweigh the evils in this world. But the fact that the good of glory is proportional to the greatness of the being whose glory it is makes me think that I fail to appreciate the good of God’s glory because I fail to appreciate *God*. So the problem is with me rather than with the defense itself. I am unable to properly appreciate the greatness of God and therefore also the deeds of God (Daniel Johnson, “Calvinism and the Problem of Evil,” p. 47, footnote 40, emphasis in the original).

<sup>117</sup> Daniel Johnson, “Calvinism and the Problem of Evil,” pp. 45-46.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 46, emphases in the original.

<sup>120</sup> Christopher Green, “A Compatibicalvinist Demonstrative-Goods Defense,” in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. 233-247.

chief replacement will be *demonstrative goods of uncertain size*. Evil provides the occasion for new modes of presentation of what God is like, such as his justice, power, and grace.”<sup>121</sup> God ordains that certain people have evil characters and that evil actions, following upon evil characters, affect others in the ways that they do so that He might present truths about Himself in certain ways that would not otherwise be possible. Specifically, allowing an evil character to exist allows Him to present Himself as just or forgiving, and allowing evil effects of evil actions magnifies the wrongfulness of the evil actions that follow upon evil characters so that His presentation of Himself as just or forgiving might be more vivid.<sup>122</sup>

Furthermore, because having a variety of modes of presentation is good, says Green, given that it allows us to have a stronger and fuller grasp of the truths being presented, it is good to have multiple different presentations of the same fact. This is how Green attempts to get out of the problem of nightmares: why didn’t God just give us nightmares to demonstrate His justice and forgiveness? Green says that demonstrating truths about God through nightmares is one type of demonstrative good, but having an additional demonstration (e.g., through reality) is a further type of demonstrative good that has additional value.<sup>123</sup>

Finally, Green says, “we cannot know the size of such demonstrative goods, and so cannot know that they do not justify any particular evil.”<sup>124</sup> Take any specific demonstration of God’s greatness. We don’t know how many creatures originally saw it, and we have no idea how many creatures will come to know of it. Thus, we don’t know how great of a demonstrative good it is, in which case we don’t know whether it justifies the evils that were necessary for it.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 233-234, emphasis in the original.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., pp. 241-243.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp. 243-244.

Green's defense, therefore, could be used to defend theism even against certain concrete, *local*, evidential arguments from evil. For any particular evil, whatever it might be, however horrible it is, if it allows God to demonstrate His greatness, then, for all we know, it is justified by the value of the demonstration.<sup>126</sup>

Everything thus far seems *prima facie* plausible to me, but we must now ask whether the divine glory defense can address the most serious evil that the theist (or, at least, the Reformed Christian) has to wrestle with. As Marilyn McCord Adams says, "My own view is that hell poses the principal problem of evil for Christians",<sup>127</sup> and I agree. The WCF states, "the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (WCF 33.2). This is, quite frankly, terrifying. There is no redemption here. As Adams points out, "Any person who suffers eternal punishment in the traditional hell will... be one within whose life good is engulfed and/or defeated by evils."<sup>128</sup> And, seemingly, numerous people end up in Hell. The early church remembers Jesus as having said the following, as found in Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV): "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."<sup>129</sup> Not only is Hell terrifying, but it is also, apparently, the lot of a great many people. So, let's grant that the divine glory defense can

---

<sup>126</sup> See Green's discussion on pp. 239-241 of how Scripture speaks "repeatedly of God's using *particular* bad things as means for demonstrating, or showing, things about himself" (Christopher Green, "A Compatibilist Demonstrative-Goods Defense," p. 239, emphasis added).

<sup>127</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," p. 302.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>129</sup> Remember that I am assuming that the WCF is largely, though perhaps not entirely, correct. Thus, I am assuming that Jesus is God (WCF 8.1-3), and I am also assuming, in this context, that the quoted passage is contained within the Word of God (WCF 1.2).

explain why God ordains various evils *this side* of Hell. We must now ask: can it explain why God ordains the eternal torments *within* Hell?

Edwards thinks so. He, thus, presents a defense against a concrete,<sup>130</sup> local, evidential argument from evil.<sup>131</sup> William Wainwright summarizes Edwards's position: the "destruction [of the wicked] contributes to God's glory in two ways. First, God's end in creation is the exercise and manifestation of his perfections *ad extra*. The destruction of the wicked manifests or glorifies three of God's attributes – his 'vindictive [punitive] justice,' his 'awful majesty,' and his infinite holiness. Second, the destruction of the wicked increases God's glory by giving 'the saints a greater sense of their happiness and of God's grace to them.'"<sup>132</sup>

Regarding the first point, because it is proper for God, as it were, to shine forth completely and most clearly, and because God's vindictive justice, majesty, and holiness are attributes of God, it is proper for God to exercise and manifest His vindictive justice, majesty, and holiness in the clearest ways possible. Because the vindictive justice, majesty, and holiness of God are most clearly manifested in eternal punishments for sin, God ordains eternal punishments for sin and the sin that is necessary for them, thereby allowing His glorious attributes to be manifested completely and most clearly. Regarding the second point, God desires the communication of Himself to the saints, consisting in the complete knowledge of God, love

---

<sup>130</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams draws a distinction between abstract and concrete problems of Hell. An abstract version has us imagine the damned prior to their deaths living in utopia, whereas a concrete version has us take into consideration concrete circumstances like those found in the lives of the damned prior to their deaths in the actual world (Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," p. 303). But, whether we consider an abstract or concrete problem of Hell, Hell is a concrete evil, in which case a problem of evil that appeals to Hell is a concrete problem of evil.

<sup>131</sup> See footnote 30 of this chapter. Also, note that Edwards probably didn't have in mind any distinction between the logical and evidential arguments from evil. I place his defense under the category of defending against an evidential argument because he seems to be claiming, at the least, that the following reasons are plausible reasons for why God has allowed the horrors of Hell. Indeed, he probably is offering a theodicy, not just a defense.

<sup>132</sup> William Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Doctrine of Hell," in *Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp (Ashgate, 2003), p. 13, the second bracket is in the original.



of God, and joy in God. For the saints to have a complete knowledge of God, all of God's attributes must be clearly manifest to them. Therefore, God desires to clearly manifest all of His attributes to them. Some of God's attributes are His vindictive justice, majesty, and holiness. Thus, God desires to manifest to them His vindictive justice, majesty, and holiness, thereby allowing the saints to completely know His greatness, from which knowledge the saints grow in their love of and joy in God. Because His vindictive justice, majesty, and holiness are most clearly manifested in eternal punishments for sin, God ordains eternal punishments for sin and the sin that is necessary for them.<sup>133</sup>

The biggest problem with this answer is that it seems, *prima facie*, that God has done what is utterly abominable. Let's grant that, even if God ordain all contingent things (external to Him), humans can still have genuine free will and/or genuine moral responsibility. Even so, if God ordains all contingent things, then God ordains that a person sins, refuses to save them, and then casts them into Hell for all of eternity for the very sin that God forced them to commit.<sup>134</sup> And for what? To be great and to be seen as great! Again, if God ordains every contingent thing, and if Hell exists, as the WCF states, then God creates humans, sentient and rational beings with feelings and emotions of their own, forces them to sin, chooses not to save them, and then

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-15. Wainwright summarizes what Edwards says in Jonathan Edwards, "Concerning the Divine Decrees in General, and Election in Particular," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2 (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), pp. 528a-528b, §10. Wainwright makes very slight modifications to Edwards's first argument, and I make slight modifications to both. See also Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*; and Jonathan Edwards, "Wicked Men Useful in Their Destruction Only," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2 (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), pp. 125a-129b.

Also, note that Edwards certainly should be counted as embracing the second type of divine glory defense, but it is less than obvious that he should be counted as embracing the first type. Wainwright's language of "the exercise and manifestation of his perfections *ad extra*" suggests that Edwards embraces both types, but the arguments for Edwards's position seem primarily to be about the second type, with the exercise of God's attributes as a mere necessary condition for adoration. Because I am less interested in historical analysis, I leave this matter an open question.

<sup>134</sup> See Derk Pereboom, "Free Will, Evil, and Divine Providence," p. 82; and William Wainwright, "Theological Determinism and the Problem of Evil: Are Arminians Any Better Off?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 50, no. 1/3 (2001), p. 93.

punishes them in extreme agony for all of eternity for the very sin that they were forced into committing. How could God *possibly* be justified in doing this for such a selfish motive as being glorified? How could God *possibly* be justified in doing it, plainly and simply? What kind of hateful, manipulative, exploitative, unjust, and evil monster the God of Calvinism must be!

Note here that the problem is not simply God casting sinners into Hell for all of eternity. If God is just, and if sin merits an eternal punishment, then it might very well be that God casts some sinners into Hell for all of eternity. It is what justice demands, after all. Indeed, the libertarian might even embrace this sort of position. No, the issue is that God, from all eternity, *ordains someone to sin*, refuses to save them, and then casts them into eternal torments *for the very sin that He ordained that they commit*. In other words, Edwards's divine glory defense might work well if God did not ordain the sins that merited people their eternal damnation. The story might go something like the following: God grants humans libertarian freedom; they misuse it and sin; their sins merit them eternal damnation; instead of saving them, God decides to sentence them to Hell; He decides to do this in part because this glorifies Him.<sup>135</sup> Such a story seems perfectly fine to me. But once we add in the component that God is also the one who ordains the very sins that merit their eternal damnation, after which God refuses to save them and then casts them into Hell for all of eternity, it makes God out to be an utter monster. *Prima facie*, it looks as though the God of Jonathan Edwards is an utterly terrible and horrible person.

Hart's account helps us through this problem to some extent.<sup>136</sup> He argues that God ordains some to go to Hell for the sake of the elect in Heaven. *Love for the saints*, not selfishness, is what motivates Him.<sup>137</sup> Additionally, "[i]t is good," says Hart, "to understand

---

<sup>135</sup> On some readings, at least part of this story might be Augustine's view. See Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," pp. 20-21, 32-33, 40.

<sup>136</sup> Matthew Hart, "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell," pp. 248-272.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., pp. 250, 262-267.

God's character and our relation to him, and the occupation of hell enables both an understanding of God's nature and good attitudes towards God on the part of the elect that wouldn't be possible otherwise."<sup>138</sup> Hart, thus, embraces the second type of divine glory defense and applies it directly to the problem of Hell. He thinks that he has provided a plausible explanation for why God would predestine someone to Hell even on theological determinism, in which case he has offered a defense against a concrete, local, evidential argument from evil.<sup>139</sup> Out of a deep love for His people, God ordains that some go to Hell so that His own glory, especially His divine justice, might be manifested to the saints, thereby allowing His beloved to enjoy the mental good of knowing God more fully.

In response to the question of why God doesn't just display His wrath in the crucifixion of Jesus, Hart notes five things. First, Hell shows God's wrath against *deserving* agents. Second, Hell provides an ongoing spectacle, which is better than only having memory to go off of. Third, Hell allows for the possibility of a better understanding of what justice demands for different sins if hell involves different punishments for different crimes. Fourth, Hell allows for a greater perception of the infinite majesty of God, as we see an infinite punishment in response to an offense against an infinite being. Fifth, Hell creates greater gratitude through appreciation of the nature of the alternative. All of these are supposed to be impossible when looking solely at Christ's death.<sup>140</sup> When asked why there are *so many* in Hell, he proposes eight goods.<sup>141</sup> I will mention only some. The damnation of many will increase the gratitude of the elect through appreciation of the likelihood and frequency of the alternative. It will also provide a greater

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., pp. 251-253.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., pp. 256-257.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 258-262.

appreciation of one's dependence upon God, of God's prerogative in salvation, of God's hatred of sin, and of God's power. Thus runs Hart's divine glory defense.

#### D. The Aim of My Dissertation

The aim of my dissertation is to advance and develop the divine glory defense with the further aim of doing two things. First, I intend for my divine glory defense to undermine the following argument from evil:

1. If God exists, then the greatest metaphysically possible being exists, ordaining all contingent things (external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous (that is, always doing what is right and never doing what is wrong) and perfectly virtuous (that is, always doing what is virtuous and never doing what is vicious).
2. The world contains a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil.<sup>142</sup>
3. If the world contains a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil, it is unlikely that the greatest metaphysically possible being exists, ordaining all contingent things (external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous and perfectly virtuous.
4. So, it is unlikely that the greatest metaphysically possible being exists, ordaining all contingent things (external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous and perfectly virtuous.
5. So, it is unlikely that God exists.

---

<sup>142</sup> I get this language from Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 8

Note two things. First, this is a global, concrete, evidential problem of evil. (2) makes a claim about the world on the whole, making the argument global. The argument is also concrete because (2) mention the vastness and horribleness of the moral and natural evil in this world. Additionally, though I take (2) to make a rather obvious claim, the argument does not claim that the known fact about evil expressed within (2) is incompatible with theism. It makes the much more modest claim that it is unlikely that God exists, given that (2) is true. Thus, we have an evidential argument. Note, second, that, though other theists might be able to attack this argument by attacking (1) and saying that God does not ordain all contingent things (external to Him), because I think that God is the greatest metaphysically possible being, and because I am a Reformed Christian, maintaining that God does ordain all contingent things (external to Him), I (as far as I can see) cannot reject it. Thus, I will attack this argument by attacking (3). I will try to show that there is a very real possibility that if God exists, God, being the greatest metaphysically possible being, ordaining all contingent things (external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous and perfectly virtuous, would ordain a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil. Doing so will undermine the claim that the world containing a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil makes it unlikely that the greatest metaphysically possible being exists, ordaining all contingent things (external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous and perfectly virtuous. Succinctly, if there is a good chance that God, if He exists, would ordain the evils mentioned in (2), then these evils do not make His existence unlikely; so, I will argue that there is a good chance that God, if He exists, would ordain the evils mentioned in (2).<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> The argument from evil that I have formulated, at the most basic level, claims this: the probability that God exists, given that the world contains a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil, is low – that is,  $P(G/E) =$

Second, I hope to attack, alongside the above argument, the following argument:

6. Numerous people will go to Hell (wherein they will experience eternal torments).
7. It is unlikely, if God exists and ordains all contingent things (external to Him), that numerous people will go to Hell (wherein they will experience eternal torments).
8. So, most likely, it is not the case that both God exists and God ordains all contingent things (external to Him).
9. Thus, most likely, either God doesn't exist or God doesn't ordain all contingent things (external to Him).<sup>144</sup>
10. Thus, most likely, if God does exist, then God doesn't ordain all contingent things (external to Him).<sup>145</sup>

Note that this is a directed attack against the doctrine that God ordains all contingent reality (external to Him). Note further that this is a concrete, local, evidential problem of evil. Discussion of the horrors of Hell makes this concrete and local, and the probabilistic nature of the argument makes it evidential. Note finally that I will attack this argument by attacking (7). I

---

low – so, because the world contains a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil, it is unlikely that God exists.

Now, according to Bayes's Theorem,

$$P(G/E) = [P(G) \times P(E/G)] \div P(E),$$

which means this: the probability that God exists given that the world contains a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil ( $P(G/E)$ ) is equal to the antecedent probability of God existing ( $P(G)$ ) multiplied by the probability of the world containing a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil on the assumption that God exists ( $P(E/G)$ ), divided by the antecedent probability that the world contains a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil ( $P(E)$ ) (cf. Alvin Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 76).

My task will be to raise  $P(E/G)$  to some significant extent. For, the higher this goes, the higher the probability of  $P(G/E)$ . For example, suppose that we conclude that  $P(G)$ ,  $P(E/G)$  and  $P(E)$  are all .5. If so, because  $[.5 \times .5] \div .5 = .5$ ,  $P(G/E) = .5$ . But, suppose that only  $P(G)$  and  $P(E)$  are .5 and suppose also that I am able to show that  $P(E/G)$  is, say, .8. If so, because  $[.5 \times .8] \div .5 = .8$ ,  $P(G/E) = .8$ . Due to space limitation, I will not say anything about either  $P(G)$  or  $P(E)$ .

<sup>144</sup> I derive this conclusion from the combination of both (8) and De Morgan's rule.

<sup>145</sup> I derive this conclusion from the combination of both (9) and material implication. In effect, it follows the pattern of disjunctive syllogism: if we have a disjunction, and if one of the disjuncts is negated, then the other disjunct is true.

will try to show that it is not unlikely, if God exists and ordains all contingent things (external to Him), that numerous people will go to Hell (wherein they will experience eternal torments). Thus, I will try to show that there is a very real possibility that, if God exists and ordains all contingent things (external to Him), numerous people will go to Hell (wherein they will experience eternal torments). Thus, my divine glory defense is meant to address two problems of evil simultaneously. I do this because the answers go hand in hand with one another.

Four further things should be mentioned here. First, though I will address two specific problems of evil, I think that much, if not all, of what I say can be used to address other formulations of the problem of evil. Similarly, I will try to provide an explanation for why God ordains every evil in this world, but, because I am a finite man, for all I know, I might miss some. Still, given that I will address in this work at least many of the evils of this world, I think that the material in my divine glory defense can most likely be used to address the evils that I have missed, if there are any. I leave to the reader the work of applying the material in this dissertation to other formulations of the problem of evil, and I also leave to the reader the work of employing my divine glory defense in an explanation of why God ordains any other evils of this world that are not addressed here.

Second, I am only offering a defense, but I do think that the defense I offer corresponds, in large part, to God's actual reasons for allowing evil. That is, I think that the material in this defense (or something very much like it) is theodical in nature. But, although I have already cited the WLC and the WSC to motivate the divine glory defense to some small extent, because this is not a theology dissertation, I leave the work of developing and defending a theodicy to the side until we get to the appendix, wherein I will provide some Scriptural reason for thinking that we have a theodicy.

Third, I will occasionally present material that we cannot know (with relative certainty) outside of special revelation. For example, in Chapter V, I will claim that those in Heaven are able to see the damned in Hell. This might worry some people. They might think that we cannot really know whether these claims are true, in which case they might think that it is inappropriate for them to be used in a (philosophical) defense. However, this shouldn't worry us (not only because I think that we can learn valuable truths pertaining to the problem of evil from special revelation, but also) because of the following reason. Peter van Inwagen said, "the person who offers a defense is not obliged to include in it only statements that are known to be true."<sup>146</sup> It is acceptable to use in a defense what very well may be true, not merely what is known (with relative certainty) to be true. If my aim is to argue, for example, that there is a *very real possibility* that, if God exists and ordains all contingent things (external to Him), numerous people will go to Hell (wherein they will experience eternal torments), then as long as my claims have a substantive chance of being correct, I can include them in my defense, even if we aren't (relatively) certain that they are true. Thus, even if we grant that we cannot really know whether certain claims I make are true (e.g., that those in Heaven are able to see the damned in Hell), as long as they *very well may be true*, we can include them in our defense.<sup>147</sup>

Fourth, I limit myself to the "ordinary" problem of evil, which asks how God can be justified in allowing evil.<sup>148</sup> I will not address the author of sin objection, nor the problem of the first sin. The former asks how God is not the author of sin in some objectionable sense,

---

<sup>146</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 71.

<sup>147</sup> Note in relation to this that I will appeal to what happens in the afterlife, but this is not unheard of in answers to the problem of evil. As Eleonore Stump points out, "Aquinas's idea, then, is that the things that happen to a person in this life can be justified only by reference to her or his state in the afterlife" (Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 51).

<sup>148</sup> I get this terminology from David Alexander and Daniel Johnson, "Introduction," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. 12-16; and from Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," pp. 40-41.



especially given that He determines all things. For example, if God determines all things, including moral evil, is He not responsible for the moral evil of our world? Even if God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing moral evil, which is the subject of the ordinary problem of evil, is there not something wrong with God being the one who determines someone to sin? The latter problem, on the other hand, asks how the first sin came to pass, given that both God created the world good, and determinism holds. After all, if all things are determined, then shouldn't a good creation always do what is good? Even if God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing the first sin, how did the first sin arise? I leave both of these issues to the side. I think that they have been adequately addressed elsewhere,<sup>149</sup> and I do not have the space to develop a strong response to either while also addressing the ordinary problem of evil.

With that having been said, let us now outline the rest of this dissertation. Chapter II will be dedicated to a full explanation of what divine glory is. There are two primary parts to divine glory: God's internal glory, and the externalization of God's internal glory. There are three ways for God's internal glory to be externalized: for there to be in creation consequences of the eternal expressions of God's attributes, for creation to mirror God, and for humans to bear the spiritual image of God.

Chapter III will be dedicated to defending the moral underpinnings of my divine glory defense. I will try to show that there is a very real possibility that the following moral views are correct. First, I will argue for a divine command theory. Second, I will explore the virtues of God. I will begin by looking at His perfect love, arguing in part that God loves Himself or His people more than the damned. Additionally, God has at least two virtues of justice, one that inclines Him to respect rights, and one that inclines Him to seek balance, equality, and fairness.

---

<sup>149</sup> See Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," pp. 25-40; and James Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," pp. 200-232.

Given a proper understanding of both divine glory and various moral matters, I will turn in Chapter IV to argue for the claim that there is a very real possibility that God, if He exists, would seek His own external glory.

Finally, in Chapter V, I will try to show that there is a very real possibility that God's pursuit of His own external glory will lead Him, if He exists, to ordain a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil, including the destruction of numerous people in Hell.

#### E. Summary of Chapter I

In this chapter I explained what the problem of evil is, and I offered some initial solutions to it. One of them was an appeal to libertarian free will. However, I was forced to reject such an appeal because I believe that God ordains at least everything that is contingent (and external to Him), including, but not limited to, the evil of this world, and that He determines everything else (external to Him) some way or other. Turning elsewhere, I presented solutions to the problem of evil that a Calvinist can embrace. The most important one was the divine glory defense. Finally, I explained the aim of this dissertation, which is to advance and develop a divine glory defense. So, without further ado, let us dig into what divine glory actually is.

## II. An Exposition of Divine Glory

Before we get into a full presentation of my divine glory defense, we need a proper understanding of what divine glory actually is. In the last chapter, while presenting several divine glory defenses that others have offered, we operated from a very rough understanding of it. The aim of this chapter is to explore in greater detail what constitutes the glory of God. There are two main parts to divine glory: the internal glory of God, understood as Him being exceptionally and unsurpassably excellent and valuable, and the externalization or shining forth of this internal glory. Externalization can take at least three forms: there being consequences in creation of the eternal expressions of God's attributes, creation mirroring God, and humans bearing the spiritual image of God.

Note, before we begin, two things. First, much of the detail in this chapter is about the nature of God, it is quite possibly wrong, and it is largely dispensable assistance meant to aid us in achieving the aim of this chapter. God is, as the WCF states, infinite in being and incomprehensible (WCF 2.1), and much of what I am doing in this chapter is, as it were, diving into the infinitely deep and incomprehensible waters of the divine. Thus, though I have tried to stay close to traditional views about the nature of God, there is a substantial chance that I am wrong about much of what is written here. But this should not distract us from the aim of this chapter. All I am trying to do is offer a general picture of the nature of divine glory. The details that are meant to help us to see this general picture might be wrong, but this is acceptable as long as they allow us to have a broad understanding of what divine glory is.

Second, the general picture of divine glory that is presented in this chapter need not be certain. I am trying to present a plausible story in which God, if God exists, allows the evils we

see in our world.<sup>1</sup> Thus, even if there are objections to the general picture of divine glory presented below, as I am sure there are, as long as there is a substantive chance that it is correct, I count this chapter a success.

Now that that has been said, let us look at the glory of God.

#### A. God's Internal Glory

Above all, God is internally glorious, and this is properly understood as God being exceptionally and unsurpassably excellent and valuable, just by virtue of being who He is. In connection with this, there are at least two things that need attention: God is the greatest metaphysically possible being, and God is Goodness, Value, and Beauty Itself.

First, God is the greatest metaphysically possible being. He exemplifies necessarily the maximally perfect set of compossible great-making properties.<sup>2</sup> Now, of all the great-making properties of God, one of the most important to mention here is God's perfect moral goodness. It is one central property of who He is. And within His perfect moral goodness are *at least* the attributes of being perfectly loving, perfectly relational, perfectly merciful, perfectly forgiving, perfectly gracious, and perfectly just (including being perfectly retributively just). Yes, God also has – or, at least, I will think of God as having – the properties of, for example, omnipotence, omniscience, eternality, (which I will understand as timelessness,) and spacelessness, but He is at least perfectly morally good.

---

<sup>1</sup> As Peter van Inwagen said, "A philosopher who responds to the argument from evil typically does so by telling a story, a story in which God allows evil to exist. This story will, of course, represent God as having reasons for allowing the existence of evil, reasons that, if the rest of the story were true, would be good ones. Such a story philosophers call a *defense*" (Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 66).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), p. 12. I change Morris's formulation to include 'the' instead of 'a.' I do not think Morris intends to imply that there can be more than one greatest possible being, especially since he primarily thinks of God in terms of *the* ultimate reality (Ibid., p. 20).

However, there is at least one challenge to the idea of God being perfectly morally good. Perfect moral goodness seems to be inconsistent with omnipotence. If a being is perfectly morally good, they cannot sin, but if they cannot sin, then there is something they cannot do, namely evil actions, which suggests that such a being is not omnipotent.<sup>3</sup> I do not think this challenge succeeds. René Descartes points out a distinction between a being's abilities and a being's will. He says, "[A]lthough the ability to deceive appears to be an indication of cleverness or power, the will to deceive is undoubtedly evidence of malice or weakness, and so cannot apply to God."<sup>4</sup> God, it seems, has the *ability* to do evil, but He does not possess any *will* to do so.<sup>5</sup> And, thus, given His abilities, God can do evil things if He wills to do them. He is omnipotent, after all. But, following in line with Thomas Aquinas, the antecedent of the conditional *God can do evil things if He wills to do them* is impossible, given His perfect moral goodness, thereby making the conditional true automatically.<sup>6</sup> That is, God is perfectly morally good, never willing to do evil, even though He has the ability to do evil, such that He could do evil *if ever* He willed to do it (which, as said, He never does).

---

<sup>3</sup> For this and some related challenges, see Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 271-303, especially pp. 275-278.

<sup>4</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, second edition, edited by John Cottingham (Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 43 (AT 53).

<sup>5</sup> Note that God might ordain sin without desiring the sin in itself. Jonathan Edwards says the following:

There is no inconsistency in supposing, that God may hate a thing as it is in itself, and considered simply as evil, and yet that it may be his Will it should come to pass, considering all consequences. ... Men do *will* sin as sin, and so are the authors and actors of it: they love it as sin, and for evil ends and purposes. God does not will sin as sin, or for the sake of any thing evil; though it be his pleasure so to order things, that, he permitting, sin will come to pass, for the sake of the great good that by his disposal shall be the consequence. His willing to order things so that evil should come to pass, for the sake of the contrary good, is no argument that he does not hate evil, as evil: and if so, then it is no reason why he may not reasonably forbid evil as evil, and punish it as such (Jonathan Edwards, *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, Which Is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame in The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 1 (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), pp. 78b-79a, emphasis in the original).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, second and revised edition, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), retrieved from *New Advent*, URL = <<https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>> (I, q. 25, a. 3).

The objector might continue: can God not change His will to will to do evil? Let us grant the distinction between God's abilities and God's will, and let us grant that God does not have the will to do evil, such that, though God could do evil if He wanted, He never wants to do it. Still, if God is omnipotent, doesn't God have absolute power over His will to make it whatever He chooses, such that He could change His will to will to do evil? And if He could change His will to will to do evil, and if He has the ability to do evil, then He could do evil after all, in which case He is not perfectly good. Thus, omnipotence entails that God is not perfectly good.

But this objection does not obviously succeed. God, being perfectly morally good, is also *necessarily* morally good. Thomas Morris explains the intuition well: "I think that many religious people hold intuitively that God is as firmly entrenched in goodness, or alternatively, that goodness is as firmly entrenched in God, as it is possible to be. Most who have this sort of intuition would go on to insist that it is not possible for God to do evil."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a requisite for holding the divine office is for the being who holds it to be essentially morally good.<sup>8</sup> It is, therefore, metaphysically impossible for God to desire to do evil. Thus, when the objector asks whether God can change His will to will to do evil, he is, in effect, asking whether God can do what is metaphysically impossible, by making a being who necessarily wills no evil thing, to will what is evil. And it seems to be no defect in power for a being not to be able to do what is metaphysically impossible. An omnipotent being cannot make a square circle. Thus, it seems that an omnipotent being could still be perfectly morally good. God, even though He is omnipotent, cannot change His will to will to do what is evil because it is metaphysically impossible for God to change His will to will to do what is evil. Therefore, the objection seems to fail.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, pp. 46-48. Cf. George Mavrodes, "Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence," *The Philosophical Review* 72, no. 2 (1963), pp. 221-223; and Harry G. Frankfurt, "The Logic of

But let's suppose that we are not able to solve this problem.<sup>10</sup> What happens then? Well, God's necessary exemplification of the maximally perfect set of compossible great-making properties does not require Him to be omnipotent and perfectly morally good. If these are incompatible with one another, then they are incompatible with one another, and God does not have both. God might, nevertheless, possess the next level down (or the level after that) for one of those properties, and presumably that level is still very high. That is, it might be that God has a degree of power that is equivalent to omnipotence-minus-1 (or -minus-2).<sup>11</sup>

But what is more important to note is that if omnipotence and perfect moral goodness are incompatible with one another, the question then becomes which of the two properties God does not have. I think that God's omnipotence should go. Perfect moral goodness, if there really is an inconsistency, is more important. This value judgment is expressed by Immanuel Kant when he says,

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.<sup>12</sup>

---

Omnipotence," *The Philosophical Review* 73, no. 2 (1964), pp. 262-263. Much more, of course, can be said, but we do not have the space to get into the weeds on this issue here. At the least, something similar to what has been said seems plausible. For more on the nature of omnipotence, see Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 168-173. For more discussion on whether God can be both morally perfect and omnipotent, see the following two articles: Eric Funkhouser, "On Privileging God's Moral Goodness," *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2006), pp. 409-422; and Thomas Senor, "God's Goodness Needs No Privilege: A Reply to Funkhouser," *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2006), pp. 423-431.

<sup>10</sup> If my response does not work, I think an excellent response is provided in Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, pp. 282-287, 295.

<sup>11</sup> See both Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, pp. 23-25; and Yujin Nagasawa, *Maximal God* (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 82-94, 100-101.

<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by James Ellington (Hackett Publishing Company, 1981); in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan (Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), p. 947a-b (393), emphasis in the original.

Power, yes, is good. Knowledge, yes, is good. But these are good only if they are accompanied by moral goodness. For, terrible villains can have great power and great knowledge, in which case their power and their knowledge are made bad. Therefore, if there is any inconsistency between omnipotence and perfect moral goodness, perfect moral goodness stays. God might be very, very, very powerful, but He won't be omnipotent. And the same can probably be said for most other properties. If there is any inconsistency between some purported property of God and His perfect moral goodness, the purported property of God that conflicts with perfect moral goodness most likely goes (if only by lowering its magnitude slightly). We *must* maintain that God is morally perfect. This is a central feature to who God is, and it shines brightly like the sun.<sup>13</sup> We deeply value it,<sup>14</sup> and it makes God glorious, especially when it is accompanied by the various other compossible great-making properties of God.<sup>15</sup>

Second, God is Goodness, Value, and Beauty Itself. As noted in the last chapter, divine simplicity seems to follow from the doctrine of divine aseity. I did not explain the entailment then, but we should do so now. Aquinas explains that God is utterly simple “because every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being”.<sup>16</sup> In other words, if some object O is composite, then the things composing O are metaphysically prior to O, and O's existence is ultimately dependent upon them. O, as it were,

---

<sup>13</sup> See both Immanuel Kant, pp. 947b-948a (394); and Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989), especially pp. 432-435, 526-531.

<sup>14</sup> See Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold (Liberty Fund, 2008), pp. 163-176.

<sup>15</sup> If the doctrine of divine simplicity is true, and if God is both omnipotent and perfectly morally good, then omnipotence and perfect moral goodness might be equally important. Because I do think the doctrine of divine simplicity is true and that God is both omnipotent and perfectly morally good, I might, thereby, be committed to the claim that they are equally important. All I am trying to get at is that *if* there is a conflict and one of them must go, then omnipotence is less important and must be the one to go.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 3, a. 7). See also Jeffrey Brower, “Simplicity and Aseity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 106-108. Cf. Alexander Pruss, “The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 93.



does not come to be until O's part are united.<sup>17</sup> But God is prior to all things, being the first cause and being entirely independent of everything. Thus, God is not composite. He has no parts and is utterly simple. The Reformed tradition has upheld this view. When the WCF states that God is "without... parts" (WCF 2.1), it is affirming divine simplicity. In line with my original assumption that the WCF is largely, though perhaps not entirely, correct, I will assume that God is utterly simple.<sup>18</sup>

Now, the main thing to note, for our purposes, is what follows from the doctrine of divine simplicity. If God is utterly simple, what should we say about the fact that God is also good, valuable, and beautiful? As Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann point out, "Because God is simple, he is identical with his goodness; that is, the divine nature itself is perfect goodness."<sup>19</sup> God is one thing, which means that any (intrinsic) attribute we ascribe to Him is equivalent to Him and, therefore, equivalent to any other (intrinsic) attribute of God's.<sup>20</sup> Hence, Augustine says,

---

<sup>17</sup> This is, of course, loose speak. I do not mean to imply that God, if composite, ever came or comes to be. Hence, I use the language of "as it were."

<sup>18</sup> For some defenses of divine simplicity, see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (1985), pp. 353-382; Jeffrey Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," pp. 105-123; and Christopher Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument: On an Invalid Argument Against Divine Simplicity," *Analysis* 79, no. 2 (2019), pp. 275-284.

<sup>19</sup> Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," pp. 375-376. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, translated by Anton Pegis (University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), pp. 152-153 (Ch. 38).

<sup>20</sup> I wonder whether we are actually committed, on divine simplicity, to the claim that each property of God's is equivalent to each other property of God's. Is it possible for omnipotence to be equivalent to God and for omniscience to be equivalent to God, but omnipotence and omniscience not to be equivalent to each other? If it is, we might also have a good answer to how the Trinity works. Though God is utterly one, He is three distinct persons. This seems to be the same sort of problem.

Perhaps logical priority will get us what we want. That is, though God has no parts, the simple being that is God has a central property that entails other attributes, which are all, ultimately, just God. The WCF states, "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son" (WCF 2.3). Maybe God the Father is logically prior to and entails God the Son, and perhaps God the Holy Spirit is logically posterior to both God the Father and God the Son, logically following from them both, even though, at bottom, they are all just God. So too, it might be that God's properties logically entail and/or are entailed by certain other properties of God. Though they are all, at bottom, just God, they differ by their logical relations. Maybe this or something like this is the solution.

But God is truly called in manifold ways, great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatsoever other thing seems to be said of Him not unworthily: but His greatness is the same as His wisdom; for He is not great by bulk, but by power; and His goodness is the same as His wisdom and greatness, and His truth the same as all those things; and in Him it is not one thing to be blessed, and another to be great, or wise, or true, or good, or in a word to be Himself.<sup>21</sup>

God, therefore, is not just good, valuable, and beautiful. He *is* goodness itself, and He *is* value itself, and He *is* beauty itself. Goodness, value, and beauty are one and the same, God Himself.

But what does it mean for God *to be* goodness, value, and beauty? How can God be, for example, beauty *itself*? One very good way of understanding this is through the lens of neo-Platonism. On Platonism, there are these abstract, transcendent, eternal Forms that constitute the highest standard of some property and in which all inferior instances of that property participate. For example, there is the Form of Beauty, or Beauty Itself. Robert Adams, summarizing Plato,<sup>22</sup> says the following: “Beauty itself, it is the standard of all beauty, and all other beautiful things are beautiful by ‘participating’ in it (211 B). It is eternal, unperishing, and (above all) unqualifiedly beautiful”.<sup>23</sup> The same could be said for many other abstract properties, such as goodness and value.<sup>24</sup> There is the Form of the Good, and there is the Form of Value.

Putting a theistic spin on this, we can generate a neo-Platonistic theory in which the transcendent and eternal God Himself is the Form of the Good. Adams continues by saying that, on the most influential type of theistic theory of the good, “The role that belongs to the Form of

---

Cf. Jeffrey Brower, “Simplicity and Aseity,” pp. 110-117. I get the language of “at bottom, just God” from Brian Leftow, “A Latin Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (2004), p. 304.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 3, edited by Philip Schaff, translated by Arthur West Haddan (Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), retrieved from *New Advent*, revised and edited for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight, URL = <<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1301.htm>> (6.7.8).

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato*, edited by John Cooper, (Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 493 (210d-211d).

<sup>23</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> On the privation theory of evil, evil is the lack of goodness (that should be present). It might, then, be that some abstract properties, such as evil, do not have existence in themselves. That is, evil itself does not properly exist. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Three: Providence Part 1*, translated by Vernon Bourke (University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), pp. 48-50 (Ch. 7).

the Good in Plato's thought is assigned to God, and the goodness of other things is understood in terms of their standing in some relation, usually conceived as a sort of resemblance, to God. For centuries most philosophical theologians in the West made some use of this strategy."<sup>25</sup> I will do the same. Thus, I will take up the position that God is Goodness Itself, Value Itself, and Beauty Itself. He is the highest standard of goodness, value, and beauty.<sup>26</sup> And anything that is good or valuable or beautiful, is good or valuable or beautiful by participating in God. Or, to put this another way, God grounds the goodness, value, or beauty of good, valuable, and beautiful things by virtue of the fact that they are good, valuable, or beautiful *because they participate in Him*. As Aquinas says, "each good thing that is not its goodness is called good by participation."<sup>27</sup> That is, anything that is not identical to goodness itself (i.e., anything that is not God) is good by participation in goodness itself (namely, God Himself).

What does it mean to participate in God and, thereby, become good by participation in Him who is Goodness Itself? One proposal is *alliance* with God. That is, it might be that something participates in God and, thereby, becomes good by participation because it is allied with the Good. Robert Adams quickly rejects this proposal, and for good reason: "[Alliance] is not a plausible candidate for constituting excellence in general. Many excellent things (a beautiful flower, for example) are not for or against anything, and not capable of alliance, except in a rather strained sense."<sup>28</sup> In other words, because there are many things that are good by participation that are not allied with God, allying with God cannot constitute participating in God – that is, in Him who is Goodness Itself. The best way to understand participation, then, which

---

<sup>25</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> God is also Omnipotence, Omniscience, and any other attribute we can ascribe to Him.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, p. 153 (Ch. 38).

<sup>28</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 28.

we will pick up in Section C, is by saying that the things that are good by participation *resemble* God in various ways. Aquinas says,

[T]hat which is said to be of a certain sort by participation is said to be such only so far as it has a certain likeness to that which is said to be such by essence. ... But God is good through His essence, whereas all other things are good by participation, as has been shown. Nothing, then, will be called good except in so far as it has a certain likeness of the divine goodness.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, God exists, and He is Goodness, and He is Value, and He is Beauty.

Anyone meditating upon God would be meditating upon Goodness, Value, and Beauty Itself, staring into, to take Plato's language, the great sea of goodness, value, and beauty.<sup>30</sup> God is the highest good, the purest value, and the most perfect beauty,<sup>31</sup> and anything that is good or valuable or beautiful is good or valuable or beautiful because it images or mirrors Him. It gets its imperfect, faded, and dim goodness, value, or beauty from the fact that it resembles the perfect, clear, and bright God who is true and actual Goodness, Value, and Beauty Himself. Thus, in addition to being the greatest metaphysical possible being and perfect in moral goodness, God is also Goodness Itself, Value Itself, and Beauty Itself. This is God's internal glory.<sup>32</sup>

## B. God's External Glory: Consequences of the Eternal Expressions of God's Attributes

At this point, we have looked at God's internal glory. We should now look at His external glory.

The best analogy to understand the external glory of God is light. The glory of God "is fitly compared to an effulgence or emanation of light from a luminary," says Jonathan Edwards,

"Light is the external expression, exhibition and manifestation of the excellency of the luminary,

---

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, p. 156 (Ch. 40).

<sup>30</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, p. 493 (210d).

<sup>31</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, pp. 157-158 (Ch. 41).

<sup>32</sup> Note that a theist could, in theory, hold that God is the ground of goodness, value, and beauty without also holding to the doctrine of divine simplicity. However, because the doctrine of divine simplicity offers, from my perspective, one of the best ways, if not the best way, to get to the conclusion that God grounds goodness, value, and beauty, I employ it here. I thank Thomas Senor for comments that helped me see this.

of the sun for instance”.<sup>33</sup> God, inwardly, is glorious, excellent, and valuable. And whenever these properties, as it were, shine forth,<sup>34</sup> God is externally glorified. How can God shine forth? There are at least three ways. The first form of the external glory of God for us to discuss is there being consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God.

To begin, consider the following possibility. It might be that God is externally glorified through God’s expression of His glorious attributes. That is to say, it might be that God acts on His attributes and, in so doing, He is externally glorified. As noted above, God’s internal glory is a matter of at least two things. First, God exemplifies necessarily the maximally perfect set of compossible great-making properties. Second, He is Goodness Itself. Taking from the first point alone, if God’s external glory is a matter of Him, as it were, shining forth, then it would be natural for us to conclude that one way in which God is externally glorified is through Him expressing His excellent attributes. By doing this, He is not merely existing in a state of excellence; His excellence is active. For example, when God exercises His power and, say, parts the Red Sea, His internal excellence, specifically, His maximal power, shines forth, and He is externally glorified. Or, when He acts on His virtue of perfect love and performs acts of love towards humanity (e.g., by blessing them), then His internal excellence, specifically, His perfect love, shines forth, and He is externally glorified. More than that, when we combine this train of thought with the second point, if God expresses His excellent attributes, because God is Goodness Itself, Goodness Itself is expressing Its attributes. Even further, on the doctrine of

---

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, p. 530. Later, in section D of this chapter, we will discuss how Edwards understands emanation. He thinks of this in a unique way. It should be noted though that I am not claiming here that all instances of the external glory of God are emanations of God as understood by Edwards. I like the language he employs for the external glory of God, whether all instances of God’s external glory are emanations or not.

<sup>34</sup> I do not mean to imply that all instances of the external glory of God are seen or experienced or known by creatures. It might be that some instances of the external glory of God are never seen or experienced or known by anyone other than God. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, translated by John Oesterle and Jean T. Oesterle (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 337.

divine simplicity, God is identical with His attributes, which are identical with His goodness, in which case His attributes are Goodness Itself as well.<sup>35</sup> Thus, when they are expressed, Goodness Itself is expressed.

However, a problem arises. I am not sure whether God's expression of His attributes should be counted as substantively external to Him, in which case I am not sure whether God's expression of His attributes should be thought of as a form of the external glory of God. If God is, for example, pure act<sup>36</sup> and utterly simple, it seems that, loosely speaking, God's expression of His attributes just is God, but if that is the case, how can God's expression of His attributes be in any substantive sense the *external* glory of God? To avoid this issue, I will instead say that the *consequences* in creation of God's eternal expressions of His attributes rightly count as one form of the external glory of God.<sup>37</sup> From all eternity, God expresses His attributes, and this expression of His attributes has various effects in creation,<sup>38, 39</sup> where these effects can rightly be called the external glory of God. For, it is through these creational consequences that God's attributes shine forth beyond God's self. When God causes the Red Sea to part, for example, God's power and mercy are manifested in creation. When God causes a flood to cover the earth, God's judgment is exhibited in the world. It is through these consequences that God's attributes, which constitute the utterly simple and internally glorious divine being, shine forth.

A question is raised at this point. If God ordains all contingent things (external to Him), then every contingent thing has come to be because of God's ordination, in which case

---

<sup>35</sup> But, see footnote 20 of this chapter.

<sup>36</sup> For some reason to think that God is pure act, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 2, a. 3; I, q. 3, a. 1-2); and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, pp. 100-101 (Ch. 16).

<sup>37</sup> Of course, this leaves room for the possibility that, after we resolve the problem that has been presented here, the expression of God's attributes is another form of the external glory of God.

<sup>38</sup> See Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," p. 356.

<sup>39</sup> After Thomas Senor's urging, I do not limit these consequences to the temporal world. It might be that God's one eternal act also creates non-temporal reality. See section A of Chapter III.

everything, ultimately, is an effect of God's. While explaining the authorial model of providence, Heath White says, "an eternal God (unlike the deist one or the Open Theist one) does not create the first instant of creation, so to speak, and then step back to watch it unfold. Since God is eternal, he does not have to wait for history to unfold; the entire historical sequence of the universe is what God creates, all at once."<sup>40</sup> Thus, everything, down to the minutest detail, is an effect of God's one eternal act. Does this mean that everything can be ascribed to God and thought of as a consequence of His eternal expression of His attributes? Surely not. Without getting too deep into the author of sin objection, let me explain.<sup>41</sup>

There are plenty of moral horrors that, though God ultimately ordains them to be, we would not want to ascribe to God. That is, we do not want to say that God produces the case of the man brutally mutilating a woman, raping her, and leaving her to die, or the case of the five-year-old girl who was severely beaten, raped, and strangled to death. Still, there are plenty of effects that differ from moral horrors that seem right to ascribe to God, such as the various miracles recorded in the Bible. Thus, we need to say that some effects are not a result of God's eternal activity, while some are.

---

<sup>40</sup> Heath White, "Theological Determinism and the 'Authoring Sin' Objection," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> Note that the immediately upcoming material is not in any way meant to be an answer to the ordinary problem of evil, which is the main project of this dissertation. Whether we can ascribe a certain evil consequence to God or not says little to nothing, on its own, about whether God is vicious or morally blameworthy for ordaining that evil consequence. For example, even if we cannot ascribe sin S to God, it might still be that God has done wrong in ordaining S. As will become clear momentarily, I am using the terms *ascribing* a consequence in creation to God and *attributing* a consequence in creation to God to indicate that God Himself has *produced* a consequence in creation, as opposed to having merely *ordained* it.

That said, the material here is certainly relevant to the author of sin objection against Calvinism. In fact, I think the material here is (or at least provides the foundation for) the answer as to why God is not the author of sin in some objectionable sense, even though He ordains all things, including sin. But, addressing the author of sin objection is not the main project of this dissertation, so I leave explicit discussion of it to the side. (Note that there are different versions of the author of sin objection. The material here might not be able to answer each one, but it does answer the charge that sin is produced by God, which seems to be the main worry behind the charge that Calvinism makes God the author of sin. For discussion of three distinct author of sin objections, see Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. 25-38.)

But how, if God ultimately determines all things, can we distinguish God effecting moral horrors and God effecting miracles? Well, on divine simplicity, God is Goodness Itself, but because God exists, He is also identical to Existence Itself, or more broadly Being Itself, in which case goodness is identical to being.<sup>42</sup> As Norman Kretzmann points out, “The basic ancient and medieval thesis connecting being and goodness, fully subscribed to by Aquinas, can be conveniently expressed, to begin with, as the claim that the two terms ‘being’ and ‘goodness’ are alike in their reference but different in their senses”.<sup>43</sup> In other words, because of God’s simplicity, ultimately, all attributes of His are, at bottom, just God. Thus, when we use terms such as ‘omnipotence’ and ‘omniscience,’ we are ultimately referring to the one thing that is God, but we are doing so through different modes of presentation. So too, due to divine simplicity, ‘good’ and ‘being’ ultimately refer to the one thing that is God, though they do so through different modes of presentation. But that means that, ultimately, being and goodness are, at bottom, equivalent to one another, and because they are equivalent to one another, evil, (badness, or non-goodness,) properly speaking, has no substance, existence, or being. Evil is a privation (of what ought to be).

---

<sup>42</sup> But, see footnote 20 of this chapter.

<sup>43</sup> Norman Kretzmann, “A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?” in *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 224. See also Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Absolute Simplicity,” pp. 355-357; and See Gottlob Frege, “Sense and Reference,” *The Philosophical Review* 57, no. 3 (1948), p. 210.

Note that we might need to make a subtly but importantly different claim. If we understand the Trinity in the same way we understand the properties of the utterly simple God, and if, when discussing the properties of God, we employ only the distinction between sense and reference, such that ‘good’ and ‘being’ refer to the same thing but have different senses, we might, as Daryl Cotton has pointed out in conversation, be committed to modalism. ‘God the Son’ and ‘God the Father’ would refer to the same thing but have different modes of presentation or names. This is unacceptable. I am committed to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, especially as it is presented in the WCF, WLC, and WSC. Thus, it might be that we should employ something stronger, such as logical priority, to distinguish the properties and persons of God. See footnote 20 of this chapter. That said, it might be that God’s properties should be understood differently from how we understand the persons within God. It might be that the persons can be distinguished by certain logical relations, but not God’s properties. Whatever the case may be, I put these complications to the side.



Now, on the privation theory of evil, because evil is the lack of being, it is perfectly coherent to say that God does not *produce* evil but only refrains from producing certain goods (that ought to be present).<sup>44</sup> Though God ordains all contingent things (external to Him), choosing them to come be and, by that very fact, ensuring or determining their existence,<sup>45</sup> He *produces* some things (e.g., miracles) but does not produce other things, which ensures the “existence” of certain evils. Hence, Edwards summarizes the point:

[T]here is a vast difference between the sun being the cause of the lightsomeness and warmth of the atmosphere, and the brightness of gold and diamonds, by its presence and positive influence; and its being the occasion of darkness and frost, in the night, by its motion, whereby it descends below the horizon. The motion of the sun is the occasion of the latter kind of events; but it is not the proper cause, efficient, or producer of them; though they are necessarily consequent on that motion, under such circumstances: no more is any action of the Divine Being the cause of the evil of men’s Wills.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, though all contingent things (external to Him) are determined or ensured to come into existence by God’s will, certain things (e.g., miracles) are produced by God and, therefore, should ultimately be ascribed to Him, while others (e.g., moral horrors) are not produced by God and, therefore, should not ultimately be ascribed to Him.<sup>47</sup>

Let’s give an example. White provides the following:

God causes in Ebenezer Scrooge a desire for material resources, which in and of itself is not bad. However he fails to cause in Scrooge any compassionate impulses toward the poor. Scrooge then proceeds to act on his desires, which involve him in hoarding wealth while failing to act compassionately. The diagnosis of his moral failures is an absence of good motivation, but speaking strictly God does not cause absences. When God does cause the presence of

---

<sup>44</sup> For simplicity, I ignore discussion of God sustaining things in existence.

<sup>45</sup> I am speaking somewhat loosely here. God does ordain evils things, but evil things are not really things at all. They don’t, properly speaking, have existence. Thus, I will momentarily put the word *existence* in quotation marks.

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, Which Is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*, p. 77b. See also Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 7 (Bk. 1, Ch 6), p. 43 (Bk. 3, Ch. 7), pp. 124-125 (Bk. 7, Ch. 12), and p. 251 (Bk. 12, Ch. 11).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Daniel Johnson, “Calvinism and the Problem of Evil,” pp. 28-32.

compassionate impulses, Scrooge becomes a better man, and God is the cause of that.<sup>48</sup>

In this case, though God ordains the entire scenario, willing it to come to be and, by that very fact, ensuring that it does come to be, we can ascribe Scrooge's desire for material resources to God, but we cannot ascribe his moral failings to God; for, his moral failings are the result of God not producing within him any compassionate impulses. Still, God ordains everything within this story, including Scrooge's moral failings.

Let's break this down even more. I'm picturing something like the following. God chooses the entire scenario in which Scrooge has the desire for material resources and in which he has a lack of compassionate impulses toward the poor. In this very choosing, the desire for material resources is produced within Scrooge, in which case God's will has ensured the existence of Scrooge's desire for material resources. However, in this very same choosing, no compassionate impulses are produced within Scrooge – and this lack of compassionate impulses is a bad thing – in which case God's will has ensured Scrooge's lack of compassionate impulses. Thus, because God ordains fact F iff (i) God chooses F and (ii) God's choosing of F ensures or determines F, God ordains the entire scenario, but He only produces a certain part of it. That which is bad within the scenario is a lack that God does not produce; He only ordains its "existence." Thus, only part of the scenario can be ascribed to God (namely, Scrooge having a desire for material resources), whereas we cannot ascribe the other part of the scenario to God (namely, Scrooge not having compassionate impulses).

So far, so good. Let us now make clear which things can be ascribed to God and which things cannot be ascribed to God. I propose that all and only good things in creation can be ascribed to Him. Augustine says, praying to God, "you created all natures and substances which

---

<sup>48</sup> Heath White, "Theological Determinism and the 'Authoring Sin' Objection," p. 86.

are not what you are and nevertheless exist. The only thing that is not from you is what has no existence.”<sup>49</sup> Given that being and goodness are the same, we can change this quote to read, “you created all good things which are not what you are and nevertheless exist. The only thing that is not from you is what is not good.”<sup>50</sup> The first sentence claims that all goods in creation are produced by God. The second sentence indicates that all non-good things in creation are not produced by God; thus, only goods in creation are produced by God. Thus, all and only goods in creation are produced by God. And this makes sense. For, if something is good and, therefore, has being, it must ultimately get its being from somewhere. And the ultimate source is God, who creates all things that exist. But, if it is not good, it does not have being, in which case God cannot produce it; for, it does not exist. Therefore, because all and only goods in creation are produced by God, all and only goods in creation can be ascribed to God. Hence, because *all* goods in creation can be ascribed to God, if something is a good thing in creation, it is a good effect or consequence that can rightly be ascribed to God; and because *only* goods in creation can be ascribed to God, if a consequence in creation can rightly be ascribed to God, it is good.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, I propose that God is externally glorified when there are consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to the eternal expression of His attributes. This is the first form of the external glory of God. His excellence and His goodness do not exist merely in His

---

<sup>49</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 251 (Bk. 12, Ch. 11). See also Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 22-23 (Bk. 1, Ch. 20).

<sup>50</sup> Compare this to The Common Doxology’s first line: “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.” A good version can be found at: Houghton Gospel Choir, “The Doxology - The Houghton Alumni Virtual Gospel Choir,” YouTube, published May 5, 2020, accessed October 10, 2022, URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0PBloK7H1M>>.

<sup>51</sup> Does my discussion take into consideration neutral effects? Yes, it does. Given that goodness and being are the same, an effect that is neutral and, therefore, not good, also lacks substance, existence, or being. It seems to differ from badness in the following way: whereas bad effects lack goodness/being that ought to be present, neutral things lack goodness/being, but it is not the case that the goodness/being that they lack ought to be present. If this is how we are to understand neutral effects, then it is also not right to ascribe them to God. For, just like evil things, God brings them into “existence” by merely refraining from producing that which is good or has being. The only difference is that in the case of neutral effects, the effect is such that it is not the case that it ought to be present.

eternal, transcendent abode, but are made to be manifested in creation through various consequences.<sup>52</sup>

### C. God's External Glory: Creation Mirroring God

To review, God is Goodness, Value, and Beauty Itself. This means that anything in creation that is good, valuable, or beautiful is good, valuable, or beautiful iff it participates in God. A thing participates in God iff it mirrors, resembles, or has a likeness to God.<sup>53</sup> Thus, a created thing is good, valuable, or beautiful iff it mirrors, resembles, or has a likeness to God. Similarly, something is good, valuable, or beautiful in proportion to how strong the resemblance to God is. The stronger the resemblance, the greater the item; and the weaker the resemblance, the worse the item.

These thoughts lead us to our second form of the external glory of God. Because God is Goodness, Value, and Beauty Itself, anything that is good, valuable, or beautiful in creation is, as it were, God shining forth, though indirectly and through creation. The reason why good, valuable, or beautiful things are good, valuable, or beautiful is *because* they mirror, resemble, or have a likeness to God. They show or demonstrate (even if imperfectly) God's nature, the nature of true goodness, value, and beauty.<sup>54</sup> Thus, when creation is good, valuable, or beautiful – that is, when creation mirrors, resembles, or has a likeness to God, who is Goodness, Value, and Beauty Itself – God is externally glorified. And the more there is of goodness, value, or beauty, the more there is of the external glory of God.

---

<sup>52</sup> As said, some consequences might be experienced or known only by God Himself. Still, it is externally glorious, whether any creature experiences or knows it or not.

<sup>53</sup> I will assume that resemblance is objective. It might be that God's view of things or will is what determines the objectivity of resemblance. For a discussion of this question, see Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, pp. 32-36.

<sup>54</sup> Some good things might never be experienced or known by any creature. Still, it is externally glorious, whether any creature experiences or knows it or not.

The main thing to do in this section is to address some objections to the claim that a thing is good, valuable, or beautiful iff it mirrors, resembles, or has a likeness to God. Doing so will also help us further flesh out the idea. The first challenge is to the claim that resemblance is necessary for something to be good. While discussing this question, Robert Adams asks how excellence in cooking resembles God. Without much analysis, it seems that excellence in cooking doesn't resemble God because God is not a cook, in which case resemblance is not necessary for something to be good.<sup>55</sup> J.L. Schellenberg and Jerome Gellman have similar examples. Respectively, God has never experienced pleasurable bike-riding,<sup>56</sup> and He has never nursed a child,<sup>57</sup> even though both seem to be good things. All three philosophers propose ways in which, nevertheless, there is some connection between these good things and God Himself.<sup>58</sup> Adams suggests that excellence in cooking resembles, if only distantly, divine creativity.<sup>59</sup> Schellenberg suggests that pleasurable bike-riding is the same type of good that God experiences when He experiences pleasure (or perhaps, more broadly, positive mental states).<sup>60</sup> Gellman proposes that nursing a child is of the same type of good as kindness or concern for the helpless, both of which God has.<sup>61</sup> By being of the same type of good in God, pleasurable bike-riding and nursing children both resemble Him. Thus, good things can resemble God by being of the same type of property that God has, whether this be creativity, pleasure, kindness, concern for the helpless, or something else entirely.

---

<sup>55</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 30.

<sup>56</sup> J.L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Jerome Gellman, "On a New Logical Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2015), p. 440.

<sup>58</sup> Schellenberg, of course, is arguing from a non-theistic perspective. He is, in this context, presenting his new logical problem of evil.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 30.

<sup>60</sup> J.L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> Jerome Gellman, "On a New Logical Problem of Evil," pp. 440-441.

Further, some goods resemble God distantly, fragmentarily, analogously, or metaphorically. For example, consider a temporally everlasting life. We might say that such a life resembles God's timelessness analogously. This helps address an additional worry. As Adams discusses, one further objection to the necessity of resemblance, which we might call the problem of finitude, is that "[s]ome of the most admired of human excellences, in love, artistic creativity, and moral virtue, seem to depend on our finitude".<sup>62</sup> For example, consider courage. If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal, it doesn't seem appropriate to say that God ever has courage. He has nothing to fear, after all. But surely courageousness is good and valuable, even if it doesn't resemble God. In response, Adams says, "The most important basis for a response to this objection is still the point that the imaging of God by creatures is a matter of distant and fragmentary resemblance."<sup>63</sup> For example, courage might distantly and fragmentarily resemble God's fortitude, eternity, or determined love.

Now, though this is a fine answer to the problem of finitude, we don't need it. I think courage can more directly resemble God. Another solution to the problem of finitude has been proposed by both Robert Adams<sup>64</sup> and Linda Zagzebski.<sup>65</sup> If God incarnated among us as the person Jesus Christ, as the WCF states (WCF 8.1-3), it might very well be that some creaturely goods are good because they resemble Christ, whose human nature was finite. It seems perfectly coherent to say that courageousness is excellent because God the Son was courageous while incarnate. Zagzebski asks how God can contain all virtues, as Aquinas claimed.<sup>66</sup> Here is her answer: "Christ did have the virtues of chastity, humility, and courage, as well as all the other

---

<sup>62</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 31.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Linda Zagzebski, "The Virtues of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (1998), pp. 547-549.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, p. 282 (Ch. 92).

virtues humans ought to develop, so the virtues of Christ are ‘contained’ in the nature of God in the way that Christ is contained in God according to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, the good things of creation, such as various virtues that seem to require finitude, might be good (partially) because they resemble God as He existed in the human person Jesus of Nazareth.

One question that is raised in connection with this point is whether goodness can be a matter of things resembling Christ’s human nature. It might be that Christ’s humanity is not something we are to compare things to when asking whether they are good. It might be that Christ’s humanity merely provides the context in which the divine nature acts. That is, it might be that good things are not good because they resemble Christ’s *humanity*, but because they resemble Christ’s *divinity* in a context in which His divine nature was united to finitude. Because Christ was both God and man, as the WCF states, His divine nature was uniquely able to do certain things that could not have been done if He had remained merely divine, such as His courageousness. If, then, someone were to express courageousness, it might be that they would be doing good not because they resembled Christ as He was a human, but because they resembled Christ as He was a divine being expressing Himself in a context in which He was bound to humanity. On the other hand, it could be that resembling any attribute of Jesus’s, including things pertaining to His humanity, makes things good.

Ultimately, I’m inclined to say that things are good only because they resemble the divine, in which case Christ’s humanity is only the circumstance in which His divinity can act in certain ways. The reason is because humanity is not Goodness Itself. God is. Why something is good is because of resemblance to Him, not humanity. The context in which God does stuff is

---

<sup>67</sup> Linda Zagzebski, “The Virtues of God and the Foundation of Ethics,” p. 548.

not what makes something good. It is the fact that God does it that makes it good. Whatever the case may be, what Jesus did on earth allows further resemblances with the divine.

Note also that we can probably extend this incarnational theory of goodness beyond what God Incarnate did in the actual story of our world.<sup>68</sup> Though Jesus is God Incarnate in *our* story, as I am assuming, given the WCF, there are plenty of other stories that God could have written (or possible worlds that God could have actualized) in which God incarnates into someone substantively different. In *our* story, for example, Jesus was a man and a carpenter (as Mark 6:3 says). But there are plenty of other stories that God could have written in which God incarnates into a professional cook, or a recreational biker, or a woman. Indeed, God could have even incarnated into a lion.<sup>69</sup> Thus, God Incarnate could have been an excellent cook, and He could have experienced pleasurable bike-riding,<sup>70</sup> and He could have nursed a child, and He could have experienced all sorts of things associated with being a lion. And if something can be good by virtue of the fact that it resembles God in the context in which He was incarnate in *our* story, it seems plausible to say that something can be good by virtue of the fact that it resembles God in the context of *a different* story in which He was incarnated in a different way. If resemblance to God is what makes something good, why couldn't we resemble God as He is incarnate in a different story and be good thereby? Thus, resemblance to God should be understood fairly broadly. This should alleviate the challenge that resemblance is not necessary for something to be good.

Next, we should ask whether resemblance to God is sufficient for something being good. Adams presents two major objections to this condition: that of disturbing resemblances and that

---

<sup>68</sup> I am here employing the language of the authorial model of providence.

<sup>69</sup> See C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (HarperTrophy, 1980), pp. 268-270.

<sup>70</sup> Also, I see no reason why Jesus couldn't have been a good cook in His day and age. So too, I see no reason why Jesus couldn't be, in Heaven, right now, or sometime in the future, pleausurably riding a bike or cooking excellently.



of caricatures. First, consider disturbing resemblances. God has great political power – He is a king, after all – and He believes Himself to be God. But, sometimes, it is not a good thing for certain people (e.g., Hitler) to wield great political power, and surely it is a bad thing for anyone to believe that they are God, unless they are in fact God Himself.<sup>71</sup> Adams's response is that "not every sharing of a property constitutes a resemblance. Judgments of resemblance are more holistic than that. ... The way or context in which a property is shared affects whether the sharing constitutes a resemblance or makes things more similar than they would otherwise have been."<sup>72</sup> Sometimes, says Adams, sharing certain properties doesn't entail resembling something. He gives an example in which a squirrel has the same number of hairs that he (Adams) has on his body. The squirrel, says Adams, does not resemble him in that respect simply because of this shared feature, and it does not resemble him more than its twin that only has twenty-seven more hairs.<sup>73</sup> Thus, though Hitler shared a property with God, namely possessing great political power, Hitler did not resemble God, in which case Hitler's possession of great political power does not constitute a counterexample to the claim that resemblance is sufficient for something to be good.

The second objection that Adams provides to the sufficiency of resemblance is the problem of parodies or caricatures.<sup>74</sup> He gives an example: "Even something so abstract and free of superfluous properties as a beautiful piece of music can be parodied; and the parody will resemble the original but will not thereby share its virtues."<sup>75</sup> Thus, something could parody God

---

<sup>71</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* In connection with this point, Adams discusses relational and negative properties. He says that no resemblance will arise from many of them. Though I am limiting my discussion to intrinsic, positive properties for the sake of simplicity, it should be noted that I am skeptical of Adams's claim here. More importantly, Adams thinks that certain properties are more important than others when evaluating resemblances. This seems right to me, at least when we are evaluating resemblances from a holistic perspective.

<sup>74</sup> For simplicity, I will assume that parodies and caricatures are the same thing.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 33.

and, therein, resemble God but not be good thereby. Adams's suggestion is to modify the account of resemblance and say that something is good because it is a *faithful* resemblance.<sup>76</sup>

I have several things that need to be said by way of response to Adams. First, I am unmoved by Adams's squirrel example. I *do* think that a squirrel that shares the same number of hairs on its body as Adams resembles Adams (as he exists in the actual world) in that respect, and I think it resembles him more than its twin that has a few more hairs. It might not have a *substantive* resemblance, and it might not resemble him *much more* than its twin, but that is neither here nor there. Something can resemble something only slightly, and something can resemble something more or less than something else only slightly. Resemblance is a spectrum, with no resemblance on one side, complete resemblance on the other, and some resemblance in the middle. Even if neither squirrel *greatly* resembles Adams, they both resemble him to some extent, and the one with the same number of hairs as Adams resembles him more, if only slightly, than its twin. Adams seems to think that, as items share more and more properties, they get closer to resembling one another, but are not yet there until they reach some sort of line on the spectrum of shared properties. But I see no reason why we should think this. If x shares any property with y, x is like y, at least to that extent, and to that extent there is resemblance.

Nevertheless, second, I think that Adams is on to something when he says that judgments of resemblances are more holistic. My view is that resemblances can be evaluated from two perspectives. First, we can evaluate resemblances by isolating properties and asking whether object x is like object y, or whether object x is more like object y than object z. But we can also evaluate things holistically, looking at objects on the whole.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>77</sup> It should be noted that, strictly speaking, there are more than two ways to evaluate resemblances. Suppose that an item has four properties. We can evaluate its resemblance to something else by looking only at one property, or two, or three, or all four.

Consider political power. When we look just at political power on its own, someone who possesses political power is more like God than someone who doesn't. Hitler, therefore, when we look just at his political power, resembles God more than the average grocery store worker. Thus, when looking just at Hitler's political power alone, it was good. But it does not follow from this that someone with political power automatically resembles God more than someone without political power when viewed holistically. When we look at Hitler on the whole, he resembles God less than the average grocery store worker. And the reason is because of his horrifically evil character. On the whole, Hitler's evil character so greatly decreases his resemblance to God that his political power is not able to counterbalance it. Therefore, when viewed holistically, Hitler was less good than the average grocery store worker.<sup>78</sup>

More than that, we might even be able to say that, when viewed holistically, Hitler's evil character *makes his political power bad* because his political power allows him to put into effect his evil will. Though, when we look at Hitler's political power in isolation from all his other properties, it resembles God and is, thereby, good, when we look at it from a holistic perspective, it does not resemble God and is, thereby, not good. Or, perhaps, we should say that when we view things holistically, we are really looking at a united property of *politically-powerful-but-horribly-evil*. This makes him resemble God less than the average grocery store worker who is not politically powerful and not horribly evil. Therefore, Hitler was less good than the average grocery store worker.<sup>79, 80</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> You could also say something like this: political power itself is good, but when it is possessed by the leader of a fascist country, the situation on the whole is bad.

<sup>79</sup> Consider the parallel with perception. Sometimes, when we view a particular shade of gray in isolation, it is clear how dark or light it is. But, when we view it holistically, or in particular contexts, it seems different. See Edward H. Adelson, "Checkershadow Proof," Perceptual Science Group @ MIT, URL =

<<http://persci.mit.edu/gallery/checkershadow/proof>>. The same sort of thing is happening here. When we view political power on its own, it seems good. But when we view it in certain contexts, it can take on a different value.

<sup>80</sup> How do we synthesize the idea of things being good or bad when viewed holistically with the material in the previous section concerning the privation theory of evil, God's production of things, and what consequences in

The same can be said for someone who believes that they are God.<sup>81</sup> The belief itself, on its own, resembles God and is, thereby, good, if only slightly, but it is bad when viewed holistically because it does not resemble God from that perspective. Therefore, the objection of disturbing resemblances fails. Resemblance to God is sufficient for goodness, but we must keep in mind that resemblances can be viewed from two different perspectives. Sometimes that which resembles God and is good on its own, does not resemble God and is not good when viewed holistically. The objection seems to work because it takes a property (e.g., great political power) that, on its own, resembles God but, when viewed holistically, is bad. But this ignores the fact that we can view things from two different perspectives.

We can apply these thoughts also to the parody objection. Adams, by way of reminder, seems to think that *x* resembles *y* iff the degree to which they share properties crosses some line on the spectrum of shared properties. Thus, when Adams speaks of a faithful or an unfaithful resemblance, he seems to be talking about an item that has crossed this line but that has some

---

creation we ascribe to God? Here are my thoughts. God, strictly speaking, only produces individual things (though He ordains every individual and collective thing). When a whole scenario is either good or bad, this is the result of seeing all at once multiple individual good and/or bad things that God has produced and/or not produced. Hence, in loose speak, we say that God has produced an entire good scenario, even if some of the parts of the scenario are bad things that do not exist and that God has not produced; and, in loose speak, we say that God has not produced an entire bad scenario, even if some of the parts of the scenario have good things within them that do exist and that God has produced.

For example, God produces Hitler's political power, which is good on its own and has existence, but He refrains from producing within Hitler, say, love for neighbor. Hitler's political power and lack of love for neighbor, when combined with other desires that may or may not be produced by God, lead him to commit atrocities. On the whole, then, the entire scenario is bad, and we say, in loose speak, that God has not produced it, even though He has produced part of it.

We can say the same sort of thing when we have a thing that is, say, good when viewed on its own, but bad when viewed holistically. Strictly speaking, if the thing is good when viewed in isolation from its context, then it has been produced by God. But, in loose speak, because it is bad when viewed holistically, we say that it has not been produced by God.

Accordingly, when ascribing various consequences in creation to God, we can say the following: all and only goods in creation can be ascribed to God because all and only goods have been produced by God, where "produced by God" is loose speak in some situations.

<sup>81</sup> I am fairly moved by the claim that we humans all have a *sensus divinitatis* telling us that God exists. Consequently, it might be that all humans understand and know that none of us is God. Thus, I am skeptical that any human actually thinks that they are a divine being. The only exception would be the God-man Jesus Christ.

further feature that makes it faithful or unfaithful. This just complicates things. We can employ what we said above to provide a simple answer. When we look at a parody P of x, there are certain features of P that are shared with x. In fact, given that P is a *parody* of x, P probably has some properties that, when viewed alone, have *great* or *substantive* resemblance to x, such that P clearly mirrors x in certain respects. But there are also features of P that are not shared with x, thereby causing the caricature. Perhaps, for example, “[t]he caricature exaggerates one or more features of the original”.<sup>82</sup> Whatever the case may be, when we look at the shared properties alone, there is great resemblance, but when we look at all the properties together, there is less resemblance. Whether this makes the item bad on the whole or just less good will depend on how bad the extra feature is to the whole.

Thus, the parody objection fails. When looking at a parody of God, and when looking only at the shared properties, the parody has, let us say, great resemblance and is, thereby, very good. But when we view it holistically, the parody resembles God less, thereby making it less good, perhaps even bad, depending upon how severe the caricature is. Therefore, the claim that resemblance to God is sufficient for something to be good, stands.

Therefore, by way of summary, something resembles God iff it is good. Its resemblance to God is why it is good, and it is good in proportion to how much it resembles God. Further, when something resembles God and is, thereby, good, God is externally glorified because God, who is Goodness Itself, is exhibited in the good things that resemble Him. His magnificent being, as it were, is placed into history, if only by way of an imperfect mirror.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 33.

<sup>83</sup> In the previous section, I noted that it is all and only good things in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God. In other words, if a consequence in creation can be ascribed to God, it is a good thing in creation; and if something is a good thing in creation, it is a consequence in creation that can be ascribed to God. This means that x is a good thing in creation (that is, a created thing that reflects the goodness of God) iff x is a consequence in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God. Thus, the first and second forms of the external glory of God entail one another. Does this mean that they are the same thing? I’m unsure, so I leave them as separate points.

Note, then, in connection with this that many theodicies and defenses can rightly be counted as divine glory theodicies and defenses. If they appeal fundamentally to some good thing that justifies God in allowing evil, they are appealing, knowingly or unknowingly, to something that is good ultimately because it reflects God. This comes out clearly in Norman Kretzmann's writings. He asks why God would risk the pristine goodness of creation by choosing to create free creatures who could choose to sin.<sup>84</sup> His answer is the following: because God's internal goodness is fundamentally love,<sup>85</sup> if God's goodness naturally diffuses itself so that it is reflected in creation,<sup>86</sup> (this reflection of God being the purpose of all things,)<sup>87</sup> love must be reflected in creation. But love requires freedom, says Kretzmann.<sup>88</sup> Thus, "if it is God as love who is manifested in creation, then creation must include created persons, who must be free."<sup>89</sup> This is, at bottom, an appeal to divine glory.<sup>90</sup>

#### D. God's External Glory: Humanity Bearing the Spiritual Image of God

In the previous section, we discussed creation resembling God. In this section, we discuss a unique instance of creation resembling God and a unique third form of the external glory of God.

Various things in creation resemble God, and, therefore, various things in creation are both good and externally glorifying to God. But what can be said about humanity in particular? Employing the language of Irenaeus and John Hick,<sup>91</sup> humans are created in the image of God

---

<sup>84</sup> Norman Kretzmann, "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" in *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 241.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245. For simplicity, I ignore Kretzmann's discussion of the distinction between benevolent and univalent love. See pp. 246-249.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>90</sup> Because God is Beauty Itself, aesthetic defenses are also, at bottom, divine glory defenses. These would probably fit well with the authorial model of providence.

<sup>91</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 253-254.

but have the capacity to become likenesses of God. Of course, everything that is good is, in a real, substantive sense, an image and/or likeness of God, but when we speak of humanity in particular bearing the image of God and having the capacity to become likenesses of God, we mean to convey something even more substantive. Humans (or at least properly mentally functioning adult humans), just like God, are persons.<sup>92</sup> They have understanding, will, and affection, just like God has understanding, will, and affection.<sup>93, 94</sup> But this “natural” or “wider” image of God is not the main thing to focus upon in this section. The main thing is that humans have the capacity to become likenesses of God, to bear the “spiritual” or “narrower” image of God.<sup>95</sup> It is this likeness that we will examine here.<sup>96</sup>

Now, what exactly is this spiritual image of God or likeness of God? It has two main features. First, whereas the natural image of God is a matter of humans having understanding, will, and affection, the spiritual image of God is a matter of humans knowing, loving, and rejoicing in *God*. Second, the spiritual image of God is a matter of having God Himself within. Let me explain both of these points in order.

---

<sup>92</sup> Or, as Cornelius Van Til says, man is a personality (Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, second edition, edited by William Edgar (P&R Publishing, 2003), p. 40).

<sup>93</sup> See Paul Ramsey’s footnote 4 in Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, p. 529.

<sup>94</sup> Does God have affections? Given that humans have been created in the image of God, and given that we have affections, I think we should maintain that He does, as long as His affections are from Him, such that His aseity is not violated. For some discussion of whether God has affections, see Robert Oakes, “The Wrath of God,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 27, no. 3 (1990), pp. 129-140; Laura Ekstrom, “Suffering as Religious Experience,” in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, edited by Peter van Inwagen (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 102-105; Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, pp. 206-211.

<sup>95</sup> Paul Ramsey uses the language of “natural” and “spiritual” image of God, while Van Til uses the language of “wider” and “narrower” image of God. See Paul Ramsey’s footnote 4 in Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, p. 529; and Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 40.

<sup>96</sup> Two things should be noted. First, discussion of animals, human children, and mentally disabled humans will be picked up in the last chapter. For now, I leave them to the side. Second, I ignore discussion of various alien and supernatural lifeforms (e.g., angels). I do not know enough about them to say anything with much confidence. (Note that the defense presented in Chapter V, including how it all applies to animals, human children, and mentally disabled humans, will probably be applicable to alien and supernatural lifeforms to some substantive extent, if not entirely.)

First, the spiritual image of God is a matter of humans having a certain object for at least some of their knowledge, love, and joy. Specifically, this object is God. This takes their natural image of God, which is a matter of having understanding, will, and affection, up a notch, glorifying God even more, all things being equal.<sup>97</sup> The reason why it glorifies God even more, all things being equal, is because their knowledge of God, love of God, and joy in God all have the same object that is the primary object of God's own knowledge, love, and joy, in which case they resemble God more fully, all things being equal – hence, the language of them bearing the spiritual *image* of God.

Why think that God's knowledge, love, and joy are primarily directed towards God Himself? Because God is infinite, and because creation is finite,<sup>98</sup> God's knowledge, love, and joy are all primarily directed towards Himself. No matter how many things can be known about the finite creation, there is more – infinitely more! – to know about God. Thus, His infinite knowledge is primarily about Himself. Indeed, His knowledge is infinitely about Himself. And the same sort of reasoning is true for His will and His affection, especially given that He is Goodness Itself. His infinite will is primarily directed towards Himself in love because He is infinite in being and goodness, whereas everything else is finite in being and goodness.<sup>99</sup> Because joy (or at least rational joy) is delight in that which is thought to be good, and because God is infinite in goodness, whereas everything else is finite in goodness, and because He is perfect in knowledge (in which case He knows that He is infinite in goodness and that everything

---

<sup>97</sup> Is the spiritual image of God just the natural image of God plus some added features? Or is the spiritual image of God a unique thing, separate from the natural image of God? I am unsure, but I will speak as though the first is correct.

<sup>98</sup> If numbers are part of creation, then creation is, in a real substantive sense, infinite. (For some discussion of this, see Brian Leftow, "God and Abstract Entities," *Faith and Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (1990), pp. 193-217.) However, the idea should be clear. In comparison to God, the things of creation are as nothing.

<sup>99</sup> We will continue our discussion of God's love of Himself in the next chapter. I mention this point only in passing here.



else is finite in goodness), His infinite affections are primarily directed towards Himself.<sup>100</sup>

Therefore, most of His infinite knowledge is about God, most of His infinite love is dedicated to God, and most of His infinite joy is in God. Indeed, His knowledge, love, and joy are infinitely directed towards His infinite self, which can be known, loved, and rejoiced in infinitely. Thus, the first main feature of the spiritual image of God is humans knowing God, loving God, and rejoicing in God, which glorifies God because it resembles God's own knowledge, love, and joy, which are primarily and infinitely directed towards God Himself.<sup>101</sup>

Second, we need to address the exact nature of the spiritual image of God. Interestingly, Edwards seems to think that some humans actually have God's *own* knowledge of Himself, God's *own* love of Himself, and God's *own* joy in Himself, within themselves. That is, it seems that Edwards embraces that humans do not possess, for example, their own knowledge that happens to be of God. No, when humans know God, the knowledge that they possess is God's own knowledge placed within them. In a key passage, Edwards says the following of God: "[H]e, from his goodness, as it were enlarges himself in a more excellent and divine manner. This is by communicating and diffusing himself; ... by flowing forth, and expressing himself in them, and making them to partake of him, and rejoicing in himself expressed in them, and communicated to them."<sup>102</sup> This language suggests that God's own properties are placed and expressed *within* humans. Hence, Paul Ramsey notes that Edwards's position is that "The knowledge of God [in creatures] is God's own knowledge of himself. The love communicated is

---

<sup>100</sup> Note that some of the material in the next chapter pertaining to God's love of Himself will also support the reasoning here pertaining to God's joy in Himself. The *love* of complacency is the *delight* in beauty.

<sup>101</sup> A thing can resemble God more by virtue of proportionality. As said, *most* of God's infinite knowledge is about God, *most* of His infinite love is dedicated to God, and *most* of His infinite joy is in God. Thus, if *most* of a person's knowledge is about God, and if *most* of their love is dedicated to God, and if *most* of their joy is in God, they resemble God greatly, not only because God knows Himself, loves Himself, and rejoices in Himself, but also because of the proportions.

<sup>102</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 461-462. See also pp. 432-435, 442, and 527-530.

not love to God approximating its object; it is God's own love indwelling the will. The happiness communicated is a participation in God's own felicity."<sup>103</sup> How can this be?

This is how Edwards understood the emanation of God. According to Edwards, God, as it were, spreads Himself, extends Himself, and multiplies Himself.<sup>104</sup> That is, God does not just create things that come to exist at a distance from Him and that remain distant from Him for all of time. No, He emanates Himself into the creation, by spreading His very own properties throughout, and by expressing Himself therein. He causes Himself to take up residence within and inhabit creation in a real, substantive, immanent, and active way. Specifically, He makes His dwelling within humans and expresses Himself within them. Hence, Walter Schultz says, "Edwards holds that the reality of creature knowledge, love, and joy in God is an 'emanation' strictly in the sense that these things are God's own intra-Trinitarian knowledge, love, and joy 'indwelling' some conscious agents by virtue of the Holy Spirit."<sup>105</sup>

This makes sense from a theological standpoint. Three points should be made in response to Biblical passages that suggest that God the Holy Spirit indwells believers (e.g., Ezekiel 36:27 and 2 Timothy 1:14) and that we are in deep spiritual union with Christ (e.g., Galatians 2:20 and Ephesians 1:3). First, when God the Holy Spirit indwells believers in some substantive sense, sanctifying them by growing them up in the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God, it would not be implausible to think that He is Himself granting to the believer His very own knowledge, love, and joy, which is expressed within him. Second, the opposite seems more implausible. That is, saying that our knowledge of, love for, and joy in God is our very own just

---

<sup>103</sup> This is Paul Ramsey's footnote 7 in Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, p. 531. See also Paul Ramsey, "Editor's Introduction," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 19-23.

<sup>104</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 432-435.

<sup>105</sup> Walter Schultz, "Jonathan Edwards's *End of Creation*: An Exposition and Defense," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (2006), p. 254. See also, pp. 252, 267-268.

complicates things. If God really does dwell within our hearts and minds in some substantive sense, and if this is supposed to have some practical effects – God doesn’t just dwell there and do nothing; instead, He actively expresses Himself – why complicate matters by saying that the knowledge of God, love of God, and joy in God that we possess are our very own when it would be much easier to say that they are God’s own expressed in and working through us? That is, because the Holy Spirit inhabits the saints, the knowledge of, love for, and joy in God are already there within us being expressed. We don’t need anything more. Saying that the saints also have their very own knowledge of, love for, and joy in God just adds unnecessary complications. Third, it seems quite plausible to think that, in deep spiritual union with Christ, the Holy Spirit in some substantive sense infuses His very own self into the saints such that His very own properties are active within them.<sup>106</sup>

Naturally, then, Ramsey points out while summarizing Edwards’s position, “No creature has a natural capacity to actualize in itself knowledge of or love to God; that is the common teaching of classical Christian theology. In evangelical Christianity in America this was, of course, and still should be, the meaning of being ‘born again.’”<sup>107</sup> Of course, some non-Christians can know that God exists and/or that God possesses certain properties,<sup>108</sup> so we need to make a distinction between two types of knowledge of God. There is the knowledge of God that God grants to some humans without infusing Himself into the creature. This is good and valuable in its own right because it resembles God, in which case it externally glorifies Him. But there is also the knowledge of God that God grants to some humans while infusing Himself into

---

<sup>106</sup> Because this might seem strange even to the Christian – it did to me! – I recommend looking at, for example, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 (for knowledge), John 17:26 (for love), and John 17:13 (for joy).

<sup>107</sup> Paul Ramsey, “Editor’s Introduction,” p. 21.

<sup>108</sup> I do not include the love of God or the joy in God. The Calvinist’s perspective on salvation begins with the idea that the natural man, though he knows some things about God, does not love God or rejoice in Him. He is spiritually dead, in rebellion to God by nature. Though he might love or rejoice in an idol – perhaps even a very great idol – he does not love or rejoice in God Himself. See WCF 6.2-4; 9.3.

the creature and expressing Himself therein. It is this latter type of knowledge that is a matter of being born again and growing in sanctification. Thus, the spiritual image of God is not only humans knowing God, loving God, and rejoicing in God; it is also God Himself inhabiting the saint in such a way that the saint's knowledge of, love for, and joy in God is God's very own knowledge of, love for, and joy in Himself being expressed through them.

So far, so good, but let's get into some details to help make sense of what's going on. The spiritual image of God I take to be a unique third instance of the external glory of God. It is a unique combination of both the first and second forms of the external glory of God, plus a special relationship that is created by the first. Let's begin with a brief word concerning the second form of the external glory of God and how it relates to the third, after which we will turn to the first form of the external glory of God and see how it relates to the third. God is externally glorified in the second form when creation resembles Him. And our third form has this feature because humans, bearing the spiritual image of God and not just the natural image of God, are made to have hearts and minds that resemble God in a unique way by virtue of the fact that they know, love, and rejoice in *God*, instead of just something or other. And the more this spiritual image grows – that is, the more humans know, love, and rejoice in God – the more He is externally glorified.

Next, our first form of the external glory of God is when there are certain effects in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God. Our third form has this same feature as well. For, as said above in section B of this chapter, all and only good things in creation can be ascribed to God. Thus, because a spiritual image bearer has the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God, and because all of these are goods in creation, resembling Him who is Goodness Itself, they can all be ascribed to God, in which case God is externally glorified in the first form

through each of these parts of the spiritual image of God. God, even God the Holy Spirit, exists in His eternal abode, but He causes certain effects to exist in the world. Specifically, He regenerates His saints by granting to them spiritual life, giving them the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God. And, again, these are consequences of God's eternal activity that can rightly be ascribed to Him. And the more He sanctifies His saints – that is, the more He causes them to grow in the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God – the more He is externally glorified because there are greater and greater consequences that God has effected in the world that can rightly be ascribed to Him.

Further, whenever God acts and causes certain consequences that can rightly be attributed to Him to arise in a particular location, we are led to say that God is present there.<sup>109</sup> William Alston said, “God is always where He works.”<sup>110</sup> This might explain how God is not merely spaceless, but omnipresent.<sup>111</sup> The world is filled with consequences that can rightly be attributed to God, in which case God is present throughout the world.<sup>112</sup> This means that whenever God

---

<sup>109</sup> Embodied beings are present wherever their bodies are located, but unembodied, timeless, spaceless beings are present wherever the consequences of their actions are.

<sup>110</sup> William Alston, “The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit,” in *Divine Nature and Human Language* (Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 240.

<sup>111</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>112</sup> Note that this account might not be able to get us to a full-fledged omnipresence. Because evil things cannot be ascribed to God, we might not be able to say that God is present in certain locations. However, appealing to the material in section C of this chapter and to some of the material in Chapter IV, some evils can be good when viewed holistically. So, if all things in creation are, when viewed holistically, goods in creation, and if all goods in creation are good effects that can be ascribed to God, then all things in creation are, when viewed holistically, good effects that can be ascribed to God. But whenever there are good effects that can be ascribed to God, we can say that God is present there. Thus, if all things in creation are, when viewed holistically, goods in creation, and if all goods in creation are good effects that can be ascribed to God, we will be able to say that God is present alongside everything in creation, when viewed holistically. And the following passages seem to indicate that Augustine held that all things are good, at least when viewed holistically:

For you evil does not exist at all, and not only for you but for your created universe, because there is nothing outside it which could break in and destroy the order which you have imposed upon it. But in the parts of the universe, there are certain elements which are thought evil because of a conflict of interest. These elements are congruous with other elements and as such are good, and are also good in themselves. All these elements which have some mutual conflict of interest are congruous with the inferior part of the universe which we call earth. Its heaven is cloudy and windy, which is fitting for it (Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 125 (Bk. 7, Ch. 13)).

grants to someone the knowledge of God, the love of God, or the joy in God – in fact, whenever God grants to anyone any knowledge, any love, or any joy (as long as their love or joy is appropriate) – because these are consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God, we can say that God is present within those people in a real, substantive sense.

However, God being present within someone in the sense just described is not the same thing as God indwelling the believer in special sort of way.<sup>113</sup> Alston proposes that God specially indwells certain people in such a way that they begin to partake of the divine nature,<sup>114</sup> and he goes on to propose that this sharing of divinity is literal: “To my mind, all the talk of being filled, permeated, pervaded by the Spirit, of the Spirit’s being poured out into our hearts, strongly suggests that there is a literal merging or mutual interpenetration of the life of the individual and the divine life, a breaking down of the barriers that normally separate one life from another.”<sup>115</sup> To help make sense of this, he gives an example of what a breaking down of barriers might be like between persons:

You and I might be in a close personal communion... But still our two lives are effectively insulated from each other. ... Mine is lived within my skin and yours within yours. ... If we can now imagine some breakdown of those barriers, perhaps by a neural wiring hookup, so that your reactions, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes, or some of them, are as immediately available to me as my own, and so that they influence my further thinking and feeling and behavior in just the same way that my own do, there would have occurred a partial merging of our hitherto insulated lives.<sup>116</sup>

---

I learnt by experience that it is no cause for surprise when bread which is pleasant to a healthy palate is misery to an unhealthy one; and to sick eyes light which is desirable to the healthy is hateful. The wicked are displeased by your justice, even more by vipers and the worm which you created good, being well fitted for the lower parts of your creation. To these lower parts the wicked themselves are well fitted, to the extent that they are dissimilar to you, but they can become fitted for the higher parts insofar as they become more like you (Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 126 (Bk. 7, Ch. 16)).

<sup>113</sup> William Alston, “The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit,” p. 240.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 243-244.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. See the rest of his discussion on pp. 246-247.

In line with this, I propose that when a person bears the spiritual image of God, some sort of breakdown of the barriers between that person and God has happened, such that God's own knowledge of Himself, love for Himself, and joy in Himself *is* that person's own knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God.<sup>117</sup>

More details are needed. How does all this happen? I'm not certain on everything, but here is a partial proposal. By the same sort of principle at play in saying that God effecting consequences that can rightly be attributed to Him in a particular location entails that God is present there, if God brings about more numerous or more substantive consequences that can rightly be attributed to Him in a particular location, we can say that God is more present there. (And, again, our first form of the external glory of God is when there are certain effects in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God.) For example, though I can attribute the food I just ate to God and appropriately thank Him for it, the consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to God of having food to eat is a less substantive consequence than God parting the Red Sea, leading the people of Israel by pillars of cloud and fire, or by filling the tabernacle with His glory (Exodus 40:34-38). And in these latter three, He is more present than in the act of giving me food.<sup>118</sup> Thus, as the consequences grow, God's presence increases. Eventually, as God's presence increases in a particular location, God is said to be there directly and immediately. There is a threshold at which the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God are so numerous and/or so substantive that God exists there in special way, and not just generally, as He exists everywhere. This is how, for example, theophanies (could)

---

<sup>117</sup> Alston proposes a way in which a human can literally share in the divine nature without, for example, God's love *being* their love (Ibid., pp. 248-251). I, following Edwards, will hold that God's love for Himself *is* His spiritual image bearers' love for God.

<sup>118</sup> See J. Ryan Lister, *The Presence of God* (Crossway, 2014), section "The Presence of God Defined," within chapter 2, "Of Storyboards and Location Scouts."

happen. It might even be how the Incarnation happened.<sup>119</sup> Where this threshold is in various cases, I am unsure; and whether there are additional conditions that are necessary for God's special presence, I do not know. But, something like this seems plausible.

Nevertheless, I propose that when God causes to exist within a certain human the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God, the consequences that can rightly be ascribed to God are so numerous and/or so substantive that God is there directly and immediately. (Once again, our first form of the external glory of God is when there are certain effects in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God.) He begins to dwell specially within the human. This causes the human to partake of the divine nature and to share in divinity. This is a breaking down of the barriers that normally separate one life from another. But, more than that, it causes a breakdown of the barriers between God and the creature related to their metaphysical identities, and they begin to become identified as one.<sup>120</sup> It is not as though God is within the human but a separate entity altogether. God *becomes part of* the human, and a metaphysical union is established.<sup>121, 122</sup> And as God's spiritual image bearers grow in the knowledge of God, the love for God, or the joy in God, God takes up deeper residence within them, and their union with Him grows.<sup>123</sup> Further, because of this breakdown of metaphysical identities, and because of this union with one another, and because all of this is centered on and "located in, with, and/or

---

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Brian Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," in *The Incarnation*, edited by Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 287-288.

<sup>120</sup> I do not claim that this happens every time God specially dwells in some location, let alone every time God dwells (whether specially or generally) in some location.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. William Alston, "The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit," p. 247.

<sup>122</sup> If x is within y, what makes it the case that x is part of y? I am unsure, and I do not have the space to explore any answers here. But perhaps there is some plausible metaphysical theory that allows God to be both within a person and part of them.

<sup>123</sup> Note that the human is not entirely God. It is only part of the human that is divine. Spiritual image bearers still sin (this side of Heaven), for example, and their sin has nothing to do with their divinity. Additionally, God is not fully contained within that part of the human. As the spiritual image grows, the part of the human that is divine grows larger, but God's infiniteness is never fully there. In other words, some, but not all, of the human is some, but not all, of God.



alongside” their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God,<sup>124</sup> as God becomes part of the human, their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God becomes God’s knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God.<sup>125</sup> Thus, we can say that God has taken up residence within them and expressed His very own knowledge of Himself, love for Himself, and joy in Himself through them. And as they are sanctified more and more, as they grow further in their knowledge of God, love for God, or joy in God, we can say that God has taken up deeper residence within their hearts and minds, expressing within them and through them to an even greater extent His knowledge of Himself, love for Himself, and joy in Himself, which is the same thing as their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God.<sup>126, 127</sup>

That said, some people might find it hard to understand what it is for a human’s knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God *to be* God’s knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God, and some people might find it philosophically or theologically unacceptable. If this troubles the reader, it should be noted that, as far as I can see, we don’t need this strong of a claim for my defense against the problem of evil. Thus, instead of saying that the spiritual image of God is God dwelling within humans and expressing Himself within them, such that their

---

<sup>124</sup> Again, whenever God acts and causes certain consequences that can rightly be attributed to Him to arise in a particular location, we are led to say that God is present *there*. Because God’s special indwelling of the human arises from God causing to exist within them the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God, God’s presence is *there*, in, with, and/or alongside their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God.

<sup>125</sup> This especially makes sense if God is utterly simple. God just is His knowledge, which is primarily about Himself, and God just is His love, which is primarily dedicated to Himself, and God just is His joy, which is primarily concerned with Himself. So, when He becomes part of the human, the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God all become part of the human.

<sup>126</sup> If the reason why we can rightly say that God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within the hearts and minds of certain humans and expressed Himself within them, is that He has caused to exist within them the knowledge of God, love of God, and joy in God, why, then, is it that a non-believer with some knowledge of God, which God has caused to exist within them, does not have the Spirit of God within them? My answer is this: if someone merely has the knowledge of God, and not the *combination* of the knowledge of God, the love of God, *and* the joy in God *together*, then the threshold for God dwelling specially within them has not been reached.

<sup>127</sup> Here is a similar proposal, which I will ignore in this work. God applies the atoning work of Christ to the human, which causes God to specially dwell within them. Because God is His knowledge, love, and joy, the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God comes to dwell specially within the human, becoming part of him.

knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God is His knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God, if we need, we can simply say that the spiritual image of God is humans knowing, loving, and rejoicing in God, with God dwelling specially (and not just generally) within them, where this indwelling, as discussed above, is a result of God causing to exist within them the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God.

Therefore, as said, the third form of the external glory of God is a unique combination of both the first and second forms of the external glory of God (respectively, there being certain effects in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God and creation resembling Him), plus a special relationship that is created by the first. God is, therefore, greatly glorified through the third form of the external glory of God.

#### E. Summary of Chapter II

The aim of this chapter was to explore in greater detail what divine glory is. As has been discussed, divine glory has two main parts. The first is the internal glory of God. God is the greatest metaphysically possible being, and He is Goodness, Value, and Beauty Itself. Internally, He is magnificent and awesome. Second, when this internal glory, as it were, shines forth, God is externally glorified. And God can be externally glorified in (at least) three ways. First, He can be externally glorified through there being consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him. Through this, the marvelous attributes of God that caused these consequences to arise shine forth. Second, God can be externally glorified through the things of this world reflecting or resembling His glorious self. Because He is the Good, the things that mirror Him are good. Thus, God is externally glorified through the existence of good things in creation, which are good because they resemble God. Third, God is externally glorified when humans bear the spiritual

image of God. This spiritual image of God is humans knowing Him, loving Him, and rejoicing in Him, and it also involves God Himself residing within them. How does the spiritual image of God glorify God? The goodness of humans knowing God, loving God, and rejoicing in God externally glorifies God in the second form, and, regarding the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God, all of these are consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God, in which case God is also externally glorified in the first form. God, thus, shines forth through the spiritual image of God.

### III. The Moral Underpinnings of the Divine Glory Defense

At this point, we have introduced the divine glory defense, and we have also explored the nature of divine glory itself. Before we move on to a full presentation of my divine glory defense proper, we need to present and modestly defend some moral views that will undergird it. First, I will try to show that (assuming that God exists) there is a very real possibility that a divine command theory is true. This will provide a plausible theory of the deontological status of actions – that is, a theory about moral obligation, moral permission, and moral wrongness<sup>1</sup> – by which we can evaluate whether God has done what is morally right or morally wrong. If we have no theory of any kind of the deontological status of actions, it is hard to say whether God has done anything right or wrong by ordaining evil, unless we appeal to something like pre-theoretical moral intuitions. Though I do think that appeals to pre-theoretical moral intuitions have their place, such that we should not disregard them completely, it is good to have a principled moral position by which we can evaluate God's actions. Thus, I present a divine command theory as a plausible theistic theory about the deontological status of actions by which we can principledly answer whether God has done right or wrong by ordaining evil.

This point cannot be stressed enough here. If we take up a theory about the deontological status of actions and don't just rely upon our pre-theoretical moral intuitions, this will substantively influence what we say by way of defense against the problem of evil. If, for example, we take up consequentialism,<sup>2</sup> we will evaluate God's actions from a consequentialist

---

<sup>1</sup> I take the language of "the deontological status of actions" from Philip Quinn, "Divine Command Theory," in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, second edition, edited by Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013), pp. 82-85.

<sup>2</sup> It might seem strange to think of consequentialism as presenting a theory of the deontological status of actions, but an action having a deontological status, in this context, only indicates that it is obligatory, optional, or wrong. (For simplicity, I ignore other possible statuses, such as an action being supererogatory.) *Why* we have such duties is another matter entirely. Consequentialists will say that an action is obligatory, optional, or wrong *because* of the consequences.

perspective. A defense from this perspective, then, might take the form of trying to present plausible reason for thinking that this world in fact is the best possible world, such that God has done right by maximizing the good.<sup>3</sup> If, on the other hand, we take up Kantianism, we will evaluate God's actions from a Kantian perspective. A defense from this perspective might try to show that it is plausible that God's actions have conformed to the principle that we must never treat humans as mere means. But if we take up a divine command theory, we will evaluate God's actions from the perspective of that divine command theory. A defense from this perspective might try to show that it is plausible that God has conformed Himself to all of His own commands that have been directed at Himself (if there are any). Thus, the first aim of this chapter is to present a modest argument for a divine command theory, thereby providing a plausible theory of the deontological status of actions that can frame my divine glory defense.

Our discussion of divine command theory will naturally lead us to a discussion of God's virtues. Thus, second, I will try to offer a plausible account of the nature of God's perfect love and try to show that there is a very real possibility that God's perfect love would incline Him to seek the good of and union with Himself or His people more than the damned. Additionally, third, I will try to offer a plausible account of God's virtues of justice. Discussion of God's virtues will do two things. First, given that God's virtues substantively influence what types of commands God will give, knowing God's virtues will help us know how God might command Himself. Second, because another way of evaluating someone's actions, besides asking whether they are right or wrong, is by asking whether they are virtuous or vicious, our discussion of God's virtues will also allow us to answer whether God has been virtuous in ordaining evil.

---

<sup>3</sup> Another consequentialist defense might take the form of skeptical theism, trying to argue that we do not have enough evidence to think that God has done wrong in actualizing the world in which we live because we do not have enough evidence to think that this world is not the best possible world. Other forms of skeptical theism can be employed under the other normative ethical theories.

Note, again, that the overall project of this dissertation is to present a plausible story in which God allows the evils we see in our world. Thus, as long as there is a substantive chance that the material presented below is correct, I count this chapter a success, even if there are objections to the material. In connection with this, note that I do not in any respect fully explore the ethical claims presented in this chapter. That would take multiple books. But this shouldn't worry us. Defusing the argument from evil requires providing reasonable doubt, thereby cutting off the inference from evil to the non-existence of God. Modestly supported divine command theory, supplemented by a reasonable account of God's virtues, even if much, much more could be said, is all that is needed when providing the plausible undergirding moral views of my defense.

#### A. Divine Command Theory

Which actions are right for God? Which actions are wrong? These questions are at the heart of the problem of evil. But if we are to evaluate whether God has done something wrong in ordaining the evils of our world, it would be a good idea to have some theory about what makes an action right or wrong. Instead of appealing purely to pre-theoretically moral intuitions, we will have a principled theory to employ when evaluating God's actions. Thus, the aim of the first section of this chapter is to offer a plausible theistic theory of the deontological status of actions, supplemented by a modest argument for it.

The theory of the deontological status of actions that I would like to offer is a divine command theory. It says that God has ultimate authority over the deontological status of actions. That is to say, if God commands someone to perform action A, A is thereby made (morally) obligatory, and nothing can change this except a further divine command; and if God forbids A,

A is thereby made (morally) wrong, and nothing can change this except a further divine command; and if God wills A to be (morally) optional,<sup>4</sup> A is thereby made (morally) optional, and nothing can change this except a further divine command.<sup>5</sup> Philip Quinn has written an excellent article that supports this theory.<sup>6</sup> His strategy is to offer a cumulative case argument, appealing to four separate pieces of evidence. Let us consider each.

His first point<sup>7</sup> is an appeal to *lex orandi, lex credendi* (or the law of prayer is the law of belief).<sup>8</sup> Though, as he points out, we shouldn't think of this as exceptionless, the general idea seems to be true: "[O]ften enough in Christianity what is professed in religious practice is a good guide to what ought to be contained in sound religious theory."<sup>9</sup> Quinn then proceeds to provide multiple quotes from saints who emphasize conformity to the divine will. By way of example, he

---

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 6 of this chapter for why I use the language of "wills."

<sup>5</sup> In this context, making something (morally) obligatory can be likened to instituting a law. Once the law is made, it remains in effect forever unless it is overturned or there were built-in time limits or restrictions. Thus, the legislative body of a state might make a law, which stays in effect for hundreds of years, until it is later repealed by the same legislative body or by a higher one.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Quinn, "Divine Command Theory," pp. 81-102. Technically, Quinn does not offer a divine command theory in his article, but a divine intention theory, according to which God's (antecedent) intentions are the basis for morality. See pp. 82-85. For example, he says, "For every human agent *x*, state of affairs *S*, and time *t*, (1) it is morally obligatory that *x* bring about *S* at *t* if and only if God antecedently intends that *x* bring about *S* at *t*, and (2) if it is morally obligatory that *x* bring about *S* at *t*, then by antecedently intending that *x* bring about *S* at *t* God brings it about that it is morally obligatory that *x* bring about *S* at *t*" (p. 85). Still, he does offer philosophical support for and defense of theological voluntarism (of which divine command theory and divine will theory and divine intention theory are all instances), according to which "there is some moral status *M* that stands in a dependence relationship *D* to some act of the divine will *A*" (Mark Murphy, *God and Moral Law* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 100). Because it makes little to no difference for the purposes of this dissertation, as far as I can see, whether I embrace divine intention theory or divine will theory or divine command theory, I will ignore the in-house debate amongst theological voluntarists and, for ease of communication, speak as though God's will, (antecedent) intentions, and commands are all, for the most part, roughly the same. That is, I will lump them all together, and I will move fairly easily between them, making little distinction between divine command theory and divine will theory and divine intention theory.

Note one important point, though. There is a distinction between God's moral will and His ultimate will. As Robert Adams points out, "Any Christian theology will grant that God in his good pleasure sometimes decides, for reasons that may be mysterious to us, not to do everything he could to prevent a wrong action" (Robert Adams, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (1979), p. 76). If wrong actions are contrary to God's will, but God has nevertheless willed ultimately for a wrong action to take place, then there must be a distinction between God's will as it pertains to morality and His will as it pertains to what ultimately happens in the world. If there were no distinction of this sort, then God would both will and will not the same thing in the same way (e.g., for murder to happen and for murder not to happen), which is contradictory.

<sup>7</sup> I have rearranged Quinn's points.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Quinn, "Divine Command Theory," pp. 88-89.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

quotes the colonial American saint Elizabeth Ann Seton as saying, “the first purpose of our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will”.<sup>10</sup>

This is all well and good, but I think we can provide even better evidence. The quotes that Quinn offers only show that the saints are concerned to obey God’s will. Don’t get me wrong. On its own, this is valuable and provides evidence for divine command theory. But if we can find quotes from Christian classics that connect the deontological status of actions with (dis)obedience to the will of God, that is even better. And I think we can. Consider the prayers from *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*. This is, as the name suggests, a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions, pulling from great Puritan saints such as Thomas Watson, John Bunyan, Isaac Watts, and Charles Spurgeon.<sup>11</sup> In it, we find at least two prayers that connect the divine will with the deontological status of actions.

First, consider the prayer titled “The Cry of a Convicted Sinner,” which reads in part:

Keep me from fluttering about religion;  
     fix me firm in it,  
     for I am irresolute;  
     my decisions are smoke and vapour,  
     and I do not glorify thee,  
     or behave according to thy will; ...  
 Save me from myself,  
     from the artifices and deceits of sin,  
     from the treachery of my perverse nature,  
     from denying thy charge against my offences,  
     from a life of continual rebellion against thee,  
     from wrong principles, views, and ends;  
     for I know that all my thoughts, affections,  
         desires and pursuits are alienated from thee.  
 I have acted as if I hated thee, although thou art love itself;

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 88. Quinn finds this quote here: Janine Idziak, “Divine Command Ethics,” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Blackwell, 1997), p. 457. Idziak finds this quote in M. Basil Pennington, *Through the Year with the Saints* (Doubleday, 1988), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Bennett (ed.), *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2020), pp. vii-ix.



have contrived to tempt thee to the uttermost,  
 to wear out thy patience;  
 have lived evilly in word and action.<sup>12</sup>

Without getting too deep into textual analysis, this prayer seems to be a cry to God in which the saint confesses his sins and asks God to save him from himself. While doing so, he says that he does not obey God's will and that he has acted evilly. Because there seems to be some sort of connection made between disobedience to God's will and acting evilly, and because acting evilly entails a deontological status, there seems to be in this prayer some sort of connection made between disobedience to God's will and the deontological status of actions.

The second prayer is titled "Contrition," and, even more directly to the point, part of it reads as follows:

I have sinned;  
 I am alien to thee  
 my head is deceitful and wicked,  
 my mind an enemy to thy law.<sup>13</sup>

This prayer seems to make a direct connection between sin, wickedness, and disobedience to God's law. If sin and wickedness are terms indicating a deontological status – and it seems that they are – then this prayer maintains that there is a direct connection between the deontological status of actions and the law of God. Thus, in both prayers, the saints make a connection between the deontological status of actions and (dis)obedience to God's law.<sup>14</sup>

Second, Quinn appeals to absolute divine sovereignty.<sup>15</sup> Given that God is sovereign over what happens in the world, it is quite natural to say that God is sovereign over what should happen in the world; or, as Quinn says it, "Considerations of theoretical unity then make it

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 38. I have tried my best to mirror the spacing in the text.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. WCF 19.1-7.

<sup>15</sup> Philip Quinn, "Divine Command Theory," pp. 92-94.

attractive to extend the scope of divine sovereignty from the realm of fact into the realm of value.”<sup>16</sup> If God is sovereign over (descriptive) facts, then it might very well be the case that He is also sovereign over the deontological status of actions.

Putting this into the context of this dissertation, we’ve already said that God ordains at least everything that is contingent (and external to Him), including, but not limited to, the evil of this world, and that He determines everything else (external to Him) some way or other. But this means that facts about value might very well be ordained by God. Given that there are many descriptive facts that are (both external to God and) contingent (e.g., the fact that evil exists and the fact that I have curly hair), in which case there are many descriptive facts that God ordains, why couldn’t it also be the case that there are many facts about value, including facts about the deontological status of actions, that are (both external to God and) contingent and that God, accordingly, ordains? And, if He ordains the deontological status of actions, then nothing can overturn them. For, on our conception of ordination (which was that God ordains fact F iff (i) God chooses F and (ii) God’s choosing of F ensures or determines F), in ordaining something,

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

God ensures or determines it to be the case.<sup>17</sup> Thus, theoretical unity makes my divine command theory attractive.<sup>18</sup>

Third, Quinn points out that the ethics of love set forth in the Bible is expressed in the form of a divine command that seems to make loving obligatory.<sup>19</sup> He says the following:

“It is a striking feature of the ethics of love set forth in the New Testament that love is commanded. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus states the command in response to a question from a lawyer about which commandment of the law is the greatest. He says: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 22:37–9).”<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Several things need to be said here. First, as I said in footnote 5 of this chapter, making something (morally) obligatory can be likened to instituting a law. Once the law is made, it remains in effect forever unless it is overturned or there were built-in time limits or restrictions. Thus, the legislative body of a state might make a law, which stays in effect for hundreds of years, until it is later repealed by the same legislative body or by a higher one. However, God making an action obligatory is different from and weaker than God ordaining (or, more broadly, determining) that it be obligatory. Ordaining an action A to be obligatory for person P during period of time T entails making A obligatory for P during T – that is, ordaining the deontological status of an action entails instituting it – but making A obligatory for P during T does not entail ordaining that A be obligatory for P during T.

If God ordains (or determines) something to be, nothing can stop it from being. It is ensured. After all, remember that God ordains fact F iff (i) God chooses F and (ii) God’s choosing of F ensures or determines F. For example, if God ordains that I mow the lawn at time t, I will mow the lawn at t. It will happen, and nothing can prevent it from happening. So, if God ordains that my killing of my son is wrong at time t, then my killing of my son is wrong at t, and He ensures that my killing of my son is wrong at t. He, thus, *makes* my killing of my son wrong at t, and nothing will be able to override this deontological status. Still, God could ordain both (1) that an action A be morally obligatory for a certain period of time T and (2) that A become morally wrong after T.

However, if God makes an action A obligatory for person P during period of time T, this does not necessarily entail that God has ordained it. For, given how I am understanding what it means to make something obligatory, making A obligatory for P during T does not entail that it is ensured that A be obligatory for P during T, which is a requirement of something being ordained. For, some instituted laws can be repelled.

Second, if God ordains the deontological status of actions, then my divine command theory is true, with one qualification to be made in the next note. For, if God ordains an action A to be obligatory for person P during period of time T, then God has willed A to be obligatory for P during T and has, thereby, ensured that A is obligatory for P during T, in which case He has *made* A to be obligatory for P during T, and nothing and no one can change this.

Third, the divine command theory that I have offered needs a qualification. Above, I presented (part of) it as follows: if God commands someone to perform action A, A is thereby made obligatory, and nothing can change this *except a further divine command*. But if God ordains that action A is obligatory for person P during period of time T, then it is ensured that A is obligatory for P during T, and nothing and no one, including God, can overturn this. However, this should not worry us. Later, when I talk about God revoking His commands, all we have to say is that this is loose speak for God, in all of eternity, ordaining, for example, that A be obligatory for P during period of time T and that A be wrong for P during the next period of time T’.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. William Alston, “Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists,” in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, edited by Michael Beaty (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 318.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Quinn, “Divine Command Theory,” pp. 86–88.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Additionally, this commanding seems to make loving obligatory. Quinn says,

“Loving everyone as we love ourselves is, I think, obligatory in Christian ethics, and it has that status, as the Gospels show us, because of God. It seems to me that Christians who take the Gospels seriously are not in a position to deny that they teach us that God intends us to love the neighbor and has commanded us to do so or that these facts place us under an obligation to love the neighbor.”<sup>21</sup>

When we hear God, either in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18) or in the New Testament (Matthew 22:34-40), command us to love our neighbors, we do not immediately think that this is optional. Our natural inclination is to say that we are fully morally obligated to keep this command, even if it is difficult. We don’t have an option about whether to love or not to love our neighbors. God’s commands bind our actions.

We can supplement Quinn’s case by looking at a command that does not bind all people at all times. This will help us to see what occasions give rise to certain obligations. Consider, just for instance, God’s command to Jonah to go to Nineveh and to call out against it (Jonah 1:1-2). This is not a command that binds all people at all times. It is unique to Jonah. Everyone besides Jonah was still free to go or not to go to Nineveh, and still free to call out or not to call out against it, even after the command was given to him. Because *they* had not been commanded, they were under no obligation. Further, Jonah was not bound *until* the command was given. That is, before God gave the command, Jonah had no obligation to go to Nineveh or to call out against it. But, once God gave the command, Jonah was bound to do it. He had no choice. He was required to go to Nineveh, and he was required to call out against it. But that means that God’s commands are occasions for obligatoriness. Why Jonah was bound was *because* God commanded him. Without the command, Jonah was free.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

This raises a question: could God's commands make certain actions that are obviously immoral, moral? Could He, for example, make killing your own son morally right? This brings us to Quinn's fourth point, in which he discusses the immoralities of the patriarchs and what Augustine, Andrew of Neufchateau, and Thomas Aquinas had to say about them.<sup>22</sup> There are cases in the Bible "in which God commands something that appears to be immoral and, indeed, to violate a prohibition God lays down in the Decalogue."<sup>23</sup> He lists three such cases. First, in Genesis 22:1-2, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, even though He later revokes this command before Isaac is killed (Genesis 22:10-12). Second, on some interpretations, Exodus 11:2 records a divine command for the Israelites to plunder the Egyptians. Third, Hosea 1:2 and 3:1 seem to contain divine commands directed at Hosea to have sexual relations with an adulteress. Now, whether these cases actually happened or not, stories of this sort seem to be at least possible. Given this, we now have the following question to ask: if God commands things such as homicide, theft, or adultery, do they thereby become right?

Augustine says that the divine law against killing has exceptions: "These exceptions are of two kinds, being justified either by a general law, or by a special commission granted for a time to some individual."<sup>24</sup> Thus, he says of Abraham, who consented to kill his son, that he "was not merely deemed guiltless of cruelty, but was even applauded for his piety, because he was ready to slay his son in obedience to God, not to his own passion."<sup>25</sup> Thus, to Augustine, Abraham did what was right in light of the fact that God had commanded him to kill his own son. Indeed, Andrew of Neufchateau says that Abraham "would not have sinned in [killing his

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-92.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Marcus Dods (The Modern Library, 1993), p. 27 (Bk. 1, Ch. 21).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

son] if God should not have withdrawn his command.”<sup>26</sup> As Quinn points out, “For Andrew, not only did Abraham do no wrong in consenting to kill Isaac but he would have done no wrong if the command had not been withdrawn and he had killed Isaac.”<sup>27</sup>

Above these, Aquinas offers an *excellent* explanation for why the saints do not do what is wrong when they obey God’s commands to commit homicide, to plunder, or to commit adultery, if He ever commands such things. He says the following:

Consequently when the children of Israel, by God’s command, took away the spoils of the Egyptians, this was not theft; since it was due to them by the sentence of God. Likewise when Abraham consented to slay his son, he did not consent to murder, because his son was due to be slain by the command of God, Who is Lord of life and death: for He it is Who inflicts the punishment of death on all men, both godly and ungodly, on account of the sin of our first parent, and if a man be the executor of that sentence by Divine authority, he will be no murderer any more than God would be. Again Osee, by taking unto himself a wife of fornications, or an adulterous woman, was not guilty either of adultery or of fornication: because he took unto himself one who was his by command of God, Who is the Author of the institution of marriage.<sup>28</sup>

The undergirding moral assumption seems to be that our rights are dependent upon the commands of God. The reason why the plundering of the Egyptians by the Israelites was not wrong was because it was the right of the Israelites, given to them by God. The reason why it would not have been wrong for Abraham to have killed his son was because Abraham had been given a right by God to do it. The reason why Hosea’s adultery was not wrong was because it was his right, which God had given to him. And the reason God is able to give such rights is because He is the Lord of all. He is the Lord of property, He is the Lord of life and death, and He is the Lord of marriage, having authority over all of these things to do what He wants with

---

<sup>26</sup> Andrew of Neufchateau, *Questions on an Ethics of Divine Commands*, translated by Janine Idziak (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Quinn, “Divine Command Theory,” p. 90.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, second and revised edition, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), retrieved from *New Advent*, URL = <<https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>> (I-II, q. 100, a. 8).

them.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it seems that God's commands can in fact make something that is normally wrong, right.

But, and this is very important, "it appears to be only a contingent fact that there are at most a few such cases."<sup>30</sup> Though God, as a matter of fact, rarely commands, for example, people to kill others, this is not a necessary truth. In other words, "The properties, such as absolute power and lordship over life and death, in virtue of which divine commands have their moral effects, would still be possessed by God even if such commands were more numerous."<sup>31</sup> The only reason why killing humans is normally wrong today is because God, as a matter of contingent fact, happened to forbid most killings of humans. It, presumably, could have been otherwise. Thus runs Quinn's fourth piece of evidence.

Therefore, it seems clear to me that God's commands, at least some of the time, *make* certain actions obligatory, optional, or wrong. In the Jonah story, for example, God's commands make it obligatory for Jonah to go to Nineveh and to call out against it. But, then, we must ask the following: if the reason why Jonah was obligated to go to Nineveh and to call out against it was because God had commanded him to do so, could anything overturn this obligatoriness? Could anything override God's command? If so, I know not what. In fact, given that God's commands can make even killing one's own son morally right, I don't know how anything could override His commands.

With all of this having been said, my divine command theory seems at least plausible, if not highly plausible, on the assumption that (the) God (of Christianity) exists.<sup>32</sup> I, therefore,

---

<sup>29</sup> Two things should be noted. First, as should be clear, I am not speaking here of epistemic authority. Instead, the authority of which I speak is moral (or political) in nature. Second, I am here talking of *de jure*, as opposed to *de facto*, authority.

<sup>30</sup> Philip Quinn, "Divine Command Theory," p. 91.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> I wonder whether a further piece of evidence can be derived from our theory of value, as detailed in the previous chapter. On this account, something is good iff it resembles God. But, on divine simplicity, God's will just is God.

conclude that God is the ultimate authority over the deontological status of actions. That is, if God commands someone to perform action A, A is thereby made (morally) obligatory, and nothing can change this except a further divine command; and if God forbids A, A is thereby made (morally) wrong, and nothing can change this except a further divine command; and if God wills A to be (morally) optional, A is thereby made (morally) optional, and nothing can change this except a further divine command

However, someone might object. Let's grant that God has authority over property and over marriage, such that He can command the Israelites to plunder the Egyptians and Hosea to commit adultery. Let's even grant that He can command the sacrifice of Isaac because He has the right to choose when and by what means (or by whom) He brings death upon sinners. Still, what about certain horrendous actions that seem just so utterly morally abhorrent that not even God has the authority to command in such a way and make them morally acceptable? For example, even if no one in this world is sinless, we can imagine possible worlds in which there are millions of innocent children. At the least, Adam was at one point sinless. Could God rightfully command someone to kill them? Could God make the massacre of millions of innocent children morally acceptable?<sup>33</sup> Surely not. Surely God has no power to make such a morally monstrous thing morally right. Thus, divine command theory, whatever the merits might be, cannot be correct. There is no possible world in which the massacre of millions of innocent children can be made right by God's commands.

---

Thus, something is good iff it resembles God's will. Because resemblances can be distant, fragmentary, analogous, or metaphorical, it might be that an action gets its goodness by virtue of the fact that it resembles God's will on account of the fact that it abides by God's will.

<sup>33</sup> This example is, I believe, from Thomas Senor when he presented divine command theory in his course on philosophy of religion that I took close to the beginning of my graduate school career. Philip Quinn has a similar case: "Divine Command Theory," p. 99.



By way of response, we should note a distinction between two things. As we pointed out in the previous chapter in connection with the tension between omnipotence and moral perfection, there is a distinction between God's ability and God's will. So too, there seems to be a distinction between God's *authority* and God's will. I agree that there is no possible world in which the massacre of millions of innocent children is made right by God's commands. But I do not think that this is because God has no authority over the matter. Instead, I think it is because God has no *will* to do so. That is, I think that God has the authority to do what He wants – He is the ultimate authority – but He is so good internally that there is no possible world in which God commands the massacre of millions of innocent children. In other words, what stops God from commanding certain things is His virtues. We have already presented the ideas in the previous chapter that God is supremely morally good and that God is Goodness Itself. The reason why God won't command certain things is because of His inner moral perfection that prevents Him from commanding things that are contrary to His nature, the nature of Goodness Itself.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, it seems (highly) plausible to me that my divine command theory is true (if the God of Christianity exists). Perhaps, in reality, some contrary theory of the deontological status of actions is correct by which we should evaluate God's actions, but this modest argument for divine command theory gives us plenty of reason to think that my divine command theory is plausible or has a very real possibility, enough for it to be employable in a defense against the problem of evil. Even so, because God commands (at least partially) from His virtues, we cannot stop here and cannot simply move on to my divine glory defense. If we are to determine what commands God very well might have commanded Himself (if any), we must now look at the

---

<sup>34</sup> See Philip Quinn, "Divine Command Theory," pp. 99-101. See also both Robert Adams, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again," pp. 67, 76-77; and William Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," pp. 303-326.

nature of some of God's virtues. Not only will this tell us what God would or would not plausibly command Himself, but it will also tell us, more broadly, what God would virtuously do, what God would virtuously strive for, and what God would virtuously desire.<sup>35</sup>

## B. The Perfect Love of God: The Nature of Perfect Love

God, being the greatest possible being, is perfect in love, but how exactly should we understand God's perfect love? In this section and the next, I will argue that, plausibly, God's perfect love seeks both the good of and union with His beloveds, and that He loves Himself or His people more than the damned.<sup>36</sup>

First, what exactly does love – or at least the *perfect* love of *God* – seek with regard to the beloved? Intuitively it seeks two things: the good of the beloved and union with the beloved.<sup>37</sup> If

---

<sup>35</sup> One might claim that if one desires something, then one has a lack. But, if this claim is correct, because God has no lack, God has no desires. This was first pointed out to me, I believe, by Jason Miller in conversation. Alvin Plantinga echoes this in his *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 319. By way of response, if we accept the claim that desiring entails a lack – and this is not obviously true to begin with – I think we can simply change our language to be about preferences instead of desires. I do not think that preferences have any hint or implication of a lack. It might be that God, being completely and utterly full and happy within Himself, simply prefers for certain things to take place. Or, perhaps we can say that, instead of having desires, God has, as Linda Zagzebski has proposed, motives with no end (Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 72-73, 213-219). See also Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" in *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 217; and Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989), p. 448. One further solution might be that God is God's own last end and highest desire in all that He does. By placing Himself as His last end and highest desire, and because He already has Himself, He has no lack and remains *a se*. See *ibid.*, p. 450; and Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" p. 215. This fits well with the claim that I will make in the upcoming sections that God loves Himself primarily.

<sup>36</sup> Again, as noted in the previous chapter, discussion of animals, human children, and mentally disabled humans will be picked up in the last chapter. Also, I ignore all alien and supernatural beings because I do not know enough about them, and discussion of loving them will take us too far afield. See footnote 96 of Chapter II. Further, note that I am only talking about love for sentient beings. Though I do think that substantive love can be directed at non-sentient things (cf. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 317-318), in which case I do not want to go as far as Norman Kretzmann does in saying that full-fledged love involves a relationship between persons (Norman Kretzmann, "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" in *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 247), nevertheless discussion of love for non-sentient things would take us too far afield.

<sup>37</sup> See Norman Kretzmann, "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" pp. 246-247; Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 91. They both cite Aquinas in support of their position. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (I-II, q. 26, a. 2 and 4). Note also that these aims are

I were to perfectly love someone, surely I would seek their good. I would not want bad to happen to them, and I would want them to flourish. This seems to be how Francis Hutcheson understood love. He said, “If we examine all the Actions which are counted amiable any where, and enquire into the Grounds upon which they are approv’d, we shall find, that in the Opinion of the Person who approves them, they always appear as Benevolent, or flowing from Love of others, and a Study of their Happiness”.<sup>38</sup> Whatever else we say about his normative ethical theory,<sup>39</sup> Hutcheson is right to make the connection between love for someone and aiming to advance their happiness.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, if I were to perfectly love someone, I would not passively desire their good. I would actively pursue it when able. A love that sits on the couch, like a sack of potatoes, desiring the beloved to flourish yet doing nothing to advance it, is not a perfect love at all. Of course, there are people who are weak or disabled, unable to actively do anything for the good of their beloveds. No one is denying this. But we are talking about God, who is omnipotent. He is not incapable of acting. Thus, God’s perfect love will actively pursue the good of His beloved.

---

probably pursued in balance with one another. See Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 70-71.

<sup>38</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold (Liberty Fund, 2008), p. 116.

<sup>39</sup> As discussed in the previous section, I think that God has commanded humans to love. Divine command theory, then, I propose, is the fundamental theory of the deontological status of actions, but it practically manifests itself (perhaps only in part) as a virtue ethical theory, at least for humans. Note that Hutcheson seems to have rejected divine command theory:

It must then first be suppos’d, that there is something in Actions which is apprehended absolutely good; and this is Benevolence, or a Tendency to the publick natural happiness of rational Agents; and that our moral Sense perceives this Excellence. And then we call the Laws of the Deity good, when we imagine that they are contriv’d to promote the publick Good in the most effectual and impartial manner. And the Deity is call’d good, in a moral Sense, when we apprehend that his whole Providence tends to the universal Happiness of his Creatures; whence we conclude his Benevolence, and Delight in their Happiness (Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, p. 182).

<sup>40</sup> For simplicity, I will assume that flourishing, happiness, well-being, and blessedness are all roughly the same.

Additionally, the perfect love of God is unitive in nature. It wants and, therefore, actively pursues, instead of merely passively accepting, (for the same reason mentioned in the above paragraph,) union with the beloved. God's perfect love doesn't just drive Him to desire things *about* those whom He loves, namely their flourishing. He desires *the people themselves*. Alvin Plantinga correctly points out that God's love for His people is regularly compared in Scripture to that of a groom.<sup>41</sup> Thus, "The church is the *bride* of Christ, not his little sister. He is not her benevolent elder brother, but her husband, lover. ... [These scriptural images] suggest that God's love for his people involves an erotic element of desire: he desires the right kind of response from us, and union with us, just as we desire union with him."<sup>42</sup> Though this quote from Plantinga only discusses God's love for His people, we can extend it and say more broadly that God's perfect love seeks union with anyone whom He loves, actively pursuing this union, just like He actively pursues their good, given that He is omnipotent.

These two pursuits within love are seen perhaps most clearly in dramas in which the beloved has an opportunity to advance their own well-being, but which, if taken, will drive them away from their lover. The lover, though wanting and seeking their beloved's good, also wants and seeks union with the beloved. This causes tension, and hard decisions have to be made. This fact that the decision is hard indicates that there really are substantive desires connected with love that drive the lover to seek both the flourishing of and union with the beloved.

So far, so good. At this point, we should ask whom God loves, whether He loves some people more than others, and whom He loves the most if He loves some more than others. To address these questions, we should first examine whether God loves all to the same extent. Jeff Jordan considers the following proposition: if God exists and is perfect, then God's love must be

---

<sup>41</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 312.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320, emphasis in the original.

maximally extended and equally intense.<sup>43</sup> To be more precise, the proposition claims that if God exists and is perfect, then God's love has everyone as its object, and His love for each person is equally maximal. Ultimately, Jordan rejects this proposition, and for good reason:

[A] human who loved all other humans equally and impartially would have a life significantly impoverished. Much of the richness of life flows from one's friendships and one's spouse and one's children, and within these attachments there is a love which is neither impartial nor equally shared by all other persons, as one loves her beloved more than she does others. It is not just that one manifests her love for the beloved differently from how one manifests her love for others. No, a person appropriately loves his own children more than other children. And without the inequality of love, one's life would be diminished. The topography of love cannot be flat if it is to enhance one's life. Indeed, a life in which all loves are flat, because of a lack of the deep attachments of close friends, or a spouse, or children, is clearly a defective life, as the deep attachments of love and friendship play a large role in making life worth living. It is the affectionate relationships which are, so to speak, the peaks of life breaking up the flatness of deficiency.<sup>44</sup>

There's something profoundly good about abounding in utter love for certain people, even though you do not do the same for others. Pouring one's life into one's spouse and children more than others is incredibly valuable.

It might be objected at this point that the reason why loving some more than others is valuable, is because we are thinking in terms of humans, who are limited. Once we consider God, the same cannot be said. That is, the reason why we find it valuable to utterly love only some and not others, is because we value deep love, and humans, who are limited, can deeply love only so many people; but God is not limited in this way. Hence, as Robert Adams says, "To be sure, human lovers have limited capacity for attention, which leads us to compete for their attention. ... [B]ut divine capacities are presumably not limited in such a way that attention to one creature would diminish the attention God could give to another."<sup>45</sup> Let's grant the point.

---

<sup>43</sup> Jeff Jordan, "The Topography of Divine Love," *Faith and Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2012), p. 53.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 174.

Yes, the deep love of humans can be directed only towards some because they are limited in power and resources. This is true. But it is also equally true that deep love itself can be directed only towards some for a separate reason that has nothing to do with limited power or resources.

What reason might this be? Jordan explains:

Since persons have incompatible interests, it follows that one cannot befriend all in the deepest sense, as it is not possible to identify with the interests of all, when those interests are incompatible. ... If friendship, like love, includes identifying with the interests of the friend, then it is in-principle not possible to love or befriend every person equally given that persons have incompatible interests. If Jones takes as his own your interests, he cannot identify with any interest incompatible with yours. Suppose Smith's interests conflict with yours. It would not be possible for Jones to identify equally with your interests and with the interests of Smith, so Jones cannot befriend or love Smith as much as he loves you. And this is not just a practical matter, or a matter of limited resources. If God were to love certain humans, and thereby identify with their interests, then God could not identify with incompatible interests. In other words, even God cannot love or befriend every human in the deepest way. ... A life which had all its loves perfectly flat could not have close or deep friendships, and would lack the great goods associated with the deeper kinds of attachments.<sup>46</sup>

That is, because humans have (possibly) conflicting interests, it is, strictly speaking, not possible for someone to love everyone maximally. For, if a person P were to love everyone maximally, P would pursue the goods of everyone whenever possible. We can frame this in terms of maximal devotion, which, as Michael Rea says, "requires [] that *nothing else is of equal or higher priority*—the maximally devoted person is not disposed to sacrifice the object of devotion for the sake of any other object or goal. ... [M]aximal devotion to something is ... a disposition to promote that thing *regardless* of whether it conflicts with other goods one might wish to promote."<sup>47</sup> Now, because the maximally loving person is maximally devoted, pursuing the good

<sup>46</sup> Jeff Jordan, "The Topography of Divine Love," pp. 62-63.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, p. 70, footnote 12; and p. 76, emphases in the original. Note that a person P could, in theory, alternate between serving one beloved B1 and serving another beloved B2 who have conflicting interests. That is, P could serve both B1 and B2 equally when there are no conflicting interests, and when there are conflicting interests, P could alternate between serving B1 and B2. (If the number of conflicting interests is odd, P could, just once, pick to serve either B1 or B2 at random.) However, maximal devotion is inconsistent with this. If P

of the beloved whenever possible, it follows that a person who maximally loves everyone is maximally devoted to everyone, pursuing everyone's good whenever possible. But because the goods of people (possibly) conflict, P cannot pursue the goods of everyone whenever possible, from which it follows that P cannot love everyone maximally. Hence, if P were to love anyone maximally, P would love some more than others. That is, P would love the person whom P loves maximally more than all those whom P does not love maximally.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, uniting all of these thoughts together, we should say the following. Because God is perfect in love, He maximally loves and is maximally devoted to some. Deep love for some is more valuable than shallow(er) love for many. It is simply a better thing for God to have a maximally deep love for some that is of the highest quality, even if this means that God cannot love all to the same degree, than to have a shallower but equal love for many.<sup>49</sup> Thus, God loves some maximally. But because, assuming that there are (possibly) conflicting interests among

---

is maximally devoted to B1, P will serve B1 in all possible scenarios, including scenarios in which serving B1 conflicts with serving B2.

<sup>48</sup> Note that, as I have alluded to in the main text, if two people have even *possibly* conflicting interests, a person cannot love them both maximally. Rea points out that “*maximal* devotion to something is not just a matter of pursuing it when it poses no conflicts with other things one values; it is, rather, a disposition to promote that thing *regardless* of whether it conflicts with other goods one might wish to promote” (Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, p. 76, emphases in the original). Thus, a maximally devoted person would pursue the good of the beloved in all possible scenarios. Thus, if I am maximally devoted to person P, I will pursue the good of P in all possible scenarios. But if the interests of P possibly conflict with the interests of person P', then there is a possible scenario in which I cannot pursue the interests of both P and P'. I must make a choice. Thus, if I am maximally devoted to P, I will pursue the good of P and not the good of P' in this possible scenario in which their interests conflict; in which case, I am not maximally devoted to P' if the interests of P and P' possibly conflict, and if I am already maximally devoted to P. Thus, if I am maximally devoted to two people, they cannot even have possibly conflicting interests.

Perhaps more succinctly, by being maximally devoted to P, I will pursue the good of P in all possible scenarios. So, in any possible scenario in which the interests of P and P' conflict, I will pursue the interests of P instead of P', in which case I am not maximally devoted to P'. Thus, if I am maximally devoted to both P and P', it cannot even be possible for the interests of P and P' to conflict.

<sup>49</sup> Compare this to the idea that some higher quality goods we would not trade for any amount of certain lower quality goods. See John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, fourth edition (Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1871); in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan (Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), pp. 1072a-1073b; Roger Crisp, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Mill on Utilitarianism* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), pp. 23-25; and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, second edition, translated by Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing Company, 2000); in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan (Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), p. 345b (Bk. 9, Ch. 8, 1169a18-1169b1).

persons, God cannot love everyone maximally, He must love some more than others. He loves those whom He loves maximally more than He loves those whom He does not love maximally.

Note two things. First, the assumption mentioned here, that there are (possibly) conflicting interests among persons, will not be defended in this chapter. It will be taken up in the last. I leave it for then. Hence, I conclude for now that God's perfect love cannot be maximally extended and equally intense. God must love some more than others. Second, so far, the reasoning presented has been about God's pursuit of the good of His beloved. But we must remember that being maximally devoted to some doesn't just entail pursuing the good of the beloved in all possible scenarios. It also entails pursuing (perfect) union with the beloved in all possible scenarios. But, if there are (possible) conflicts with God being (perfectly) united with all people, for the same reasons offered above, God cannot be maximally devoted to everyone. Thus, because God is maximally devoted to some, if there are (possible) conflicts with God being (perfectly) united with all people, God loves some more than others. To save space, I will leave to the side discussion of whether there are (possible) conflicts with God being (perfectly) united with all people.

From this, I propose that we think of God's love in terms of a hierarchy. God Himself, God's people, and the damned are all on it, each belonging to some tier.<sup>50</sup> In the first tier is

---

<sup>50</sup> Two things should be noted. First, for simplicity, I will speak of God's people on the whole and the damned on the whole. The hierarchy gets *much* more complicated once we introduce discussion of individuals within each group. For example, I'm inclined to think that there can be multiple individuals within one group and that individuals within a group can have higher or lower positions within that group. I'm also inclined to say that loving a group on the whole entails loving all the individuals in that group in balance, while privileging those in higher positions. I do not have the space here to get into the details, so I leave them to the side.

Second, I am assuming in this work that God loves everyone, including the damned, to at least some extent. However, there might well be some sense in which God hates the damned. Aquinas said, "God loves all men and all creatures, inasmuch as He wishes them all some good; but He does not wish every good to them all. So far, therefore, as He does not wish this particular good—namely, eternal life—He is said to hate or reprobated them" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, (I, q. 23, a. 3)). Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989), p. 390.



God's primary beloved, in the second tier is God's secondary beloved, and in the third tier is God's tertiary beloved. This continues until there are no further objects of God's love. Because God is perfectly loving, there is at least someone whom He maximally loves and to whom He is maximally devoted, seeking their good and union with them whenever possible. This someone is in the first tier. Now, this first tier could also include others. For example, if X and Y have no (possibly) conflicting interests, and if God can be (perfectly) united to them both in all possible scenarios, they might both be in the first tier.<sup>51</sup> That is, if the good of one does not (possibly) conflict with the good of another, and if God could be (perfectly) united to both in all possible scenarios, then God could, in principle, be maximally devoted to both, perfectly pursuing the good of both and perfectly pursuing (perfect) union with both, with no conflicts ever arising.<sup>52</sup> But if they do have (possibly) conflicting interests, or if God cannot be (perfectly) united to both in all possible scenarios, then they cannot both be in the first tier. So, one of them must be in a lower tier.

Now, the second tier is just like the first tier but with one change. Whereas for the first tier, God seeks the good of the beloved and union with the beloved whenever possible, period, end of story; for those in the second tier, God seeks their good and union with them whenever possible, once, as it were, God has finished both His pursuit of the good of the first-tier beloved and His pursuit of union with the first-tier beloved. Perhaps we can think of this in terms of God's ordination. When God ordains all things authorially, His first objective of love is to

---

<sup>51</sup> I say "might" because there might be reasons for keeping some particular beloved out of the first tier even if there are no (possibly) conflicting interests and even if God can be (perfectly) united to them in all possible scenarios. See, for example, the arguments in the next section by Edwards and Rea on why God should love Himself primarily.

<sup>52</sup> This helps explain God's intra-Trinitarian love, which involves each person of the Trinity loving equally every other member of the Trinity. For example, God the Father loves God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to the same degree. (Similarly, God the Father might also love Himself, namely God the Father, to the same degree.) He does not love one more than the other, but He abounds in love for both, equally. The reason, of course, why God the Father can love both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit equally is because they do not have (possibly) conflicting interests and because God the Father can be (perfectly) united to them both in all possible scenarios.

advance the good of the first-tier beloved as much as possible and to be united with the first-tier beloved to the highest extent. Once He has made sure that these things will be brought about, He then sets out to advance the good of the second-tier beloved as much as possible and to be united with the second-tier beloved to the highest extent. Because things have already been planned to advance the good of the first-tier beloved as much as possible and for God to be united with the first-tier beloved to the highest extent, any conflicts of interest or conflicts of union that might arise between the first-tier and second-tier beloveds will always fall in such a way that the first-tier beloved is benefitted more than the second-tier beloved.

The same reasoning applies for the third and fourth and fifth tiers. God, as it were, when He is in the process of authorially ordaining all things, ordains the good of and union with the higher-tiered beloveds first, and then turns to ordain the good of and union with the lower-tiered beloveds next. It is sort of like a checklist. He makes sure to get the most important things done first, and then He turns to the less important ones. For example, here is how the divine mind might work in part:

*What would benefit my primary beloved(s) the most? X would, so I will ordain X. Can my second-tier beloved(s) be benefitted by X as well? Yes, they can! That's wonderful! I am glad that I have ordained X. What about my third-tier beloved(s)? Can X benefit them if X happens in a specific way? No, there is no way for them to be benefitted by X. But there is a way for them to be benefitted if I ordain Y, which has no causal impact on any higher beloveds, so I will ordain Y. Still, there is a way for my fourth-tier beloved(s) to be benefitted by X if X happens in way W, and way W does not make my higher-tier beloveds experience any less happiness, nor does it prevent me from being (perfectly) united to them, so I will ordain X to happen in way W so that my first-, second-, and fourth-tier beloveds can be benefitted. Now, what about my fifth-tier beloved(s)?*

Though this is rather crude and simplistic, and though God's mind includes many other variables, and though God probably thinks more holistically than systematically, it should get across the point well enough. God's primary interest is in advancing the good of and union with

the first-tier beloved(s), after which He is interested in the second-tier beloveds, and then the third-tier beloveds. This continues until the hierarchy is complete.

A question arises: can second-tier beloveds (or even lower-tier beloveds) have conflicting interests among themselves? Yes, they can. I have presented the second tier in the following way: God seeks the good of and union with those in the second tier whenever possible, *once, as it were, He has finished both His pursuit of the good of the first-tier beloved and His pursuit of union with the first-tier beloved*. If there are conflicting interests in the second tier, their conflicts must be, as it were, resolved while God pursues the good of and union with the first-tier beloved(s). If they are not resolved, such that (possibly) conflicting interests remain after God has, as it were, finished His pursuit of the good of and union with His primary beloved(s), then the two beloveds with (possibly) conflicting interests cannot be in the second tier.

For example, the following seems to be coherent. Suppose that it is in the best interest of first-tier beloved B1 to marry person P. And suppose it is also in the interest of second-tier beloved B2 for B1 to marry P (perhaps because P is B2). But suppose that this conflicts with the interests of second-tier beloved B2'. B1 marrying P is contrary to the interests of B2'. This is coherent because, when God ordains all things, He plans to bring about the good of B1 first. He will, thus, plan for B1 to marry P. It is *only after this* that God considers His second-tier beloveds. Assuming that there are no further (possible) conflicts of interest, because God has satisfied His first objective of love, God can pursue the good of and union with both B2 and B2' in all possible *remaining* scenarios. But if there are further (possible) conflicting interests, then B2 and B2' cannot both be in the same tier because if God were to pursue, say, the good of B2 in all possible remaining scenarios, God will not be able to pursue the good of B2' in all possible remaining scenarios. And the same sort of thing can be said for union with multiple beloveds:

there can be unitive conflicts between those in the second tier, as long as there are no further (possible) conflicts after God has satisfied His first objective of love.<sup>53</sup>

### C. The Perfect Love of God: The Hierarchy of God's Love

Given the hierarchy of God's love, we must now ask: whom, then, does God love primarily, secondarily, and tertiarily? I will argue two things. First, I will argue that there is a very real possibility that God loves Himself primarily. Second, I will argue that, at the very least, God loves Himself or His people primarily, such that He loves either Himself or His people more than the damned.

First, what reasons can be offered in favor of the claim that there is a very real possibility that God loves Himself primarily? There are at least three. First, self-love is an important form of love. This is certainly true for humans, as will be argued momentarily. And if it is true for humans, the same might well be true for God, in whose image we have been created. Though this point does not, in and of itself, have a comparative component to it, such that it says nothing on its own about whether God loves Himself more than anyone else, let alone primarily, it does provide indirect support for the claim that God loves Himself primarily by showing that God's love for Himself should be taken seriously and that God's love for Himself might well be very deep.

So, what can be said in support of the claim that self-love is an important form of love for humans? First, Adam Smith claimed that we humans naturally prefer our own happiness above others and that this is good in a certain respect.<sup>54</sup> He said, "Every man is, no doubt, by nature,

---

<sup>53</sup> These same thoughts can be applied to those in lower tiers.

<sup>54</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Liberty Fund, 1982), pp. 82-83 (II.ii.2.1).

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.”<sup>55</sup> We are, in large part, our own primary caretakers because we are more fit to tend to ourselves than to tend to any other person and because other people are more fit to tend to themselves instead of to us. It is good, therefore, for us to love ourselves and to be driven by self-love to take care of ourselves primarily.<sup>56</sup> And even if this is too strong of a claim, perhaps because we should love God more than any other, including ourselves,<sup>57</sup> it does convey accurately that loving ourselves is important.<sup>58</sup>

The thoughts in the above paragraph should certainly be understood as saying that we should attend to our own well-being. A caretaker seeks what is good for those being cared for, so if we should be our own caretakers, we should seek our own good. But we should not ignore self-love’s additional pursuit of self-*union* (which might well be part of taking care of oneself). As Eleonore Stump has noted, “a person can be divided against herself. She can lack internal integration in her mind, and the result will be that she is, as we say, double-minded. She can also lack whole-heartedness or integration in the will.”<sup>59</sup> For example, if a person both wills and does not will the same thing, she is internally divided against herself.<sup>60</sup> Another example might be a

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 82 (II.ii.2.1).

<sup>56</sup> Two points should be noted in connection with Smith’s claims here. First, he says that we must humble our self-love and must refrain from causing harm to others in order to benefit ourselves. Second, the reason why we must not cause harm to others in order to benefit ourselves is, says Smith, because we humans are (roughly) equal to one another and, in the grand scheme of things, largely insignificant (Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 82-83 (II.ii.2.1)). God, of course, is neither equal to humans, nor largely insignificant in the grand scheme of things (see Mark Murphy, *God’s Own Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 55-57).

<sup>57</sup> This point will be discussed below.

<sup>58</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 344b-345b (Bk. 9, Ch. 8, 1168a28-1169b1). Therein Aristotle says, “For it is said that we must love most the friend who is most a friend; and one person is a friend to another most of all if he wishes goods to the other for the other’s sake, even if no one will know about it. But these are features most of all of one’s relation to oneself; ... [O]ne is a friend to himself most of all. Hence, he should also love himself most of all. ... [E]very understanding chooses what is best for itself and the decent person obeys his understanding” (Ibid., pp. 344b and 345b (Bk. 9, Ch. 8, 1168b1-4, 9-10, 1169a17-18)). I thank Bryan Reece for directing my attention to this passage.

<sup>59</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 100.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

woman who both doubts and believes in God at the same time. And just like our taking care of ourselves and seeking our own good is important, it also seems important for us to seek union or oneness within ourselves by being internally integrated. Indeed, it might be that we must be internally integrated in order fully to flourish, which self-love certainly cares about. Thus, self-love, with its pursuit of our own good and our own internal integration, is a very important love for humans. And if it is important for humans, it might very well be important for God as well.

Relatedly, God's pursuit of His own interests and desires is one thing that Michael Rea has recently emphasized.<sup>61</sup> Appealing to the work of Susan Wolf,<sup>62</sup> he points out that "part of what it is for God to be genuinely and perfectly personal is for God to be someone with interests and desires distinct from and not necessarily oriented around those of others, projects that further those interests and desires, and a personality that is at least partly expressive of them."<sup>63</sup> And it is good for God to pursue these various interests and desires and projects. Hence, Rea says,

One odd feature of much contemporary philosophy of religion is that it seems to portray God as having a 'personality' that is almost entirely empty, allowing his behavior to be almost exhaustively determined by facts about how it would be best *for others* for an omnipotent being to behave. But why should we think of God like this? God is supposed to be a person not only of unsurpassable love and goodness but of unsurpassable beauty. Could God really be *that* sort of person if he's nothing more than a cosmic, others-oriented, utility-maximizing machine? On that way of thinking, God—the being who is supposed to be a person *par excellence*—ends up having no real *self*.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, putting the thoughts of the last few paragraphs together, it seems right to conclude that God should deeply love Himself and that He should pursue His own interests and His own desires. This is a good thing for Him to do. Again, though this point does not, in and of itself,

---

<sup>61</sup> Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, pp. 72-79; and Michael Rea, "Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence," in *Philosophy of Religion*, sixth edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Wadsworth, 2012), pp. 271b-274b.

<sup>62</sup> Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (1982).

<sup>63</sup> Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, p. 74.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Rea, "Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence," p. 274b, emphases in the original.

have a comparative component to it, such that it says nothing on its own about whether God loves Himself more than anyone else, let alone primarily, it does provide indirect support for the claim that God loves Himself primarily by showing that God's love for Himself should be taken seriously and that God's love for Himself might well be very deep.

My second reason for thinking that God loves Himself primarily is that God is the most appropriate object of love for anyone, including God Himself. We can see this through a brief look at what Jonathan Edwards says. He mentions two types of love. There is love of benevolence and love of complacence. The former is a matter of seeking (or, at least, desiring or taking delight in) the good of that which has existence. For example, because a cat has existence, a person who has the love of benevolence will seek (or, at least, desire or take delight in) the good of the cat. But a perfect love of benevolence, says Edwards, seeks (or, at least, desires or takes delight in) the good of the existing thing in proportion to the amount of existence it has.<sup>65</sup> The latter is a matter of delighting in beauty itself (primarily moral beauty). For example, a person with the love of complacence will take delight in a morally beautiful display of virtue. But, just like with the love of benevolence, a perfect love of complacence delights in that which is beautiful in proportion to how beautiful it is.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, if we follow Alvin Plantinga, delighting in beauty probably has a unitive desire associated with it. While considering the yearning and longing that we have when experiencing something of true beauty, he says, "it isn't easy to say with any precision what the longing is a longing *for*, but it can seem to be for a sort of union: it's as if you want to be absorbed into the music, to become part of the ocean, to be at one with the landscape."<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 542, 545-546, 550-551.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 539, 542-543, 546-549, 550-551, 561-562. Cf. Mark Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, pp. 23, 42, and 45.

<sup>67</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 318, emphasis in the original.

But, says Edwards, God has not only the most being, but also the most beauty.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, God has them infinitely so. Hence, Edwards says that true virtue, for anyone, whether creaturely or divine, primarily consists in love to God:

From what has been said, 'tis evident that true virtue must chiefly consist in love to God; the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best of beings. ... God has infinitely the greatest share of existence, or is infinitely the greatest being. So that all other being, even that of all created things whatsoever, throughout the whole universe, is as nothing in comparison of the Divine Being. ... [And] as God is infinitely the greatest being, so he is allowed to be infinitely the most beautiful and excellent: and all the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation, is but the reflection of the diffused beams of that Being who hath an infinite fullness of brightness and glory. ... Therefore he that has true virtue, consisting in benevolence to Being in general, and in that complacence in virtue, or moral beauty, and benevolence to virtuous being, must necessarily have a supreme love to God, both of benevolence and complacence. And all true virtue must radically and essentially, and as it were summarily, consist in this.<sup>69</sup> Because God is not only infinitely greater and more excellent than all other being, but he is the head of the universal system of existence; the foundation and fountain of all being and all beauty; from whom all is perfectly derived, and on whom all is most absolutely and perfectly dependent; *of whom*, and *through whom*, and *to whom* is all being and all perfection; and whose being and beauty is as it were the sum and comprehension of all existence and excellence: much more than the sun is the fountain and summary comprehension of all the light and brightness of the day.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, if God's perfect love contains both something like the perfect love of benevolence and something like the perfect love of complacence, which seems to have a unitive component to it,

---

<sup>68</sup> If being and beauty are the same, given divine simplicity, then the love of benevolence and the love of complacence might collapse into one. Edwards seems to allude to this possibility (Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, p. 542).

<sup>69</sup> The language of "all true virtue" entails that Edwards thinks that, as said, true virtue, for anyone, whether creaturely or divine, primarily consists in love to God.

<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, pp. 550-551, emphases in the original. Edwards speaks of two objects of truly virtuous love: being, simply considered, and benevolent being, which is moral or spiritual beauty. Benevolent being is the object, says he, of *both* the love of benevolence *and* the love of complacence (Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, pp. 545-549). He says, "For he that has a simple and pure good will to general entity or existence must love that temper in others that agrees and conspires with itself" (Ibid., p. 547). In other words, perfect love of benevolence seeks the good of being in general, which naturally causes it to love other instances of the love of benevolence. Thus, perfect love of benevolence loves the love of benevolence. But the love of benevolence is moral or spiritual beauty. Thus, perfect love of benevolence loves moral or spiritual beauty. Still, moral or spiritual beauty is "the *primary* ground of [complacence]" (Ibid., p. 548, emphasis in the original). Thus, both perfect love of benevolence and perfect love of complacence love moral or spiritual beauty, of which God has an infinite amount. For simplicity, I have ignored this complication in the main text.



then God loves Himself primarily, seeking (or, at least, desiring or taking delight in) His own good and delighting in Himself, longing for union with Himself, above all others. Therefore, Edwards says, “From hence also it is evident that the *divine virtue*, or the virtue of the divine mind, must consist primarily in *love to himself*”.<sup>71</sup>

Rea appeals to similar intuitions when arguing that God is not maximally devoted to humans.<sup>72</sup> When there are conflicts between God’s pursuit of purely human goods and His pursuit of purely divine goods, Rea thinks that God *should* pursue divine goods instead of human goods. He says, “there is no more reason to think that the promotion of human goods should take priority than there is for thinking that the promotion of mosquito goods should take priority over the promotion of human goods.”<sup>73</sup> Additionally, Rea points out that, just like “[o]ne should not, for example, desire union ... with one’s cat to the same degree that one would desire union with a human spouse, sibling, or close friend”,<sup>74</sup> so too “human beings seem not to be appropriate objects for an unlimited divine desire for union.”<sup>75</sup> Instead, only a divine being or person is the appropriate object of unlimited unitive desire.<sup>76</sup> It is more fitting, then, for God to seek His own goods and union with Himself than it is for Him to pursue human goods and union with humans. Thus, God loves Himself primarily.

A third reason for thinking that God loves Himself primarily is (on the assumption that the WCF is largely, though perhaps not entirely, correct) the fact that God is triune (WCF 2.3).

---

<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, p. 557, emphases in the original. Cf. Marilyn McCord Adams, “The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians,” in *Reasoned Faith*, edited by Eleonore Stump (Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 308. Note that immediately after this quote, Edwards discusses intra-Trinitarian love. This foreshadows my third point. Cf. Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, pp. 76-78.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, pp. 72-79.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78. See also Mark Murphy, *God’s Own Ethics*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, p. 78. Rea also mentions intra-Trinitarian union and unitive desire. Again, this foreshadows my third point.

Take any particular person of the Trinity. If there are any people to whom His heart will most naturally be drawn to seek their good and union with them primarily, they are the other persons of the Trinity. If there are any worries with the idea of God loving Himself primarily, perhaps because it seems to make God out to be selfish, then this should alleviate them. God the Father might not love Himself primarily on account of the fact that this would be selfishness, but He might nevertheless love God the Son and God the Holy Spirit primarily, seeking their good and union with them primarily. If God the Father really is, in some substantive sense, a *father* to God the Son, it is very reasonable to think that God the Father most naturally loves God the Son primarily and that God the Son most naturally loves God the Father primarily. And the same can be said for God the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from both the Father and the Son.<sup>77, 78</sup>

Therefore, with everything having been said, we can conclude that there is a very real possibility that God loves Himself primarily. Admittedly, none of these arguments in any way decisively shows that God loves Himself primarily. Because God is perfectly loving, God must love *someone* primarily, but *whom* He loves primarily might well be a matter of choice. Choice

---

<sup>77</sup> This seems to be the view taken by Timothy Keller. See his *The Reason for God* (Riverhead Books, 2008), pp. 223-225.

<sup>78</sup> Consider one of the main parts of Richard Swinburne's account of the Trinity. He says, "Love is sharing, giving to the other what of one's own is good for him and receiving from the other what of his is good for one; and love is cooperating with another to benefit third parties" (Richard Swinburne, "Could There Be More Than One God?" *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 3 (1988), p. 233). Given this, he goes on to say,

Now a first God is the almighty principle of being; but for his choice there would be none other with whom to share. So the divine love of a first God  $G_1$  would be manifested first in creating another God  $G_2$  with whom to share his life, and the divine love of  $G_1$  or  $G_2$  would be manifested in creating another god [sic]  $G_3$  with whom  $G_1$  and  $G_2$  cooperatively could share their lives (Ibid., p. 234).

(Why create other Gods and not finite creatures? Swinburne says, "If God is love, he must share, and sharing with finite beings such as humans is imperfect sharing. God's love has to be manifested in a sharing with a God" (Ibid., p. 237).) Putting this into terms more in line with the WCF (WCF 2.3), God the Father begets God the Son so that He (God the Father) might share life with another divine person. Further, God the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and God the Son so that they (God the Father and God the Son) might cooperate in sharing their lives with a third divine person. In other words, the reason why God is triune, suggests Swinburne, is because of God's desire to love perfectly. (Note that the aim of section IV of Swinburne's article (Richard Swinburne, "Could There Be More Than One God?" pp. 234-237) is meant to explain how his idea fits within orthodox Christianity.)

seems to be a real factor (if it is not the ultimate deciding factor)<sup>79</sup> when it comes to the objects of our love, or at least the objects of the love of a free God.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, it might be that God can choose to cast His love upon the most unworthy or most despicable of humans such that He loves them more than all others, even though God's love might be most naturally drawn out to His infinitely beautiful self, inclining Him to love Himself primarily.<sup>81</sup> As John Bunyan once said, "Love in Christ requireth no taking beauteousness in the object to be beloved ... It can act *of* and *from* itself, without all such kind of dependencies. This is manifest to all who have the least true knowledge of what that object is in itself, on which the Lord Jesus has set his heart to love them."<sup>82</sup> Thus, the most we can say is that it very well might be that God loves Himself primarily, knowing also that, nevertheless, it could be that God has instead cast His love upon someone else in such a way that God loves them more than He loves Himself.

Let us now turn to our second point. At the least, God loves either Himself or His people primarily, and therefore He loves either Himself or His people more than the damned. If God does love Himself primarily, because I am assuming that God and His people have conflicting interests with the damned, which will be discussed in the last chapter, the damned must be in a lower tier. Thus, if God loves Himself primarily, God loves Himself more than the damned. But what if God does not love Himself primarily? If God does not love Himself primarily, then God must love His people primarily. Consider the following argument.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" pp. 208-211.

<sup>80</sup> Do we humans choose whom we love? As it is said, the heart wants what the heart wants. When I introspect, I find that I do not choose whom I love. Instead, I just find myself loving them. For God, though, it might be that the same cannot be said, given His freedom (see footnote 93 of Chapter I). Nevertheless, if God is not free to choose whom to love, the arguments just given suggest that God must love Himself primarily.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Robert Adams, "Must God Create the Best?" *The Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (1972), pp. 317-332, especially pp. 322-325.

<sup>82</sup> John Bunyan, *The Saints' Knowledge of Christ's Love*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, Volume 2, edited by George Offor (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), pp. 16b-17a, emphases in the original.

<sup>83</sup> As indicated above, I am only considering God, His people, and the damned.

To begin, we need to make clear what makes God's people, God's people, and what makes the damned, the damned. I think that there is at least one major characteristic of each group. God's people are those who experience Heaven, whereas the damned are those who experience Hell. I do not describe God's people as those whom God loves more than the damned because it might be that they are both in, say, the second tier of God's hierarchy of beloveds, with God in the first tier, in which case God's people and the damned will be loved by God equally. In such a scenario, conflicting interests between God's people and the damned will be, as it were, resolved while God pursues the good of and union with Himself. Thus, we cannot distinguish the two groups of people by God's love for them. How, then, can we distinguish the groups? One good way is to say that one group goes to Heaven, and the other goes to Hell.

However, prior to being classified as either God's people or the damned – that is, prior to eternal destinies being determined – there are three objects of God's love: God, Group X (made up entirely of humans), and Group Y (made up entirely of humans). If God is not God's primary beloved, then God must love either Group X or Group Y primarily. For, because God is perfectly loving, there is someone whom He maximally loves and to whom He is maximally devoted, seeking their good and union with them whenever possible. And because Group X and Group Y have conflicting interests, as I am assuming, which will be taken up in the last chapter, one of them must be God's primary beloved, and the other must be lower in the hierarchy of God's love. If Group X is loved primarily, then, as will be argued in the upcoming chapters, God will grant to them Heaven, and He will cast Group Y, whom God loves less, into Hell, in which case Group X will be God's people, and Group Y will be the damned. If, however, Group Y is loved primarily, then, for the same reasons, God will grant to them Heaven, and He will cast Group X, whom God loves less, into Hell, in which case Group Y will be God's people, and Group X will

be the damned. Whichever group God loves primarily, will be God's people, and whichever group God loves less, will be the damned. Thus, if God is not God's primary beloved, then God's people are in the first tier, and God loves them more than the damned.

From these observations, we can conclude that God loves either Himself or His people primarily, and therefore He loves either Himself or His people more than the damned. For, either God loves Himself primarily, or He does not love Himself primarily. If He loves Himself primarily, because His interests conflict with the interests of the damned, He loves Himself more than the damned, in which case it is true that God loves Himself or His people more than the damned. If, however, He does not love Himself primarily, then He loves His people primarily. And if He loves His people primarily, because their interests conflict with the interests of the damned, He loves His people more than the damned, in which case it is true that God loves Himself or His people more than the damned. Thus, either way, whether God loves Himself primarily or not – and if God does not love Himself primarily, then He loves His people primarily – God loves Himself or His people more than the damned.

#### D. The Perfect Justice of God: Respecting Rights

Now that we have addressed God's virtue of perfect love, we should presently turn to address God's virtue of perfect justice. In this section and the next, I will do two things. First, I will examine God's virtue of justice that pertains to respecting people's rights. Second, I will examine God's virtue of justice that pertains to balance, equality, and fairness.

First, one type of justice is respecting people's (moral) rights. For example, suppose that I own a property, say, a fence. If I own it, I have rights over it,<sup>84</sup> so if I do not give you permission,

---

<sup>84</sup> The fact that stealing is *morally* wrong and not just illegal indicates that property rights are not just legal rights but moral rights as well, especially if rights and duties entail one another, as will be discussed momentarily.

and if we are not within a circumstance that entails that my rights are overridden or revoked,<sup>85</sup> you cannot simply take it from me or do what you want with it without committing an injustice. The first form of justice, then, is a matter of respecting people's (moral) rights, whether these rights be property rights or rights to life or rights of something else entirely.

Now, this first form of justice is key in human affairs, and we filter much of our ethical thinking through it. We intuitively know that we must respect people's rights. We do not think that we can simply steal what belongs to our neighbors. Similarly, we do not think that we can simply take the lives of our fellow human beings, even if doing so benefits them.<sup>86</sup> In fact, one reason why so many people have deontological intuitions is because they intuitively understand this first form of justice. One of the biggest problems people have with utilitarianism is that it, at least *prima facie*, doesn't take the rights of others seriously. For example, the following is a classic case that has been used to argue against utilitarianism. Suppose you are doctor with five dying patients, each in need of a separate organ, and suppose that you can save all five if you take a healthy man (who happens to be in the hospital for routine tests), remove his organs, and distribute them to the five dying patients. Suppose, then, that you have two options: you can either do nothing, in which case the five will die and the healthy man will live, or you can take the healthy man's organs (without his consent) and give them to the five, in which case he will die but the five will live.<sup>87</sup> What should you do? Most, I gather, would

---

<sup>85</sup> While discussing Wesley Hohfeld's account of rights and privileges, David Kennedy says,

Sometimes the law gives the property owner a 'no right,' and gives to others a 'privilege' to interfere. For example, ordinarily, the owner of a field may insist that travelers on an adjacent road not enter upon her land (and the travelers thus have a corresponding duty not to enter). If the road is blocked by a snowdrift or other obstruction, however, travelers have a privilege to evade the obstacle by crossing the field, and the landowner has a 'no-right' to exclude them" (David Kennedy, "Wesley Hohfeld," in *The Canon of American Legal Thought*, edited by David Kennedy and William Fisher III (Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 49).

<sup>86</sup> See Philippa Foot, "Euthanasia," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 6, no. 2 (1977), pp. 100, 106, 108.

<sup>87</sup> This is from Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 3-4.

say that you should do nothing. Why? The intuitive thought is that the healthy man has rights over his body, over his organs, and over his life. We cannot simply take them without his consent. Doing so would be unjust.<sup>88</sup>

Indeed, this same thought explains why it does not matter if the action we perform is (partially) loving or courageous or otherwise virtuous (in some way that is independent of the first form of justice). If someone's rights are violated, injustice has been committed, and the act is morally unacceptable. Hence, even if stealing for one's wife is indicative of love or of courageousness or of some other virtue, one must not steal (unless given the privilege to do so, in which case, as Aquinas said above in section A of this chapter, it is not really theft at all).<sup>89</sup> Thus, the first form of justice is key in human affairs, something that we all (or at least most of us) intuitively understand and appreciate.

So far, so good. The first form of justice, which we all (for the most part) intuitively grasp and understand to be important, requires us to respect the rights of others. But what exactly are rights? Or, perhaps, better, is there anything that entails and is entailed by someone possessing a right? It seems so. Wesley Hohfeld proposes that rights (that is, claims) and duties are correlatives.<sup>90</sup> He says, "it is certain that even those who use the word and the conception 'right' in the broadest possible way are accustomed to thinking of 'duty' as the invariable correlative. ... In other words, if X has a right against Y that he shall stay off the former's land, the correlative (and equivalent) is that Y is under a duty toward X to stay off the place."<sup>91</sup> Thus,

---

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Alexander Pruss, "The First Sin," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 188; and Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by James Ellington (Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan (Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), pp. 966a-967b (428-431).

<sup>89</sup> This is an allusion to a famous thought experiment found in Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Development of Modes of Moral Thinking and Choice in the Years 10 to 16" (PhD dissertation, the University of Chicago, 1958), pp. 363-364.

<sup>90</sup> Wesley Hohfeld, "Some Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning," *The Yale Law Journal* 23, no. 1 (1913), pp. 28-32.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

according to Hohfeld, rights and duties entail one another,<sup>92</sup> and Hohfeld's views have become widely accepted.<sup>93</sup>

This helps make sense of why we feel so compelled to respect people's rights. Of course we must do what is just; we must respect people's (moral) rights because we must obey our (moral) duties. This means that the first form of justice is, ultimately, doing what we are (morally) obligated to do,<sup>94</sup> which is equivalent to respecting people's rights. If we have an obligation to perform action A, the first form of justice demands that we perform A. Not performing A would be unjust and wrong. If we have an obligation not to perform A (that is, if it is forbidden to perform A), then the first form of justice demands that we not do it. Performing A

---

<sup>92</sup> Here is a summary of Hohfeld's thoughts:

Crucially, Hohfeld proposes to use these legal terms only *in relationship to one another*. For example, he proposes to use the term *right* to describe a person's legal interest only where another person has a *duty*, and vice versa. In lay parlance, it was (and is) common to describe all sorts of interests as "rights." In Hohfeld's view, by contrast, one has a *legal right* only where the law imposes a *duty* on someone else. The right and the duty, moreover, will be parallel—each will define the scope of the other. For Hohfeld, the term *right* simply means that another person has a *duty*, while the term *duty* means that another person has a *right*. ...

In a similar fashion, Hohfeld attacks the vague and general use of terms like "freedom" and "liberty." If others have an enforceable "duty" to respect a legally protected interest of yours, you have a "right" correlative to their duty of noninterference. In the absence of such a duty to respect your interest, however, they have a "privilege" to intrude upon your interest, and you have what Hohfeld calls a "no-right" (David Kennedy, "Wesley Hohfeld," pp. 48-49, emphases in the original).

Note that, though Hohfeld writes from a legal perspective, his thoughts seem equally applicable to morality. Indeed, it seems that moral duties are simply moral laws (or, perhaps better, divine laws, given divine command theory). This helps explain the idea present in the following quote from Augustine: "a law that is not just does not seem to me to be a law" (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, in *Augustine: On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, edited by Peter King (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 10 (1.5.11.33)).

<sup>93</sup> Leif Wenar notes, "The Hohfeldian system for describing the form of rights is widely accepted, although there are scholarly quarrels about its details" (Leif Wenar, "Rights," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/rights/>>). I believe it was Bekka Williams who first made me aware that it is fairly common for philosophers to hold that rights and duties entail one another. For some material in opposition to this view, see Eleonore Stump, "God's Obligations," *Philosophical Perspectives* 6, Ethics (1992), pp. 478-482.

<sup>94</sup> Are duties and obligations the same? They seem to be. But, whether they are or not, I will use them synonymously in this work. This seems to be appropriate because people sometimes use them interchangeably in ordinary conversation. Hence, one of Merriam-Webster's definitions of *duty* is "a moral or legal obligation" (Merriam-Webster, s.v. "duty," accessed March 27, 2023, URL = <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/duty>>).



would be unjust and wrong. And if we have neither an obligation to perform A, nor an obligation not to perform A (that is, if it is not forbidden to perform A), then the first form of justice allows us to perform it. Performing A is optional because there is no right to violate because there is no correlative duty.

But here's the thing. Given my divine command theory, as has been argued above, God has ultimate authority over the deontological status of actions. If God commands us to perform action A, we are, thereby, (morally) required to perform A (and nothing can change this except a further divine command). What He commands must be done.<sup>95</sup> Action A will be (morally) obligatory for us to perform, and this means that the first form of justice will require us to perform it (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command because nothing, except a further divine command, can change the deontological status of an action that has been established by a previous divine command). Similarly, if God commands us not to perform A, it will be obligatory for us not to perform A, in which case the first form of justice will demand that we not perform A (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command). Additionally, if God so wills us not to have an obligation to perform A nor to have an obligation not to perform A, then we will have neither an obligation to perform A, nor an obligation not to perform A, in which case the first form of justice will allow us to perform it, and it will be optional for us to perform (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command). This means that what God commands dictates and determines what the first form of justice demands of people.

In other words, God's commands make actions obligatory, optional, or wrong, and these deontological statuses of actions determine what rights people have, if any. Thus, because the

---

<sup>95</sup> Cf. C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (HarperTrophy, 1981), pp. 23-24, 174-175.

first form of justice is respecting people's rights, God can command and, thereby, dictate what the first form of justice demands of people. For, if He commands a certain way and, thereby, makes it obligatory to perform (or not to perform) some action A, then He has assigning a corresponding right to someone (or to multiple people), in which case the first form of justice demands of people that they respect that right (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command); but if He commands a different way and, thereby, makes it the case that no one has a duty to perform A and that no one has a duty not to perform A, then He makes it the case that no one has a corresponding right, in which case the first form of justice does not demand of people that they respect that right because there will be no right to respect (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command). For example, if God commands agent A not to kill person P, then it will be obligatory for A not to kill P, in which case P will have a right to life against A, and the first form of justice will demand that A not kill P. But, if He wants, God could command in a certain way and remove any obligation for A not to kill P, in which case P will not have a right to life against A, and the first form of justice will not demand that A not kill P.

Given all of this, we must now ask the following: how does the first form of justice influence God's actions? I think it is fairly clear that, because God is the greatest possible being, in addition to being perfectly loving, God also possesses the virtue of perfect justice. This entails that He has the first form of justice as a virtue, in which case He respects people's rights.<sup>96</sup> However, you might ask: if God has ultimate authority over what is obligatory and, therefore, over what rights people have and, therefore, over what the first form of justice demands of

---

<sup>96</sup> Note that the virtue of the first form of justice has multiple functions. Its *primary* function is to constrain the virtue holder's actions in such a way that they respect people's rights. But it also has secondary functions. For example, it leads the virtue holder to desire others to act according to the first form of justice. Discussion of secondary functions just adds unnecessary complications, so I leave it to the side in the main text.

people, does God's virtue of the first form of justice do anything? Does it influence God at all? It does. Three things should be said.

First, strictly speaking, my divine command theory allows for the possibility that there are obligations and, therefore, rights, prior to any divine commands. For example, one part of my theory says, "if God commands someone to perform action A, A is thereby made (morally) obligatory, and nothing can change this except a further divine command." But this is consistent with there being obligations prior to any of His commands. It could be that are some initial obligations that are grounded in, say, God's nature, independently of any of His commands. And the first form of justice says that God must respect all rights, whatever their origins. Thus, if I were to have a right over a fence, grounded in God's nature, God would have to respect my right over that fence. As long as that right stays in existence, His virtue of the first form of justice will require Him to respect it. This means that God might be bound by the first form of justice before He ever commands anything.

Second, God might command certain things of Himself, and in such a case His virtue of the first form of justice will constrain His actions. For example, suppose that God commands that all covenants and promises be kept, whoever makes them. If God, then, enters into a covenant or makes a promise, His virtue of the first form of justice will constrain Him to keep His covenant or promise perfectly. It will not be possible for God to break it, at least as long as God's command that all covenants and promises be kept stays in effect. For, His command will make it obligatory that He keep all covenants and promises that He has made, in which case the first form of justice will demand of Him that He keep all covenants and promises that He has made.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> For related material, see William Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," pp. 304-316; and Eleonore Stump, "God's Obligations," pp. 475-491.

Third, it seems perfectly coherent to say that the Incarnate God (WCF 8.1-3) was bound by the law of God while He lived on earth. His virtue of the first form of justice constrained Him to do what the law had stated must be done. God had laid down the law, and His commands bound all people to obey it. So, when Jesus came on the scene, He also was bound to obey it, and His virtue of the first form of justice, constraining Him to respect all rights and, therefore, to obey all His duties, led Him to obey the law of God perfectly. Hence, the WCF states that Jesus “was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it” (WCF 8.4). As long as the law was in place, Jesus had to obey it.

That said, though the first form of justice does *something* to constrain God’s actions, it doesn’t really do much. Because God has ultimate authority over the deontological status of actions, He can, if ever He so chooses, simply strip away any rights that any creature has and/or command something radically different from how He has commanded in the past. Yes, the first form of justice constrains God to respect the rights of others, whatever their origins, but God can simply strip others of their rights. For example, if I have a right over a fence, perhaps grounded in God’s nature, though God must respect my right as long as my right exists, God can simply command in such a way that it becomes morally permissible for specific others (e.g., God) to do whatever they want with the fence, and I will no longer have a right over my fence against those people. Yes, the first form of justice constrains God, including God Incarnate, to obey His own commands that He has directed at Himself, but God can simply revoke His commands that have been directed at Himself. For example, if God has commanded everyone, including God, to keep their promises, God can simply revoke the command and will that it become morally permissible for specific others (e.g., God) not to keep their promises, in which case it will then become

morally permissible for them not to keep their promises. This will remove all correlative rights. And without these rights, the first form of justice will not do anything to constrain God's actions.

Put another way, because God has ultimate authority over the deontological status of actions, His commands make actions obligatory, optional, or wrong. But duties and rights entail one another. So, He can dictate what rights people have. Thus, He can change what rights people have. Hence, He can strip people of their rights by changing the corresponding duties by commanding in certain ways. But this means that, though God has the first form of justice as a virtue, such that He will respect people's rights, it doesn't do much to constrain His actions. For, if God wants to perform a certain action A, but if there are rights and duties that make it the case that God's virtue of the first form of justice constrains Him not to perform A, all He has to do is simply command in a particular way and, thereby, revoke those rights and duties, at which point His virtue of the first form of justice will no longer constrain Him not to perform A, and He will be free to perform it (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command).

You might ask: if there can be rights and duties prior to God's commands, grounded in His nature, does God have any obligations, grounded in His nature, not to revoke certain rights, such that the first form of justice will constrain Him not to revoke those rights? More broadly, are there any rights that God can't revoke because He is morally constrained, due to obligations that are grounded either in His nature or in His commands, not to revoke them? My answer is as follows: given that, as was discussed in section A of this chapter, God's commands can even make actions that are normally morally abhorrent, such as killing one's own son, morally right, it is at least plausible that God has absolutely no obligations, either from His nature or from His commands, concerning what He commands, in which case it is at least plausible that the first form of justice does absolutely nothing to constrain God in what He commands.

Therefore, ultimately, it is plausible that the virtue of the first form of justice doesn't really do much to constrain God's actions, though it does constrain human actions substantively. For, given that rights and duties entail one another, the virtue of the first form of justice constrains God to do whatever is obligatory for Him to do, but God can command Himself in certain ways and, thereby, dictate what is obligatory for Him to do. Therefore, God can command Himself in certain ways and, thereby, dictate what the virtue of the first form of justice constrains God to do. So, the question is why He would command Himself what He would command Himself. And given that it is plausible that God has absolutely no obligations concerning what He commands, such that it is plausible that the virtue of the first form of justice does absolutely nothing to constrain God in what He commands, the reason why He would command Himself to do certain things plausibly has nothing to do with the virtue of the first form of justice. For, the first form of justice is respecting people's rights, in which case if there are no rights (in some particular context), the virtue of the first form of justice has nothing to do (in that context). So, because, plausibly, God has no obligations concerning what He commands Himself, there are, plausibly, no corresponding rights, in which case His virtue of the first form of justice is, plausibly, inactive when it comes to God making choices about what to command Himself. Thus, what matters is the more fundamental will within God that drives Him to command Himself as He does, and that has nothing to do with His virtue of the first form of justice, but that is influenced largely by His other virtues.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Or, at least, it has nothing to do with His virtue's primary function. See footnote 96 of this chapter.

### E. The Perfect Justice of God: Equality

Our second form of justice is a matter of balance, equality, and fairness.<sup>99, 100, 101</sup> Thus, the virtue of the second form of justice seeks balance, equality, and fairness in the world and tries to do what is balanced, equal, and fair. It is unjust, for example, for a race to be run when the runners have unequal starting positions (at least if the race is serious). Of course, we might debate about how exactly the race is made equal – do we start everyone on the same line, or do we let the slower runners start a few meters ahead? – but we all know that the runners should have an equal opportunity to win the race. Similarly, we all know that it is unjust to unfairly tax people. Again, we might debate what a fair tax is – should all people be taxed the exact same amount of money, or should the rich be taxed more than the poor? – but we all know that we should tax people fairly. Here is another example: when a teacher has multiple students in their class, we all know that the teacher should treat their students equally. Treating them unequally would be unjust. Once more, we might debate about how exactly justice can be accomplished here – should teachers, for example, give every student the exact same amount of attention, or should they give struggling (or perhaps excelling) students more attention? – but we all know that teachers should treat their students equally.<sup>102</sup> The fundamental idea is that, at least in human affairs, things should be fair. We should treat people equally, and we should desire to bring about states of affairs that are equal. So, a person who has the virtue of the second form of justice will be motivated to do what is fair and to bring about a world of equality.

---

<sup>99</sup> Or, at least, balance, equality, and fairness in the affairs of rational (and perhaps even non-rational but sentient) beings. It is hard to say that a perfectly balanced stick on a pipe, if it has nothing to do with the affairs of rational (or sentient) beings, is justice.

<sup>100</sup> Though I am sure there are subtle differences between balance, equality, and fairness, for simplicity I will ignore such differences and move fairly easily between them.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition (Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 11; and Immanuel Kant, pp. 962a-964b (421-424).

<sup>102</sup> Are these debates about how to make things *truly* equal, or are they debates about how *best* to make things equal? I am unsure, and I leave that debate to the side. The point, though, should be clear.

The most important implication of this form of justice for our purposes is retribution. As Jonathan Edwards says, “he which from his will *does* evil to others should *receive* evil from the will of others, or from the will of him or them whose business it is to take care of the injured, and to act in their behalf: and [] he should suffer evil in *proportion* to the evil of his doings.”<sup>103</sup> This is seconded by Adam Smith, who said, “As every man doth, so shall it be done to him, and retaliation seems to be the great law which is dictated to us by Nature. ... The violator of the laws of justice ought to be made to feel himself that evil which he has done to another”.<sup>104</sup> When a person does evil, they should be punished with proportionate evil. This is a matter of balance; it is a matter of justice. Yes, there might be some utility in punishing evildoers (e.g., deterring crime), and this might provide an extra reason for punishing them, but one main reason why we care to punish evildoers is that we think it is their due.<sup>105</sup> They have done evil, and so, as a matter of balance, they deserve evil. They have heaped upon themselves ill desert that should be met with punishment. Most certainly, we can debate exactly what a person’s punishment should be for their crimes, but we nevertheless think that the second form of justice demands some form of equal retribution.

Now, does God possess the second form of justice as a virtue? Given that He is the greatest possible being, I think we should maintain that He is perfectly just, in which case I think we should also maintain that He has as a virtue the second form of justice.<sup>106</sup> However, a problem arises. In the above, we argued that perfect love is unbalanced (assuming that people

---

<sup>103</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, p. 569, emphases in the original.

<sup>104</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 82 (II.ii.1.10).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., pp. 86, 89-91 (II.ii.3.4, 9-12).

<sup>106</sup> Are the two forms of justice the same? I’m not sure. I am inclined, pre-theoretically, to say that they are different, but, given that God has both, saying that they are the same might make the most sense on divine simplicity. For material that might be helpful in ascertaining the answer, see Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Blackwell, 1999), pp. 160-164; Immanuel Kant, pp. 962a-964b (421-424), and pp. 966a-967b (428-431); and footnote 20 of the previous chapter.



have conflicting interests). God does not love everyone equally. He loves some more than others. Indeed, I have argued that God loves Himself or His people more than the damned. But it seems that if God has the virtue of the second form of justice, then He will equally love everyone. And, of course, God can't both equally love everyone and not equally love everyone at the same time. How, then, can we solve this problem?

By way of response, it should first be noted that it is not obvious at all that any problem arises to begin with. As a reminder, Edwards claimed that there are two forms of perfect love: the perfect love of benevolence and the perfect love of complacency. The former seeks the good of that which has existence, *in proportion to* the amount of existence it has. The latter delights in beautiful objects, *in proportion to* how beautiful they are. Thus, Edwards's account of love might well incorporate balance, fairness, and equality. As noted, sometimes there are debates about how to make things equal. One example I gave was taxation: should all people be taxed the exact same amount of money, or should the rich be taxed more than the poor? What we have in the case of perfect love is another debate about how to make things equal: should God love each individual being the same amount, or should He love in proportion to how much being and beauty they have? Yes, if we should take the former, there is an obvious inconsistency between equality and my claim that God loves some more than others, but it is not obvious at all that we should take the former. If, however, we should take the latter instead, God can love some more than others (e.g., He can love Himself more than humans, given that He has an infinite amount of being and beauty, whereas humans only have a finite amount), yet still be perfectly just.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> This also might make the most sense of divine simplicity. For related material, see Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, pp. 539-574; Terry Johnson, "Love, Justice, and Wrath," *Tabletalk*, May 2022, accessed August 23, 2022, URL = <<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2022/05/love-justice-and-wrath/>>; and footnote 20 of the previous chapter.

Now, I am more inclined to say that, instead of loving each being the same amount, God should love in proportion to how much being and beauty they have, just like I am – and I would think most people are – inclined to say that, instead of taxing everyone the same amount, we should tax in proportion to people's income (or something similar to that).<sup>108</sup> But, let's suppose that the debate runs its course and the conclusion is opposite to what I am inclined to say. That is, suppose that the second form of justice demands of God that He love each individual being the same amount. Because God's perfect love entails that He loves some more than others, what, then, should we say? How can God be both perfectly loving while also having the second form of justice? Something has to give. I propose that, if the second form of justice demands that God love everyone the exact same amount, then God will choose to love perfectly instead of act on the second form of justice. Two arguments should be considered.

First, we can appeal to the same intuitions that initially drove us to say that the perfect love of God is deep but unbalanced. Suppose that you have two options. Your first option is that you can love an individual person maximally, though doing so does not allow you to love a second person to the same extent. Your second option is that you can love two people equally, but this prevents you from loving one of them maximally. Which is the better choice? By this question I do not mean to ask which is a better form of *love*. We have already argued that perfect love is deep but unequal, given the (possibly) conflicting interests of persons. Instead, in the present context, we are trying to determine what God would choose if His virtue of perfect love, which inclines Him to love some more than others, conflicts with His virtue of the second form of justice. That is, we are trying to ascertain whether God would choose perfect love, which is unbalanced, over the form of justice that seeks balance if ever there is a conflict between the two.

---

<sup>108</sup> I am not sure whether income tax is the best form of taxation, but my claim should be clear nevertheless: those who are better off should be taxed more than those who are less well off.

Thus, by my question, I mean to ask the following: which is a better choice *all things considered*? In other words, would you choose perfect love that is unbalanced, or would you choose balanced but imperfect love? Though I am sure that there are some – perhaps many – people who would choose the latter and give up perfect love for equality, the former seems much, much better to me. This is one, though probably not the only, reason why so many people enter into monogamous marriages. They recognize that deep love with one person is simply better, all things considered, than having inferior love with multiple people. It is simply a less valuable form of life to refrain from the deepest forms of love that we are capable of, whether engaging in perfect love violates equality or not.

This same intuition seems to be expressed in a quote that I employed earlier while arguing that God’s perfect love is deep but unbalanced. Recall to mind the following passage from Jeff Jordan, and pay close attention to the language:

[A] human who loved all other humans equally and impartially would have a life significantly impoverished. Much of the richness of life flows from one’s friendships and one’s spouse and one’s children, and within these attachments there is a love which is neither impartial nor equally shared by all other persons, as one loves her beloved more than she does others. It is not just that one manifests her love for the beloved differently from how one manifests her love for others. No, a person appropriately loves his own children more than other children. And without the inequality of love, one’s life would be diminished. The topography of love cannot be flat if it is to enhance one’s life. Indeed, a life in which all loves are flat, because of a lack of the deep attachments of close friends, or a spouse, or children, is clearly a defective life, as the deep attachments of love and friendship play a large role in making life worth living. It is the affectionate relationships which are, so to speak, the peaks of life breaking up the flatness of deficiency.<sup>109</sup>

In this selection, Jordan employs the language of: “a life significantly impoverished”, “the richness of life”, “one’s life would be diminished”, “enhance one’s life”, “a life in which all loves are flat”, “defective life,” “making life worth living”, and “the peaks of life breaking up the

---

<sup>109</sup> Jeff Jordan, “The Topography of Divine Love,” pp. 60-61.

flatness of deficiency.” This suggests that he is not merely asking which type of *love* is better. No, he’s asking, which is a better type of *life*? And he thinks that it is better for God’s life to be filled with deep but unbalanced love. In terms of maximal devotion, God’s life is better when He is maximally devoted to some than to none, even if this entails inequality. Without perfect love, God’s life is significantly impoverished and deficient. God, who is supremely happy and blessed (WCF 2.2), therefore, would choose (or would have already chosen) perfect love over the second form of justice because this makes for a better, happier, and more blessed life.<sup>110</sup>

Second, at least one entailment (or form) of perfect love would be chosen by God over at least one entailment (or form) of the second form of justice. We have already discussed that the second form of justice sometimes carries itself out in retribution. We should now discuss how divine mercy is one way in which the perfect love of God carries itself out. Take any beloved of God’s B. Suppose that there is no higher-tiered beloved of God’s whose good or union with God prevents God from having mercy on B. That is, suppose that after God has sought the good of and union with all higher-tiered beloveds (if there are any), God is still able to show mercy to B. What, then, would God’s perfect love (independently of God’s perfect justice)<sup>111</sup> seek if B has committed a crime that calls out for punishment?

Now, I think that most likely God’s perfect love (independently of God’s perfect justice) would allow B to endure punishment if the punishment causes, in the long run, B to be better off or B to have greater union with God than if B had been shown mercy. For example, if punishment has greater sanctifying effects when compared to mercy, then God might well

---

<sup>110</sup> Perhaps more accurately, the fact that a life of perfect love is better than a life of the second form of justice, if ever there is a moment in which they conflict, indicates that God, because He is Goodness Itself, has chosen for Himself perfect love over the second form of justice in situations in which they conflict, which has made it the case that a life of perfect love is better than a life of the second form of justice if ever there is a conflict between the two.

<sup>111</sup> This includes both the first and second forms of justice.

choose, purely from His perfect love, punishment instead of mercy. Indeed, if God can act on both perfect justice and perfect love at the same time, that is ideal, in which case if a punishment of God's has, all things considered, greater or equal sanctifying effects for B when compared to mercy, God will most likely choose to punish because punishing B will satisfy both God's perfect justice and perfect love simultaneously.<sup>112</sup>

That said, as much as I approve of what I have just said, it is not able to make any inroads into the debate about what God would choose *when perfect love and the second form of justice conflict*. Currently, we are debating whether God would choose perfect love or the second form of justice when there are conflicts between them. Because of this, we are looking for separate entailments of perfect love and the second form of justice that conflict so that we can then ask which of the entailments God would choose over the other. If we can show that one of the entailments of perfect love would be chosen over one of the conflicting entailments of the second form of justice, we have (non-conclusive) evidence that perfect love would be chosen over the second form of justice when they conflict. Thus, a case, as we have here, in which perfect love and perfect justice do not conflict does nothing to settle the debate. We need a case in which their entailments do conflict.

So, let us suppose that, whether God punishes or shows mercy, any effects (e.g., sanctification) that come after the initial punishment or act of mercy are the same. Given this, what will God's perfect love (independently of the demands of perfect justice) seek? Well, if it really does seek the good of and union with the beloved, it will seek mercy. It does not want B to

---

<sup>112</sup> Note that, in Chapter V, I will assume that punishing sinners with Hell is perfectly retributively just because all sin merits an infinite punishment. This means that if punishing B causes, in the long run, B to be better off or B to have greater union with God when compared to what would result if B were to be shown mercy, then the punishment was not full. For, if the punishment were full, then B would be cast into Hell. Such punishment would, in the long run, neither make B better off nor cause B to have greater union with God when compared to what would have resulted if B were to have been shown mercy. And this act itself of not punishing someone fully is itself merciful.

endure punishment. Punishments cause pain and hardship, which are, on their own (that is, discounting any later effects), not good for a person, in which case the perfect love of God will not allow B to endure punishment. God will, instead, show mercy, thereby preventing bad consequences from coming upon His beloved.

Putting it differently, a person who abounds in love (ignoring perfect justice) ultimately wants good for their beloved, and that means that they ultimately want to see them not in a state of suffering, even if a certain state of suffering is deserved. The love of a father wants his son not to go to prison, even if he knows that his son retributively deserves it, even if his son deserves to go to prison because of a crime against him (that is, against the father). Such love will have mercy upon the son and try to rescue him from prison time, perhaps by not pressing charges against him. The same sort of thing is true in cases in which the second form of justice demands non-retributively that a person be destitute. Suppose that a son has taken his inheritance from his loving father, has left him and his home, and has squandered his inheritance. The second form of justice will say that poverty is his due, even if this is not a matter of retribution. Still, the love of the father will not want his son to endure destitution. Once more, such love will have mercy upon him and try to rescue him from destitution, perhaps by welcoming him back home and by providing for him yet again.<sup>113</sup> And, though the love of both of these fathers might ultimately be stopped from showing mercy if there is a conflict with loving higher-tiered beloveds (e.g., God or their wives) or if letting their children suffer will, in the long run, when all things are considered, be better for them (or not different for them) when compared to what would result if they were shown mercy, their love is most naturally drawn out to their beloved sons to show

---

<sup>113</sup> This is a reference to the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

them mercy and to rescue them from their sorrows. And the same is true for God, who is perfect in love.<sup>114, 115</sup>

Thus, the perfect love of God, under certain conditions, entails mercy, and the second form of justice entails retribution, but mercy and retribution conflict with one another. At this point we have to ask: which is superior? Which would the greatest possible being value more? Mercy or retribution? It is clear, at least pre-theoretically within my mind, that mercy is far superior to retribution. I think it is much closer to God's heart than punishment for sins. Two supporting points should be made.

First, whether the Gospels are divinely authoritative or not, they provide historical evidence for how the early church remembered Christ, and how they remembered Him was as a person who had great love for and mercy upon people. Though there were certainly times in which He was wrathful or furious (e.g., when He, as described in John 2:13-17, made a whip, drove out the money-changers from the temple, and then overturned their tables), He was primarily remembered for His compassion, for His healing and for His teaching of people from town to town (Matthew 9:35-38), for His being a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Luke 7:34), and for His commanding constant forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22), going even so far as to claim seemingly that instead of demanding that retributive justice be paid, we should, like our Father in heaven, radically love our neighbors, including even our enemies and those who have wronged us:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your

---

<sup>114</sup> See Thomas Goodwin, *An Exposition of the Second Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, Verses 1-11*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, Volume 2 (Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), p. 178 (Sermon XII).

<sup>115</sup> I'm not sure how mercy and forgiveness relate to one another, but a similar, though perhaps not identical, argument can be run from perfect love to forgiveness. Love does not hold grudges or wish bad things upon the beloved. Love forgives.

tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:38-48, ESV).

This is the same Jesus who taught the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), one lesson of which is that God is so disposed to love and mercy that, if we but turn to God, even if we have squandered His gifts, He is inclined to joyously welcome us into Himself. Again, whether the Gospels are divinely authoritative or not, this is how the early church consistently remembered Christ, and Christ was God Incarnate, as I am assuming (WCF 8.1-3). Does this sound like a person who was just champing at the bit to destroy the wicked? No, this is a God of love, a God who is slow to anger and quick to show mercy.<sup>116</sup>

Second, there is much greater beauty in mercy than in retributive justice. One of my favorite stories is *Les Misérables*.<sup>117</sup> It begins with Jean Valjean completing his nineteen years of imprisonment, which had been accompanied by hard labor. After finally being released, he is given papers that warn that he is a dangerous man. Unable to find work or refuge, he makes his way to a church and receives aid from a bishop, who offers him wine and food and shelter and a place to rest. But, after being shown great kindness, Valjean absconds in the middle of the night with much silver. He is caught red-handed and brought back to the bishop. What he deserves is

---

<sup>116</sup> See also Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly* (Crossway, 2020), especially pp. 25-27, 135-153. The whole of Ortlund’s book provides good theological reasons for embracing the claim that God is more disposed to mercy than to retribution.

<sup>117</sup> Sadly, the only rendition of *Les Misérables* I have seen fully is the 2012 movie, directed by Tom Hooper. I am, therefore, primarily referencing it, though I would guess that the story is not much different in other renditions.



to be thrown right back into prison from which he has just been freed. But what does the bishop do? He says that he has given the silver to Valjean, and, taking in his hand even more silver, he says, “But, my friend, you left so early. Surely something slipped your mind. You forgot I gave these also. Would you leave the best behind?” Whatever else we might say, this act of mercy is beautiful and touching, and it utterly humbles Valjean. How much less beautiful it would have been if he had gotten what he deserved! And because God is Beauty Itself, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is much more likely that God would choose mercy instead of retribution.

Compare this to *The Green Mile*.<sup>118</sup> Arlen Bitterbuck, a somewhat minor character in the story, is executed for the crime of killing a man while drunk.<sup>119</sup> The scene is, quite frankly, difficult to watch. While the guards prepare him for execution by electrocution, you can hear the sound of him breathing. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. And as they declare the judgment that has been issued upon him, you can see his chest moving in and out repeatedly. When they finally send electricity through his body, he grunts in agony. With the high-pitched sound of electricity racing through him and with smoke rising from his body, he shakes uncontrollably. Eventually, they turn the electricity off, and a doctor checks to make sure that he’s dead. He’s not. So, they pass even more electricity through him. The piercing sound of electricity screeches yet again, and he continues to shake uncontrollably until he finally dies. Whatever else we say, death is what the second form of justice demands for killing another person.<sup>120</sup> But it is not something to take delight in. It is not beautiful. It is not touching. It should be hard to watch and hard to bear.<sup>121</sup> God, then, who is Beauty Itself, is much less disposed to retribution than to mercy.

---

<sup>118</sup> I am primarily referring to the 1999 movie rendition, directed by Frank Darabont. I have consumed only it fully, but, again, I would guess that the story is not much different in the book.

<sup>119</sup> Stephen King, *The Green Mile* (Gollancz, 2008), p. 90.

<sup>120</sup> Indeed, if the eternal torments of Hell are what all sinners deserve because they have offended against an infinite, holy, and righteous God, then what Bitterbuck experienced was nothing in comparison to what he actually deserved.

<sup>121</sup> See Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 105.

Hence, naturally, Thomas Goodwin states:

My brethren, though God is just, yet his mercy may be in some respect said to be more natural to him than all acts of justice itself that God doth shew, I mean vindicative justice; in them there is a satisfaction to an attribute, in that he meets and is even with sinners; yet notwithstanding there is a kind of violence done to himself in it, the Scripture so expresseth it; there is something in it that is contrary to him. And so many interpret that place, ‘I will not the death of a sinner;’ that is, I delight not simply in it, I will not do it *animi causa*, for pleasure’s sake, because I delight in the thing, as those that are of the Remonstrants’ [Arminians’] opinion slander the other party, that they make God to delight in the death of a sinner. No; when he exerciseth acts of justice, it is for a higher end, it is not simply for the thing itself; there is always something in his heart against it. But when he comes to shew mercy, to manifest that it is his nature and disposition, it is said that he doth it with his whole heart; there is nothing at all in him that is against it, the act itself pleaseth him for itself, there is no reluctance in him. Therefore, in Lam. iii. 33, when he speaks of punishing, he saith, ‘He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.’ But when he comes to speak of shewing mercy, he saith he doth do it ‘with his whole heart, and with his whole soul;’ so the expression is, Jer. xxxii. 41. And therefore acts of justice, you know, are called *opus alienum*, his ‘strange work,’ and his ‘strange act,’ in Isa. xxviii. 21. But when he comes to shew mercy, he rejoices over them, to do them good, with his whole heart, and with his whole soul; as it is in that Jer. xxxii. 41.<sup>122</sup>

Whether the Biblical passages mentioned by Goodwin are divinely authoritative or not, this is how at least some prominent figures in the Christian tradition have understood God.<sup>123</sup> He is much more disposed to mercy than to retributive justice.

Thus, God is more disposed to show mercy, which is an entailment of perfect love (under certain conditions), than retribution, which is an entailment of the second form of justice.

Though it is not conclusive, this suggests that God is more disposed to exercise perfect love than He is disposed to exercise the second form of justice.

---

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *An Exposition of the Second Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, Verses 1-11*, pp. 179-180. See also Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), p. 60; Terry Johnson, “Love, Justice, and Wrath”; and Jonathan Edwards, “Impending Judgments Averted Only by Reformation,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 14: *Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729*, edited by Kenneth Minkema (Yale University Press, 1997), p. 221.

<sup>123</sup> For those who haven’t heard of Thomas Goodwin, consider what Dane Ortlund has to say about him: “As for Goodwin, he stood up and spoke from the floor more often (357 times) than any other divine at the creation of the Westminster standards [which contains the WCF, WLC, and WSC] in England in the 1640s” (Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, p. 143).

From these observations, I conclude that God would choose perfect love over the second form of justice if ever they conflict. Does this mean that God never exercises the second form of justice? No, when God can exercise both perfect love and the second form of justice at the same time, He will exercise both. But, when there is a conflict between the two (if ever there is one), God will exercise perfect love instead of the second form of justice. Because of this, God will love some more than others, even if this counts as unequal or unbalanced or unfair.

#### F. Summary of Chapter III

If we are to evaluate God's actions (in, for example, ordaining the evils of this world), we need a plausible account of the deontological status of actions, and we need a plausible account of His virtues. In this chapter, I have tried to provide plausible accounts of both. First, I modestly defended a divine command theory, according to which if God commands someone to perform action A, A is thereby made (morally) obligatory, and nothing can change this except a further divine command; and if God forbids A, A is thereby made (morally) wrong, and nothing can change this except a further divine command; and if God wills A to be (morally) optional, A is thereby made (morally) optional, and nothing can change this except a further divine command. Now, given that God commands (at least partially) from His virtues, if God's virtues incline Him to perform action A, God very well might command Himself in a particular way and make it the case that A is morally acceptable for Him to perform. Thus, if something is virtuous for God to perform, then performing it might very well be morally right for Him.

Second, after discussion of my divine command theory, I discussed the virtues of God so that we can begin to have an idea of how God might command Himself. Further, because another way of evaluating someone's actions, besides asking whether they are right or wrong, is by

asking whether their actions are virtuous or vicious, a good discussion of God's virtues provides us a further way of evaluating His actions. Thus, I have tried to provide a plausible account of the virtues of God. The first virtue I discussed was the perfect love of God, and I proposed that God has a hierarchy of love. I also argued for the claim that God loves Himself or His people more than the damned. For, either God loves Himself primarily, or He does not love Himself primarily. If He loves Himself primarily, because His interests conflict with the interests of the damned (as will be discussed in Chapter V), He loves Himself more than the damned, in which case it is true that God loves Himself or His people more than the damned. If, however, He does not love Himself primarily, then He loves His people primarily. Because their interests conflict with the interests of the damned (as will also be discussed in Chapter V), He loves His people more than the damned, in which case it is true that God loves Himself or His people more than the damned. Thus, either way, God loves Himself or His people more than the damned. The second virtue I discussed was the first form of justice, which is a matter of respecting people's (moral) rights, and it was argued that this virtue doesn't really constrain God's actions all that much. For, God can simply command and revoke the rights that people possess, at which point the virtue of the first form of justice will have nothing to do. God's third virtue was the second form of justice, which is a matter of balance, equality, and fairness, and I argued that God would choose perfect love over the second form of justice if ever they conflict.

These plausible, though perhaps not certain, moral claims will undergird the rest of my dissertation and will be key in understanding my defense against the problem of evil.

#### IV. God's Passion for His Glory<sup>1</sup>

In the past two chapters, we have done two things. First, we have provided an explanation of divine glory. Second, we have dug into the moral underpinnings of my divine glory defense. It is now time to argue that, given the material discussed in the previous chapters, it is plausible that God, if He exists, will ordain very great instances of the external glory of God. That is the aim of this chapter. Section A is dedicated to a discussion of some preliminary material. Section B is dedicated to a discussion of God's desire for His own good, assuming that He is His own primary beloved, and how this inclines Him to ordain His external glory. Section C is dedicated to a discussion of God's desire for union with Himself, assuming that He is His own primary beloved, and how this inclines Him to ordain His external glory. Section D is dedicated to two short supporting arguments. Section E is dedicated to a discussion of God's love for His people, assuming that His people are in the first tier of God's hierarchy of beloveds, and how this inclines God to ordain His external glory. And, finally, section F summarizes the chapter.

Also, it seems mandatory to mention once again that I am merely trying to present a plausible story in which God allows the evils we see in our world. So, if the material presented within this chapter is plausible, I count this chapter a success.

##### A. Preliminary Material

Imagine God prior to His ordination of all things, trying to decide what to ordain. Given that He is perfectly virtuous, what exactly will He choose to come to be? Well, whatever choice He

---

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is named after John Piper's book *God's Passion for His Glory* (Crossway, 1998). In it, I first read Jonathan Edwards's *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*. For a more academic version of the text, which is the main one I have been using in this work, see Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989).

makes concerning what to ordain needs to be consistent with His virtues. More than that, because His actions flow, at least partially, from His virtues, it would be good if we can imagine His choice being influenced by or arising from His virtues. I propose that God, if He exists, would choose to ordain His own external glorification,<sup>2</sup> and I will argue in this chapter that this is a plausible option that is perfectly consistent with and that arises from His perfectly virtuous nature.

To begin, recall that, as noted in the previous chapter, God, if He exists, has (at least) three virtues: perfect love, the first form of justice, and the second form of justice.<sup>3</sup> What would these motivate God to choose when He is trying to decide what to ordaining in the world? Let's first look at the first form of justice, which is respecting people's (moral) rights. As already noted in the previous chapter, the first form of justice doesn't really do much to constrain God's actions. For, because God is the ultimate authority over the deontological status of actions, God can, whenever He so wills, simply command in a particular way and strip humans of any rights that they might have had that inhibit His choices, at which point the first form of justice will have nothing to do and will not constrain God's actions because there will be no human right for God to respect (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command). In other words, given that rights and duties entail one another, the virtue of the first form of justice, which is a matter of respecting people's (moral) rights, ultimately just constrains God to do whatever is obligatory for Him to do, but God can command Himself in certain ways and,

---

<sup>2</sup> God ordains all contingent things (external to Him), but the argument of this chapter is that at least one thing that God would plausibly choose to ordain is His own external glory.

<sup>3</sup> Some virtues, as discussed in section E of the previous chapter, derive from these three virtues, such as His mercy and retribution. For simplicity, I ignore the derived virtues for now. Additionally, there is a good chance that God has some virtues that neither derive from nor derive these three, unless, of course, God is utterly simple. One example might be His courageousness. Due to space limitations, I cannot evaluate every single virtue that God might have and analyze how they might come to bear upon my defense. Thus, I focus on these big three, which have already been discussed at length in the previous chapter.

thereby, dictate what is obligatory for Him to do. Therefore, God can command Himself in certain ways and, thereby, dictate what the virtue of the first form of justice constrains Him to do. So, the question is why He would command Himself what He would command Himself. And given that it is plausible, as discussed in the previous chapter, that God has absolutely no obligations concerning what He commands, such that it is plausible that the virtue of the first form of justice does absolutely nothing to constrain God in what He commands, the reason why He would command Himself to do certain things plausibly has nothing to do with the virtue of the first form of justice. What is more important, then, is the more fundamental will within God that drives Him to command Himself as He does, and that has nothing to do with His virtue of the first form of justice, but that is influenced largely by His other virtues. Thus, plausibly, the virtue of the first form of justice will not, *ultimately*, constrain God's actions when He is choosing what to ordain. Therefore, we can put the first form of justice to the side. It won't do much here.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, consider the virtue of the second form of justice, which seeks balance, equality, and fairness in the world and tries to do what is balanced, equal, and fair. As we also argued in the previous chapter, if there is any conflict between God's perfect love and the second

---

<sup>4</sup> Remember that, in footnote 96 of Chapter III, I pointed out that the virtue of the first form of justice has multiple functions. Its *primary* function is to constrain the virtue holder's actions in such a way that they respect people's rights. But it also has secondary functions. For example, it leads the virtue holder to desire others to act according to the first form of justice. With that reminder in place, we now need to add a further note. I do not think that the secondary functions of the virtue of the first form of justice influence God (nearly) as much as the primary function of the virtue of perfect love, where the primary function of God's perfect love is to drive Him to seek the good of and union with His beloveds, according to His hierarchy of love. Three points should be made. First, if God has two virtues, He is most likely going to privilege the primary functions of those virtues over any secondary functions that they might have. Second, even if our first point is incorrect, God's love is incredibly important; it is central to who He is. The primary function of His perfect love will, thus, most likely, overcome any sort of secondary function of other virtues. (I thank Thomas Senor for comments that directed my attention to this point.) Third, at the least, given the importance of God's perfect love, and given that primary functions are generally more important than secondary functions, there is a very real possibility that God could simply choose (and/or has already chosen) to privilege the primary function of His perfect love over the secondary functions of other virtues (if only because, when there are conflicting desires, God has to choose one over the other).

form of justice, God will choose perfect love. A life of perfect love is more valuable than a life of balance; and mercy, which derives from (perfect) love, is greater than retribution, which derives from the second form of justice. Thus, if the second form of justice conflicts with the perfect love of God, God will choose perfect love instead of the second form of justice. If they do not conflict, then God will be perfectly able to choose without any problems whatever His perfect love motivates Him to ordain. We can, therefore, put the second form of justice to the side. It also will not do much in our discussion here.

Therefore, I turn to look at what perfect love motivates God to ordain. Given that the two forms of justice will not do anything to dissuade God from acting on His perfect love,<sup>5</sup> whatever His perfect love inclines Him to do will be perfectly virtuous for Him to do. Further, because the two forms of justice will not do anything to dissuade God from acting on His perfect love, and because God commands from His virtues, and because God is the ultimate authority over the deontological status of actions, He is likely going to command from His perfect love in such a way that whatever His perfect love inclines Him to do will plausibly be made morally righteous. That is, it is likely that God, if He exists, will command Himself in such a way that whatever is perfectly virtuous for Him to do will also be perfectly righteous for Him to do. Thus, whatever God's perfect love plausibly motivates God to do will be both plausibly virtuous and, given that my divine command theory is plausible, plausibly morally acceptable. Thus, we must ask what God's perfect love would plausibly incline God to do. And I think that perfect love plausibly motivates God to seek His own external glory, as will be argued momentarily. And if so, it is

---

<sup>5</sup> If perfect love and the second form of justice ever conflict with one another, then the second form of justice probably does provide God with *some* motivation not to do whatever perfect love motivates God to do. Still, as said, perfect love will (likely) win out in the end. However, if there are no conflicts, then the second form of justice will provide no motivation for God not to act on His perfect love.



plausible that God will ordain His own external glory. From here, let us turn to ask why we should think that the perfect love of God would motivate God to seek His own external glory.

In the previous chapter, we discussed several important points related to the perfect love of God. First, God, if He exists, actively seeks, in perfect love, both the good of and union with His beloveds. Next, there is a very real possibility that God loves Himself primarily, but, whether we embrace this or not, God loves either Himself or His people primarily. In connection with this, remember that God actively pursues the good of and union with His primary beloved(s) above all others. Because God is perfectly loving, there is at least someone whom He maximally loves and to whom He is maximally devoted, seeking their good and union with them whenever possible. This someone is a primary beloved of God's. Thus, God will ordain all contingent things (external to Him) with at least one of His primary objectives, if not His only primary objective, being grounded in His active desire for the good of and union with His primary beloved(s), whom He maximally loves and to whom He is maximally devoted. So, let us first look at what follows from God loving Himself primarily, after which we will look at what follows from God loving His people primarily.

Suppose, then, that God loves Himself primarily. What follows from this? Well, if God is in the first tier of God's hierarchy of beloveds, then God's first objective (or at least one of His first objectives) in what He ordains will be to pursue the good of and union with Himself as much as possible. Let us consider God's pursuit of His own good first. If God were to pursue His own good as much as possible, what exactly would happen? What would He do? Well, of course, He would seek to maximize His own flourishing. But a complication almost immediately arises. God is, from all of eternity, completely in and of and from Himself, supremely happy and blessed (WCF 2.2). The creation is not needed for God to have maximal flourishing, happiness,

well-being, and blessedness.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it seems that God's pursuit of His own good says absolutely nothing about what God would ordain to happen in the world. A discussion of God's desire for His own good, then, seems to have little to nothing to say by way of defense against the problem of evil because God's happiness is self-contained.

However, this conclusion is much too hasty. We can think of God as a sort of fountain that is inclined to overflow. Consider what Jonathan Edwards says in connection with God's emanation into His spiritual image bearers:

As there is an infinite fullness of all possible good in God, a fullness of every perfection, of all excellency and beauty, and of infinite happiness. ... [S]o it seems a thing amiable and valuable in itself that it should be communicated or flow forth, that this infinite fountain of good should send forth abundant streams, that this infinite fountain of light should, diffusing its excellent fullness, pour forth light all around. ... Surely, 'tis no argument of indigence in God that he is inclined to communicate of his infinite fullness. 'Tis no argument of the emptiness or deficiency of a fountain that it is inclined to overflow.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, bearing in mind that God is Goodness Itself, consider the neo-Platonistic principle to which Aquinas often appeals: "*Goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself*".<sup>8</sup> So too, we can plausibly propose something similar with regard to God's love for Himself and His desire for His own good, which are maximal and active, actively pursuing His own good with maximal yearning. This active pursuit, if it is part of a maximal love, is, plausibly, inclined to spill over into a pursuit of next-best things when the primary (or direct) object of His loving desire has been fully actualized. The idea is that a maximal and active love, maximally yearning for and actively pursuing its primary object, doesn't want to just quit once its primary object has been

---

<sup>6</sup> As said in footnote 40 of Chapter III, for simplicity, I will assume that flourishing, happiness, well-being, and blessedness are all roughly the same.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 432-433, 448.

<sup>8</sup> Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" in *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 217, emphasis in the original. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, translated by Donald Zeyl, in *Plato*, edited by John Cooper (Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 1236 (29e-30b).

fully actualized. It remains maximal and active, and it still actively pursues the good of the beloved with maximal yearning. So, if the primary object of His love has been fully actualized, it will be inclined to, as it were, let out its pent-up energy on some closely related pursuit.<sup>9</sup> His love, as it were, bubbles up within Him and wants Him to do more.<sup>10</sup> He, as it were, takes out His love on next-best things.<sup>11, 12</sup> Thus, because God has, as we are assuming, a primary and, therefore, a maximal and active love for Himself, and because He fully has, in all of eternity, the primary object of His loving desire for His own good, which is His own supreme flourishing, His

---

<sup>9</sup> I say “as it were” because the language of “pent-up energy” makes it seem as though God would not be fully satisfied if He merely pursued His own good and did not spill over into a pursuit of next-best things, which is not true.

<sup>10</sup> I say “as it were” because the language of “bubbling up within Him” makes it seem as though God is not in control of Himself, which is not true.

<sup>11</sup> I say “as it were” because the language of “takes out His love on next-best things” makes it seem as though God is weak and unable to satisfy His primary desires of love, which is not true.

<sup>12</sup> This is, at bottom, the same sort of thing as the psychological phenomenon(s) of transference (and/or displacement). One definition of transference is as follows: “The displacement of patterns of feelings, thoughts, and behavior, originally experienced in relation to significant figures during childhood, onto a person involved in a current interpersonal relationship” (Burness Moore and Bernard Fine (eds.), *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts* (The American Psychoanalytic Association and Yale University Press, 1990), s.v. “transference,” p. 196b). Another definition is the following: “in psychoanalysis, a patient’s displacement or projection onto the analyst of those unconscious feelings and wishes originally directed toward important individuals, such as parents, in the patient’s childhood. ... The term’s broader meaning—an unconscious repetition of earlier behaviors and their projection onto new subjects—is acknowledged as applying to all human interactions” (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, s.v. “transference,” The American Psychological Association, accessed October 17, 2022, URL = <<https://dictionary.apa.org/transference>>). Both of these definitions speak of displacement, so here is its definition:

[T]he transfer of feelings or behavior from their original object to another person or thing. In psychoanalytic theory, displacement is considered to be a defense mechanism in which the individual discharges tensions associated with, for example, hostility and fear by taking them out on a less threatening target. Thus, an angry child might break a toy or yell at a sibling instead of attacking the father; a frustrated employee might criticize his or her spouse instead of the boss; or a person who fears his or her own hostile impulses might transfer that fear to knives, guns, or other objects that might be used as a weapon (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, s.v. “displacement,” The American Psychological Association, accessed October 28, 2022, URL = <<https://dictionary.apa.org/displacement>>).

Even if God’s overflow and even if (some of or all of) the upcoming examples I give in this section don’t technically count as transference (or displacement), the general psychological phenomenon (or something very much like it), in which one (re)directs one’s feelings, thoughts, and/or behaviors from something (or some things) to another thing (or to other things), is real. More to the point, the general psychological phenomenon (or something very much like it), in which one (re)directs one’s feelings, thoughts, and/or behaviors to something (or some things) *closely related to the original (or direct or primary) object(s)* of one’s feelings, thoughts, and/or behaviors, is real, and that (or something very much like it) is what I am proposing happens with God’s love for Himself. I thank Judy Kerr, a licensed certified social worker in the state of Arkansas, for directing my attention to the phenomenon of transference and for discussion of the material in this footnote.

maximal and active pursuit of His own good is, plausibly, inclined to spill over into a pursuit of next-best things, things that are perhaps closely associated with or analogous to, though not the same thing as, God's actual flourishing.<sup>13</sup> Yet, these next-best things might well be within creation.<sup>14</sup> Thus, even if God is supremely happy without creation, His love might still overflow in ways that lead Him to ordain things within creation.<sup>15</sup>

We can see glimpses of this phenomenon of turning to advance next-best things when looking at what people do when they cannot advance the good of their beloveds (anymore). Their active pursuit of the good of their beloved is most naturally (re)directed to a pursuit of related things. Suppose that a beloved friend of mine is setting up a booth at a market, and suppose that, out of a deep love for her, I decide to go out of my way to help her. Suppose, next, that, though I give her aid, she doesn't need much help. If my deep love for her is still active after we are finished setting up her booth, still faithfully pursuing her good, and if she doesn't need any remaining help, what will I most naturally be inclined to do? My active love for her that is still pursuing her good will most naturally be inclined to spill over into helping someone else. Perhaps I help the woman in the booth on her right, or perhaps I help the man in the booth on her left. Whatever the case may be, I will be inclined to pursue next-best things.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> I do think that God's love inclines Him to overflow into a pursuit of next-best things when the primary object of His love has been fully actualized, but I am unsure why exactly this is. That is, I am unsure whether it is the fact that God's love is *active* that God is inclined to overflow, or whether it is the fact that God's love is *deep* – in this case, maximally deep – that God is inclined to overflow, or whether it is the combination of the two that God is inclined to overflow. To cover all my bases, I will act as though it is the third option. This works well because, as I introspect, I find it to be the combination of the two that causes similar overflows in human life.

<sup>14</sup> Is it possible for a next-best thing to be outside of creation? Yes, it is possible. In theory, God's union with Himself (independently of creation) might be one of the next-best things associated with His own happiness. In other words, God's own good might have as a next-best thing God's own union with Himself (independently of creation). (I add "independently of creation" because, as will talk about later, one of the best ways for God to be united with Himself is for Him to be united with spiritual image bearers, in whom He resides.)

<sup>15</sup> Why does God overflow to next-best things and not just to something or other? Well, it is most natural for Him, a perfectly rational being, to overflow into next-best things instead of just something or other.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Senor proposes that a better way of thinking about what's going on is that I have a lot of love to give, such that, after I've done all that I can for my friend, my love needs a new outlet, which leads me to do good for those nearby, and that I don't help people in neighboring booths as an expression of the love I have for my friend

Consider, second, the saints. They love God deeply, and they want God to flourish, but they cannot benefit Him because He is immutably, timelessly, and supremely flourishing independently of creation. Normally, a lover pursues the good of their beloved, but the saints can't really do that with God. What, then, do they do? They are most naturally inclined to turn to advance next-best things, things that are, perhaps, closely associated with or analogous to, though not the same thing as, God's actual flourishing. This is perhaps one reason why some saints go on mission trips.<sup>17</sup> They want to advance God's kingdom, recognizing that they cannot advance God's actual happiness. If the saints don't normally think about the fact that God is immutably, timelessly, and supremely flourishing independently of creation, such that they don't normally think about the fact that they cannot do anything to make God happier, then, at the least, we can say this. The saints think of themselves as the loving servants of God. If they were to reflect and come to recognize that they cannot do anything to improve God's flourishing, would they simply stop lovingly serving Him? No, they would continue to serve Him lovingly, but they would do so with the recognition that what they were advancing was not God's actual happiness, but next-best things that were related to God's happiness.

Consider, third, people who lose a loved one. Suppose that Mary's beloved husband James dies and suppose that Mary finds out about it a few hours later. What exactly will she do?

---

(unless I'm motivated to help them because my friend loves them and because I want to love what/whom she loves). In effect, this proposal seems to affirm something like the following. I have a love that is fundamentally neutral regarding its object and that contingently takes on my friend as its object. This love is, then, poured out on my friend. Once I can no longer pour it out on my friend, my love takes on a new contingent object and is then poured out on them.

I don't like this way of thinking about what's going on. It seems to me that my love for my friend is not fundamentally neutral. When I serve those in neighboring booths, I don't do this because of a fundamentally neutral love that can no longer serve its original object, but because my love that is fundamentally directed at a certain object can no longer pursue the good of its primary object. But I will not debate this point. However we describe the case, the point remains the same: my love originally strives for the good of person P and then becomes (re)directed onto another person P' when I can no longer advance the good of P.

<sup>17</sup> Of course, there are other or additional reasons why people go on mission trips.

If she still deeply loves James, she will still be actively seeking James's good. But, because James has died, Mary can't benefit him in any of the normal ways. For example, though Mary might normally cook dinner for James out of a love for him and a desire for his good, she can't really do that anymore. Or, at least, she can't cook him a dinner that he will eat and enjoy. What, then, will her active love do as it continues to pursue James's good? It will be inclined to pursue the advancement of next-best things. She might begin tending to the care of things that once belonged to him. If he owned a dog, Mary might now be driven to take care of the dog, even if she didn't have much to do with it previously.<sup>18</sup> Or, she might begin helping friends of his whom he left behind. Her love for James and active pursuit of his good express themselves not (directly) on James himself, but on those he was close with.<sup>19</sup> Mary might even begin taking care of people who look like and/or act like James, even if James never knew them.<sup>20</sup>

This widow example is not perfect, and one main reason why is because a person's flourishing might not be unaffected by external factors. On objective list theories of well-being, according to which a person's happiness (well-being, flourishing, and blessedness) is a function of how many objective goods (including, but not limited to, pleasure, the lack of pain, and the satisfaction of desires) are in their life, a person's well-being can be impacted by goods that are

---

<sup>18</sup> I thank Judy Kerr for this dog example.

<sup>19</sup> In his blog (Jon Patterson, "How I Started Dating My Best Friend's Widow," *Walk by Faith* (blog), WordPress, published January 18, 2016, accessed October 15, 2022, URL = <<https://jonepatterson.wordpress.com/2016/01/18/how-i-started-dating-my-best-friends-widow/>>), Jon Patterson tells the story of how he began dating the widow of a dear friend he lost to cancer. He thinks that being with Cady, the widow, allows him to honor his late friend, appealing to the custom of levirate marriage, in which an unmarried brother of a deceased man marries his widow, sometimes to provide an heir for the deceased (see both Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "levirate," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed October 15, 2022, URL = <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/levirate>>).

<sup>20</sup> As Thomas Senor has pointed out, sometimes we love what our beloveds love(d). This is certainly true. However, a love for person P that is naturally (re)directed to a pursuit of related things when the lover can no longer advance the good of P (anymore), can cause the lover to pursue the good of P's own beloveds or the good of things P never loved in the first place.

external to their person – perhaps even goods beyond their death.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it could very well be that James flourishes more when Mary tends to a dog that used to be his, in which case Mary can love James and perfectly, without any infelicitousness, pursue his good after his death through various means. Her love for him and desire for his good don't have to express themselves in secondary ways that do nothing to actually benefit him.<sup>22</sup>

In connection with this point, two things should be said. First, even if Mary is able to make James flourish more after his death, the same general idea applies. Once the ordinary means of improving James's flourishing are closed, she is inclined to go through secondary means instead. Second, I am committed to God's aseity. However, I am also inclined towards an objective list theory of well-being, in which case, seemingly, external goods will (at least in principle) be able to impact God's well-being, contrary to divine aseity. How, then, can we reconcile God's aseity with an objective list theory of well-being? Here's my thinking: I think that God's flourishing and our flourishing are simply different from one another. Even if it is proper for us to say that objective list theory is correct for the flourishing of both God and humans, God and humans flourish in fundamentally different ways. On the one hand, God is Goodness Itself, and because of this God flourishes supremely without any external goods. But,

---

<sup>21</sup> Debating the correct conception of well-being is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is good to mention briefly some motivation for objective list theory, which I will assume is true the rest of this work. I tend to doubt hedonism, according to which a person's happiness is purely a function of how much pleasure and how little pain they have. Nozick's experience machine suggests that having *real* experiences is important. A life of pleasurable experiences that are fake, illusory, or deceptive seems less good than a life of real pleasurable experiences. See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Blackwell, 1999), pp. 42-45. Additionally, I also tend to doubt desire-satisfaction theory, according to which a person's happiness is purely a function of how many satisfied desires they have. Hitler was probably not living a good life, even though his desire to murder millions of Jews was satisfied. See Augustine, *The Happy Life*, translated by Ludwig Schopp, in *Writings of Saint Augustine*, Volume 1, *The Fathers of the Church*, Volume 5 (CIMA Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 55-57 (2.10). To avoid these problems, I tend towards objective list theory. Much more can be said, but for a general introduction, see Roger Crisp, "Well-Being," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2021 edition, edited by Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/well-being/>>.

<sup>22</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, second edition, translated by Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing Company, 2000); in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan (Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), p. 261b (Bk. 1, Ch. 8, 1099a28-1099b8); and pp. 262b-264a (Bk. 1, Ch. 10-11, 1100a10-1101b9).

additionally, because God is Goodness Itself, any external good that comes to God is really just a mirror of God Himself, whom He already has fully in His possession. And because mirrors merely reflect light and do not create light, all external goods, reflecting God's goodness, do not add any further goodness to God's life. The level of, as it were, illumination in God's life remains the same. This is different from humans, who might not have certain goods in their lives that reflect God until certain external goods come their way. Thus, God, who is Goodness Itself, flourishes completely and utterly within Himself, and all external goods that might come His way have no impact on His flourishing. Yet, this is consistent with a theory of well-being for humans that allows the flourishing of humans to be impacted by external goods, such as an objective list theory. These external goods, as it were, illuminate their lives and cause them to flourish to a greater extent by reflecting the goodness of God into their lives.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the point is this. From all of these examples, we can see that if a strong and active love cannot express itself through the normal channels, it will, still pursuing the good of the beloved, likely express itself through some other channel.<sup>24</sup> It will likely bubble up and

---

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 530-532. Note also that the evils that damage a person's flourishing are, on the privation theory of evil, a lack of good things (that ought to be present). See section B of Chapter II.

<sup>24</sup> Compare this with one motivation for violent resistance and terrorism. For the former, consider the following portion from Nelson Mandela's speech at the opening of the defense case in the Rivonia Trial:

"We had no doubt that we had to continue the fight. Anything else would have been abject surrender. *Our problem, My Lord, was not whether to fight, but was how to continue the fight.* We of the ANC had always stood for a non-racial democracy, and we shrank from any action which might drive the races further apart than they already were. But the hard facts were that fifty years of non-violence had brought the African people nothing but more and more repressive legislation, and fewer and fewer rights. ...

"At the beginning of June 1961, after a long and anxious assessment of the South African situation, I, and some colleagues, came to the conclusion that as violence [in this country - inaudible] was inevitable, it would be unrealistic and wrong for African leaders to continue preaching peace and non-violence at a time when the Government met our peaceful demands with force.

"This conclusion, My Lord, was not easily arrived at. *It was when all, only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to*



overflow (if able). And I see absolutely no reason why the same isn't also true for God. On our assumption that God loves Himself primarily, He is in complete and utter love with Himself, and He has an active and maximal desire for the maximization of His own good. His love does not sit still like a sack of potatoes; He actively pursues His happiness with maximally deep yearning. But once His maximal happiness is fully actualized, His maximal love, still actively pursuing His own good, is, plausibly, inclined to continue to do things, but, because the direct object of His desire for His own good has already been fully actualized, He turns to advance next-best things.

Indeed, from these same points we can even go so far as to say that God, plausibly, will be inclined to pursue next-best things *as far as possible*. Suppose, for instance, that the second-best thing is x. Suppose, then, that God ordains x. At that point, His active and maximal love for Himself and desire for His own good will still be active and maximal. It will still be, as it were, stirring within Him and inclining Him to act further. Abundantly overflowing water, once it has filled to the brim the thing into which it has overflowed, will cause additional overflows until

---

*embark on violent forms of struggle, ... We did so not because we desired such a course, but solely because the Government had left us with no other choice"*  
 (Nelson Mandela, "I Am Prepared to Die," Nelson Mandela Foundation, accessed October 27, 2022, URL = [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS010&txtstr=prepare d%20to%20die](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS010&txtstr=prepare%20to%20die)), brackets in the original, emphases added).

Next, consider one excuse that some terrorists or terrorist sympathizers will give for terrorism:

*"The most common excuse for terrorism is that it is a last resort, chosen only when all else fails. The image is of people who have literally run out of options. One by one, they have tried every legitimate form of political and military action, exhausted every possibility, failed everywhere, until no alternative remains but the evil of terrorism. They must be terrorists or do nothing at all. The easy response is to insist that, given this description of their case, they should do nothing at all; they have indeed exhausted their possibilities. But this response simply reaffirms the principle, ignores the excuse; this response does not attend to the terrorists' desperation. Whatever the cause to which they are committed, we have to recognize that, given the commitment, the one thing they cannot do is 'nothing at all'"* (Michael Walzer, "Terrorism: A Critique of Excuses," in *Problems of International Justice*, edited by Steven Luper-Foy (Routledge, 2019), p. 239, emphases added).

there is nothing more into which its water can overflow.<sup>25</sup> God's maximal and active love will, therefore, be inclined to continue not to sit still, and it will be inclined to continue on until there is nothing more He can pursue that is related to His own good.<sup>26</sup>

This same reasoning can be applied to God's loving desire for union with Himself. Given that He is His own primary beloved, God not only desires to maximize His own good, but He also desires maximal union with Himself. However, just like with God's desire for His own flourishing, a problem almost immediately arises. God is, as the WCF states (WCF 2.3), triune, existing eternally in a community of persons. And each person of this Trinity, though different, is perfectly united to each of the other members of the Trinity, in which case our triune God is, from all of eternity, utterly united to Himself within Himself. Thus, just like His desire for His own good, His desire for union with Himself is, from all of eternity, already met independently of the creation.<sup>27</sup> Will God's desire for union with Himself have anything to say about His ordination of things within creation, then?

I think it will, for the same sorts of reasons already mentioned. God's active pursuit of union with Himself, if it is part of a maximal love, is, plausibly, inclined to spill over into a pursuit of next-best things when the primary object of His loving desire has been fully actualized. Thus, because God has, as we are assuming, a primary and, therefore, a maximal and active love for Himself, and because He fully has, in all of eternity, in the Trinity, the primary object of His loving desire for union with Himself, His active pursuit of union with Himself is,

---

<sup>25</sup> Somewhat morbidly, this reminds me of a scene from the movie *Titanic*. See Titanic Movie/Película, "'Titanic will founder' - Scene HD," YouTube, published August 15, 2018, accessed November 19, 2022, URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SP7BWb1ndpA>>.

<sup>26</sup> This might entail that God, from a desire for *His own good*, will desire to maximize *the good of humans*, who have been created in the image of God, and especially any spiritual image bearers. See Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 458-459, and 533-534.

<sup>27</sup> But, see footnote 60 of this chapter.

plausibly, inclined to spill over into a pursuit of next-best things, things that are perhaps closely associated with or analogous to, though not the same thing as, union with God.

We can see this type of thing in ordinary life. Consider, for instance, marriage and children. When a person P deeply loves and, therefore, yearns for union with person P', actively pursuing marriage with them, what is one thing that P might (quite naturally) be inclined to pursue once they have finally fulfilled their desires and are married to and united with P'? One thing might be having children with P' and being united with those children. Even if they never thought about having children before, as a result of P loving P' deeply and actively pursuing union with P', P might (quite naturally) be inclined to pursue a sort of secondary union with P' through being united with the children of P' once P has actualized the primary object of their loving desire, which is marital union with P'. The active pursuit of union with P' might simply shift or overflow into a pursuit of next-best things.<sup>28, 29</sup>

Consider also, once again, James and Mary. When James dies, Mary does not stop deeply loving him all of a sudden. She still has an active yearning to be with him, pursuing union with him even after his death. However, she can't be united with him (at least in normal ways) because he's dead. What, then, happens? Because she has a set of churning desires of love that are rising to the surface within her, they incline her to seek next-best things. Maybe she tries spending time with James's son (whether his son is also Mary's son or not). Maybe she ends up becoming friends with someone very similar to him. Maybe she falls in love and becomes romantically involved with a friend of his. Whatever she does, her active and deeply loving desire for union with James inclines her to pursue next-best things.

---

<sup>28</sup> I am not claiming that this always happens, and I am not claiming that this is the main reason for why people have children. All I am claiming is that something like this could realistically take place.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Richard Swinburne, "Could There Be More Than One God?" *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 3 (1988), p. 233.

This, I would think, also happens with God. On our assumption that God loves Himself primarily, He has an active and maximal love for Himself that actively and maximally pursues the maximization of union with Himself. But this active and maximal love does not want to just sit still once God's perfect union with Himself has been fully actualized. No, once His perfect union with Himself has been fully actualized, His maximal and active love, still actively and maximally pursuing union with Himself, is inclined to continue to do things, but, because the direct object of His desire for union with Himself has already been fully actualized, He turns to advance next-best things.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, in line with what was said above, from these same points we can even go so far as to say that God, plausibly, will be inclined to pursue next-best things *as far as possible*. Suppose, for instance, that the second-best thing is x. Suppose, then, that God ordains x. At that point, His active and maximal love for Himself and desire for union with Himself will still be active and maximal. It will still be, as it were, stirring within Him and inclining Him to act further. Abundantly overflowing water, once it has filled to the brim the thing into which it has overflowed, will cause additional overflows until there is nothing more into which its water can overflow. God's love will, therefore, be inclined to continue not to sit still, and it will be inclined to continue on until there is nothing more He can pursue that is related to union with Himself.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Senor asks, "Is there the possibility that since God is infinitely lovable and infinitely loving, there is a perfect fit between the subject and object of love and so there isn't really the possibility of there being excess love, as it were, because of the infinitely love-worthiness of the object of love?" By way of response, God's infinite lovableness might be one reason *why* God loves Himself primarily (see section C of Chapter III), but God's infinite love for Himself, being active and maximal, still wants to *do* something. Love naturally seeks the good of and union with the beloved. But, of course, God is already perfectly flourishing and perfectly united with Himself. Thus, His love, being maximal and active and refusing to sit still, overflows into a pursuit of next-best things. In other words, the perfect fit of God infinitely loving the infinitely lovable God says nothing this way or that about what actions God would perform from His love for Himself, especially if He is already perfectly flourishing and perfectly united with Himself.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 419-427 and 448, especially p. 421.

Three final points need to be addressed before we turn to a discussion of some plausible next-best things. First, as already discussed, God's active and maximal love for Himself will be inclined to continue to pursue next-best things until there is no further next-best thing that He can pursue. This means that He will be inclined to maximize next-best things, in terms of both quality and quantity. But is it possible to actualize the maximization of next-best things?

Suppose, for instance, that one of the next-best things that God will pursue is having in creation consequences that can rightly be ascribed to Him. (This is, in fact, one of the things I will argue in the next section.) Seemingly, no matter which world God actualizes, there will always be another in which there are more consequences that can rightly be ascribed to Him. We can see this with a very simple point. Suppose that God actualizes world  $W$  and suppose that in  $W$  there are  $n$  number of instances of humans miraculously being healed of various illnesses, which are, let us suppose, consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God. Now, whatever  $n$  is, there seems to be another possible world  $W'$  in which the number of instances of humans being miraculously healed of various illnesses is  $n+1$ . So also, there seems to be another world  $W''$  in which the number of instances of humans miraculously being healed of various illnesses is  $n+2$ . Thus, there is seemingly always another possible world in which the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God can be increased to a greater quantitative extent. Thus, it seems that there is no maximization, in terms of quantity at least, of the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God. Even further, it might be that there is always another possible world in which the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God can be increased to a greater *qualitative* extent. I will not argue here that this is

correct, but the point should be clear. It might be that maximizing the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God is impossible to be done.<sup>32</sup>

What, then, should we say, given that God will be inclined to maximize next-best things, in terms of both quality and quantity? There are at least two possible solutions. First, it might be that all possible worlds are real, or it might be that there is an infinite multiverse, or it might be that there is a single universe that is infinite in some respect; and it might be that, throughout this infinite creation, God brings about the maximization of next-best things. In effect, a version of the principle of plenitude is correct:<sup>33</sup> all next-best things are actual somewhere in this, say, infinite multiverse.<sup>34</sup> If there is an infinite number of next-best things that God's active and maximal love is likely to pursue, then God might well actualize them all by ordaining them all to exist in an infinite creation.

Second, it might be that the maximization of next-best things really is impossible. If so, God will just have to choose a (perhaps random)<sup>35</sup> degree to which He will pursue next-best

---

<sup>32</sup> For related material, see Norman Kretzmann, "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" in *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 231-238; Stephen Irby, "Potentials, Actuals, and the Logical Problem of Evil" (MA thesis, University of Arkansas, 2019), pp. 18-29; and William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 60-63; and Nick Trakakis, "Does Hard Determinism Render the Problem of Evil even Harder?" *Ars Disputandi* 6, no. 1 (2006), paragraphs 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> See Hud Hudson, "Best Possible World Theodicy," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), pp. 236, 243-246. I do not have the space here to discuss the entirety of such a proposal, but to say the least, many questions arise. For example, is it possible for there to be a different multiverse? And if it is, does this entail that the actual multiverse does not contain *all* next-best things? Also, we might ask whether it is, strictly speaking, even possible for all next-best things to be actualized in the same multiverse. For a related point, see Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, pp. 60-63. Further, can the, say, quantity of next-best things in one infinite multiverse be greater than the quantity of next-best things in another infinite multiverse? This, of course, raises questions about the nature of infinity. For some discussion of the nature of infinity, see Jordan Howard Sobel, *Logic and Theism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 185-187. Digging into all of these questions is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, so I leave further examination to the side and merely offer the multiverse theory as one possible response to our current problem.

<sup>35</sup> For some discussion of whether God can choose at random, see Klaas Kraay, "Can God Choose a World at Random?" in *New Waves in Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Yujin Nagasawa and Erik Wielenberg (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009), pp. 22-35.

things (perhaps a degree that is higher than the degree to which He will pursue the good of and union with non-first-tier beloveds, given that He loves Himself primarily), after which He will rest content.<sup>36</sup> This seems to be a better position. Some of the next-best things require God to create (as should become clear throughout the rest of this chapter), but God was free to create this universe, so He was free to ordain or not to ordain some next-best things.<sup>37</sup> Even further, from the very beginning of our present discussion, I have been using the language of “inclination.” For example, I said, “This active pursuit, if it is part of a maximal love, is, plausibly, *inclined* to spill over into a pursuit of next-best things when the primary (or direct) object of His loving desire has been fully actualized.” I don’t think any overflow is necessary. Still, God is inclined to overflow, nevertheless.<sup>38, 39</sup> If this is correct, then, though there will be nothing within God *compelling* Him to ordain next-best things, we can say, at the least, that it would not be surprising if He were to ordain them and that it is plausible that God will ordain them. And that is all we need for our purposes here. For, we are merely trying to present a plausible story in which God allows the evils we see in our world.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> A good point at which God might rest content is one in which He has actualized every *type* of next-best thing.

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 93 of Chapter I.

<sup>38</sup> This might be where the metaphor breaks down. Thomas Senor has suggested that an “overflow” seems to be unintentional and beyond one’s control. I am not convinced of this, but let’s grant the point. No metaphor is perfect, so as long as it communicates well enough what it is trying to convey, that is good enough for me.

<sup>39</sup> In this context, I do not hold to what you might call a deterministic account of inclination. That is, I do not hold to anything like the following, at least for God: a person P is inclined to perform action A iff P will perform A if there are no other desires or preferences that prevent P from performing A. I’m thinking of God as having something akin to libertarian freedom. His maximal and active love for Himself draws Him to overflow and causes Him to greatly desire it, but He is free to refrain from overflowing, even if there are no competing desires or preferences. If the reader does not accept my language of “inclination,” that is okay with me. Change the language to some other word to indicate what I mean. I thank Thomas Senor for comments that pushed me to say something about this.

<sup>40</sup> If God loves Himself primarily, does the pursuit of next-best things related to God’s own good and God’s union with Himself have a greater priority for God than His pursuit of the good of and union with His non-first-tiered beloveds? That is, let’s grant that God would pursue His own good and union with Himself above all lower-tiered beloveds. Still, we have to ask: would God pursue *next-best things* related to God’s own good and God’s union with Himself before pursuing the good of and union with His non-first-tiered beloveds? I’m unsure. Maybe God would pursue the good of and union with His non-first-tier beloveds before any next-best things related to God’s own good and God’s union with Himself, but maybe not. At the least, it is plausible that He would pursue next-best things first. For, the reason why God is inclined to overflow in the first place is because He is in complete and utter love with Himself, having an active and maximal desire for the maximization of His own good and for the maximization

Our second final point is the following. In the upcoming sections, I will oftentimes refer to what I call *comprehensive* maximization. To understand what I mean by comprehensive maximization, consider the following. Suppose that there are two conflicting pleasures p and q, and suppose that p is, all else being equal, a better pleasure than q. Because of this, if we were to maximize pleasure, all else being equal, we would choose p over q. However, by choosing p over q, we have not *comprehensively* maximized pleasure. Though we have maximized pleasure, given that p and q conflict, because we do not have *both* p and q, we do not have pleasure *comprehensively*. Comprehensively maximizing pleasure would be actualizing all pleasures that are, when considered by themselves, possible. Similarly, God might maximize next-best things yet not *comprehensively* maximize next-best things. Comprehensive maximization of next-best things is the actualization of everything that can be counted as a next-best thing, so if God fails to actualize everything that can be counted as a next-best thing, He also fails to comprehensively maximize.

This is important because when God's maximal and active love for Himself churns within Him, He becomes inclined to pursue (in which case He begins to desire the actualization of) everything and anything that can in any respect be considered secondary or analogous to His own good and to union with Himself. He desires it all. He doesn't want to make compromises. He wants to actualize everything that can in any respect be counted as a next-best thing. But, because conflicts might arise between next-best things (or between next-best things and something else entirely) and because maximization simpliciter might be impossible, God might have to make compromises, in which case He won't be able to actualize all next-best things.

---

of union with Himself, yearning not to sit still like a sack of potatoes. This is an incredibly strong desire, so it seems perfectly acceptable to say that it is plausible that God would pursue next-best things related to His own good and to union with Himself before pursuing the good of and union with His lower-tiered beloveds.



Is it coherent to say that God desires the comprehensive maximization of next-best things? Yes, I think it is. To see this, consider God's desire for maximization simpliciter of next-best things. Even if the maximization simpliciter of next-best things is not possible, perhaps because there are always more next-best things that God can ordain, we should still think of God as desiring it in some sense. Being inclined to pursue next-best things as much as possible, God wants the maximization simpliciter of next-best things. He is inclined to pursue them and then to continue to pursue them until He can no longer do so anymore. He wants the highest degree of next-best things. But, though God desires this maximization in some sense, when the rubber meets the road, He will have to make some choices if maximization simpliciter is not possible.

A distinction can probably be made between what we might call God's abstract and concrete thinking. While reflecting on His maximal and active love for Himself, He, in purely abstract thinking, wants the maximization simpliciter of next-best things. He recognizes that this is something that He desires to actualize if maximization simpliciter is possible. But, when God, as it were, turns and reflects upon whether maximization simpliciter is possible, He might well come to recognize that, concretely, such maximization is not possible, at which point He will have to make some choices. Still, in some sense, He desires this maximization.

Similarly, in the abstract, God desires the comprehensive maximization of next-best things. He is inclined to pursue them all, and He doesn't want to make compromises; He doesn't want to leave anything out. It might be, however, that God cannot actualize all next-best things because they conflict with one another (or with independent things) or because maximization simpliciter is impossible. So, it might be that, in the end, God has to make compromises. Still, in some sense, He desires to actualize them all. Abstractly, He thinks to Himself, *if I can actualize*

*all of these, then I want to actualize them all.* But, when the rubber meets the road, He will have to make choices if conflicts arise.<sup>41, 42, 43</sup>

Thus, in the upcoming sections, I will speak of God *abstractly* desiring the comprehensive maximization of certain next-best things. By this, I mean to indicate that He wants the maximization of those next-best things if maximization is possible, and that He wants to actualize every instance of those next-best things if no conflicts arise with actualizing every instance of those next-best things. This type of desiring is idealistic; God ignores concrete complications that may or may not arise when it comes to satisfying His desire.<sup>44</sup> Still, it is a legitimate type of desiring.

For our third final point, I note again that all we need in this dissertation is a plausible story in which God, if God exists, allows the evils we see in our world. Of course, the more likely it is, the better, so I want to offer as strong of an account as possible, but the point remains the same: if the material in this section is plausible, that is good enough for our purposes here.

---

<sup>41</sup> If any conflict arises, God will choose the next-best things that are higher in the hierarchy of next-best things, if such a hierarchy exists. If, however, there is no hierarchy, He might just choose some next-best things instead of others.

<sup>42</sup> Compare this with the distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will. See John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, Volume 37: *St. John of Damascus*, translated by Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), pp. 260-263 (Bk 2, Ch. 29); and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, second and revised edition, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), retrieved from *New Advent*, URL = <<https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>> (I, q. 19, a. 6); Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 259; and Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 385. Related points can be found in: Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. 33-36.

<sup>43</sup> Imagine a philosophy student who is zealous for their education. While enrolling in classes for some semester, they might think to themselves that they want to maximize the number of philosophy classes that they take, but they might also think to themselves that they want to take every single philosophy class that their university has to offer. Of course, when the rubber meets the road, they might have to make some choices if, for example, certain classes meet at the same time, but the idea should be clear: they might think to themselves *if I can take all of these classes, then I will*. Similarly, God, in utterly zealous love for Himself, wants to actualize all next-best things. In the abstract, He desires their comprehensive maximization.

<sup>44</sup> More broadly, an abstract desire is a desire for something without the desirer considering complications that may or may not arise with actualizing it. Note that abstractly desiring something does not mean that there are complications. It only means that the desirer ignores whether there are complications.

## B. Next-Best Things Related to God's Own Good

Because, at this point, the preliminary material has been discussed, we should now turn to a discussion of the next-best things. Let us first look at the next-best things related to God's own good. That is, what are some of the next-best things that God might well desire to ordain (or that God is inclined to pursue), given His active and maximal desire for His own good? Such next-best things will be things that are perhaps closely associated with or analogous to, though not the same thing as, God's actual flourishing. What are some of these things?<sup>45</sup>

I think that there is a *very* good chance that the second-best thing is the comprehensive maximization of God's external glory (or, perhaps more accurately, there is a very good chance that the external glory of God is the second-best thing, and God will abstractly desire its comprehensive maximization, given that He abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of next-best things). In fact, I can't think of a more plausible candidate. And even if there is a more plausible candidate, it is, at the very least, plausible that the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God is one of the next-best things that God will be inclined to pursue. As a reminder, the external glory of God is when God's internal glory, as it were, shines forth. And God can be externally glorified in (at least) three ways: (1) through there being consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him, (2) through there being good things in this world, and (3) through humans bearing the spiritual image of God, which is a matter of humans knowing God, loving God, and rejoicing in God, with God Himself residing within them. God comprehensively shining forth as His glorious self seems quite natural for God to abstractly

---

<sup>45</sup> As indicated in footnote 26 of this chapter, one next-best thing is probably the flourishing of humans, who have been created in the image of God, and especially any spiritual image bearers. Section E will address this. I focus in the meantime on other next-best things. It should be clear that some next-best things might have little or nothing to do with other rational, sentient, or living beings. Consider again Mary and her late husband James. If James loved old cars, Mary might, quite naturally, begin collecting them and refurbishing them after his death, even though old cars are not rational, sentient, or living. Similarly, there might be next-best things related to God's flourishing that have little or nothing to do with the flourishing of other rational, sentient, or living beings.

desire if He desires the next-best things related to His own good. This seems to be closely associated with or analogous to God's actual flourishing. For, talk of God shining forth as His glorious self sounds to me a whole lot like God acting on His function.<sup>46</sup> But, if it is not just immediately obvious that one next-best thing related to God's own good is the comprehensive maximization of God's external glory, I offer the following reflections.

There are at least three arguments for the conclusion that one of the next-best things related to God's own good is the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God. First, the simplest argument appeals to the doctrine of divine simplicity, which I have been assuming in this work. Thus, I call it *the argument from divine simplicity*. If God is utterly simple, then God's flourishing just is God's internal glory.<sup>47</sup> So, if God's maximal and active desire for His own flourishing leads Him to desire next-best things that are perhaps closely associated with or analogous to, though not the same thing as, God's actual flourishing, and if God's actual flourishing just is God's internal glory, one quite natural next-best thing will be His external glory. And, given that His overflowing desire for His own good is maximal and active, inclining Him to pursue next-best things as far as possible, He will be inclined to pursue this external glory as far as possible. Even more than this, it is not unlikely that He will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God. As said, He doesn't want to make compromises. He wants it all. So, He will abstractly desire to actualize every instance of the external glory of God.

Second, let us consider *the argument from God's goodness*. As noted above, it is because God is Goodness Itself that God flourishes supremely without any external goods. He has all

---

<sup>46</sup> For the connection between acting on one's function and flourishing, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 259b-260a (Bk. 1, Ch. 7, 1097b22-1098a21).

<sup>47</sup> But see footnote 20 of Chapter II.

goodness, value, and beauty already contained within Himself. His life, therefore, is, on its own, utterly blessed. But this means that God's supreme flourishing is directly connected with the fact that His life is filled with infinite goodness. His life being filled with infinite goodness is why He flourishes as He does. Naturally, then, God's abstract desire for His own comprehensively maximal flourishing, which follows from His complete and utter love for Himself,<sup>48</sup> will lead Him to abstractly desire a life of His own that is comprehensively filled with all goodness. Of course, He already has all goodness, value, and beauty contained within Himself, so His abstract desire for His life to be comprehensively maximally filled with all goodness is not an abstract desire for something that He lacks. Still, it is an abstract desire, nonetheless. Given this, imagine God, with His active and maximal desire for His own good, pondering what the next-best things are that are related to His own good and that He could pursue. One quite natural, plausible option, given that His infinite goodness is why His life is infinitely flourishing, is the comprehensive maximization, in terms of both quality and quantity, of goodness in the world. But this just is the comprehensive maximization, in terms of both quality and quantity, of the second form of the external glory of God. Hence, plausibly, God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the second form of the external glory of God.<sup>49</sup>

Further, the comprehensive maximization, in terms of both quality and quantity, of the second form of the external glory of God entails the comprehensive maximization, in terms of both quality and quantity, of the other two forms of the external glory of God. For, the first form of the external glory of God just is there being consequences in creation that can rightly be

---

<sup>48</sup> Note that now that we have made the distinction between maximization simpliciter and comprehensive maximization, we should make clear that God desires comprehensive maximization of His own good. Out of a complete and utter love for Himself, He desires everything that can in any way improve His well-being.

<sup>49</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 19, a. 6). Perhaps this is one reason why, at least in reference to God, "*Goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself*" (Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" p. 217, emphasis in the original). Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, p. 1236 (29e-30b).

ascribed to God. And, as discussed in section B of Chapter II, it is only good effects in creation that can be ascribed to God. Because goodness and being are the same, bad (or evil), properly speaking, has no substance, existence, or being, in which case it is the lack of goodness that ought to be present. That means that God does not, properly speaking, produce it. He brings it about by refraining from producing that which is good or has being. We should not, therefore, ultimately ascribe it to Him.

This raises a question now that we have presented material in Chapter III. If it is only good effects in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God, then can we rightly ascribe (the consequences of) God's retributive justice to God? Take any instance of (the consequences of) His retributive justice (e.g., Hell). In it, the evildoer endures punishment, which is seemingly an evil. In fact, when we discussed retributive justice in section E of Chapter III, we quoted Jonathan Edwards saying, "he which from his will *does* evil to others should *receive* evil from the will of others, or from the will of him or them whose business it is to take care of the injured, and to act in their behalf: and [] he should suffer evil in *proportion* to the evil of his doings."<sup>50</sup> But that means that, seemingly, we cannot ascribe (any consequence of) God's retributive justice to God. It is an evil, after all, and it is only good effects, never evil ones, that can rightly be ascribed to God. But this conclusion seems wrong. If it is (a consequence of) *God's* retributive justice, surely we should be able to rightly ascribe it to *God*!

By way of response, we must remember that we can view things from either an isolated or holistic perspective, as discussed in section C of Chapter II. If we view, for example, Hell, isolated from its context of retributive justice, we cannot rightly ascribe it to God because the pains of Hell are bad on their own. However, when we view them holistically, seeing them in the

---

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989), p. 569, emphases in the original.

context of retributive justice, which is good, we can say either that the state of affairs on the whole is good, in which case we can rightly ascribe it to God, or that the pains of Hell take on a new character that makes them good, (similar to how Hitler's evil character makes his political power bad, given that his political power allows him to put into effect his evil will, even though political power on its own is good when isolated from its context,) in which case we can rightly ascribe it to God. Thus, we can ascribe retributive justice to God, even though only good effects can rightly be ascribed to God. And the reason is because, when viewing instances of retributive justice holistically, either the whole is good or the evils themselves that are a part of the retributive justice become good, though the pains are bad when viewing them without considering their context.

With this worry out of the way, we can conclude that it is only good effects in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God. At this point, then, we can see that the comprehensive maximization of the second form of the external glory of God entails the comprehensive maximization of the first form of the external glory of God. For, if good things are comprehensively maximized in terms of both quality and quantity, such that there is no further good that God can actualize, and if it is only good effects that can rightly be ascribed to God, then there is no consequence left for God to ordain that can be ascribed to Him, in which case the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God have been comprehensively maximized, in terms of both quality and quantity. In other words, if God comprehensively maximizes goodness, then the only consequences left for God to ordain are bad or neutral ones, and neither of them can rightly be ascribed to God, in which case there is no further consequence that can be ascribed to God. Therefore, the comprehensive maximization, in terms of both quality and quantity, of the second form of the external glory of God, such that good things are

comprehensively maximized in terms of both quality and quantity, entails the comprehensive maximization of the first form of the external glory of God. Hence, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the second form of the external glory of God, He also (at least in some sense) abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the first form of the external glory of God as well.<sup>51, 52</sup>

But, as noted in section D of Chapter II, the third form of the external glory of God, in which humans bear the spiritual image of God, is a combination of both the first and second forms of the external divine glory. And because, as has just been argued, God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, if there is a way for Him to be externally glorified through the first two forms, He will abstractly desire it as well. Thus, because one way in which the first and second forms of the external glory of God can be instanced is through the comprehensive maximization, in terms of both quality and quantity, of the third form of the external glory of God, God will abstractly desire it (at least in some sense).<sup>53, 54</sup> Therefore, God will abstractly desire (at least in some sense) the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God.

---

<sup>51</sup> If God desires x, and x entails y, does God desire y? It seems so, even if it is only because y is required for x to occur. This does not, of course, mean that God desires y for its own sake. Note that this claim does not obviously apply to humans. A human might desire x yet not recognize that a necessary condition of actualizing x is y, thereby preventing them from desiring y. But for God, who knows all things, desiring x entails desiring whatever is necessary for actualizing x. Cf. Daniel Johnson, "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil," pp. 33-36.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 428-430, 437.

<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that the third form of the external glory of God is not merely a combination of both the first and second forms of the external glory of God. As discussed in section D of Chapter II, when God causes to exist within a certain human the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God, God begins to dwell specially within them. But because this indwelling derives from God causing certain consequences to exist in the world that can rightly be ascribed to Him, and because the first form of the external glory of God is there being consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him, this point should not worry us. If God were to comprehensively maximize the first form of the external glory of God, He would ordain every consequence in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him. But that would include God ordaining certain humans to have the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God. And because of this, God would begin to dwell specially within them, in accordance with the details presented in section D of Chapter II.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 430-444.



The third argument for the conclusion that one of the next-best options is the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God is *the argument from the kingdom of God*. One quite natural, plausible next-best thing that is related to God's own good and that I think that God would abstractly desire is the comprehensive maximization of His kingdom (or, perhaps more accurately, the kingdom of God is a next-best thing, and God will abstractly desire its comprehensive maximization, given that He abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of next-best things). If He, fundamentally, wants to advance His own flourishing, then a good next-best thing will be to advance the flourishing of His kingdom. And it seems that every instance of the external glory of God can be counted as part of this kingdom. When God works and brings about various consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him (the first form of the external glory of God), we should say that the kingdom of God is there because God's influence is there, if only slightly.<sup>55</sup> Further, when goodness in the world increases (that is, when the second form of the external glory of God increases), we should rightly say that there has been an increase in the kingdom of God; for, as discussed in Chapter II, God's nature is seen through good things and is reflected by them. They are the king's images.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, when God

---

<sup>55</sup> Compare this with my remark in section D of Chapter II: "whenever God acts and causes certain consequences that can rightly be attributed to Him to arise in a particular location, we are led to say that God is present there."

<sup>56</sup> The hymn "Thy Kingdom Come, O God" seemingly connects the desire for the kingdom of God to come with the desire for the first and second forms of the external glory of God (and possibly the third). Here it is in full:

Thy kingdom come, O God,  
Thy rule, O Christ, begin;  
Break with thine iron rod  
The tyrannies of sin.

Where is thy reign of peace  
And purity and love?  
When shall all hatred cease,  
As in the realms above?

When comes the promised time  
That war shall be no more,  
And lust, oppression, crime  
Shall flee thy face before?

opens hearts and minds and causes people to become born again, making them to know Him, love Him, and rejoice in Him, taking up residence within their hearts and minds (all three forms of the external glory of God), a citizen is added to the kingdom, and the kingdom is expanded. And when these people grow in the knowledge of God, the love of God, or the joy in God, God's rule in their hearts is increased, and God's kingdom is advanced.<sup>57</sup> Thus, every instance of the external glory of God adds to the kingdom of God.

---

We pray thee, Lord, arise,  
And come in thy great might;  
Revive our longing eyes,  
Which languish for thy sight.

Men scorn thy sacred name,  
And wolves devour thy fold;  
By many deeds of shame  
We learn that love grows cold.

O'er lands both near and far  
Thick darkness broodeth yet:  
Arise, O Morning Star,  
Arise, and never set!

A good version can be found at: mkariobangi, "ST MARY'S COLLEGIATE CHURCH-THY KINGDOM, O GOD," YouTube, published November 18, 2013, accessed October 8, 2022, URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oe-Vy5LkYEs>>. I thank Camden Gilmore for directing my attention to this hymn. I also thank Hunter Bailey, who was (I believe) the first one to show me the connection between the kingdom of God and goodness in the world.

<sup>57</sup> One of my favorite Christmas hymns is "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus," and in the last verse a desire is seemingly expressed for the third form of the external glory of God, and it is seemingly connected with God's kingdom. Speaking of Jesus, it reads:

Born thy people to deliver,  
Born a child, and yet a King,  
Born to reign in us for ever,  
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By thine own eternal Spirit,  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By thine all-sufficient merit,  
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

A good version can be found at: Red Mountain Church - Topic, "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus," YouTube, published November 10, 2015, accessed October 6, 2022, URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDLac0N-coU>>.

See also Joel R. Beeke, "The Sovereignty of God and Soul Winning," *Tabletalk*, September 2017, accessed October 6, 2022, URL = <<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2017/09/sovereignty-god-evangelism/>>.

Thus, if the kingdom is comprehensively maximized, the external glory of God is also comprehensively maximized. For, if God actualizes everything that can be counted as part of the kingdom of God, and if every instance of the external glory of God can be counted as part of the kingdom, then He actualizes every instance of the external glory of God. If there were any instance of the external glory of God that had not been actualized, because every instance of the external glory of God can be counted as part of the kingdom of God, God would not have actualized everything that can be counted as part of His kingdom of God. Hence, because it is plausible that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the kingdom of God, it is plausible that God will also abstractly desire (in at least some sense) the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God.

From our discussion, we can see that it very well might be that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God. Prior to creation, then, when God is deciding what to ordain, when there is no external glory of God because there is no world in which the external glory of God can exist, we would not be surprised to see God ordaining the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God, if such comprehensive maximization is possible. If maximization simpliciter is not possible, then we would not be surprised to see God choosing a degree to which He will pursue the external glory of God, after which He will rest content. Similarly, if there are conflicts within the comprehensive maximization of the three forms of the external glory of God (or if their comprehensive maximization conflicts with something else), then God will have to choose some things to ordain over others.<sup>58</sup> Still, we would not be surprised to see God ordaining very great instances of the external glory of God.

---

<sup>58</sup> If there are conflicts between certain instances of the external glory of God, then God will have to make a choice about which instances to ordain and which not to ordain. But if it is also the case that maximization simpliciter of

### C. Next-Best Things Related to God's Union with Himself

Let's turn now to a discussion of the next-best things related to God's union with Himself. That is, what are some of the next-best things that God might well seek, given His active and maximal desire for union with Himself? Well, one of the best ways to be united with God is to be united with His spiritual image bearers, in whom He resides. Thus, it is plausible that God, while actively and maximally desiring comprehensively maximal union with Himself,<sup>59</sup> will abstractly desire comprehensively maximal union with His spiritual image bearers.<sup>60</sup> In connection with this, six points need to be addressed, the entirety of which I will call *the spiritual image bearers argument*.

First, we need to be clear on what exactly God is desiring when He desires union with His spiritual image bearers. God's direct and most immediate desire is *not* the creation of spiritual image bearers, but union with those people who are *already* spiritual image bearers. And the reason is because a spiritual image bearer is a human who has God (the Holy Spirit) residing within them (and expressing Himself therein, such that their knowledge of, love for, and joy in God are His knowledge of, love for, and joy in God).<sup>61</sup> These humans are, in some

---

the external glory of God is not possible, such that God has to simply choose some degree to which He will pursue the external glory of God and rest content afterwards, then it seems possible for God to choose, among, say, the two conflicting instances of the external glory of God, the instance that is less good.

<sup>59</sup> Similar to what was said in footnote 48 of this chapter, now that we have made the distinction between maximization simpliciter and comprehensive maximization, we should make clear that God desires to be comprehensively maximally united with Himself. Out of a complete and utter love for Himself, He desires every instance of union with Himself.

<sup>60</sup> Is God's comprehensively maximal union with His spiritual image bearers a *next-best* thing related to God's union with Himself, or is it the *primary* object of God's desire to be comprehensively maximally united with Himself? If God really and truly dwells within His spiritual image bearers, then I am unsure. I will talk as though it is a next-best thing, but if it is the primary object of God's desire to be comprehensively maximally united with Himself, my argument is only strengthened. For, God will still pursue it, but not because it is next-best thing. Instead, He will pursue it because it is the primary object of His desire to be comprehensively maximally united with Himself.

<sup>61</sup> I add these parentheses because, as pointed out in section D of Chapter II, the weaker version of the spiritual image of God is merely the following: humans knowing, loving, and rejoicing in God, with God dwelling specially (and not just generally) within them, where this indwelling is a result of God causing to exist within them the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God. As said in that section, as far as I can see, we don't need the strong version for my defense against the problem of evil.

substantive sense, already united with God. So, because God desires union with Himself, God desires to be united with people who are already spiritual image bearers, humans who are already united with God. It is in God being united with spiritual image bearers, who are united with God, that God is united with God and, therefore, Himself. This is the direct and immediate desire of God when He desires union with His spiritual image bearers.

Second, what exactly does it mean for God to be united with His spiritual image bearers in addition to them already being spiritual image bearers – that is, in addition to them already being united with God by virtue of the fact that they already have God (the Holy Spirit) in residence within them (and expressing Himself therein, such that their knowledge of, love for, and joy in God are His knowledge of, love for, and joy in God)? I’m not exactly sure what all goes into being united with someone, but I think substantive fellowship and relationship with one another are parts of it.<sup>62</sup> And, whatever substantive fellowship and relationship with someone amounts to, one necessary condition is being in regular and close contact with them. For, how can you have *substantive* fellowship and relationship with someone, yet not be in regular and close contact with them? Thus, God would most naturally bring His spiritual image bearers into regular and close contact with Him. Of course, God is outside of time, but, as has been discussed in section D of Chapter II, He can ordain various consequences that can rightly be attributed to Him, and, as these consequences grow, God’s presence increases. Eventually, as God’s presence increases in a particular location, God is said to be there directly and immediately. Hence, God can establish regular and close contact with His spiritual image bearers by ordaining

---

<sup>62</sup> If my memory serves me right, A.G. Holdier proposed in conversation that this might be an analytic claim.

consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him, thereby allowing Him to be regularly present where they are directly and immediately.<sup>63</sup>

Even further, because He abstractly desires comprehensively maximal union with His spiritual image bearers, He also abstractly desires that this close contact be continual, everlasting, and intimate. This can be accomplished well in Heaven. I am thinking of Heaven as being at least a place in which there are numerous and substantive consequences that can rightly be attributed to God, such that God's presence is continually there directly and immediately for all of eternity to some substantive extent, an extent that is much greater than anywhere currently on Earth. This means that Heaven provides a very good setting for God to be in continual, everlasting, and intimate close contact with His spiritual image bearers. Are there any other places in which God can be continually and substantively present with them directly and immediately for all of eternity? Perhaps, but Heaven is, at least, a very good choice, so God very well could choose to bring them to be with Him forever in Heaven. And if they are brought to be with Him forever in Heaven, they will rightly be called the people of God.

Third, one necessary condition of God being united with His spiritual image bearers is for His spiritual image bearers to exist. Hence, if God desires to be united with His spiritual image bearers, God will desire (in some sense at least) the creation of His spiritual image bearers, not because this is the direct aim of His desire, but because it is a necessary condition of what He most directly desires, which is union with His spiritual image bearers. And humans bearing the spiritual image of God just is the third form the external glory of God. Hence, God will desire (in some sense at least) to ordain the third form of the external glory of God.

---

<sup>63</sup> This seems to be the same type of way in which humans establish close contact with one another. Humans interact by creating various consequences (e.g., verbal sounds or written words) that engage with others.

Even further, as said, in the abstract, God desires the comprehensive maximization of next-best things. He is inclined to pursue them all, and He doesn't want to make compromises; He doesn't want to leave anything out. Thus, God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of next-best things, including the next-best things associated with His union with Himself. But if this is the case, then He will also abstractly desire to comprehensively maximize the number of spiritual image bearers. For, God being united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers is a next-best thing associated with His union with Himself, in which case, given that He abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize next-best things, including the next-best things associated with His union with Himself, God will also abstractly desire to comprehensively maximize His being united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers. Thus, God will abstractly desire to comprehensively maximize the number of spiritual image bearers so that He can be more united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers. In other words, the more spiritual image bearers there are, the more God can be united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers. Thus, if God has ordained to exist every possible spiritual image bearer except one, then God has not comprehensively maximized the next-best things associated with His union with Himself because there is still one more possible spiritual image bearer through whom God can be united with Himself – that is, it is possible for God to be more united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers by being united with that one remaining possible spiritual image bearer. Thus, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of next-best things associated with His union with Himself, He also abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the number of spiritual image bearers.

Fourth, it is plausible that God will abstractly desire to comprehensively maximize the spiritual image of God within those who are spiritual image bearers. As pointed out in section D

of Chapter II, as God's spiritual image bearers grow in the knowledge of God, the love for God, or the joy in God, God takes up deeper residence within them, and their union with Him grows. Thus, God is, in a way, more present within them. He resides in His spiritual image bearers in proportion to how much knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God they have.<sup>64</sup>

But that means that God can be united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers only in proportion to how much knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God they have. For, God can be united to someone only to the extent that they are present, and God is present within a spiritual image bearer in proportion to how much knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God they have. Thus, because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize His being united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers, He will also abstractly desire Himself to be present within His spiritual image bearers comprehensively maximally, thereby allowing Him to be comprehensively maximally united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers. And, given that God is present within a spiritual image bearer in proportion to how much knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God they have, God being comprehensively maximally present within His spiritual image bearers just entails that He has comprehensively maximized the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God within them. But this is the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God within His spiritual image bearers.

Consider a parallel. When we experience true beauty, we might have, as already noted in section C of Chapter III, a yearning or longing for union with that beauty. Now, suppose that you teach creative writing and suppose that you are helping a student create as beautiful a story as she can. Suppose further that you can see, within her initial drafts, glimpses of deep beauty. It is

---

<sup>64</sup> I am speaking loosely here. There might be other ways, besides growing in the knowledge of God, the love for God, or the joy in God, by which God dwells more fully within someone. For simplicity, I ignore this possibility in the main text.



quite reasonable to say that, if you have a maximal desire for union with that beauty, you will quite naturally want her to make her story better, to bring forth the various beautiful features that you are only tasting in her drafts so that you can more fully experience the beauty therein. So too, God, desiring to have as much union with Himself through His spiritual image bearers as is possible, will naturally want Himself to be present within His spiritual image bearers as much as possible so that He can be united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers as much as possible. So, because God resides within His spiritual image bearers in proportion to how much knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God they have, God wants His spiritual image bearers to have the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God as much as possible.

Let's be clear on the reasoning. God dwells within His spiritual image bearers more if He improves their knowledge of God, love for God, or joy in God. And if His presence within them grows, God can be united with Himself through them to an even greater extent. Hence, if He improves their knowledge of God, love for God, or joy in God, God can be united with Himself through them even more. Thus, because He abstractly desires to be united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers comprehensively maximally, (given that He abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the next-best things associated with His union with Himself, and given that God's being united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers is a next-best thing associated with His union with Himself,) He abstractly desires to improve their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God comprehensively maximally. For, if there were more knowledge of God, love for God, or joy in God to grant to them, then God could be more present within them, in which case God could be more united with Himself through them. Hence, if God actualizes comprehensively maximal union with Himself through His spiritual image bearers, such that God cannot actualize more union with Himself through them, then there is no more

knowledge of God, love for God, or joy in God to grant to them – that is, the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God have been comprehensively maximized within them.

Therefore, because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize His being united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers, God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the knowledge of God, the love for God, and joy in God within His spiritual image bearers. And it is through this comprehensive maximization of the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God that God specially dwells substantively within them (and is substantively one with them, with their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God *being* God's knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God).<sup>65</sup> Succinctly, God abstractly desires His spiritual image bearers to comprehensively maximally know God, love God, and rejoice in God so that He can more substantively indwell them specially (and be one with them), so that He can be united with Himself through them more fully. But His spiritual image bearers comprehensively maximally knowing God, loving God, and rejoicing in God, with God substantively indwelling them specially (and being one with them), just is the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God within His spiritual image bearers. Thus, God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God within His spiritual image bearers.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> I do not say that the comprehensive maximization of the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God within God's spiritual image bearers entails that God specially dwells within them comprehensively maximally (or that God is comprehensively maximally one with them). For, there might be other ways through which God can dwell more fully within them (and through which God can be more fully one with them). Still, the comprehensive maximization of the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God does entail substantive indwelling (and substantive oneness).

<sup>66</sup> Does the spiritual image of God grow if God indwells a spiritual image bearer more fully through some other means besides them growing in the knowledge of God, the love for God, or the joy in God? I'm unsure, but, for simplicity, I leave such discussion to the side. The main point to get across is that God wants to comprehensively maximize the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God within His spiritual image bearers. Even so, because God wants to be united with Himself through His spiritual image bearers comprehensively maximally, God also wants to indwell His spiritual image bearers comprehensively maximally, however this happens, so that He can be united with Himself through them comprehensively maximally. Thus, He will desire to indwell His spiritual image bearers through those other means as well.

Therefore, God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God. God abstractly desires, as discussed, to comprehensively maximize the number of spiritual image bearers and to comprehensively maximize the spiritual image of God within those who are spiritual image bearers. And this just is the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God.

Fifth, if there is a substantive likelihood that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God – or, even more narrowly, if God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the spiritual image of God within those who are already spiritual image bearers – then there is also a substantive likelihood that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the first form of the external glory of God. To see this, we should begin with the observation that there is a distinction between propositional knowledge and experiential knowledge. A wonderful example was given by a former student of mine.<sup>67</sup> If you have a book on roller coasters, you might be able to know a whole lot about roller coasters (namely, propositional information about them), but until you ride one, your knowledge of roller coasters is woefully incomplete because you do not have an experiential knowledge of them.

Here is a more famous example.<sup>68</sup> Imagine Mary. Mary is a brilliant scientist who studies the neurophysiology of vision, and who comes to know all that there is to know about, for example, how the brain processes colors and how we use terms such as ‘red’ and ‘blue.’ But suppose that Mary has been in a black-and-white room for her entire life and suppose that she has never had a perceptual experience of color. Frank Jackson asks, “What will happen when

---

<sup>67</sup> I am unsure of who it was, but I believe it was Naomi Floyd.

<sup>68</sup> The example is from Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 127 (1982), p. 130. Eleonore Stump also talks about it in: *Wandering in Darkness*, pp. 50-51.

Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a colour television monitor? Will she *learn* anything or not? It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it. But then it is inescapable that her previous knowledge was incomplete.”<sup>69</sup> Mary had all relevant propositional knowledge about vision and about color, but she did not have a complete knowledge of these things until she had the experiential knowledge of, for example, red and blue.

Eleonore Stump takes this story of Mary and provides a modified example, one that is perhaps more fitting for this dissertation. Again, suppose that Mary has been isolated from birth (by some suitable villain).<sup>70</sup> Now, imagine the following:

Mary in her imprisonment has had access to any and all information about the world as long as that information is *only* in the form of third-person accounts giving her knowledge *that*. ... She knows that there are other people in the world ... But she has never had any personal interactions of an unmediated and direct sort with another person. ... And then suppose that Mary is finally rescued from her imprisonment and united for the first time with her mother, who loves her deeply.

When Mary is first united with her mother, it seems indisputable that Mary will know things she did not know before, even if she knew everything about her mother that could be made available to her in non-narrative propositional form, including her mother’s psychological states. Although Mary knew that her mother loved her before she met her, when she is united with her mother, Mary will learn what it is like to be loved. And this will be new for her, even if in her isolated state she had as complete a scientific description as possible of what a human being feels like when she senses that she is loved by someone else.<sup>71</sup>

Once more, we can see the distinction between propositional and experiential knowledge. Mary propositionally knew that her mother loved her, but she did not experientially know this until she was rescued and united with her mother (who, let us stipulate, did things that allowed Mary to experience her mother’s love for her). It seems clear, then, that a person’s knowledge of x is not

---

<sup>69</sup> Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” p. 130, emphasis in the original.

<sup>70</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 50.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52, emphases in the original.

complete until they have experiential knowledge of x (assuming that x is something that can be experienced in the first place).

Next, we should remember that perfecting the spiritual image of God entails perfecting the knowledge of God within His spiritual image bearers. But, perfecting the knowledge of God within His spiritual image bearers requires them having not just complete propositional knowledge about God, but complete experiential knowledge of Him as well. For, experiential knowledge of God is genuine knowledge of God. A person who lacks some experiential knowledge of God does not comprehensively maximally know Him. The general principle at play in this point is that a full knowledge of x requires a full experiential knowledge of x (assuming that x can be experientially known in the first place). For, if a person does not fully experientially know x, then they can (at least in principle) experientially know x further; but if they can (at least in principle) experientially know x further, then they can (at least in principle) know x further, in which case they do not fully know x. Thus, if they fully know x, they fully experientially know x. Hence, because there is a substantive likelihood that God wants to comprehensively maximize the spiritual image of God, which includes the comprehensive maximization of the knowledge of God within His spiritual image bearers, there is also a substantive likelihood that God will abstractly desire that His spiritual image bearers experientially know Him comprehensively maximally (assuming that He can be experientially known in some sense in the first place).<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Loving God and rejoicing in God are probably dependent upon knowing God. See Jonathan Edwards, "Concerning the Divine Decrees in General, and Election in Particular," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2 (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), pp. 528a-528b, §10. Hence, if God desires to expand the spiritual image of God in relation to the love of God or the joy in God, He will also need to expand the knowledge of God. For simplicity, I do not bring this complication into the main text.

However, if His spiritual image bearers experientially know God comprehensively maximally, God must comprehensively maximize the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him. These consequences allow us to experientially know God more fully. For, these consequences arise from His attributes. In fact, by experiencing the consequences arising from His attributes, we, in some sense, experience the attributes themselves.<sup>73, 74</sup> So, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the experiential knowledge of God within His spiritual image bearers, God abstractly desires (in some sense at least) to comprehensively maximize the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him. For, if there is some consequence that can rightly be attributed to God that God has yet to ordain, then there is still available to His spiritual image bearers another consequence that they can (at least in principle) experience through which they can experientially know God more fully.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> It seems that we come to experientially know the attributes of other humans this way as well. I experientially know that someone is powerful by experiencing the consequences of his power. And, in some sense, by experiencing the consequences of his power, I experience his power.

<sup>74</sup> This might be one thing that Edwards is getting at in the following, rather enigmatic, quote: “God’s exercising his perfection to produce a proper effect is not distinct from the emanation or communication of his fullness: for this is the effect, viz. his fullness communicated, and the producing this effect is the communication of his fullness; and there is nothing in this effectual exerting of God’s perfection, but the emanation of God’s internal glory” (Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 527-528).

<sup>75</sup> The “at least in principle” is an important qualification. Even if an experience (e.g., seeing light that is beyond the visible spectrum) is not available to humans as they currently exist in their present state, perhaps because their nature forbids them from experiencing it, because God was the one who created humans (and their nature), and because He can change them at any moment, He can change their beings to the point in which they are able to experience even things that are currently beyond them (e.g., God can give them the ability to see light that is beyond the current visible spectrum). Thus, though some consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God might be such that humans cannot *currently* experience them, God can always change them (or their nature or their abilities) to the point in which they can experience those consequences. And, seemingly, because those consequences are *in creation, any* created being, with suitable modifications to who they are, should be able to experience them.

What about non-temporal consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God? Several things should be said. First, if God can create non-temporal things, I see no reason why God couldn’t create beings that are non-temporal, in which case I see no reason why God couldn’t modify human beings to the point in which they are non-temporal. If so, why couldn’t they experience those non-temporal consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God? Second, non-temporal things can currently be experienced by humans in some sense. Moral truths seem to be non-temporal, yet we can seemingly experience them. When someone steals from us, we don’t just experience the act of theft; we experience the act’s wrongness as well. Indeed, God, who is non-temporal, can be experienced by experiencing the temporal consequences of His actions. Why, then, can’t we experience non-temporal consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God? Third, if these points aren’t convincing, I see no problem with modifying the statement currently under discussion to say this: if there is some *temporal*

Hence, if His spiritual image bearers have a comprehensively maximal experiential knowledge of God, there is no consequence left for God to ordain that can rightly be attributed to Him. That is, He has comprehensively maximized the first form of the external glory of God.

Indeed, even if God has shown certain spiritual image bearers an attribute thousands or even millions of times by causing various consequences to arise in creation from this attribute, they do not *fully* experientially know that attribute until they have experienced every possible consequence that can arise from it. Having a small or even a great taste of an attribute, qualitatively or quantitatively, is not the same thing as *fully* experientially knowing that attribute, just like experientially knowing part of a burger is not the same thing as experientially knowing the entirety of it. You might have a pretty good idea of what eating the full burger is like, but your experiential knowledge is not complete if you have not fully eaten the burger. So too, comprehensively maximally experientially knowing the height and the depth and the width of God's infinite attributes requires comprehensively maximally experiencing the height and the depth and the width of God's infinite attributes.<sup>76</sup>

---

consequence that can rightly be attributed to God that God has yet to ordain, then there is still available to His spiritual image bearers another consequence that they can experience through which they can experientially know God more fully. We can go even further: if there is some consequence that can rightly be attributed to God, that God has yet to ordain, and that creatures (or, perhaps more narrowly, humans) can experience, then there is still available to His spiritual image bearers another consequence that they can (at least in principle) experience through which they can experientially know God more fully. And, as far as I can see, this change (and all related changes to the rest of my arguments in this section, chapter, and dissertation) won't have any impact on the main thoughts present in this work. For, the story I present in the next chapter of God ordaining the evils of this world has absolutely nothing to do with the non-temporal consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God, such as the creation of numbers and/or moral truths.

<sup>76</sup> Note two things. First, even if finite humans cannot comprehensively maximally experientially know the height and the depth and the width of God's infinite attributes, God can still abstractly desire it. In the abstract, He wants humans to know Him perfectly, but, given their finitude, He might not be able to actualize their knowing Him perfectly. Second, I'm inclined to say that finite humans can, at least in principle, know some of the infinite attributes of God fully. If eternal life is possible, then an eternal expansion of the knowledge of God might be possible. Thus, though there will never be a moment in which the knowledge of God is perfected, from the perspective of God's, the perspective that can see the whole of time, it might be that the knowledge of some of God's attributes is perfected (Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 443-444, 534-536).

The general principle underneath this point is that fully experientially knowing x (in principle) requires fully experiencing x. For, if you can (in principle) experience x more fully, either qualitatively or quantitatively, then you can (in principle) grow in the experiential knowledge of x. Thus, if you have a full experiential knowledge of x, such that you cannot (in principle) grow any more in the experiential knowledge of x, then you cannot (in principle) experience x more fully – that is, you have fully experienced x. Thus, because it is plausible that God will abstractly desire that His spiritual image bearers experientially know Him comprehensively maximally, it is also plausible that God will abstractly desire (at least in some sense) that they experience Him comprehensively maximally. Further, because God can be experienced through the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him, He will also plausibly abstractly desire (in some sense at least) the comprehensive maximization of the first form of the external glory of God. For, if God abstractly desires (in at least some sense) that His spiritual image bearers experience Him comprehensively maximally, then He will abstractly desire everything that can in any way add to their experience of Him. But that includes all the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him. Thus, God will plausibly abstractly desire (in some sense at least) to actualize them all. In other words, if God has not comprehensively maximized the first form of the external glory of God, then there is a further consequence that can rightly be ascribed to God that God has not yet ordained but that He can still ordain through which His spiritual image bearers can experience God more fully, in which case they have not comprehensively maximally experienced God. Hence, if God comprehensively maximizes His spiritual image bearers' experience of God, such that they cannot (in principle) experience Him more fully, then God has comprehensively maximized the first form of the external glory of God. Therefore, because it is plausible that God will abstractly



desire (at least in some sense) that His spiritual image bearers experience Him comprehensively maximally, it is also plausible that God will abstractly desire (at least in some sense) to comprehensively maximize the first form of the external glory of God.<sup>77, 78</sup>

Sixth, the first form of the external glory of God entails the second form of the external glory of God. For, as argued above, the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God are all good effects. If the effects were either evil or neutral, we could not attribute them to God. Thus, if there are consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God, then those effects must be good. Thus, if God desires the first form of the external glory of God, God will also desire (in some sense at least) various good effects in creation. But there existing good things that reflect God, who is Goodness Itself, just is the second form of the external glory of God. Hence, God will desire (in some sense at least) the second form of the external glory of God.

---

<sup>77</sup> Norman Kretzmann proposes that representations can be better without being practically better. For example, suppose that we are trying to represent an infinite line by drawing a line on the ground. No matter how long we draw that line, there is always a better representation of the infinite line. Yet, at some point, there is no practically better representation, especially given the limitations of the human mind (Norman Kretzmann, "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" p. 239). Maybe, then, there is some point at which consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God will not improve our experiential knowledge of God.

By way of response, I should first note that I reject the claim. You might have full *propositional* knowledge or understanding of God's infinite nature after experiencing it repeatedly and in increasingly better ways, but you will not have *experiential* knowledge of it until you have experienced the infinite fullness of the infinite God. Still, let's suppose that I am wrong. We can modify our claim to say that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the first form of the external glory of God at least until the point at which humans cannot experientially know Him more. This modification, as far as I can see, won't undermine the argument in this dissertation. For, I will argue that God will ordain the evils of this world to exist (in part) so that He can ordain various consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him, so that His people can experientially know Him to the greatest extent that is possible, so that the spiritual image of God can be perfected to the greatest extent that is possible. If there is a practical cap on how much His spiritual image bearers can experientially know God, the basic contours of this argument remain the same. The only thing we will have to say is that it might be impermissible for God to ordain evils to some specific degree D because the various consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him that are responses to these evils will not improve His spiritual image bearers' experiential knowledge of God. Where D is, is uncertain.

<sup>78</sup> See Christopher Green, "A Compatibilist Calvinist Demonstrative-Goods Defense," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. 241-242.

More importantly, because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him, God will also abstractly desire (in some sense at least) the comprehensive maximization of good effects in creation. For, there is no good in creation that we cannot attribute to God as being an effect of the eternal expression of His attributes. As discussed in section B of Chapter II, all goods in creation are good effects that can be ascribed to God. But if all goods in creation are good effects that can be ascribed to God, then if God comprehensively maximizes the consequences in creation that can be attributed to Him, then there is no good left out of creation. For, if there were a good left out of creation, then there would be at least one thing not in creation that God could still ordain to exist within creation that would count as a consequence that can rightly be ascribed to God – that is, God would not have every consequence in creation that could rightly be ascribed to Him. Hence, if God comprehensively maximizes the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him, leaving nothing out, then God comprehensively maximizes goodness in the world. Thus, comprehensively maximizing the first form of the external glory of God entails comprehensively maximizing the second. Hence, if God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the first form of the external glory of God, He will also abstractly desire (in some sense at least) to comprehensively maximize the second form of the external glory of God.

Therefore, combining the above points together, from God's active and maximal desire for union with Himself, there is a good chance that God will abstractly desire to comprehensively maximize all three forms of the external glory of God. Prior to creation, then, when God is deciding what to ordain, when there is no external glory of God because there is no world in which the external glory of God can exist, we would not be surprised to see God ordaining the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God, if such maximization is possible. If

maximization simpliciter is not possible, then we would not be surprised to see God choosing a degree to which He will pursue the external glory of God, after which He will rest content. Similarly, if there are conflicts within the comprehensive maximization of the three forms of the external glory (or with them and something else), then God will have to choose some things to ordain over others. Still, we would not be surprised to see God ordaining very great instances of the external glory of God.

Therefore, if God's primary love is for Himself, whether we consider His active and maximal desire for His own good, or whether we consider His active and maximal desire for union with Himself, there is a very real possibility that God will ordain very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God. And remember that God's perfect love seeks the good of and union with His primary beloved(s) above all others, in which case if His pursuit of His external glory comes into conflict with the good of or union with a non-primary beloved, God will still, plausibly, pursue it.<sup>79</sup> And remember also that the first form of justice and the second form of justice don't do anything to dissuade God from acting on His perfect love. From these observations, on the assumption that God loves Himself primarily, we can conclude that it very well might be the case that God's virtues will lead Him to ordain very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God. Thus, ordaining very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God is plausibly virtuous. Finally, because God commands from His virtues, and because my divine command theory is plausible, ordaining very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God is plausibly morally acceptable.

---

<sup>79</sup> See footnote 40 of this chapter.

#### D. Supporting Arguments

Two supporting arguments should be provided. First, appealing substantively to the work of Jonathan Edwards, we can see that there is a very real possibility that God delights in His own external glory. And if so, we will be able to see that God very well might ordain very great instances of the external glory of God. I call this argument *the argument from God's delight*.

In many respects, I think it should just be obvious that God takes delight in His own external glory, especially since I think it should just be obvious that God takes delight in Himself and in His own internal glory. But let's dig in and provide an argument for the claim that God takes delight in His own external glory. The love of complacency "is no other than delight in beauty".<sup>80</sup> And it is plausible that God has the love of complacency (or something very much like it) primarily directed at Himself. He is perfect in love, after all, and a perfect love of complacency is primarily directed at God because He is infinitely beautiful, whereas everything else is only finitely beautiful.<sup>81</sup> Thus, it is plausible that God delights in His own beauty primarily, or at least substantively.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, taking delight in something can cause us to take delight in related things.

Edwards says,

God's love to himself, and his own attributes, will therefore make him delight in that which is the use, end and operation of these attributes. If one highly esteem and delight in the virtues of a friend, as wisdom, justice, etc., that have relation to action, this will make him delight in the exercise and genuine effects of these virtues: so if God both esteem and delight in his own perfections and virtues, he can't but value and delight in the expressions and genuine effects of them. ...

[And] he that loves any being, and has a disposition highly to prize, and greatly to delight in his virtues and perfections, must from the same disposition be well

---

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, p. 543.

<sup>81</sup> See section D of Chapter II and section C of Chapter III.

<sup>82</sup> I add the qualification of "or at least substantively" because it could be that God's primary delight is in something other than beauty. Perhaps He has other delights that have nothing to do with beauty and that are more primary than His delight in beauty. This same sort of point should be kept in mind the rest of this argument.

pleased to have his excellencies known, acknowledged, esteemed and prized by others. He that loves and approves any being or thing, he naturally loves and approves the love and approbation of that thing, and is opposite to the disapprobation and contempt of it.<sup>83</sup>

Modifying these thoughts for this dissertation, we can say the following. God primarily or substantively delighting in His own beauty will naturally lead Him to delight substantively in His eternal expression of His attributes. If I delight in God's beauty, perhaps primarily His moral beauty that is found in His eternal virtues, I will most naturally take delight in the eternal expression of His attributes, wherein His beauty is perfectly expressed, perhaps primarily taking delight in the eternal expression of His virtues. And what is true for me, in this context, is true for God. So, there is a very real possibility that God delights substantively in the eternal expression of His attributes.<sup>84</sup>

Next, delighting substantively in God's eternal expression of His attributes causes one to substantively delight in all the consequences in creation of this eternal expression of His attributes. Because all consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God are consequences in creation of this eternal expression of His attributes, God delights in all consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him. Thus, there is a good chance that God delights in any instance of the first form of the external glory of God. Additionally, because, as was noted in section B of Chapter II, every good thing can be counted an effect in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God, there is a very real possibility that God substantively delights in every good thing, in which case there is a good chance that God substantively delights in

---

<sup>83</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, p. 437.

<sup>84</sup> If the doctrine of divine simplicity holds, then God's beauty and the eternal expression of His attributes seem to be the same. (For a complication, see footnote 20 of Chapter II.) Thus, if God primarily or substantively delights in His own beauty, He also primarily or substantively delights in the eternal expression of His attributes.

every instance of the second form of the external glory of God.<sup>85</sup> And substantively delighting in all instances of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, because the third form of the external glory of God is a unique combination of both the first and second forms of the external glory of God, entails a substantive delight in any instance of the third form of the external glory of God.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, it is plausible that God substantively delights in all instances of the third form of the external glory of God.

Another argument can be given for the conclusion that it very well might be that God substantively delights in the third form of the external glory of God. Substantively delighting in God's beauty and the eternal expression of His attributes, leads to a substantive delight in *God*

---

<sup>85</sup> Another argument for the conclusion that God delights substantively in every instance of the second form of the external glory of God is the following. Because of divine simplicity, and because God is both good and beautiful, God's goodness and beauty are, ultimately, the same. (See sections A and C of Chapter II, but see also footnote 20 of that same chapter.) Thus, because God delights substantively in His own beauty, He also delights substantively in His own goodness. But if God delights substantively in His own goodness, then He also delights substantively in anything reflecting that goodness. Hence, God substantively delights in any instance of the second form of the external glory of God.

This, then, gives us a further reason for thinking that God delights substantively in all instances of the first form of the external glory of God. For, as said, the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God are all good effects. Thus, if God substantively delights in all instances of the second form of the external glory of God, then He also substantively delights in every consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to God.

<sup>86</sup> As has been noted, the third form of the external glory of God is not merely a combination of both the first and second forms of the external glory of God. As discussed in section D of Chapter II, when God causes to exist within a certain human the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God, God begins to dwell specially within them. But because this indwelling derives from God causing certain consequences to exist in the world that can rightly be ascribed to Him, and because the first form of the external glory of God is there being consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him, this point should not worry us. Because God delights substantively in every instance of the first form of the external glory of God, He will also substantively delight in any divine indwelling that is the result of any instance of the first form of the external glory of God (just like His substantive delight in the eternal expression of His attributes entails a substantive delight in any of the effects in creation of the eternal expression of His attributes). Thus, God delights in the entirety of the third form of the external glory of God.

But, even if God were not to delight substantively in the divine indwelling, that should not bother us. For, my point, as will be discussed momentarily, is that it is plausible that God will pursue His own external glory as a personal project, given His substantive delight in it. Because He delights substantively in every instance of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, He delights substantively in every consequence in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him and in every good thing. But that means that God substantively delights in any human having the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God; for, these are consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God – they do not exist in a creature unless God has granted spiritual life to them – and they are reflections of God's own knowledge, love, and joy, in which case they are good things. Thus, it is plausible that God will pursue, as a personal project, humans having the knowledge of God, the love of God, and the joy in God. And if He does, divine indwelling will result.

(at least in those respects),<sup>87</sup> which naturally leads to a substantive delight in any person's (including non-divine persons) knowledge of, love for, and delight (or joy) in God (at least in those respects).<sup>88</sup> And given that, as noted in section D of Chapter II, those with the knowledge of God, love of God, and joy in God have God Himself residing within them (and, therein, expressing His very own knowledge of God, love of God, and joy in God), substantively delighting in any person's knowledge of, love for, and delight (or joy) in God (at least in certain respects) (if the person is non-divine) leads to a substantive delight in any instance of the spiritual image of God (at least to some extent), which is the third form of the external glory of God. Thus, it is plausible that God substantively delights in the third form of the external glory of God (to at least some extent).

More directly, because God is utterly simple, God's beauty just is God's internal glory.<sup>89</sup> So, because there is a very real possibility that God delights substantively in His own beauty, it very well might be that God delights substantively in His own internal glory. But if it very well might be that God delights substantively in His own internal glory, there is a good chance that God delights substantively in His own external glory, which is the shining forth of His internal glory. Indeed, it is plausible that God delights substantively in every instance of it.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, because there is a very real possibility that God takes substantive delight in His own beauty (and in the eternal expression of His attributes), it is plausible that God takes substantive delight in any instance of the external glory of God.

---

<sup>87</sup> Note two things. First, if the doctrine of divine simplicity holds, as I have been assuming in this dissertation, this qualification of "at least in those respects" is not needed. God's beauty and the eternal expression of His attributes will both be, at bottom, God. Second, the qualification might not be needed for an independent reason: substantively delighting in God's beauty and the eternal expression of His attributes is a substantive delight in many (central) aspects of God, which will likely lead to a substantive delight in the whole of God.

<sup>88</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, pp. 546-549.

<sup>89</sup> But, see footnote 20 of Chapter II.

<sup>90</sup> Note that God being Beauty Itself is one major reason why God is internally glorious in the first place (see section A of Chapter II).

Finally, if it very well might be that God substantively delights in all instances of the external glory of God, there is a good chance that God will pursue many instances of His external glory as a personal project. And because it seems plausible that having greater instances of the external glory of God entails greater delight, it is plausible that God will pursue very great instances of the external glory of God. At the very least, because He delights in *all* instances of the external glory of God, including very great instances of it, even if He does not have greater delight in those greater instances, there is a substantive likelihood that He will pursue very great instances of the external glory of God as a personal project. And if He, as we are assuming, loves Himself primarily, seeking His own good above all lower-tiered beloveds, what would stop Him from pursuing them? We would not be surprised, then, if He did ordain very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God out of a delight for them.<sup>91</sup>

Let's turn now to the second supporting argument, *the argument from the saints*. None of this talk of divine glory should seem strange to you if you have been around many religious people. Out of a deep love for and out of a great delight in God, who is Goodness and Value and Beauty Itself, the saints yearn for the external glory of God. For, how could a person who loves God deeply not want Him to be externally glorified? How could a person who delights in God greatly not want Him to shine forth as His glorious self? The saints, then, want God to be externally glorified,<sup>92</sup> and this desire is sometimes expressed when they sing doxologies.<sup>93</sup> For example, the final verse in some versions of "Of the Father's Love Begotten" goes as follows:

---

<sup>91</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 421-425. See also section C of Chapter III and my discussion of some of Michael Rea's views.

<sup>92</sup> They also want God's kingdom to come, which, as discussed, includes the external glory of God. This is one reason why so many people support or go on mission trips.

<sup>93</sup> Merriam-Webster explains the etymology: "*Doxology* passed into English from Medieval Latin *doxologia*, which in turn comes from the Greek term *doxa*, meaning 'opinion' or 'glory,' and the suffix *-logia*, which refers to oral or written expression. It's logical enough, therefore, that 'doxology' has referred to an oral expression of praise and glorification since it first appeared in English around 1645. The word ultimately derives from the Greek verb *dokein*,



Glory be to God the Father,  
 Glory be to God the Son,  
 Glory to the Holy Spirit,  
 Persons Three yet Godhead One.  
 Glory be from all creation,<sup>94</sup>  
 While eternal ages run,  
 Evermore and evermore.<sup>95</sup>

Even in contemporary Christian music, with all its problems, a desire for God's external glory is sometimes expressed. In Meredith Andrews's song "Open Up the Heavens," we can see a clear desire for God's external glory:

We've waited for this day.  
 We're gathered in your name,  
 Calling out to you.  
 Your glory like a fire,  
 Awakening desire,  
 Will burn our hearts with truth.

You're the reason we're here.  
 You're the reason we're singing.

[Chorus:]  
 Open up the heavens.  
 We want to see you.  
 Open up the floodgates,  
 A mighty river,  
 Flowing from your heart,  
 Filling every part of our praise.

Your presence in this place,  
 Your glory on our face,  
 We're looking to the sky.  
 Descending like a cloud,  
 You're standing with us now.  
 Lord, unveil our eyes.

You're the reason we're here.

---

meaning 'to seem' or 'to seem good'" (Merriam-Webster, s.v. "doxology," accessed October 3, 2022, URL = <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/doxology>>, emphases in the original).

<sup>94</sup> The fact that the doxology mentions glory *to* God and glory *from* creation suggests that it is speaking (at least) of God's external glory.

<sup>95</sup> A particularly good version of this hymn is by Out of Darkness. See outofdarknessmusic, "'Of The Father's Love Begotten' from Out of Darkness (OFFICIAL LYRIC VIDEO)," YouTube, published December 19, 2016, accessed October 3, 2022, URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jICEbS4acQ>>.

You're the reason we're singing.<sup>96</sup>

[Chorus]

[Chorus]

Show us, show us your glory.  
Show us, show us your power.  
Show us, show us your glory, Lord.

Show us, show us your glory.  
Show us, show us your power.  
Show us, show us your glory, Lord.

We want to see you.  
We want to see you.<sup>97</sup>

[Chorus]

[Chorus]<sup>98, 99</sup>

The saints want God to be externally glorified, and they want Him to be externally glorified greatly. If, then, God loves Himself primarily and delights in Himself substantively (partially because He is infinitely beautiful), it seems *highly* likely to me that God will also desire His own external glorification. It would be utterly absurd for the saints, who are sinful and who imperfectly love and delight in God, to desire it – indeed, it would be quite strange for them to desire *very great* instances of it – yet God not to desire it at all, even though He loves Himself primarily and delights in Himself substantively. We should, therefore, not be surprised at all if God ordains instances – perhaps even *very great* instances – of it.

---

<sup>96</sup> All of the above suggests a desire for the third form of the external glory of God.

<sup>97</sup> “Show us, show us your glory” through “We want to see you” suggests a desire for the first form of the external glory of God.

<sup>98</sup> meredithandrewsmusic, “Open Up the Heavens,” YouTube, published March 1, 2018, accessed October 6, 2022, URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFXJ0j6zsgE>>.

<sup>99</sup> Does this song express a desire for any instance of the second form of the external glory of God? Yes, the second form of the external glory of God is part of the third form of the external glory of God, and the song clearly expresses a desire for the third form of the external glory of God, as noted in footnote 96 of this chapter. But, if you want a clearer expression of the desire for the second form of the external glory of God, see footnote 56 of this chapter.

### E. God's Love for His People

So far, we have argued that it is plausible that God will ordain very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God, given that He loves Himself primarily. But, though we have, as discussed in section C of Chapter III, good reason to think that God does love Himself primarily, what if God does not love Himself primarily? What if, instead, He loves His people – or, more exactly, some group of humans<sup>100</sup> – primarily? Even then I think that it is plausible that His love will lead Him to ordain all three forms of the external glory of God.

Given the nature of love, if God loves His people (or some group of humans) primarily, being utterly enthralled with them, then He will be actively and maximally devoted to them, actively pursuing their good and union with them comprehensively maximally,<sup>101</sup> and I think that this entails that there is a very real possibility that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God. Of course, if maximization simpliciter is not possible, then He will pursue the good of and union with His people to some chosen extent, after which He will rest content,<sup>102</sup> in which case there will be nothing within God

---

<sup>100</sup> See section C of Chapter III. Note that this group of people does not exist while God is deciding, from His primary love for them, what to ordain. That is, the people are merely possible, but God casts His primary love upon them and then decides what will happen in the world, given His love that He has just cast upon them.

<sup>101</sup> Similar to what was said in footnotes 48 and 59 of this chapter, now that we have made the distinction between maximization simpliciter and comprehensive maximization, we should make clear that God desires the comprehensive maximization of the good of His people and to be comprehensively maximally united with them. Out of a complete and utter love for them, He desires anything and everything that can advance their good and God's union with them.

<sup>102</sup> It might also be that God ordains a multiverse (or something similar to one), throughout which both the good of His people and union with them are (comprehensively) maximized. If human identity is not contained to just our section of the multiverse, such that we have a trans-world being, then it could be that there are an infinite number of universes with an infinite number of parts to our trans-world being, with the universe we are currently in merely housing one part of our trans-universe being. God, then, could bring about every possible way in which our happiness can be improved and every possible way in which He can be united with us, even though some of these ways might be found only in other parts of the multiverse, affecting only those parts of our trans-world being that exist in those other parts of the multiverse, and not affecting the part of our trans-world being that is in this universe.

This proposal might initially seem absurd, and I do not intend to seriously entertain it, but if we exist in other possible worlds, such that we can say, without any infelicitousness, things such as "I have only ever lived in America, but I could have lived in London," and if God can actualize all possible worlds and bring them all into existence at once in something like an infinite multiverse, then why can't we have a trans-world being? This thought is inspired by Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (Blackwell Publishing, 1981).

compelling Him to ordain certain things that improve the good of or union with His people. Similarly, if there are conflicts in actualizing everything that is to the advantage of a person and to the advantage of God's union with them, then God will have to pick some things over others. Still, if we are successful in arguing that it is plausible that God, from a love that is primarily directed towards His people (or some group of humans), will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God, then we can say, at the least, that it would not be surprising if He did ordain very great instances of the external glory of God.

Let us begin our discussion by considering the second of God's loving desires, His abstract desire for comprehensively maximal union with His people (or some group of humans). Naturally, then, the argument I will present here is what I will call *the union with God's people argument*. Now, though I am not exactly sure what all goes into being united with a person, there are two very good and quite natural ways in which God can be united with humans. First, it seems to me that one very good and direct way in which God can be united with them is by entering into substantive fellowship and relationship with them. And, as said above, whatever substantive fellowship and relationship with someone amounts to, one necessary condition is being in regular and close contact with them. For, how can you have *substantive* fellowship and relationship with someone, yet not be in regular and close contact with them? Thus, God would most naturally bring His people (or some group of humans) into regular and close contact with Him. Of course, as also said above, God is outside of time, but He can ordain various consequences that can rightly be attributed to Him, and as these consequences grow, God's presence increases. Eventually, as God's presence increases in a particular location, God is said to be there directly and immediately. Hence, He can establish regular and close contact with His people (or some group of humans) by ordaining consequences in creation that can rightly be

attributed to Him, thereby allowing Him to be regularly present where they are directly and immediately.

Even further, because God abstractly desires comprehensively maximal union with His people (or some group of humans), God will also abstractly desire continual, everlasting, and intimate fellowship and relationship with them, in which case He will also abstractly desire continual, everlasting, and intimate close contact with them. This can be accomplished well in Heaven. Again, I am thinking of Heaven as being at least a place in which there are numerous and substantive consequences that can rightly be attributed to God, such that God's presence is continually there directly and immediately for all of eternity to some substantive extent, an extent that is much greater than anywhere currently on Earth. This means that Heaven provides a very good setting for God to be in continual, everlasting, and intimate close contact with them. Once more, we can ask: are there any other places in which God can be continually and substantively present with someone directly and immediately for all of eternity? Perhaps, but Heaven is, at least, a very good choice, so God very well could choose to bring His people (or some group of humans) to be with Him forever in Heaven. And if they are brought to be with Him forever in Heaven, they will rightly be called the people of God. Thus, there is a good chance that whichever collection of (non-divine) people God loves primarily will be brought into Heaven to be with Him forever. Therefore, I will call them the people of God.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> In Chapter III, I said,

God's people are those who experience Heaven ... However, prior to being classified as either God's people or the damned – that is, prior to eternal destinies being determined – there are three objects of God's love: God, Group X (made up entirely of humans), and Group Y (made up entirely of humans). If God is not God's primary beloved, then God must love either Group X or Group Y primarily. ... If Group X is loved primarily, then, as will be argued in the upcoming chapters, God will grant to them Heaven, and He will cast Group Y, whom God loves less, into Hell, in which case Group X will be God's people, and Group Y will be the damned. If, however, Group Y is loved primarily, then, for the same reasons, God will grant to them Heaven, and He will cast Group X, whom God loves less, into Hell, in which case Group Y will be God's people,

Second, I think that there is a very real possibility that another very good and direct way in which God can be united with His people is by taking up residence within their hearts and minds through granting to them the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God (such that their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God *is* God's knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God);<sup>104</sup> and this just is the third form of the external glory of God. Additionally, because God abstractly desires comprehensively maximal union with them, He will also abstractly desire to be comprehensively maximally present within them. Thus, it is plausible that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God within His people.<sup>105</sup>

Let's be clear on the reasoning. God dwells within His people more if He grants to them more of the knowledge of God, the love for God, or the joy in God. And if God dwells within

---

and Group X will be the damned. Whichever group God loves primarily, will be God's people, and whichever group God loves less, will be the damned.

Some comments about this are needed at this point in our discussion. God might love some group of humans primarily yet not grant to them Heaven. If comprehensive maximization (or even maximization simpliciter) of God's union with His primary beloved(s) is not possible, then God will not ordain all things that advance God's union with them. This means that God might not grant Heaven to whichever group of people He loves primarily, even if He desires it. Further, if comprehensive maximization is possible, then God will, plausibly, bring them to be with Him forever in Heaven, but I say "plausibly" because there might be other places besides Heaven in which God can be continually and substantively present with someone directly and immediately for all of eternity. Thus, God might not grant Heaven to whichever group of people He loves primarily.

But this is a technical point that shouldn't bother us. If God loves some group of humans primarily, we would not be surprised to see God bringing them to be with Him forever in Heaven; and if He does, they will rightly be called the people of God. Thus, to qualify the quoted portion, we can say that if Group X is loved primarily, then there is a very good chance that God will grant to them Heaven and that He will, as will be argued in the next chapter, cast Group Y, whom God loves less, into Hell, in which case Group X will be God's people, and Group Y will be the damned; but if Group Y is loved primarily, then there is a very good chance that God will grant to them Heaven and that He will, as will be argued in the next chapter, cast Group X, whom God loves less, into Hell, in which case Group Y will be God's people, and Group X will be the damned.

<sup>104</sup> If we hold to the strong version of the spiritual image of God, then there is a more substantive union between God and His people when they bear the spiritual image of God. On this account, there is a breakdown of the barriers between God and His people related to their metaphysical identities, and their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God *becomes* God's knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God. However, even if we hold to the weaker version, there is still a substantive union between God and His people by virtue of the fact that God specially dwells within them.

<sup>105</sup> Notice that this is not the same claim as God desiring to comprehensively maximize the third form of the external glory of God, simpliciter or in general. At this point in the argument, it might be that God desires to comprehensively maximize the spiritual image of God only within some, namely His people.

His people to an even greater extent, then He is more united with them. Thus, if God grants to His people more of the knowledge of God, the love for God, or the joy in God, then He will be more united with them. Hence, because God abstractly desires to be united with His people comprehensively maximally, He also abstractly desires to improve their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God comprehensively maximally. For, if there were more knowledge of God, love for God, or joy in God to grant to them, then God could be more united with His people. Thus, if God actualizes comprehensively maximal union with His people, such that He cannot be more united with them, then there is no more knowledge of God, love for God, or joy in God to grant to them – that is, the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God have been comprehensively maximized within them. Therefore, because God abstractly desires to be united with His people comprehensively maximally, God also abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the knowledge of God, the love for God, and the joy in God within His people, whereby God specially dwells substantively within them (and becomes substantively one with them, with their knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God *being* God's knowledge of God, love for God, and joy in God). And His people comprehensively maximally knowing God, loving God, and rejoicing in God, with God Himself substantively indwelling them specially (and being one with them), just is the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God within His people. Succinctly, God abstractly desires His people to comprehensively maximally know God, love God, and rejoice in God so that He can more substantially indwell them specially (and be one with them), so that He can be united with them more fully. Hence, there is a very real possibility that God will abstractly desire the

comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God within His people. Thus, we would not be surprised to see Him ordaining it.<sup>106</sup>

But, if God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God within His people, then God will also abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the first and second forms of the external glory of God. As discussed above, because comprehensively maximizing the spiritual image of God within someone requires comprehensively maximizing that spiritual image bearer's knowledge of God, such that they have everything that can in any way add to their knowledge of God, including the comprehensive maximization of the experiential knowledge of God, and because any consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to God can add to a spiritual image bearer's experiential knowledge of God and of His attributes, God, abstractly desiring the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God within His people, will also abstractly desire to comprehensively maximize the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him. For, if there is some consequence that can rightly be attributed to God that God has yet to ordain, then there is still available to God's people another consequence that they can experience through which they can experientially know God more fully. Hence, if God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God within His people and, therefore, the comprehensive maximization of their experiential knowledge of God, God will also abstractly desire for there to be no consequence left for God to ordain that can rightly be attributed to Him. That is, He will abstractly desire to comprehensively maximize the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him (i.e., the first form of the external glory of God). Thus, it is plausible that God

---

<sup>106</sup> The same sort of material expressed in footnotes 64-66 of this chapter could also be expressed here.



will abstractly desire (at least in some sense) the comprehensive maximization of the first form of the external glory of God.

As also discussed, if God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the first form of the external glory of God, then He will also abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the second form of the external glory of God. All goods in creation are good effects that can rightly be ascribed to God. But if all goods in creation are good effects that can rightly be ascribed to God, then if God comprehensively maximizes the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him, then there is no good left out of creation. For, if there were a good left out of creation, then there would be left out of creation at least one consequence that, if it were to exist, could rightly be ascribed to God. Hence, if God comprehensively maximizes the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him, leaving nothing out, then God comprehensively maximizes goodness in the world. Thus, comprehensively maximizing the first form of the external glory of God entails comprehensively maximizing the second. Hence, if God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the first form of the external glory of God, He will also abstractly desire (in some sense at least) to comprehensively maximize the second form of the external glory of God.

Finally, as discussed above as well, the third form of the external glory of God is a combination of both the first and second forms of the external glory of God, both of which, just argued, God will abstractly desire to comprehensively maximize. And because He will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, if there is a way for Him to be externally glorified through the first two forms, He will abstractly desire it as well. Thus, because one way in which the first and second forms of the external glory of God can be instanced is through the comprehensive maximization, in terms of

both quality and quantity, of the third form, God will abstractly desire it (at least in some sense). Thus, it very well might be that God will abstractly desire not just the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God *within His people*, but also the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God *simpliciter or in general*.<sup>107</sup> Hence, God will abstractly desire (at least in some sense) the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God.

Therefore, from an active and maximal love for the people of God and from an active and maximal desire for union with them, God will, plausibly, abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God. We, therefore, should not be surprised at all if we see Him ordaining very great instances of all three.

Finally, before turning to discuss how all of this applies to the problem of evil, we should look at the first desire of God's primary love for His people, namely His desire for their good. Accordingly, I will call this argument *the good of God's people argument*. If God loves His people primarily, He will not just desire union with them, but He will also desire their good. Indeed, because His love is active and maximal, He will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of their good. What, then, will God desire in connection with His abstract desire for the comprehensive maximization of the good of His people?

I propose that the highest good for humans is, plausibly, comprehensively maximal union with God. As mentioned above, God being Goodness Itself is why God flourishes supremely without any external goods. He has all goodness, value, and beauty already contained fully within Himself. His life, on its own, is already utterly blessed. But if the infinite sea of goodness being contained within God's life is why God flourishes on His own, the most natural and best

---

<sup>107</sup> See footnote 53 of this chapter.

way to make a person's life go well – or, at least, one necessary condition of a person comprehensively maximally flourishing, having everything that can in any respect add to their happiness – is for them to be comprehensively maximally united with and filled with this very infinite goodness, value, and beauty that makes God's life go so well. But this infinite goodness, value, and beauty is God Himself. God is the Good, the Valuable, and the Beautiful. Therefore, the most natural and best way for God to make a person's life go well – or, at least, one necessary condition of a person comprehensively maximally flourishing – is for that person to be comprehensively maximally united and filled with God Himself. Thus, if God really is Goodness, Value, and Beauty Itself, an infinite sea of goodness, value, and beauty, nothing is better for humans than them being in continual, everlasting, and intimate close contact with Him, being in substantive fellowship and relationship with Him, and having Him reside within them (and expressing Himself through them) for all of eternity. Naturally, then, Eleonore Stump says, "God loves every human being, and so He desires the good of each human person and union with her, which is also her ultimate good and her ultimate flourishing."<sup>108</sup> Of course, we are operating on the assumption that God loves His people primarily and more than the damned, given that they have conflicting interests, but the point should be clear: there is a good chance that a person's highest good – or, at least, one necessary condition of a person comprehensively maximally flourishing – is comprehensively maximal union with God.

Thus, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the good of His people, it is plausible that He will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of union with them, which means that the arguments previously made concerning what God would want, given His abstract desire for comprehensively maximal union with His people, can be made

---

<sup>108</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 102.

again here: God will abstractly desire to bring this group of humans into continual, everlasting, and intimate fellowship and relationship with Him in Heaven, and He will, plausibly, abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God within them, which means that God will, plausibly, abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, which also means that God will, plausibly, abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God simpliciter or in general. Therefore, it very well might be that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God. We, thus, should not be surprised to see Him ordaining very great instances of all three.<sup>109</sup>

Therefore, if God loves His people primarily, whether we look at His desire for their good or His desire for union with them, there is a very real possibility that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God. And remember that God's perfect love seeks the good of and union with His primary beloved(s) above all others, in which case if His pursuit of the comprehensive maximization of His external glory comes into conflict with the good of or union with a non-primary beloved, God will still pursue it. And remember also that the first form of justice and the second form of justice don't do anything to dissuade God from acting on His perfect love. From these observations, on the

---

<sup>109</sup> In footnote 26 of this chapter, I pointed out that one of the next-best things related to God's own good that God might well desire as part of the overflow of His active and maximal love for Himself was the maximization of the good of humans, who have been created in the image of God, and especially any spiritual image bearers. (With the development of our thoughts, we should talk of God abstractly desiring the comprehensive maximization of the good of humans.) The argument here makes it clear that if God does abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the good of a human, He will, plausibly, abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God. For, if God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the good of a human, He will, plausibly, abstractly desire comprehensively maximal union with them, at which point, as said, the previous arguments come into play, leading us to the conclusion that God will, plausibly, abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God. Thus, if God overflows from a maximal and active love for Himself into a pursuit of the next-best thing of the comprehensive maximization of the good of (some) humans, then He will, plausibly, pursue the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God, suitably modified by any constraints, such as the impossibility of maximization simpliciter and/or any conflicts.

assumption that God loves His people primarily, we can conclude that it is plausible that God's virtues will lead Him to ordain very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God. Thus, God's ordination of very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God is plausibly virtuous. Finally, because God commands from His virtues, and because my divine command theory is plausible, God's ordination of very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God is plausibly morally acceptable.

Hence, combining the thoughts in the last several sections, we can see that there is a very real possibility that God will ordain very great instances of all three forms of the external glory of God. As argued in section C of chapter III, God loves either Himself or His people primarily. And, as argued in sections A through D in this chapter, if God loves Himself primarily, it is plausible that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God and that He will ordain very great instances of them. Similarly, as argued in this section, if God loves His people primarily, it is plausible that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God and that He will ordain very great instances of them. Thus, it is plausible that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God and that He will ordain very great instances of them.<sup>110</sup>

#### F. Summary of Chapter IV

The aim of this chapter was to explain how, if God exists, and if God is virtuous, it is likely that God will pursue very great instances of His own external glory. In Chapter III, it was argued that

---

<sup>110</sup> Note in connection with this that God could very well pursue (the next-best things related to) His own good, (the next-best things related to) His union with Himself, the good of His people, and union with His people all at the same time. Whether God also loves both Himself and His people primarily, I do not know. See Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 458-459, and 533-534.

the virtue of the first form of justice, which is a matter of respecting people's rights, does not really constrain God's actions all that much because God can simply command in whatever way He wants and revoke the rights that people possess. I also argued in that chapter that God would choose to follow His virtue of perfect love instead of His virtue of the second form of justice, which is a matter of balance, equality, and fairness, if ever they were to conflict. Thus, I turned my attention to God's virtue of perfect love, asking what it would incline God to do. And, as also argued in Chapter III, God loves either Himself or His people primarily.

I argued extensively in this chapter that if God loves Himself primarily, He will be greatly inclined to ordain very great instances of the external glory of God. I first pointed out that, though God cannot improve His own flourishing, and though He cannot improve His own union with Himself, it is likely that God, if He exists, would pursue next-best things, things that are, perhaps, closely associated with or analogous to, though not the same thing as, God's actual flourishing or union with Himself. I also argued that His love for Himself, being maximal and active, would abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of next-best things. The comprehensive maximization of next-best things is the actualization of everything that can be counted as a next-best thing, so, if God fails to actualize everything that can be counted as a next-best thing, He also fails to comprehensively maximize. He *abstractly* desires this because He is inclined to pursue all next-best things, and He doesn't want to make compromises. Abstractly, He thinks to Himself, *if I can actualize all of these, then I want to actualize them all*. But, when the rubber meets the road, He will have to make choices if conflicts arise. Still, even if God cannot ordain the comprehensive maximization of next-best things, He abstractly desires it. Thus, even if comprehensive maximization is not possible, at the least we should not be surprised to see Him ordaining very great instances of next-best things.

I then argued that one of the next-best things related to both God's actual flourishing and God's union with Himself was the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God, in which case we should not be surprised to see Him ordaining very great instances of the external glory of God. I appealed to numerous arguments to get to this conclusion. First, I presented the arguments from (1) divine simplicity, (2) God's goodness, and (3) the kingdom of God. I then presented the spiritual image bearers argument. After these four, two supporting arguments were given, the argument from God's delight and the argument from the saints.

That said, what if God loves His people primarily? With two arguments I argued that, even then, God will, if He exists, be greatly inclined to ordain very great instances of the external glory of God. The first argument was the union with God's people argument. The second was the good of God's people argument.

Thus, whether God loves Himself or His people primarily, His love inclines Him to ordain very great instances of the external glory of God. And because the two virtues of God's justice do nothing to dissuade God from acting on what His love inclines Him to do, we can conclude that if God exists, He very well might ordain very great instances of the external glory of God. We should not be surprised at all to see Him ordaining them.

## V. The Divine Glory Defense

At this point, we have argued that it is plausible that God will abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God and that He will ordain very great instances of them. Because of this, we are only a short step away from seeing how all of this comes to bear upon the problem of evil. The aim of section A of this chapter is to present a plausible story that is supposed to explain why God has ordained the various evils of our world, including the evils of Hell. Section B is dedicated to addressing the nightmare objection, the primary objection to my defense. Section C is dedicated to extending the story that was presented in section A to animals, children, and mentally disabled humans. Section D summarizes the material in this chapter. Finally, section E contains concluding remarks for the dissertation on the whole.

Now, before we dig in, four things should be noted. First, it is good to keep in mind in this chapter the fact that, because it is plausible that God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of all three forms of the external glory of God, it is also plausible that He abstractly desires: (1) every consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him, including those that follow from His retributive justice and mercy, (2) every good thing, including every instance of retributive justice and mercy, and (3) everyone to know Him, love Him, and rejoice in Him fully, such that everyone fully knows His retributive justice and mercy.

Second, one assumption I will make is that Hell is a just punishment for sinners. Given theological compatibilism, even if God determines a person to sin, if they sin, they are responsible for their sin, and they deserve punishment. I will assume that punishing sinners with



Hell (and with natural evils) is perfectly retributively just<sup>1</sup> because all sin merits an infinite punishment.<sup>2, 3</sup>

Third, as said at the end of Chapter I, I will present some material that we cannot know outside of special revelation, such as those in Heaven being able to see the damned in Hell. This might worry some people, but it shouldn't. Again, as Peter van Inwagen said, "the person who offers a defense is not obliged to include in it only statements that are known to be true."<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is acceptable to use in a defense what very well may be true, not merely what is known to be true. Thus, even if we grant that we cannot really know whether certain claims I make are true (e.g., that those in Heaven are able to see the damned in Hell), because what I say *very well may be true*, we can include it in our defense.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Hart makes an important distinction:

We need to realize that the decree of *reprobation* must be distinguished from the decree of *damnation*: the former takes place before the creation of the world, while the latter occurs at the Day of Judgement. We can think of the decree of reprobation as representing God's decision to create, from all possible persons, some he intends to occupy hell for all eternity. The decree of damnation only concerns itself with created persons: at the Second Coming the quick and the dead are all summoned before God for judgement, and of these God damns to hell those whose sins remain unforgiven. It is clear that the motivation for the decree of damnation is to see justice done, but it seems no such motivation can lie behind the decree of reprobation, for when God is reprobating there are not yet any guilty people in existence (Matthew Hart, "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 253, emphases in the original).

I will assume that the decree of *damnation* is morally acceptable. We still must ask whether the decree of *reprobation* is.

<sup>2</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 1 (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), pp. 669a-671a.

<sup>3</sup> The "(and with natural evils)" qualification needs some comment. It could be that when God declares an infinite punishment upon sin, He carries it out on (some of) the damned as time progresses. That is, it could be that (sometimes) He causes the damned to bear some of the infinite punishment this side of Hell through natural evils, and the rest of the infinite punishment while in Hell.

<sup>4</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> Note in relation to this, as also said at the end of Chapter I, that I will appeal to what happens in the afterlife, but this is not unheard of in answers to the problem of evil. As Eleonore Stump points out, "Aquinas's idea, then, is that the things that happen to a person in this life can be justified only by reference to her or his state in the afterlife" (Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 51).

Fourth, once more, following on the heels of the third point, the overall project of this dissertation is to present a plausible story in which God, if God exists, allows the evils we see in our world. Thus, as long as there is a substantive likelihood that the material presented below is correct, I count this chapter a success.<sup>6</sup> With that said, let us dive into my divine glory defense.

#### A. The Ordination of Evil

Consider holistically the following story.<sup>7</sup> I will begin with an explanation as to why God ordains His people to commit numerous and heinous sins. In all of eternity, God tries to decide what to do. He, as argued in the previous chapter, loving either Himself or His people primarily, abstractly desires the compressive maximization of the external glory of God. From this, He decides to ordain the atonement of Christ, which we might define as the reconciliation of God and sinful human beings through the workings of Christ on the cross. This atonement is a consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to both God's retributive justice and God's mercy.<sup>8</sup> For, this atonement is accomplished by Christ bearing the retributive justice and wrath of God on the cross, whereby He pays the penalty for the sins of a select group of people, such that

---

<sup>6</sup> Note in relation to this point that, though I, at times, present the following story in a somewhat matter-of-fact way, we must remember that I am only trying to present a plausible account of why God, if God exists, does what He does. I am following in line with van Inwagen, whose expanded free will defense (Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 84-91) reads to some extent as matter-of-fact. He tells a story of what *did* happen (e.g., "[God] set in motion a rescue operation" (Ibid., 87)) and what *will* happen (e.g., "All this evil, however, will come to an end" (Ibid., p. 89)), yet all of it was merely supposed to be a story with a very real possibility (Ibid., pp. 65-68). Thus, he turns to say, "I contend that the expanded free-will defense is a possible story (internally consistent, at least as far as we can see). I contend that, given that the central character of the story, God, exists, the rest of the story might well be true" (Ibid., p. 90). Thus, I ask the reader to keep in mind that, though I will, at times, write to some extent in a matter-of-fact way, saying, for example, "He decides to ordain the atonement of Christ," I do not claim that the following story is definitely true. I am only claiming that it is plausible.

<sup>7</sup> I will progress from one evil to the next, aiming to provide a plausible story as to why God, if He exists, has allowed all of them. But, I do not intend my story to be a picture of how God systematically thought through everything when He decided to ordain evil. God probably thinks more holistically than systematically, so I ask the reader to keep that in mind.

<sup>8</sup> Note that, because the first form of the external glory of God is *not* God's actions, but there being consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God and/or to His actions, and because the second form of the external glory of God is *not* good features in God's actions, but there being good things in creation, when I refer to the atonement of Christ, I am not referring to Christ's *works*, but to the *results* of Christ's deeds in creation.

God cannot justly send them to Hell. And after all of this, God takes that select group of people and brings them to be with Him forever in Heaven, thereby making them the people of God.<sup>9, 10</sup> Now, because, in Christ's atonement, God's retributive justice and mercy are manifested through a consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him, God has ordained, in ordaining the atonement of Christ, a very great instance of the first form of the external glory of God. However, this consequence in creation requires God's people to sin. For, atonement cannot happen unless the people of God sin. Thus, God ordains them to sin.

Indeed, as their sin increases, the atonement of Christ becomes more substantive in nature, in which case the consequence that can rightly be attributed to God becomes more substantive in nature. For, just like an atonement for two sinful people is, all else being equal, a consequence with more substance to it when compared to an atonement for just one sinful person, so too an atonement for a very great sinner is, all else being equal, a consequence with more substance to it when compared to an atonement for just a minor sinner. As a person's sins increase, either qualitatively or quantitatively, the substance of the atonement increases proportionally. Thus, because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the first form

---

<sup>9</sup> See sections C and E of the previous chapter.

<sup>10</sup> My story thus far employs the penal substitution theory of the atonement, which is in line with the Reformed tradition. As the WCF says, "The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him" (WCF 8.5). Similarly, the Belgic Confession states:

We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son to assume that nature in which the disobedience was committed, to make satisfaction in the same and to bear the punishment of sin by His most bitter passion and death. God therefore manifested His justice against His Son when He laid our iniquities upon Him and poured forth His mercy and goodness on us, who were guilty and worthy of damnation, out of mere and perfect love, giving His Son unto death for us and raising Him for our justification, that through Him we might obtain immortality and life eternal (Article 20).

Due to space limitations, I cannot provide a proper defense of this view of the atonement, so I will assume that these confessions are correct on this point.

of the external glory of God – that is, the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him – He ordains His people to commit numerous and heinous sins so that there can be a more substantive atonement.<sup>11</sup>

Even further, the atonement of Christ is a very great good, perhaps the greatest good besides the goodness of God Himself,<sup>12</sup> in which case, through ordaining the atonement, God has also ordained a very great instance of the second form of the external glory of God. However, the atonement requires God's people to sin.<sup>13</sup> Thus, God ordains them to sin. Indeed, just like what was said above, as their sin increases, the atonement becomes better. For, just like an atonement for two sinful people is, all else being equal, a better good when compared to an atonement for just one sinful person, so too an atonement for a very great sinner is, all else being equal, a better good when compared to an atonement for just a minor sinner. As a person's sins increase, either qualitatively or quantitatively, the good of the atonement increases proportionally. Thus, because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the second form of the external glory of God – that is, goodness in the world or that which reflects God Himself who is infinitely

---

<sup>11</sup> Note that God does not desire the sin in itself. Indeed, God desires there not to be sin. He hates sin. This is true at least in part because, as noted in footnote 96 of Chapter III, God has the virtue of the first form of justice, which influences Him in such a way that He desires others to act according to the first form of justice – that is, to respect people's (moral) rights. But, as said in footnote 96 of Chapter III and footnote 4 of Chapter IV, this is not the primary function of the virtue of the first form of justice, which is to drive the virtue holder to respect people's (moral) rights, and I do not think that its secondary function is as strong as the primary function of the virtue of God's perfect love, which is to drive God to seek the good of and union with His beloveds, according to His hierarchy of love. At the least, there is a very real possibility that God could simply choose to privilege the primary function of His perfect love over the secondary function of the first form of justice (if only because, when there are conflicting desires, God has to choose one over the other). But if God could very well privilege the primary function of His perfect love over the secondary function of the first form of justice, it seems to me that He could very well decide to ordain very great instances of the external glory of God, including those detailed in this chapter, despite His desire for people not to sin. For, God's perfect love, as argued in the previous chapter, leads Him to desire to ordain very great instances of the external glory of God.

<sup>12</sup> See Alvin Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa,'" in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, edited by Peter van Inwagen (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 7-10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

merciful and infinitely retributively just – He ordains His people to commit numerous and heinous sins so that there can be the better good of better atonement.

Additionally, God also decides to ordain His people to become spiritual image bearers, and He wants them to bear the spiritual image of God and to know Him to some substantive extent. This gives God further reason for ordaining the atonement of Christ. For, Jesus's atonement is a means through which God's people can know more fully God's mercy. For, through, as a result of the cross of Christ, never bearing the deserved punishments for your sins, you directly experience the mercy of God.<sup>14</sup> This allows God's people to experientially know more fully how merciful God actually is. Thus, the atonement of Christ allows for an increase in the third form of the external glory of God – that is, the spiritual image of God. Hence, God ordains it.

Take note in relation to this that by *directly* experiencing God's mercy, by actually being the beneficiary of the mercy of God, as opposed to *indirectly* experiencing it, through, for example, seeing other people being the beneficiaries of it, God's people are able to experience God's mercy more fully and, thereby, come to experientially know it more fully as well. Therefore, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God, which means that He wants to increase the knowledge of God within His spiritual image bearers as much as possible, He abstractly desires that His people themselves be the beneficiaries of the atonement of Christ; He wants them all, because they are all spiritual image bearers, to directly experience the mercy of God through Christ's cross.

---

<sup>14</sup> If directly experiencing the mercy of God requires knowing both that you are a sinner and that God has preventing you from bearing the deserved punishments for your sins, so be it. God will make sure to ordain that His people know these things.

At the least, God's abstract desire for the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God gives God reason for ordaining very great instances of (judicial) mercy<sup>15</sup> that can be attributed to Him, whether they have anything to do with Christ's cross or not, so that His spiritual image bearers can know God and His mercy more fully through directly experiencing those very great instances of (judicial) mercy that can be attributed to Him, thereby allowing God to actualize very great instances of the third form of the external glory of God. However, for God to show (judicial) mercy to someone, for them to directly experience the (judicial) mercy of God, they must sin. Hence, God ordains His people, each of whom He has ordained to be a spiritual image bearer, to sin so that He can perform very great acts of (judicial) mercy towards them so that they can know more fully His mercy through acquiring a greater experiential knowledge of His mercy by directly experiencing it.

More than that, God has reason for ordaining that His people sin in numerous and heinous ways. For, as their sin increases, God can be and is more merciful to them. And when mercy abounds that much more, the extent of God's infinite mercy is, to that very extent, more fully experientially known.<sup>16</sup> For, if I only commit one small sin and if God shows me mercy for that one small sin, I will not experientially know the fullness of God's infinite mercy nearly as well as I would if God were to show me mercy for numerous and heinous sins. To

---

<sup>15</sup> Though there can be acts of mercy that have nothing to do with refraining from carrying out retributive justice, which will be briefly discussed in section C of this chapter, I limit myself for now purely to a discussion of mercy that is a matter of refraining from carrying out retributive justice. This is what we might call judicial mercy. Note that this limitation should not worry us. God is still judicially merciful, in which case God can still be externally glorified through His judicial mercy shining forth. Further, because He abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God, He also abstractly desires His judicial mercy shining forth comprehensively maximally.

<sup>16</sup> This is true as long as the sinner remembers and understands their sinfulness. But this should be no problem. God, who perfectly knows all things, can remind people of the extent of their sinfulness. In fact, this seems to be one purpose of Judgment Day. But, whether reminders are given on Judgment Day or not, they can be given at various points throughout eternity. See Luke 12:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 4:5. See also Robin Collins, "The Connection-Building Theodicy," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 229.

(experientially) know more fully the height and the depth and the width of God's infinite mercy, I must sin more numerous and more heinously so that God can exhibit His infinite mercy more fully. Hence, God ordains His people to commit numerous and heinous sins.

More straightforwardly, as indicated in section C of the previous chapter, if a person has a full knowledge of God and, therefore, a full knowledge of His mercy, they must have a full experiential knowledge of His mercy, but if they have a full experiential knowledge of God's mercy, they must have fully experienced God's mercy. And, if a person has fully experienced God's mercy, not only must they have experienced God's mercy directly, but they must also have sinned in numerous and heinous ways. For, *directly* experiencing God's mercy, which requires the person to sin, provides a fuller experience of God's mercy than *indirectly* experiencing it; and experiencing God's mercy for numerous and heinous sins also provides a fuller experience of God's mercy than experiencing His mercy for only one small sin. More simply, you cannot fully experience God's infinite mercy if God has shown you mercy for only one small sin. Thus, because God wants His people to have a full knowledge of God, He ordains them to sin in numerous and heinous ways and to directly experience His mercy for those numerous and heinous sins.

A similar line of reasoning is the following. Appreciating T, as I will understand it here, is something akin to understanding the significance, worth, and/or value of T.<sup>17</sup> For example, if I

---

<sup>17</sup> If someone disagrees with this definition, I have two things to say in response. First, I am not particularly interested in semantics. What I care to do is to communicate with my readers. So, define "appreciation" how you want but recognize that I will be using the word as described in the main text. Second, the word "appreciate" is, in fact, used, at least in common parlance, in the way I will be understanding it here (or at least in similar ways). Dictionaries, though naïve at times, help us to get a firm (if only introductory) grasp on how a word is oftentimes used, and multiple dictionaries define "appreciate" in ways that are similar, if not identical, to my definition. For example, Merriam-Webster's first definition for the word is "to grasp the nature, worth, quality, or significance of" (Merriam-Webster, s.v. "appreciate," accessed February 24, 2023, URL = <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/appreciate>>). The first definition of the Oxford Dictionary of English is "recognize the full worth of", noting also that it derives from the Latin *ad-* 'to' + *pretium* 'price'. (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, second edition, revised, edited by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford University Press, 2010), s.v.

fully appreciate a relationship with someone, I understand how significant it is. I understand its place in my life and how it plays its role in my daily living. I understand its worth and how valuable it is, if at all. I grasp the importance of the relationship. Similarly, if Russia invades Ukraine, and if I fully appreciate what's going on, I understand its importance historically, economically, and politically. I recognize the gravity of the situation.

Now, given this definition, appreciating God adds to the spiritual image of God. For, in understanding the significance, worth, and/or value of God (and/or His attributes), the spiritual image bearer knows God more. Hence, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the third form of the external glory of God, He abstractly desires everything that can in any way add to the spiritual image of God, including, but not limited to, the appreciation of God. Indeed, He wants to comprehensively maximize the appreciation of God. For, if a spiritual image bearer can appreciate God more, then that spiritual image bearer can know God more, in which case the spiritual image of God can be increased within them. Thus, because God abstractly desires to increase the spiritual image of God comprehensively maximally, He abstractly desires His spiritual image bearers to comprehensively maximally appreciate God.

Moreover, God has a deep appreciation for Himself. For, He fully understands His own significance, worth, and/or value. This means that all appreciation of God is good because all appreciation of God reflects the deep appreciation that God has for Himself. Further, because all

---

“appreciate”). The Cambridge Dictionary’s second definition is “to understand a situation and realize that it is important” (Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “appreciate,” accessed February 26, 2023, URL = <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/appreciate>>). The Britannica Dictionary’s first definition is “to understand the worth or importance of (something or someone): to admire and value (something or someone)” (The Britannica Dictionary, s.v. “appreciate,” accessed February 26, 2023, URL = <<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/appreciate>>). Cf. Matthew Hart, “Calvinism and the Problem of Hell,” p. 268.

Note that it might be that, for some things, we understand their significance, worth, and/or value through our emotions. This goes well with my tendency to believe that we know moral truths through the sentiments. See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 293-306 (3.1.1-3.1.2).



appreciation of God is good, and because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the second form of the external glory of God (that is, goodness), God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the appreciation of God.

Additionally, because, as has been discussed, all goods in creation are good effects that can be ascribed to God, every instance of a creature appreciating God, being good, is a good effect in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God. Thus, because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the first form of the external glory of God (that is, consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to Him), He abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the appreciation of God in the world. For, if there is still more appreciation of God that God can bring about in the world, then there is still at least one more consequence that God can bring about in the world that can rightly be ascribed to Him, namely the further good of more appreciation of God. Hence, if God comprehensively maximizes the first form of the external glory of God, such that there is no further consequence that God can bring about in the world that can rightly be ascribed to Him, then He comprehensively maximizes the appreciation of God. Thus, if He abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the first form of the external glory of God, He also abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the appreciation of God. Putting these points together, then, we can conclude that, from God's abstract desire to comprehensively maximize all three forms of the external glory of God, God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the appreciation of God.

Furthermore, a person cannot fully appreciate something unless they have experienced it fully. For, first, fully understanding the significance, worth, and/or value of T requires fully knowing T. The more I know something, the more I can understand its significance, worth,

and/or value.<sup>18</sup> For example, suppose that I learn that a tornado destroyed several homes as it swept through a town. Learning about this allows me to (more fully) appreciate the severity of how bad the natural disaster was. But, if I learn later on that it also killed 300 people, I am, thereby, better able to appreciate how bad the storm actually was. Thus, this new knowledge allows me to better estimate the significance, worth, and/or value of the tornado. Coming to a greater understanding of the tornado allows me to appreciate it more fully.<sup>19</sup> Hence, if I do not know something fully and, therefore, can (at least in theory) come to a greater understanding of it, I can (at least in theory) appreciate that thing more fully. Therefore, if I fully appreciate something and, therefore, cannot appreciate it more fully, I fully know it. Second, as indicated in section C of the previous chapter, one's knowledge of something is not complete until one has full experiential knowledge of that thing, which requires fully experiencing that thing. Therefore, if I fully appreciate x, I fully know x; but if I fully know x, I fully experientially know x; and if I fully experientially know x, I have fully experienced x.<sup>20</sup>

But, let's suppose that there are some pieces of propositional knowledge that do not allow us to appreciate something more fully. That is, suppose that fully understanding the significance,

---

<sup>18</sup> This makes sense in light of the view expressed in section B of Chapter II that goodness and being are the same. When we grow in the knowledge of something, it seems that we are growing in the knowledge of either its being (or lack of being) or its goodness (or lack of goodness). If we come to a greater understanding of its goodness (or lack of goodness), then we come to a greater appreciation of it. For, in knowing its goodness (or lack of goodness), we understand its significance, worth, and/or value. But if we grow in the knowledge of its being (or lack of being), all we have to do to grow in our appreciation of it is to recognize that its being and goodness are the same (or that its lack of being and lack of goodness are the same).

<sup>19</sup> Someone might object: if understanding the significance, worth, and/or value of T adds to one's knowledge of T, as indicated above, and if adding to one's knowledge of T allows one to understand the significance, worth, and/or value of T more fully, then we seem to be going in a vicious circle. Two things should be said by way of response. First, there is no circle in the above. What's going on is this. Someone comes to know things about T, and this allows them to appreciate T to some extent. This appreciation of T gives them a greater knowledge of T, and this greater knowledge of T helps them to appreciate T even more fully. In other words, as the person reflects more and more upon T, their knowledge and appreciation of it progressively improve. Second, if this first point does not satisfy the objector, then we can limit our claim under discussion ("fully understanding the significance, worth, and/or value of T requires fully knowing T") to something like the following: fully understanding the significance, worth, and/or value of T requires fully knowing T in every respect besides understanding the significance, worth, and/or value of T.

<sup>20</sup> As should be clear, I am only talking about things that can be experienced and experientially known.

worth, and/or value of T does not require fully knowing T because one can appreciate something fully without having those pieces of propositional knowledge that don't do anything to help us to appreciate it more fully. Still, we can say the following: the more I *experience* something, either quantitatively or qualitatively, the more I can understand its significance, worth, and/or value.<sup>21</sup> Consider your first instance of experiencing x, where x is anything that you have already experienced multiple times. Wouldn't you say that this experience allowed you to appreciate x (more fully)? Weren't you able to understand (to a greater extent) its significance, value, and/or worth? But now consider your second instance of experiencing x. Wouldn't you also say that this allowed you to grow in your appreciation of x? If the first instance allowed you to grow in your appreciation of x, why wouldn't the second have allowed you to grow in your appreciation of x as well? And I see absolutely no reason why this would ever stop. For example, my first instance of experiencing war (through, possibly, pictures of the attack on Pearl Harbor) allowed me to appreciate (more fully) (to at least some extent) the severity of war. I was able to recognize (more fully) how serious it is and how horrible war can be. I was able to grow in my understanding of its (negative) value. But if my first experience allowed me to grow in my appreciation of the severity of war, why wouldn't a second experience of war also allow me to appreciate it more fully? Would I not know even more substantively how dreadful war is? Would I not understand more deeply how bad it can be? But if I can increase in my appreciation on both my first and second experiences of war, most likely any experience of war will help me to more fully understand its significance, worth, and/or value.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, and much more clearly, having deeper or more substantive experiences of something allows you to appreciate that thing more fully. If I were to directly experience war, for example, my understanding of its significance,

---

<sup>21</sup> Again, as should be clear, I am only talking about things that can be experienced and experientially known.

<sup>22</sup> See section C of Chapter IV.

worth, and/or value would be much improved, all else being equal, in comparison to experiencing war through pictures. Thus, experiencing something more fully, either quantitatively or qualitatively, allows me to appreciate it more fully. Hence, if I have not experienced something fully and, therefore, can (at least in theory) experience it more fully, I can (at least in theory) appreciate that thing more fully. Thus, if I fully appreciate something and, therefore, cannot appreciate it more fully, I have fully experienced it. Hence, if I fully appreciate x, I have fully experienced x.

Therefore, if I fully appreciate x, I fully know x; but if I fully know x, I fully experientially know x; and if I fully experientially know x, I have fully experienced x. Or, at the least, if I fully appreciate x, I have fully experienced x. Keeping this in mind, consider the following reasoning. Because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the appreciation of God, He also abstractly desires that His people fully appreciate His mercy; and because He abstractly desires that His people fully appreciate His mercy, He also abstractly desires that they fully experience His mercy. And, if a person has fully experienced God's mercy, not only have they experienced God's mercy directly, but they have also sinned in numerous and heinous ways. For, *directly* experiencing God's mercy, which requires the person to sin, provides a fuller experience of God's mercy than *indirectly* experiencing it; and experiencing God's mercy for numerous and heinous sins also provides a fuller experience of God's mercy than experiencing His mercy for only one small sin. More simply, you cannot fully experience God's infinite mercy if God has shown you mercy for only one small sin. To experience more fully the height and the depth and the width of God's infinite mercy, which can be poured out on the worst of sinners and on those who have committed more numerous sins and more heinous sins than anyone else, God's people must sin more numerous and more

heinously so that God can exhibit His infinite mercy more fully. God being merciful to the worst of sinners is a greater manifestation of His infinite mercy than Him being merciful to someone who committed only one small sin, in which case the worst of sinners is able to directly experience more fully the infinite mercy of God than someone who has committed only one small sin. Thus, abstractly desiring that His people fully experience His mercy, God ordains that His people sin in numerous and heinous ways and to directly experience His mercy for those numerous and heinous sins. More simply, the more a saved person sins, the more that person can appreciate the infinite mercy of God that has been poured out for them. Thus, God ordains His people to sin in numerous and heinous ways so that, by directly experiencing the mercy of God for those sins, they can more fully appreciate His mercy.<sup>23</sup>

Let us now turn to address two evils alongside one another: the eternal torments of Hell and God's people bearing numerous and substantive natural evils. With the aim of being glorified in the third form to an even greater extent, God also wants His people to know more fully His retributive justice, both for its own sake and because knowing it more fully increases their knowledge of, love for, and delight (or joy) in God's mercy, which has saved them (and all the other people of God) from an eternity of retributive justice. Therefore, God ordains His people, who are His spiritual image bearers, to experience, in some respect, Hell, the retributively just punishment for sin, so that they can understand more fully both the fullness of God's retributive justice against sin and the mercy of God in saving them from Hell, which leads to even greater instances of the third form of the external glory of God. For, because God's

---

<sup>23</sup> God showing mercy to great sinners is also a means for the damned to come to know and appreciate more fully the mercy of God, where this knowledge and appreciation are both good things, and are both good effects in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God, and which both glorify God, even if the damned do not bear the spiritual image of God. As will be discussed momentarily, according to my story, God's people, while residing in Heaven, are able to view those in Hell, which means that those in Hell might also be able to view those in Heaven. Thus, the damned might be able to come to know and appreciate God's mercy more fully through seeing God's people in Heaven and knowing of their sinfulness.

people are finite, without an experiential knowledge of the eternal torments of Hell, they can hardly comprehend its horrors, given its infinite nature. At the least, without an experiential knowledge of Hell, they cannot fully understand it.<sup>24</sup> And without a full understanding of its horrors, they will not fully understand God's retributive justice. More than that, by not fully understanding what they have been saved from, they will not fully understand His mercy in saving them from Hell. Indeed, even if they can understand the horrors of Hell to a considerable degree without ever experiencing them, God's people can always understand the horrors of Hell more by experiencing them. So, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God within His people, in which case He abstractly desires that they experientially know Him, His retributive justice, and His mercy more fully, in which case He abstractly desires that they experience His retributive justice more fully, God ordains His people to experience Hell in some respect. Similarly, God ordains His people to experience, in some respect, Hell so that they can more fully appreciate both the fullness of God's retributive justice against sin and the mercy of God in saving them from Hell.

More to the point, again, if I fully appreciate x, I fully know x; but if I fully know x, I fully experientially know x; and if I fully experientially know x, I have fully experienced x. Or, at the least, when it comes to appreciation, if I fully appreciate x, I have fully experienced x. Thus, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the spiritual image of God and, therefore, the knowledge of God within His people, and because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the appreciation of God, God abstractly desires that His people fully know and fully appreciate Him and His attributes, including His retributive justice;

---

<sup>24</sup> See Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," in *Reasoned Faith*, edited by Eleonore Stump (Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 309-310; and Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 38.

and because of this, He abstractly desires that they fully experience His retributive justice. But fully experiencing His retributive justice requires experiencing Hell, wherein God's wrath is primarily poured out.<sup>25</sup> Thus, God desires that His people experience Hell.

However, as said, God's people are in Heaven, not in Hell. After all, Christ has paid their debt. God has shown them mercy by saving them from Hell. So, they can't directly bear Hell themselves.<sup>26</sup> Instead, if they are to experience it at all, they must experience it indirectly or secondarily or vicariously. Hence, God ordains that there be inhabitants of Hell that His people can view from Heaven for all of eternity, thereby giving them (His people) a greater understanding and appreciation of God's retributive justice and, thereby, also a greater understanding and appreciation of God's mercy in saving them from Hell, thereby allowing them to know more fully, love more greatly, rejoice more exceedingly in, and appreciate more deeply God's attributes and, therefore, God.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> I am going to consider Hell to be definitionally the location in which the following takes place, wherever the exact location is: "the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (WCF 33.2).

<sup>26</sup> If Christ has atoned for His people, can they bear *any* punishment at all, even in their antemortem lives? I'm not sure, but I am inclined to say that they cannot.

<sup>27</sup> The idea that God's people can view Hell from Heaven might seem strange to many people, including Christians. It shouldn't, though. Two points should be made. First, there is Biblical reason for thinking it. Consider Luke 16:19-31, in which Jesus tells a story of a poor man (named Lazarus) and of a rich man. Here is part of it (in the ESV):

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us."

One lesson we might be able to take from this story is that there is a great gulf between Heaven and Hell, yet people on either side can view those on the other side.

Second, the idea that those in Heaven can view those in Hell is not unheard of in the philosophical literature. Thomas Aquinas said, "Nothing should be denied the blessed that belongs to the perfection of their beatitude. Now everything is known the more for being compared with its contrary, because when contraries are placed beside one another they become more conspicuous. Wherefore in order that the happiness of the saints may be more delightful to them and that they may render more copious thanks to God for it, they are allowed to see

Additionally, for God's people to fully understand and appreciate God's retributive justice and, therefore, God's mercy in saving them from Hell, they must experientially know what suffering is actually like. For, without that experiential knowledge, their grasp and appreciation of Hell and, therefore, their grasp and appreciation of His mercy, will not be complete. They need to experientially know what it is like to be there, in addition to seeing people bear the eternal torments therein. Both of these components are important. If God's people lack either an experiential knowledge of what it is *like* for those in Hell or an experiential knowledge of the *depth* of God's wrath against sin, then their knowledge and appreciation of His infinite retributive justice and His infinite mercy will not be complete. Thus, God ordains His people to view, from Heaven, the inhabitants of Hell so that, by viewing their eternal torments, they will know more fully the depth of the wrath of God without having to directly experience it themselves, and He also ordains, in addition to this, that His people directly experience suffering before they enter Heaven so that they have some idea of what it is like for those in Hell to experience their eternal torments. Thus, God causes His people to be victims of natural evils, so that they can know exactly what it feels like to be punished by God. For, experientially knowing what it is like to be punished by God is a requirement for fully understanding and appreciating the wrath of God.

Even further, God ordains His people to directly experience very great and numerous, though (given that they will be saved ultimately) not infinite, sufferings through natural evils, so that they can have a fuller grasp and appreciation of what it is like to suffer deeply and regularly under God's retributive justice, thereby also granting to them a greater and deeper understanding

---

perfectly the sufferings of the damned" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, second and revised edition, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), retrieved from *New Advent*, URL = <<https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>> (Suppl., q. 94, a. 1)).



and appreciation of His mercy in saving them from Hell. For, experientially knowing what it is like to be punished by God *to a great extent* is a requirement for fully understanding and appreciating the *depth* of the wrath of God. For, if a person P has only directly experienced one small natural evil, and if a person P' has directly experienced great and numerous natural evils, P does not, in comparison to P', understand nearly as well what it is like to be under the infinite wrath of God. As the natural evils a person directly experiences increase in either quality or quantity, their understanding of what it is like to be under the infinite wrath of God is, to that very extent, increased. Thus, God ordains that His people endure numerous and substantive natural evils, through which they can come to experientially know what it is like to be punished by God to a great extent, thereby giving them a greater understanding and appreciation of the retributive justice of God.<sup>28</sup>

Let us summarize the story thus far. Currently, we have provided (what I take to be) a plausible story in which God's people sin quite substantially. Thus, we have a plausible story that accounts for the moral evils of God's people. We also have a plausible story in which God's people have much suffering in their lives, caused by natural evils. Additionally, we have a plausible story for why God ordains some to go to Hell.

At this point, we can now answer a question that has been put off for far too long. We said in Chapter III that God and God's people have conflicting interests with the damned, and we can now answer why that is. It is in the interest of the damned not to go to Hell, but it is in interest of both God and God's people for the damned to go to Hell. For, it is through the experience of God's people viewing, from Heaven, the damned in Hell that they grow in the

---

<sup>28</sup> Compare these thoughts with the following portion from Peter van Inwagen's expanded free-will defense: "For human beings to cooperate with God in this rescue operation, they must know that they need to be rescued. They must know what it means to be separated from him. And what it means to be separated from God is to live in a world of horrors" (Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 88).

spiritual image of God, which is in both their interest and the interest of God's. It is in the interest of the people of God because, as has been discussed in section E of the previous chapter, the people of God are benefitted as they grow in the spiritual image of God. For, the most natural and best way for God to make a person's life go well – or, at least, one necessary condition of a person comprehensively maximally flourishing – is for that person to be comprehensively maximally united and filled with God Himself. If God really is Goodness, Value, and Beauty Itself, an infinite sea of goodness, value, and beauty, nothing is better for humans than them being in continual, everlasting, and intimate close contact with Him, being in substantive fellowship and relationship with Him, and having Him reside within them (and expressing Himself through them) for all of eternity. Thus, because God dwells more deeply within His people as they grow in the spiritual image of God, and because God dwelling more deeply within someone is to their advantage, it is in the interest of the people of God to grow in the spiritual image of God as much as possible. Therefore, it is in the interest of the people of God for the damned to go to Hell, which allows their spiritual image of God to grow, as has been detailed. They, thus, have conflicting interest with the damned. It is also in God's interest because it is in His interest to be comprehensively maximally externally glorified, in which case it is in His

interest to grow the spiritual image of God as much as possible. Thus, it is in God's interest for the damned to go to Hell, which, as described, allows the spiritual image of God to grow.<sup>29, 30</sup>

Let us continue our story. Presently, I will provide further reasons for God ordaining the eternal torments of Hell, and alongside that I will explain why God ordains the damned to bear numerous and substantive natural evils. In connection with these thoughts, I will also explain why God ordains the damned to commit numerous and heinous sins. So, let us keep going. Because Hell is a consequence of the retributive justice of God, the eternal torments therein externally glorify God in the first form. They are consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God, following from His virtue of retributive justice. Indeed, Hell is a very substantive consequence of God's retributive justice. God doesn't pour out His wrath in Hell to some extent or other. He pours it out *exceedingly*. Hell is, therefore, a very substantive instance of the first form of the external glory of God because God's retributive justice shines forth more as the retributively just punishment increases.

Moreover, if there exists a state of some retributive justice – that is, if there is a state in which a sinner is punished, to at least some extent, for their sins, or in which a sinner gets, to

---

<sup>29</sup> Further comment is needed on this last point. I am not sure whether God's external glory can, strictly speaking, count as an interest of God's, given that He is, from all of eternity, completely in and of and from Himself, supremely happy and blessed, and given that His external glory is a next-best thing related to His own good and His own union with Himself. But this should not worry us. Even if the external glory of God cannot properly count as an interest of God's, I spilled much ink in the previous chapter to argue that if God loves Himself primarily, loving Himself with a maximal and active love, there is a very real possibility that He will ordain very great instances of His own external glory, abstractly desiring the comprehensive maximization of His own external glory. However, as has been made clear in this chapter, some instances of the external glory of God come into conflict with the interests of the damned. And, as said in section B of Chapter III, the maximally loving person is maximally devoted, pursuing the good of the beloved whenever possible. Thus, if God loves Himself primarily, even if the external glory of God cannot properly count as an interest of God's, there is a very real possibility that He will ordain what will come into conflict with the interests of the damned, in which case He will not pursue the good of the damned whenever possible, which means that He is not maximally devoted to them and does not love them maximally, which also means that He does not love them primarily, in which case He loves Himself more than the damned.

<sup>30</sup> The upcoming thoughts also show that Hell is a means for God to advance the first and second forms of the external glory of God, both of which are in, at least, God's interest.

some extent, his (retributively) just deserts – that is a good thing in creation.<sup>31</sup> The demands of the second form of justice, which is a matter of balance, equality, and fairness, are closer to being met. Thus, because the existence of Hell entails that there exists a state of some retributive justice, by ordaining Hell God actualizes another instance of the second form of the external glory of God. Further, the closer we get to meeting the demands of the second form of justice, the better. The state of a person receiving exactly what their sins deserve is, all else being equal, better than the state of a person receiving only part of what their sins deserve. So, because Hell isn't a place in which the damned endure their deserved punishments to some extent or other, but a place in which there exists a state of *perfect* retributive justice (at least from the perspective of eternity), with the damned bearing *exactly* what they deserve, Hell is also a very great good, in which case it greatly glorifies God in the second form.<sup>32</sup>

So, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of both the first and second forms of the external glory of God, He abstractly desires to ordain Hell, independently of the reasoning above concerning God's people growing in the knowledge and appreciation of God's retributive justice and mercy through experiencing Hell secondarily.

Similarly, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of both the first and second forms of the external glory of God, abstractly desiring to actualize every possible consequence that can rightly be attributed to Him and every possible good, He also abstractly desires that the damned endure many instances of pre-Hell punishments, some of which are quite bad, that are true instances of the retributive justice of God. For, pre-Hell

---

<sup>31</sup> Similar to what was said in footnote 8 of this chapter, when I refer to the state of retributive justice, I am not referring to God's virtue of retributive justice, nor to His actions of retributive justice, but to the *results* in creation of Him acting from His virtue of retributive justice.

<sup>32</sup> We might be able to get to this same conclusion, that Hell is a very great good, from another direction: given that, as has been discussed, the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God are all good effects, because Hell is a very great consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to God, it is plausible that Hell is also a very great good.

punishments on the damned are consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God, flowing from His retributive justice, and they are also, because they create a state in which there exists some retributive justice, good. Thus, He ordains many pre-Hell punishments, some of which are quite bad, for the damned to endure. Specifically, He ordains that they be victims of various natural evils and that they suffer the many and substantive pains caused by them.<sup>33</sup>

In other words, because God abstractly desires to actualize every possible consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him, He also abstractly desires to actualize every possible pain in the world that can rightly be attributed to His retributive justice; and because He abstractly desires to actualize every possible good in the world, He also abstractly desires to actualize every possible state of a sinner getting his (retributively) just deserts, each of which is a good thing. So, because any instance of pre-Hell pains that the damned directly experience that come through natural evils are pains in the world that can rightly be attributed to God's retributive justice, and because they create a state of sinners getting their (retributively) just deserts, each of which is a good thing, God abstractly desires all instances of pre-Hell pains that the damned directly experience that come through natural evils, and some of them happen to be quite severe. So, He ordains many and substantive instances of them. And the more there are, and/or the more substantive they are, the more God is externally glorified. For, as their greatness or number increases, the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God and/or to God's retributive justice become greater or more numerous, in which case God is more glorified; and goodness in the world increases because all sin merits an infinite punishment and because, as

---

<sup>33</sup> Note also that it could be that God, abstractly desiring the comprehensive maximization of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, ordains an infinite manifestation of His retributive justice. This would be both a consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to God, flowing from His retributive justice, and, because it creates a state in which there exists perfect retributive justice, a good thing. Further, it could be that He carries out some of it in Hell, and some of prior to Hell through natural evils. See footnote 3 of this chapter.

said, the closer we get to meeting the demands of the second form of justice, the better things are, in which case the more punishment a sinner receives, the closer they get to the infinite punishment that they deserve and the better things are, in which case God is more glorified.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> I'm inclined to think that *any* form of suffering, pain, and/or harm that the damned endure, whatever the practical source, can be attributed to the retributive justice of God. This includes any form of suffering, pain, and/or harm that arises from natural evils, but it also includes any form of suffering, pain, and/or harm that arises from moral evils. If God is sovereign over *everything* in the world, then God can prevent any form of suffering, pain, and/or harm that is possible for a person to endure. For example, God can prevent a terroristic gunman from causing harm to his intended victims by dematerializing the bullets or by making them go through the bodies of his targets without causing them any pain and then reshaping the organs instantaneously, similar to how you might think a bullet would go through a ghost. This means that if God makes it the case that bullets cause harm to people, God has chosen to make it the case that they cause harm to people.

Similarly, I think these thoughts can be extended even to include forms of suffering, pain, and/or harm that the damned endure that arise due to practical happenstance – that is, suffering, pain, and/or harm that does not arise from, say, natural disasters or human maliciousness, but that arises from things in the world just happening to shape up in such a way that people end up suffering, being pained, and/or being harmed. Sometimes people suffer for the simple reason that things happen in such a way that they never get the desires of their hearts. (For some discussion of the connection between suffering and being deprived of the desires of the heart, see Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 6-11.) But God is sovereign even over this suffering, pain, and/or harm, and it does not have to occur. God can simply make it the case that people always get the desires of their hearts. For example, if God decides to ordain that person P be the president, then all He has to do is ordain it to be the case that all other persons do not deeply desire to be the president. Here's another example: if God decides to ordain that person P and person P' will get married, then all He has to do is ordain that no one else deeply desires to be married to either P or P'. This means that any suffering, pain, and/or harm that arises from lacking the desires of the heart is chosen by God. And it seems that we can say the same sort of thing for any other form of suffering, pain, and/or harm that arises due to practical happenstance. God chooses that people suffer if they in fact suffer.

Thus, given that God is sovereign over all forms of suffering, pain, and/or harm, I'm thinking that *any* form of suffering, pain, and/or harm in the lives of the damned is an instance of God's judgment upon them. He is manifesting His retributive justice by causing them to suffer, to be pained, and/or to be harmed in various ways. Further, because every instance of pre-Hell suffering, pain, and/or harm that the damned endure, whatever their practical origin, is an instance of suffering, pain, and/or harm in the world that can rightly be attributed to God's retributive justice, and because every instance of pre-Hell suffering, pain, and/or harm that the damned endure, whatever their practical origin, creates a state of sinners getting their (retributively) just deserts, each instance of which is a good thing, God abstractly desires all instances of pre-Hell sufferings, pains, and/or harms that the damned endure, whatever their practical origin, and some of them happen to be quite severe. For, He is externally glorified in the first and second forms through these pre-Hell sufferings, pains, and/or harms. So, He ordains many and substantive instances of them. And the more there are, and/or the more substantive they are, the more God is externally glorified. For, as their greatness or number increases, the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God and/or to God's retributive justice become greater or more numerous, in which case God is more glorified; and goodness in the world increases because all sin merits an infinite punishment and because, as said, the closer we get to meeting the demands of the second form of justice, the better things are, in which case the more punishment a sinner receives, the closer they get to the infinite punishment that they deserve and the better things are, in which case God is more glorified.

Note in connection with this, that this gives God reason to make *His people* suffer in various ways. For, if God brings suffering, pain, and/or harm to the damned through natural evils, moral evils, and/or practical happenstance, all flowing from His retributive justice, then God, abstractly desiring His people to know and to appreciate more fully His retributive justice, might ordain them to endure suffering, pain, and/or harm that is caused by natural evils, moral evils, and/or practical happenstance. This allows them to experientially know what it is *like* to be punished by God in the various ways that He punishes the damned, thereby giving them a greater understanding and appreciation of the retributive justice of God. That is, if a person has a full understanding and appreciation of the

But, in order for the punishments of Hell and for the punishments of natural evils to be retributively just, the damned must be sinners. This is a requirement to make the pains of Hell and the natural evils prior to Hell true instances of retributive justice. So, God ordains the damned to sin prior to all of their punishments. Even further, similar to what was said above regarding the atonement, as sin increases, the state of retributive justice becomes both more substantive and better. For, just like a state of punishment for two sinful people is, all else being equal, a more substantive and better state of affairs when compared to a state of punishment for just one sinful person, so too a state of punishment for a very great sinner is, all else being equal, a more substantive and better state of affairs when compared to a state of punishment for just a minor sinner.<sup>35</sup> As a person's sins increase, either qualitatively or quantitatively, the substantiveness and goodness of the state of retributive justice increase proportionally. Thus, because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the first and second forms of the external glory of God, He ordains the damned to commit numerous and heinous sins so that there can be a more substantive and better state of retributive justice – that is, so that there can be more substantive consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God and so that there can be better states of affairs to more fully reflect Him who is infinitely retributively just.

---

wrath of God, they must not only propositionally know all the ways in which God can punish someone, but they must also experientially know what it is like to be punished by God in those various ways. So, because God abstractly desires that His people fully know and fully appreciate His wrath, He wants them to experientially know what it is like to be punished in those various ways. Thus, He ordains that they be victims of natural evils, moral evils, and practical happenstance. And because God can punish more severely by sending more pains and/or more substantive pains upon someone through these various means, He also ordains that His people endure numerous and substantive pains through natural evils, moral evils, and practical happenstance so that they can come to experientially know what it is like to be punished by God to a great extent, thereby giving them a greater understanding and appreciation of the infinite wrath of God. For, as those pains that come about through natural evils, moral evils, and practical happenstance increase in either quality or quantity, their understanding of what it is like to be under the infinite wrath of God is, to that very extent, increased.

<sup>35</sup> Think of it this way. Convicting a crime lord is a more substantive and better judicial act than convicting someone who is only guilty of trespassing.

More than that, though the damned are not spiritual image bearers, they are natural image bearers, having understanding, will, and affection, all of which are good. And, as discussed in section D of Chapter II, the knowledge of God that God grants to some humans without infusing Himself into them is good and valuable in its own right because it resembles God, who knows Himself perfectly, in which case it externally glorifies Him in the second form. It also glorifies God in the first form, given that, as has been said, all goods in creation are good effects that can rightly be ascribed to God. Indeed, the more anyone knows God, the more God is externally glorified. So, God wants the damned to know more fully His attributes, including His retributive justice. This gives God another reason for ordaining Hell and great and numerous natural evils. If the damned experience Hell and great and numerous natural evils, they will have a fuller grasp of God's retributive justice, which is a good thing. In fact, because experiencing an attribute of God's directly (by, for example, bearing the wrath of God oneself) provides a fuller experience of that attribute than experiencing it secondarily (through, for example, seeing other people bear the wrath of God), the damned will have a *much* fuller grasp of God's wrath when compared to God's people, who do not experience Hell directly, and this deeper understanding is, to that very extent, better and more glorifying to God. Succinctly, God abstractly desires the damned to know His retributive justice fully, but this requires them experiencing fully the infinite retributive justice of God, so, because Hell is the place in which God primarily pours out His wrath, God ordains them to experience Hell directly; and because God can punish someone through sending them great and numerous natural evils, God also ordains the damned to experience directly great and numerous natural evils. The more wrath they experience directly, whether in Hell or prior to Hell, the more fully they will be able to know the infinite wrath of God.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> The knowledge of God's retributive justice might even be good for the damned. For, it seems that any knowledge of God makes one's life better, if only for the simple fact that there is more good in one's life. Cf. David Alexander,



Similarly, as said above, all appreciation of God glorifies God in both the first and second forms, in which case God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the appreciation of God. This entails that God abstractly desires the damned to fully appreciate His attributes, including, but not limited to, His wrath. Hence, God ordains the damned to directly endure Hell and great and numerous natural evils so that they can appreciate more fully the depth of the infinite retributive justice of God. Again, if I fully appreciate x, I fully know x; but if I fully know x, I fully experientially know x; and if I fully experientially know x, I have fully experienced x. Or, at the least, if I fully appreciate x, I have fully experienced x. Thus, because God abstractly desires the damned to fully appreciate His wrath, He ordains them to directly experience it to some substantive extent.

Additionally, because God abstractly desires that the damned know and appreciate His retributive justice fully, He also abstractly desires that they know and appreciate His wrath against every possible type of sin. For, if the damned only know and appreciate His wrath against, say, murder, then they will not fully know or appreciate His retributive justice. They will not know or appreciate His wrath against, for example, thievery or rape. Thus, abstractly desiring every good thing and every consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to God, including all knowledge of God and all knowledge of His wrath, and including all appreciation of God and all appreciation of His wrath, God ordains the damned to directly experience His wrath against murder,<sup>37</sup> thereby allowing them to know and to appreciate more fully the retributive justice of God. But, for the same reason, He also ordains the damned to directly

---

“Orthodoxy, Theological Determinism, and the Problem of Evil,” in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 142.

<sup>37</sup> Note that this story of mine that I am currently telling does not say that each damned person is a murderer. No, instead it says that there is a group of people, the damned, and that some of them are murderers. I ask the reader to keep this in mind as we go.

experience His wrath against theft and against rape and against multiple other possible types of sins. But the damned directly experiencing God's wrath against all these different types of sins requires the damned to commit all these different types of sins, and some of them happen to be heinous. Thus, God ordains the damned to commit multiple different types of sins, some of which are heinous, so that they might know and appreciate more fully the retributive justice of God by bearing the wrath of God against multiple different types of sins.

We can frame this point differently. Because God abstractly desires that the damned know and appreciate His retributive justice fully, He also abstractly desires that they experience His retributive justice fully. But this means that He abstractly desires that they directly experience His wrath against murder and His wrath against theft and His wrath against rape and His wrath against every other possible type of sin, where some of these types of sins are heinous. For, *directly* experiencing God's wrath provides a fuller experience than *indirectly* experiencing it; and experiencing God's wrath against *every* possible type of sin provides a fuller experience of God's wrath than experiencing His wrath against *only some* types of sin. Thus, God ordains the damned to directly experience His wrath against murder and His wrath against theft and His wrath against rape and His wrath against every other possible type of sin (or, at least, many different types of sins).<sup>38</sup> But directly experiencing God's wrath against some particular type of sin just is bearing the wrath of God for having committed that type of sin. Thus, the damned must commit those types of sins. Hence, God ordains the damned to commit murder and theft and rape and every other possible type of sin (or, at least, many different types of sins), and some of them happen to be heinous. In short, God abstractly desires that the damned directly

---

<sup>38</sup> Perhaps there are some types of sins that God has prevented humans from committing.

experience His wrath against every possible type of sin, including heinous sins, so He ordains the damned to commit heinous sins so that they can directly experience His wrath against those sins.

Further, God ordains the damned to commit numerous sins. Again, God abstractly desires that the damned know and appreciate His retributive justice fully. But fully knowing and appreciating God's retributive justice requires fully experiencing God's retributive justice. And, if God does not pour out His wrath upon every possible token of sin, then there will be (at least in principle) more of the wrath of God that the damned can experience, in which case they will not have fully experienced God's infinite retributive justice.<sup>39</sup> This means that, if God does not pour out His wrath upon every possible token of sin, the damned will neither fully know nor fully appreciate God's infinite wrath. Thus, because God abstractly desires that the damned know and appreciate His retributive justice fully, He also abstractly desires to pour out His wrath upon every possible token of sin. Thus, God ordains the damned to commit multiple instances of sin so that He can pour out His wrath on numerous tokens of sin, thereby allowing the damned, who experience the wrath of God directly, to more fully experientially know and appreciate the infinite wrath of God.

Framing it differently, because God abstractly desires that the damned know and appreciate His retributive justice fully, He also abstractly desires that they experience His retributive justice fully. But this means that He abstractly desires that they directly experience His wrath against every instance of sin. For, *directly* experiencing God's wrath provides a fuller experience than *indirectly* experiencing it; and experiencing God's wrath against *every* possible instance of sin provides a fuller experience of God's wrath than experiencing His wrath against

---

<sup>39</sup> As indicated in section C of the previous chapter, even if God has shown someone an attribute thousands of times by causing various consequences to arise in creation from this attribute, they do not *fully* experientially know that attribute until they have experienced every consequence that can arise from it.

*only some* instances of sin. Thus, God ordains the damned to directly experience His wrath against multiple instances of sin. But directly experiencing God's wrath against multiple instances of sin just is bearing the wrath of God for having committed multiple instances of sins. Thus, the damned must commit multiple instances of sin. Hence, God ordains the damned to commit numerous sins.

To put it simply, again, if I fully appreciate x, I fully know x; but if I fully know x, I fully experientially know x; and if I fully experientially know x, I have fully experienced x. Or, at the least, when it comes to appreciation, if I fully appreciate x, I have fully experienced x. Thus, if the damned fully know and fully appreciate God's wrath, they have fully experienced God's wrath. But *fully* experiencing God's wrath requires directly experiencing God's wrath against every possible type and token of sin. And directly experiencing God's wrath against every possible type and token of sin requires sinning numerous times and in every type of way, where some of these ways are heinous. Thus, because God abstractly desires that the damned fully know and fully appreciate God's wrath, He ordains them to commit numerous and heinous sins.<sup>40, 41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Three related notes should be made. First, we can give a similar line of reasoning that focuses on God's abstract desire to comprehensively maximize *His people's* knowledge and appreciation of His retributive justice. God might well ordain numerous types of sins, some of which happen to be more heinous than others, and multiple different instances of sin to be committed by the damned so that God's people, knowing the sins of the damned (perhaps merely due to Judgment Day), and seeing the punishments that they endure because of them, can indirectly experience the wrath of God against multiple types and tokens of sin, thereby allowing them to know and appreciate more fully God's infinite retributive justice. Similarly, second, if God wants His people to know and appreciate more fully His mercy towards them in particular, then God might well ordain that the damned sin in similar ways to show God's people exactly what their (God's people's) very sins deserve. Because, as has already been discussed in the main text, God's people were ordained to sin in numerous and heinous ways, God, therefore, might well ordain that the damned sin in numerous and heinous ways as well. Third, God might well ordain that His people commit various types and tokens of sin so that they might more fully know and appreciate God's infinite mercy by directly experiencing His mercy towards them in response to multiple different types and tokens of sin. Thus, God might well ordain that His people commit numerous sins and different types of sins, some of which happen to be heinous.

<sup>41</sup> This line of reasoning is inspired by Matthew Hart, "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell," pp. 256-257.

It is time to take stock again. We have (what I take to be) a plausible story in which God's people sin quite substantially and in which God's people have much suffering in their lives, caused by natural evils. We also have a plausible story in which God ordains the damned to experience both Hell and the many and substantive pains prior to Hell that natural evils cause. Finally, we have a plausible story of God ordaining the damned to sin quite substantially. Still, there are (at least) two parts of our story yet to be unraveled. I will introduce them with two questions. First, why does God create so many of the damned? Second, why are people victims of moral evils?

Let us consider the first of these questions, first. God ordains there to be many damned people for (at least) the following reasons.<sup>42</sup> First, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, He abstractly desires every possible punishment that can rightly be ascribed to Him, each instance of which is good, given that, as has been discussed, the consequences in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God are all good effects, being neither bad nor neutral. Further, because one instance of a sinner bearing Hell (and the pains of natural evils) is both a punishment that can rightly be ascribed to God and good, God abstractly desires it. And I see absolutely no reason why the same isn't also true for every other instance of a sinner bearing Hell (and the pains of natural evils). For, if God ordains another instance of a sinner bearing Hell (and the pains of natural evils), there is another punishment that can rightly be ascribed to God and another good. Thus, God abstractly desires every possible instance of a sinner bearing Hell (and the pains of natural

---

<sup>42</sup> Note that these reasons provide one explanation as to why God doesn't manifest His wrath merely upon Christ on the cross. I was first made aware of this worry while reading Roger Olson, "The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, edited by Bruce Ware (B&H Academic, 2008), pp. 162-163. For more responses to this worry, see Matthew Hart, "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell," pp. 255-262. Note that similar thoughts can be used to explain why God doesn't just annihilate people.

evils); for, having more sinners bearing Hell (and the pains of natural evils) entails more external glory of the first and second forms. Thus, having many sinners experience damnation (and the pains of natural evils) is something that God abstractly desires. Thus, He ordains it.

Additionally, because God abstractly desires His people and the damned to know and to appreciate His wrath more fully, God also abstractly desires more sinners to be damned (and to bear natural evils). For, if seeing one sinner bear punishment improves someone's understanding and appreciation of God's retributive justice, seeing many sinners bear punishment improves their understanding and appreciation even more. As indicated above, even if God has shown certain people an attribute thousands of times by causing various consequences to arise in creation from this attribute, they do not *fully* experientially know that attribute until they have experienced every consequence that can arise from it. Thus, God abstractly desires more and more sinners to be damned (and to bear the pains of natural evils) so that His people and the damned can experience His wrath more fully, thereby increasing their knowledge and appreciation of His retributive justice, thereby increasing the glory of God that much more. Hence, He ordains it.

Framing this differently, again, if I fully appreciate x, I fully know x; but if I fully know x, I fully experientially know x; and if I fully experientially know x, I have fully experienced x. Or, at the least, when it comes to appreciation, if I fully appreciate x, I have fully experienced x. Thus, because God abstractly desires both His people and the damned to fully know and to fully appreciate His wrath, God abstractly desires both His people and the damned to fully experience His wrath. And fully experiencing God's wrath requires God to fully pour out His wrath. But if God ordains just one sinner to bear the wrath of God, then He has not fully poured out His infinite wrath. For, He could ordain numerous sinners, instead of just one, to bear the wrath of

God, and this would be a fuller pouring out of the infinite wrath of God. Thus, with the aim of more fully pouring out of His infinite wrath, God ordains there to be numerous sinners.<sup>43</sup>

Let us now consider the second question: why are people victims of moral evils?<sup>44</sup> Because there are two types of people, the saved (that is, God's people) and the damned, and because both types of people can be either the victim or the perpetrator of moral evil, there are four possible situations to address. First, the saved are victims of other saved people so that they (the victims) can more fully know and appreciate God's mercy. Seeing another person in Heaven and propositionally knowing that they were a sinner does increase one's knowledge and appreciation of the mercy of God. But, this knowledge and appreciation of God's mercy can be improved when experientially knowing and appreciating how bad they actually were through experiencing their sinfulness. By being a victim of a saved person, the saved person who was the victim can more fully recognize and appreciate how deep and infinite God's mercy is that He is able to show mercy to someone so horrible.

Similarly, second, the saved are victims of the damned so that they (the saved) might experientially know and appreciate more fully how bad the damned actually are, thereby giving them a greater understanding and appreciation of God's retributive justice against them. Seeing a person in Hell and propositionally knowing that they were a sinner does increase one's knowledge and appreciation of the retributive justice of God, but this can be improved when experientially knowing and appreciating how bad they actually were through experiencing their sinfulness. The victims will more fully recognize how warranted God's wrath is and will appreciate to a greater extent God's retributive justice in bringing punishment upon sinners. They will better understand the significance, worth, and/or value of God's wrath upon the damned.

---

<sup>43</sup> The same sort of reasoning in these paragraphs can be used to explain why God creates so many people of God.

<sup>44</sup> I thank Daniel Cadiz for bringing this question to my attention.

Additionally, the saved experiencing what moral evil is like (from the perspective of the victim), whoever the perpetrator is, helps them to know and appreciate more fully their own sinfulness and how bad it actually is, thereby improving their own knowledge and appreciation of God's mercy towards them.<sup>45</sup>

Third, for the same sorts of reasons mentioned above, the damned are victims of the saved so that their (the victims') knowledge and appreciation of God's mercy towards the saved can be improved. If God's people can view the damned in Hell, why can't the damned see the saved in Heaven? But in seeing the saved in Heaven, and in experientially knowing and appreciating how bad the saved actually were, the damned will all the more know and appreciate how deep God's mercy is. Again, seeing a person in Heaven and propositionally knowing that they were a sinner does increase one's knowledge and appreciation of the mercy of God, but this knowledge and appreciation of God's mercy can be improved when experientially knowing and appreciating how bad they actually were through experiencing their sinfulness. By being a victim of the saved, the damned person more fully recognizes and appreciates how deep and infinite God's mercy is to be able to show mercy to someone so horrible, and this knowledge and appreciation of God is good.

Fourth, for the same sorts of reasons mentioned above, the damned are victims of the damned so that they (the victims) can know and appreciate more fully the retributive justice of God. Seeing another person in Hell and propositionally knowing that they were a sinner does increase one's knowledge and appreciation of the retributive of God, but this can be improved when experientially knowing and appreciating how bad they actually were through experiencing their sinfulness. The victims will more fully recognize how warranted God's wrath is and will

---

<sup>45</sup> See also footnote 34 of this chapter.



appreciate to a greater extent God's retributive justice in bringing punishment upon sinners. They will better understand the significance, worth, and/or value of God's wrath upon the damned.

Additionally, the damned experiencing what moral evil is like (from the perspective of the victim), whoever the perpetrator is, helps them to know and appreciate more fully their own sinfulness and how bad it actually is, thereby improving their own knowledge and appreciation of God's retributive justice towards them.<sup>46, 47</sup>

In effect, God, abstractly desiring to be externally glorified to a greater extent, abstractly desires that people know and appreciate more fully both His retributive justice and His mercy. Because of this, He ordains that people experientially know and appreciate how bad people actually are through experiencing their sinfulness (from the perspective of being one of their victims). And people are deeply sinful, committing numerous and heinous sins. Thus, because, as has already been discussed above, God will ordain both the saved and the damned to commit numerous and heinous sins, God will also ordain that people be victims of (some of these) numerous and heinous sins committed by the saved and the damned, thereby giving them a greater experiential understanding and appreciation of how bad the saved and the damned actually are, thereby giving them a greater understanding and appreciation of the mercy of God towards the saved who committed such numerous and heinous sins and a greater understanding and appreciation of the retributive justice of God that is poured out on the damned who committed such numerous and heinous sins.

To put it differently, because God will ordain both the saved and the damned to sin in numerous and heinous ways (for the reasons listed previously in this section), God will ordain

---

<sup>46</sup> See also footnote 34 of this chapter.

<sup>47</sup> Also, people might be victims of moral evils so that they can experientially know and appreciate more fully how bad a particular type of sin is, thereby giving them a fuller understanding and appreciation of God's mercy or retributive justice towards anyone who has committed a sin of the same sin-type.

that people experience (some of) these numerous and heinous sins (from the perspective of the victim) so that they can experientially know and appreciate more fully the depth of the badness of the sinfulness of the saved and the damned. This, in turn, improves their knowledge and appreciation of God's mercy, which is manifested in the salvation of the saved, and of God's retributive justice, which is manifested in the damnation of the damned.

If we want, we can present our point in a somewhat more systematic way. Fully knowing and fully appreciating God's mercy and God's retributive justice – and God abstractly desires that both the saved and the damned fully know and fully appreciate His mercy and His retributive justice – requires fully experientially knowing and fully appreciating the depth of the sinfulness of those upon whom God casts His mercy and retributive justice. But fully experientially knowing and fully appreciating the depth of the sinfulness of those upon whom God casts His mercy and retributive justice requires fully experiencing the depth of their sinfulness (from the perspective of the victim). And, given that they sin in numerous and heinous ways, fully experiencing the depth of their sinfulness (from the perspective of the victim) requires experiencing numerous and heinous moral evils (from the perspective of the victim). Thus, God ordains that the saved and the damned experience numerous and heinous moral evils (from the perspective of the victim).<sup>48, 49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> See Christopher Green, "A Compatibilist Demonstrative-Goods Defense," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. 238, 241.

<sup>49</sup> What about those who are victims of moral evils without ever knowing about it? For example, suppose that person P deceives person P'. Whether P' ever finds out about it or not, it seems that P' is a victim of the moral evil of deception. But, if P' never finds out about it, it seems that P' is a victim of moral evil without being able to experientially know or appreciate the depth of the badness of the sin committed against them. If so, it seems that my explanation for why God allows people to be victims of moral evils does not cover all cases. For, it seems that some people are victims of moral evils without ever finding out about it and, therefore, without ever experientially knowing or appreciating the depth of the badness of the sin committed against them. What should we say, then? My response is simple. Everyone will eventually find out about the sins committed against them. This seems to be one purpose of Judgment Day. But, whether people find out on Judgment Day or not, they can still find out about them at some point throughout all of eternity. See Luke 12:1-3, 1 Corinthians 4:5, and Robin Collins, "The Connection-Building Theodicy," p. 229. Thus, if P' never finds out about being deceived *this side* of judgment, they will find out

Therefore, when taking stock of everything, we have (what I take to be) a plausible story in which both God's people and the damned sin quite substantially, in which both God's people and the damned have much suffering in their lives caused by natural evils, in which both God's people and the damned are victims of numerous and substantive moral evils, and in which many people directly experience the eternal torments of Hell.<sup>50</sup> Even though the damned are (probably) made worse off in this story, we should not worry. For, (1) God's abstract desire for the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God, which leads Him to ordain this story, flows from His perfect love, which seeks the good of and union with His primary beloved(s) above all others, and which is primarily directed not at the damned, but at either God Himself or His people; (2) the two forms of justice don't do anything to dissuade God from acting on His perfect love; and (3) my divine command theory is plausibly correct. These three points entail that, plausibly, even though the damned are (probably) made worse off, God's ordination of the above story will still be perfectly virtuous and perfectly morally acceptable. For, God's ordination of the above story flows from His virtues, in which case it is perfectly virtuous; and He will likely command from His virtues, such that it is likely that He will command Himself in

---

about it *at* (or after) judgment, and they will thereby understand what it is like to have been the victim of the moral evil of the deception of P.

<sup>50</sup> Aquinas agrees with the heart of this defense. He said,

The reason for the predestination of some, and reprobation of others, must be sought for in the goodness of God. Thus He is said to have made all things through His goodness, so that the divine goodness might be represented in things. Now it is necessary that God's goodness, which in itself is one and undivided, should be manifested in many ways in His creation; because creatures in themselves cannot attain to the simplicity of God. Thus it is that for the completion of the universe there are required different grades of being; some of which hold a high and some a low place in the universe. That this multiformity of grades may be preserved in things, God allows some evils, lest many good things should never happen, as was said above [Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 22, a. 2)]. Let us then consider the whole of the human race, as we consider the whole universe. God wills to manifest His goodness in men; in respect to those whom He predestines, by means of His mercy, as sparing them; and in respect of others, whom he reprobates, by means of His justice, in punishing them. This is the reason why God elects some and rejects others (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 23, a. 5)).

such a way that it becomes (if it is not already) morally acceptable for Him to do whatever His virtues incline Him to do (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command), in which case, because God's virtues incline Him to ordain the above story, it is likely that He will command Himself in such a way that it becomes (if it is not already) morally acceptable for Him to ordain the above story (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command). Thus, it is plausible that God's ordination of the above story will be both virtuous and morally acceptable.<sup>51</sup>

Yes, perhaps God could ordain other stories instead of the one I have described here, but the one presented above (or something very much like it) is something that God very well could ordain. Let's go through one train of thought that was brought up in the previous chapter. First, recall to mind that, because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God, if such comprehensive maximization is possible, we should not be surprised at all to see God ordaining the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God. Now, we can put this possibility to the side because comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God is not possible for at least the following reason. If a spiritual image bearer knows God's mercy fully, then they have fully experienced God's mercy, in which case they have directly experienced the fullness of God's mercy, in which case they have been saved from

---

<sup>51</sup> Let's be clear on one important corollary: the Kantian objection that God treats the damned as mere means will fall flat. For, though Kantianism might well be the true theory of the deontological status of actions, it is still plausible that my divine command theory is correct. But if my divine command theory is plausibly correct, it is plausible that God's treatment of the damned as mere means is morally acceptable. For, if God is inclined to ordain the above story due to His perfect love (and His other virtues), and if God commands from His perfect love (and His other virtues), it is likely that God will command Himself in such a way that it is not wrong for Him to ordain the above story, even though the above story does (seem to) entail that God uses the damned as mere means. It will likely, therefore, be morally acceptable, if my divine command theory is correct, for God to use the damned as mere means so that the above story can be actualized. Hence, if my divine command theory is plausibly correct, it is plausible that it is morally acceptable for God to use the damned as mere means so that the above story can be actualized. For some discussion of the Kantian objection, see Marilyn McCord Adams, "Plantinga on 'Felix Culpa': Analysis and Critique," *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2008), pp. 123-140.

Hell. But this means that they are not able to know God's retributive justice fully because they cannot directly experience the fullness of God's wrath. Though they can know it to some extent, through, for example, seeing the damned in Hell, they will never know it completely. Thus, any spiritual image bearer who know God's mercy fully does not know God's retributive justice fully. Thus, God cannot comprehensively maximize the knowledge of God within His spiritual image bearers. Thus, He cannot comprehensively maximize the third form of the external glory of God.

Second, if maximization simpliciter of the external glory of God is not possible, then we should not be surprised to see God choosing a degree to which He will pursue the external glory of God, after which He will rest content. And it seems to be the case that maximization simpliciter of the external glory of God is not possible. For, it seems that God can always create, for example, one further spiritual image bearer, no matter how many are already in existence. Thus, He can always be glorified more, and maximization simpliciter of the external glory of God is not possible. Therefore, He's going to have to make some choices about the degree to which He will pursue His own external glory.

Third, if there are conflicts within the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God (or if comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God conflicts with something else) – and the reason given above for why the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God is not possible, was that there was at least one conflict within it – then God will have to choose some things to ordain over others. Thus, God is going to have to make some choices here as well and decide which parts of the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God He wants to actualize and which not to actualize. But if God has to make some choices about the degree to which He will pursue the external glory of God and about which

parts of the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God He's going to actualize and which He's not going to actualize, why couldn't the story presented in this section (or something very much like it) be the one that God chooses to ordain? We, thus, should not be surprised at all to see Him ordaining it, especially since it contains many and various and substantive instances of the external glory of God, even though they are connected with the evils of our world.<sup>52</sup>

Thus runs my divine glory defense. Though some of the details are probably wrong, and though some of the arguments getting here probably fail, the general structure of the defense is the following, and it seems quite plausible to me. God, if God exists, is perfect in love and wants, above all else, to advance the good of and union with those whom He loves most deeply. This love is a more important virtue for God than His justice, and it is the primary influencing force behind God's commands, which make certain actions right or wrong. Thus, whatever God's perfect love leads Him to do, will be not only virtuous, but also morally acceptable; for, God will command Himself in such a way that it is made morally acceptable for Him to do whatever His perfect love leads Him to do, where His perfect love is His primary virtue. But, in His virtuous pursuit of the good of and union with those whom He loves most deeply (God Himself and/or His people), He is led, for a variety of reasons, to glorify Himself. If, for example, He loves Himself most deeply – and there's very good reason to think that He does – He's going to want to be glorified. For, how could a person who loves God most deeply not want Him to be glorified? But because God is glorified by Him shining forth as the wonderful being He is, and

---

<sup>52</sup> This point addresses Bruce Reichenbach's worry: "The fact that God takes the initiative to redeem the sinner, and the length to which he goes – that he himself becomes incarnate to achieve this purpose – says something good about God. But why is this more glorifying of God than that God made persons with a nature such that they always did the good" (Bruce Reichenbach, "Evil and a Reformed View of God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 24, no. ½, The Problem of Evil (1988), p. 80)? Maybe there are other stories that are more glorifying to God, but why should we think that God had to choose one of those other stories if, for example, there is always another story that is more glorifying to God?

because God is wondrously merciful and retributively just, God ordains the evils of our world so that He might shine forth as His wondrously merciful and retributively just self. And even if this entails that God makes the lives of the damned worse off, God is still perfectly virtuous and perfectly righteous. For, His decision to ordain the evils of our world so that He might be glorified flows from His primary virtue of perfect love.

We can now answer the two problems of evil set forth in the final section of Chapter I. The first one read as follows:

1. If God exists, then the greatest metaphysically possible being exists, ordaining all contingent things (external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous (that is, always doing what is right and never doing what is wrong) and perfectly virtuous (that is, always doing what is virtuous and never doing what is vicious).
2. The world contains a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil.
3. If the world contains a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil, it is unlikely that the greatest metaphysically possible being exists, ordaining all contingent things (external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous and perfectly virtuous.
4. So, it is unlikely that the greatest metaphysically possible being exists, ordaining all contingent things (external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous and perfectly virtuous.
5. So, it is unlikely that God exists.

As said, I was going to attack (3) by trying to show that there is a very real possibility that if God exists, God, being the greatest metaphysically possible being, ordaining all contingent things

(external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous and perfectly virtuous, would ordain a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil. I believe that I have done this. On my defense, God, if He exists, is the greatest metaphysically possible being, ordaining all contingent things (external to Him) with perfect power, perfect knowledge, and perfect goodness, being perfectly righteous and perfectly virtuous. And one of the things that there is a very real possibility that He would ordain is a vast amount of truly horrible moral and natural evil. Thus, this argument fails.

Second, I hoped to attack, alongside the above argument, the following argument:

6. Numerous people will go to Hell (wherein they will experience eternal torments).
7. It is unlikely, if God exists and ordains all contingent things (external to Him), that numerous people will go to Hell (wherein they will experience eternal torments).
8. So, most likely, it is not the case that both God exists and God ordains all contingent things (external to Him).
9. Thus, most likely, either God doesn't exist or God doesn't ordain all contingent things (external to Him).
10. Thus, most likely, if God does exist, then God doesn't ordain all contingent things (external to Him).

As said, I was going to attack this argument by attacking (7) by trying to show that there is a very real possibility that, if God exists and ordains all contingent things (external to Him), numerous people will go to Hell (wherein they will experience eternal torments). On my defense, God, if He exists, ordains all contingent things (external to Him), and one of the things that there is a very real possibility that He would ordain is numerous people going to Hell (wherein they will experience eternal torments). Thus, this argument fails as well.



## B. The Nightmare Objection

At this point, we should address what is perhaps the primary objection to my defense. In Peter van Inwagen's discussion of appreciation defenses, which say something like, "if there were no evil, no one would appreciate—perhaps no one would even be aware of—the goodness of the things that *are* good",<sup>53</sup> he says the following:

It is not at all evident that an omnipotent creator would need to allow people really to experience *any* pain or grief or sorrow or adversity or illness to enable them to appreciate the good things in life. An omnipotent being would certainly be able to provide the knowledge of evil that human beings in fact acquire by bitter experience of real events in some other way. An omnipotent being could, for example, so arrange matters that at a certain point in each person's life—for a few years during his adolescence, say—that person have very vivid and absolutely convincing *nightmares* in which he is prisoner in a concentration camp or dies of some horrible disease or watches his loved ones being raped and murdered by soldiers bent on ethnic cleansing. ... But it seems clear that a world in which horrible things occurred *only* in nightmares would be better than a world in which the same horrible things occurred in reality, and that a morally perfect being would, all other things being equal, prefer a world in which horrible things were confined to dreams to a world in which they existed in reality.<sup>54</sup>

Applying this to my divine glory defense, why couldn't God have avoided creating any of the damned, and why couldn't He have, on top of this, created God's people, who only ever dwell in Heaven, who only ever deeply flourish, and who only ever are in deep union with God, but who, if experiencing many and various and substantive evils improves their knowledge and appreciation of God, are occasionally given nightmares wherein they experience many and various and substantive evils? For example, if God wants His people to experience, in some sense, the infinite wrath of God because this is a requirement for knowing and appreciating His

---

<sup>53</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 68-69, emphasis in the original.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70, emphases in the original. Cf. Justin McBrayer, "Counterpart and Appreciation Theodicies," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 198.

retributive justice fully, why create Hell and cast real people into it, when He could have simply given His people nightmares of what Hell would be like?

There are numerous responses to this objection. First, the nightmare objection cannot object to the entirety of my divine glory defense. For, God is not just concerned to improve the knowledge and appreciation that humans have of God. He abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize all three forms of the external glory of God. For example, because Hell is a consequence of the retributive justice of God, the eternal torments therein externally glorify God in the first form. They are consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him. Thus, even if the nightmare objection were to successfully show that God would not be justified in ordaining some humans to bear Hell for the purpose of improving the knowledge and appreciation that His people have of God, God would still have good reason to ordain Hell so that He might be glorified in the first form. We must view my divine glory defense holistically, recognizing that each evil might be connected in numerous ways with God's external glory.

This point alone makes it clear that the following evils are still accounted for in my story: the moral evils of God's people, the eternal torments of Hell that multiple damned people directly experience, the natural evils directly experienced by the damned, and the moral evils committed by the damned.<sup>55</sup> For, God's people sin in numerous and in heinous ways (in part) because God abstractly desires to ordain a very great atonement, through which God is able to actualize a very great instance of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, independently of any people growing in the knowledge or appreciation of God; and, multiple damned people sin in numerous and in heinous ways (in part) because God desires to ordain very

---

<sup>55</sup> We can also explain why the damned endure moral evils if the material in footnote 34 of this chapter is correct.

great states of retributive justice (i.e., Hell and natural evils),<sup>56</sup> through which God is able to actualize very great instances of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, independently of any people growing in the knowledge or appreciation of God. What is left to explain is why God ordains His people to directly experience real natural evils and why He ordains both His people and the damned to be victims of real moral evils, instead of just giving them nightmares. For, my explanations of these evils appeal purely to people growing in the knowledge and appreciation of God.

Now, before getting into a second response to the nightmare objection, we should point out that we might be able to explain these remaining evils by appealing to convenience and to the good of an ordered universe. Note, first, that an ordered world “with regularity and predictability, with law-governing processes”,<sup>57</sup> seems to be an additional good (or, at least, a necessary condition for additional goods), because it “is a precondition of morally significant lives, of rationality, [and] of beauty”,<sup>58</sup> which means that God abstractly desires it, given that He abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the first and second forms of the external glory of God, and given that, as has been discussed, all goods in creation are good effects that can be ascribed to God. With that said, let us ask the following question: if God, as noted above, is already going to send actual natural evils into the world to punish the wicked, and if God wants His people to directly experience natural evils, whether real or imagined, so that they can know and appreciate Him more fully, why not just create an ordered universe (like ours) that

---

<sup>56</sup> We should probably qualify this to say: multiple damned people sin in numerous and heinous ways (in part) because God desires to ordain *even more* very great instances of retributive justice besides the retributive justice experiencing by Christ on the cross. See footnote 42 of this chapter.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Johnson, “Calvinism and the Problem of Evil,” in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 52.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. For more discussion of the value of an ordered universe, see Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 120-123.

naturally creates real natural evils that everyone, including God's people and the damned, will directly experience? That seems to be both convenient and glorifying to God.

Consider, next, God's ordination of both His people and the damned to be victims of moral evils. Remember that God wants them to experience (from the perspective of the victim) the depth of the sinfulness of humans so that they can more fully know and appreciate God's mercy and retributive justice that has been directed towards those humans. But, if God is already going to ordain, as noted above, the moral evils of both God's people and the damned, because God wants both His people and the damned to experience (from the perspective of the victim) the depth of the sinfulness of humans, why not just have them experience (from the perspective of the victim) those very sins that He was already going to ordain? That seems convenient. Thus, our first response, when combined with remarks about convenience and the good of an ordered universe, explains all the evils discussed in the previous section.

A second response to the nightmare objection is the following. God is concerned to advance the following good, given that He abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the first and second forms of the external glory of God, and given that all goods in creation are good effects that can be ascribed to God: people having *real* experiences – that is, having experiences that are in contact with something that is deeper than illusions in the mind.<sup>59</sup> Though it might be that, when all else is equal, having an experience that is real is always (or usually) better than

---

<sup>59</sup> The idea is straightforward, but let's be clear. If we grant that you can experience evils through dreams, then there are two ways in which you can experience an evil. The first way is by dreaming of it. Even if the evil does not exist in real life, you can experience it through a dream. For example, if someone murders you within a dream, you experience being murdered, even if no one actually murders you in real life. Second, you can experience the evil in real life. For example, if someone actually murders you in real life (and if you are aware enough, with properly functioning senses), you will experience it *really*. The former is what we might call an illusory or fake experience, whereas the latter is a real experience.

having an experience that is illusory,<sup>60</sup> at the least having *good* experiences that are real is more valuable than having good experiences that are illusory. This point comes out most clearly when talking about experiencing God Himself, who is Goodness Itself. It is incredibly good (in general and for the person having the experiences) to have real experiences of God and not just dreams of Him.<sup>61</sup> For example, it is better to have a real experience of God's (judicial) mercy, than to have a fake one within a dream.<sup>62</sup>

Third, as noted, though not quoted, in section C of Chapter I, Christopher Green addresses this same issue while presenting his version of the divine glory of defense. Here is (part of) what he says:

[T]he argument from [divine] hiddenness recognizes that the value in presenting some divine character quality is not exhausted merely in *one* presentation. Rather, those who think God is too hidden demand evidence for *themselves*—that is, in the place and time they find themselves. They demand an additional mode of presentation. But if they recognize the value of an additional mode of presentation in the context of the argument from hiddenness, they should also recognize it in the context of the argument from evil. Additional modes of presentation of the same truth have additional value. ... Hearing a sound in stereo, through the dual modes of presentation of our two ears, is a far different, and more valuable, epistemic good than hearing it in only one ear. Our grasp of a fact can be stronger and fuller if it comes to us through a variety of means. ...

Why couldn't God achieve the same demonstrative good by allowing us to know the same thing through, say, nightmares? He surely could allow the same *type* of demonstrative good—that is, a demonstration of the same *fact*—through nightmares, or through a simple text message explaining the same point: for instance, “I *would* punish Hitler in thus-and-so a manner if he *were* to exist.” But that would not be the same *demonstrative good*. It would be a different mode of presentation. And additional modes of presentation have additional value.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> I will not defend this claim. It is too controversial. But I will say that I am inclined to embrace it. I tend to value reality much more than illusions in my mind, even when what I am experiencing is bad. *When all else is equal*, I think that I would rather be in reality than in a dream.

<sup>61</sup> This might be true even for those experiencing the wrath of God. Cf. footnote 36 of this chapter. If this goes too far, at the least having *good* experiences of God that are real is more valuable than having good experiences of God that are illusory.

<sup>62</sup> See Matthew Hart, “Calvinism and the Problem of Hell,” p. 268; and Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Blackwell, 1999), pp. 42-45.

<sup>63</sup> Christopher Green, “A Compatibilist Demonstrative-Goods Defense,” pp. 241-243, emphases in the original.

Putting what he said into terms more in line with my version of the divine glory defense, even if we must hold that nightmares improve our knowledge and appreciation of God, we should also affirm that experiencing real evils, such as Hell, adds to our knowledge and appreciation of God as well.

Remember that God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the first, second, and third forms of the external glory of God, such that the knowledge and appreciation of God is comprehensively maximized. Here is just one train of thought: because all knowledge of God is good, (given that all knowledge of God reflects the perfect knowledge of God within the omniscient God, who is Goodness Itself,) and because all appreciation of God is good, (given that all appreciation of God reflects the deep appreciation that God, who is Goodness Itself, has for Himself,) and because God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of the second form of the external glory of God (that is, goodness), God also abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the knowledge and appreciation of God. Because of this, God abstractly desires that humans experience any real evils that allow them to come to a greater understanding or appreciation of who God is. For, if God has not (yet) ordained everything that can improve humanity's knowledge or appreciation of God, such that there is still something that God could ordain that can improve the knowledge or appreciation of God within humans, then God has not (yet) comprehensively maximized the knowledge and appreciation of God. Thus, because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the first, second, and third forms of the external glory of God and, therefore, the knowledge and appreciation of God, He abstractly desires to ordain everything that can improve humanity's knowledge or appreciation of God. But that includes experiencing real evils.

Fourth, it is not obvious, from the very beginning, that you can gain any sort of experiential knowledge of something merely by dreaming a dream of it. Suppose that I know, propositionally, that my parents love me and that they would die for me (if it were needed). Suppose also that I dream a dream in which my parents lovingly die for me. Is it proper, fitting, or appropriate to say that I have gained any sort of experiential knowledge of their love for me and willingness to die for me? Saying *yes* seems to me to be stretch. For, in dreaming a dream, I am not experiencing *their love for me or willingness to die for me*. What I am experiencing is a fantasy or illusion in my mind, and that fantasy or illusion in my mind is not a product of the love of my parents or their willingness to die for me.

This same thought is also true for evils. For, in dreaming of various evils, I am not experiencing *those various evils*, in which case I am not increasing in any sort of experiential knowledge of those various evils.<sup>64</sup> This limits what I can experientially know about God through dreams. For example, if I merely dream of Hell, then I do not experience *Hell*. What I experience is a fantasy or an illusion in my mind, which is not the product of God's retributive justice.<sup>65</sup> But if I do not experience Hell, then I do not grow in any sort of experiential knowledge of the retributive justice of God. Sure, if God is the one who sent me the dream, then it is likely that I am growing in an experiential knowledge of God's *omnipotence*; for, in sending me dreams, I am experiencing an outcome of God's power. But I am not experiencing God's

---

<sup>64</sup> Justin McBrayer proposes that nightmares are themselves evil (Justin McBrayer, "Counterpart and Appreciation Theodicies," p. 202). I am, of course, talking about evils outside of dreams. You don't experience an evil that is outside of a dream merely by dreaming of it. For example, you don't experience being murdered by merely dreaming of being murdered. What you experience is a fantasy or an illusion in your mind. For simplicity, I put to the side the idea that nightmares are themselves evil.

<sup>65</sup> This point needs some comment. A nightmare of Hell (that God has sent) is a product of God's retributive justice in the sense that God intends to communicate more fully what His retributive justice is like. That is, the fact that God is retributively just leads God to send someone a nightmare of Hell. Thus, in some sense, the nightmare is a product of God's wrath. But what I am trying to communicate is that God is not exercising His wrath when He sends someone a nightmare of Hell.

wrath against sin,<sup>66</sup> in which case I am not growing in any sort of experiential knowledge of God's wrath against sin. So, because God wants humanity to have a perfect and full and comprehensive knowledge of Himself, He also wants them to experientially know the fullness of His attributes, including His retributive justice; but that means that they must experience *His retributive justice*, which, given that we do not experience *God's retributive justice* when we merely dream of His retributive justice, requires God to bring about actual instances of the retributive justice of God.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> If God is absolutely simple, do I experience every attribute of God's when I experience any attribute of God's? I think not. Three points should be said. First, the material discussed in footnote 20 of Chapter II can probably deal with this problem. There, I proposed that it might be that God's properties logically entail and/or are entailed by certain other properties of God. Though they are all, at bottom, just God, they differ by their logical relations. If this is the case, why couldn't I experience an attribute of God's without experiencing all the others?

Second, and more importantly, even if God is utterly simple, God's singular attribute can produce multiple different effects in creation that can rightly be ascribed to God, and those effects are best described in different ways (cf. the Aquinas quote in footnote 50 of this chapter). When a sinner is cast into Hell, even if God is ultimately acting from the singular attribute of, say, love-wrath-omnipotence-omniscience, it is still best to speak of this consequence in creation, when narrowly considered, as an instance of wrath, not love. Of course, it might also be the case that one reason why God casts that sinner into Hell is because of His love for His people. Because He loves His people, He abstractly desires to give them a full and complete knowledge of His singular attribute by (at least in part) making them to experientially know all of the effects that His singular attribute can produce, where some of these effects, when narrowly considered, should be spoken of only in terms of God's wrath. Thus, the entire scenario of *God sends someone to Hell in part because He loves His people* might best be understood as being the product of both God's wrath and love expressed in one act, though, when viewing Hell alone, it would be best to speak only in terms of God's wrath. Therefore, when narrowly considered, because experiencing a dream of God's wrath cannot be ascribed to God's wrath – the consequence in creation of having a nightmare of Hell cannot be spoken of as though it arose from His retributive justice – I do not experience God's wrath against sin when experiencing a dream of Hell. See Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" in *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 224; Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (1985), pp. 355-357; and See Gottlob Frege, "Sense and Reference," *The Philosophical Review* 57, no. 3 (1948), p. 210; and Terry Johnson, "Love, Justice, and Wrath," *Tabletalk*, May 2022, accessed August 23, 2022, URL = <<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2022/05/love-justice-and-wrath/>>.

Third, if the above is too complicated, we can probably frame the main point in the following way. Because God abstractly desires to give humanity a full and complete knowledge of His singular attribute by (at least in part) making humans to experientially know all of the effects that His singular attribute can produce, and because one of the effects that His singular attribute can produce is casting sinners into Hell, He abstractly desires that they experientially know *God casting sinners into Hell*. But, we do not experientially know *God casting sinners into Hell* if we do not experience *God casting sinners into Hell*. Thus, He abstractly desires that they experience *God casting sinners into Hell*. Therefore, because we do not experience *God casting sinners into Hell* when we merely dream of Him casting sinners into Hell, God abstractly desires actually to cast sinners into Hell.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Matthew Hart, "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell," p. 268.



Fifth, even if we grant that you can gain experiential knowledge of something merely by dreaming a dream of it, the nightmare objection has different problems depending upon whether the dreamers ever come to know that they were dreaming. For, if they continue, for all of time (or until they no longer exist), to incorrectly believe that their dreams were real, in which case they continue not to know that they were dreaming, three problems arise. First, there will be less knowledge in the world than God abstractly desires. For, because all knowledge is good, (given that all knowledge reflects the perfect knowledge within the omniscient God, who is Goodness Itself,) and because God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize goodness in the world, God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize knowledge. But if people continue not to know that they were dreaming, God has comprehensively maximized neither knowledge nor goodness in the world. Indeed, because believing what is false is a bad thing, if God ordains people to continue to incorrectly believe that their dreams were real, God has ordained what is bad for the world. Second, if the dreamers continue in the belief that their dreams were real, their life will be worse off. Living a life fooled by a dream is less good than living a life in touch with reality. It is good for a person to believe what is true, and it is good for a person not to believe that which is false – even better, to reject it. Third, such a world will be massively deceptive.<sup>68</sup> If people regularly experience nightmares yet never come to recognize that they were experiencing nightmares, such a world is similar to an evil demon world. This is certainly a bad thing.<sup>69</sup> So, putting these points together, unless God has *very* good reason, such as advancing the good of or union with His primary beloved(s), for causing people regularly and consistently to become

---

<sup>68</sup> Compare this point with Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 120-121, from which I get the language of “massively deceptive.”

<sup>69</sup> See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, second edition, edited by John Cottingham (Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 17-19 (AT 21-23).

deceived and to continue in their states of deception, which is bad not only for the world in general but also for those who are deceived, He's not going to do it.

Let's suppose, however, that the dreamers eventually come to realize that their dreams were merely dreams. Problems still arise. First, when they come to realize that their dreams were merely dreams, any experiential knowledge that they might have had from their dreams will be undermined (at least partially). Suppose that I propositionally know that the sheets on my bed are blue (perhaps because I've been told that they are) and suppose that I've been having experiences of seeing blue sheets on my bed. Next, suppose that I find out that these experiences are hallucinations or dreams or illusions. Now, even if I gained some experiential knowledge of my sheets being blue through these hallucinations, that knowledge is surely diminished to some extent now that I have found out that my experiences are not real. The same is true for experientially knowing evils. If I find out that my experiences of particular evils are fake or illusory, my experiential knowledge of those evils is undermined (at least partially). But, if the experiential knowledge of evils is supposed to lead us to a greater experiential knowledge of God, when the experiential knowledge of these evils is undermined (at least partially), so is the experiential knowledge of God.

Further, God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the appreciation of God. However, any appreciation of God obtained through experiencing various evils through nightmares will be undermined (at least partially) upon finding out that the experiences of those various evils were merely within nightmares. While evaluating appreciation defenses, Justin McBrayer says,

[I]t is very hard to see how we would ever fully appreciate health without illness, wealth without poverty, love without hate. In a world in which we dealt with illness only in our dreams or in literature, it seems unlikely that we would fully appreciate the fact that we were healthy. After all, what happens in dreams and

stories is one thing; what happens in reality is quite another. It is hard to fear something that can only happen in a dream or in a fairy tale.<sup>70</sup>

But why is it so hard to (fully) fear something that can only happen in a dream or in a fairy tale?

The reason seems to be because we know that it is not real (or, at least, we do not believe that it is real). Matthew Hart points out, “once you realize that the display is not of reality a great deal of the sting is appropriately lost: a man who reacts emotionally to everything he sees in a film as if it were real is dysfunctional.”<sup>71, 72</sup> Thus, finding out that an experience of evil is merely within a nightmare reduces its impact quite substantially (if not fully). But because this impact is supposed to drive us to a greater appreciation of God, the revelation that the experience of evil is merely within a nightmare, after undermining (at least partially) the impact of the experience of evil, undermines (at least partially) the appreciation that we have for God that arises out of the impact of the experience of evil. But this is contrary to God’s desire to comprehensively maximize the appreciation of God. Thus, God does not particularly want it.

In other words, if the dreamers eventually come to realize that their dreams were merely dreams, they will not have a full appreciation of God (at least after the realization that their dreams were merely dreams). And the reason is because this realization will undermine the impact of their experiences of evil, in which case it will also undermine their appreciation of God to which this impact of their experiences of evil is supposed to drive them. To have a full appreciation of God, then, one must believe that their experiences of evil, which are designed to drive them to a greater appreciation of God, are real. Thus, because a person fully appreciating God must have experiences of evil that are believed to be real, if the dreamers eventually come

---

<sup>70</sup> Justin McBrayer, “Counterpart and Appreciation Theodicies,” p. 202.

<sup>71</sup> Matthew Hart, “Calvinism and the Problem of Hell,” p. 268.

<sup>72</sup> For related material, see Gregory Currie, “Imagination and Make-Believe,” in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, edited by Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (Routledge, 2000), pp. 260-261.

to realize that their dreams were merely dreams and, therefore, stop believing that their experiences of evil were real, then they will eventually not have a full appreciation of God. Thus, the dreamers, to whom it is revealed that their dreams were merely dreams, will not have a full appreciation of God if they do not have a real experience of evil. That is, if the dreamers eventually come to realize that their dreams were merely dreams, having a full appreciation of God requires them to have real experiences of evil.

That said, what if the dreamers withhold belief concerning the reality of their experiences? That is, suppose that they neither believe that their experiences were dreams, nor believe that their experiences were real. Suppose that they remain agnostic to it all. What, then? The same sorts of problems arise here as well. First, though the dreamers will not be deceived, because they do not believe the truth, they do not have knowledge concerning the truth. But, as pointed out above, God abstractly desires the comprehensive maximization of knowledge in the world. Second, because they have less knowledge, they have less good in their lives, in which case they flourish less. Third, not believing that their experiences were real undermines (at least partially) their experiential knowledge and appreciation of God. Though withholding belief might not undermine the experiential knowledge and appreciation of God to the same extent as knowing that the dreams were merely dreams, it still diminishes their experiential knowledge and appreciation of God to some extent.<sup>73</sup>

Putting the first response to the nightmare objection to the side, I think that this response is the main reason why the objection fails (though, most certainly, I think that there is some merit to the other responses given above). Yes, God could send nightmares, but He wants people,

---

<sup>73</sup> For simplicity, I have ignored the possibility that people go back and forth between knowing and not knowing that they were dreaming, and I have also ignored the possibility that some people know while other people don't know that they were dreaming.

especially *His* people, to know the truth, yet knowing the truth that they have merely experienced a nightmare undermines, to at least some extent, the purpose of the nightmare. Let's go through each of the evils described in the previous section and apply this response to each.

First, God wants and ordains His people to sin in numerous and heinous ways (in part) so that they might more fully know and appreciate the fullness of the infinite mercy of God through directly experiencing it to some substantive extent. But if they merely have dreams of sinning and of God showing them mercy, because God wants them to know the truth, He will reveal to them that they never actually sinned and that God never actually showed them mercy. But this will undermine both their experiential knowledge and appreciation of God's mercy.

Second, God ordains many people to bear Hell (in part) so that His people can more fully know and appreciate the fullness of God's infinite retributive justice through experiencing it secondarily to some substantive extent. But if they merely have dreams of this happening (or if some other illusion or deception is at play, such as God casting into Hell humanoid robots that don't feel anything but act as though they do), because God wants His people to know the truth, He will reveal to them that no one is actually in Hell. But this will undermine both their experiential knowledge and appreciation of God's retributive justice.

Third, God ordains His people to be victims of great and numerous natural evils so that they might know more fully what it is like to be punished by God with the eternal torments in Hell, thereby allowing them to know and to appreciate the infinite retributive justice of God more fully. But if they merely have dreams of being victims of natural evils, once God reveals to them that they never actually were victims of natural evils and that they never actually endured any sort of suffering, pain, and/or harm from natural evils, their experiential knowledge of what

it is like to endure God's retributive justice and their appreciation of God's retributive justice will be diminished.

Fourth, God ordains many damned people to experience Hell and great and numerous natural evils (in part) so that they might know and appreciate God's infinite retributive justice more fully through directly experiencing it themselves and through seeing others experiencing it. But if they merely have dreams of people, including themselves, enduring Hell and enduring great and numerous natural evils, once God reveals to them that no one actually endured Hell, and that no one actually endured great natural evils, and that no one actually endured numerous natural evils, their experiential knowledge and appreciation of God's retributive justice will be diminished.<sup>74</sup>

Fifth, God ordains that the damned commit numerous and heinous moral evils (in part) so that they can know and appreciate more fully the infinite retributive justice of God by directly experiencing it against various types and tokens of sin. But if they merely have dreams of committing numerous and heinous sins and of God exercising His retributive justice against them, once God reveals to them that they never actually sinned and that God never actually punished them for those sins, their experiential knowledge and appreciation of God's retributive justice will be undermined.

Sixth, because God will ordain both His people and the damned to commit numerous and heinous sins, God will also ordain His people and the damned to be victims of numerous and heinous moral evils so that they can more fully know and appreciate the sinfulness of those to whom God manifests His infinite mercy and His infinite retributive justice so that they can more fully know and appreciate God's mercy and retributive justice. But if they merely have dreams of

---

<sup>74</sup> If God refrains from ordaining Hell, then no one can rightly be called "the damned." Nevertheless, the thought should be clear.

being victims of moral evils, once God reveals to them that they never actually were victims, their experiential knowledge and appreciation of the sinfulness of humans will be diminished, which will, in turn, diminish their experiential knowledge and appreciation of God's mercy and retributive justice.

Thus, when considering all of the above points together, I conclude that the nightmare objection fails. God, rightly, wants to ordain real evils. Perhaps one of these reasons is why Peter van Inwagen, despite his usage of the nightmare objection, presents, in the very same work, a defense that appeals to similar thoughts.<sup>75</sup> He says, "For human beings to cooperate with God in this rescue operation, they must *know* that they need to be rescued. They must *know* what it means to be separated from him. And what it means to be separated from God is to live in a world of horrors."<sup>76</sup> But why couldn't God just give them any requisite knowledge through sending them nightmares of horrors? Perhaps one reason is the following: if people experience horrors merely through nightmares, once God reveals to them that their nightmares are not real (given that He wants them to know the truth), their experiential knowledge of living in a world of horrors, separated from God, will be undermined.

### C. Extending the Defense

Can my divine glory defense be extended to explain the evils in the lives of animals, children, and mentally disabled humans? Some of the most astonishing evils involve seeming innocents being put through atrocious horrors. For example, when William Rowe has us imagine a fawn

---

<sup>75</sup> Justin McBrayer points out this discrepancy (Justin McBrayer, "Counterpart and Appreciation Theodicies," p. 202).

<sup>76</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 88, emphases added. He presented the nightmare objection on pp. 68-70.

suffering for days on end,<sup>77</sup> and when Bruce Russell recounts a real case in which a five-year-old girl was severely beaten, raped, and strangled to death,<sup>78</sup> and when we read in the news of a twenty-five-year-old woman with the mental capacity of a toddler being raped and traumatized to the point in which, for years, she barely spoke,<sup>79</sup> we are dumbfounded. Can my divine glory defense explain these? I think so.

First, animals, children, and mentally disabled humans are either within the moral community or not.<sup>80</sup> If they are, in fact, within the moral community, then I see absolutely no reason why the same material in the previous sections won't be applicable to them as well. For example, God, if He exists, might ordain them to sin so that He might redeem them by His (judicial) mercy or punish them with His retributive justice. For, in redeeming them by His (judicial) mercy or in punishing them with His retributive justice, He is able to produce consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him, namely the state of affairs in which they are not destroyed for their sins or the state of affairs in which they are destroyed for their sins. This glorifies God in the first form. Also, the states of affairs of being shown (judicial) mercy and of being punished in retributive justice are both good things, given that, as has been said, the consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to God are all good effects, in which case God abstractly desires them for the further reason of advancing the second form of the external glory of God.

---

<sup>77</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 4-5.

<sup>78</sup> Bruce Russell, "The Persistent Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (1989), pp. 123-125.

<sup>79</sup> Andrea Ramey, "Man pleads guilty to rape of mentally disabled woman near Bienville Square," NBC 15 News, published November 1, 2021, accessed January 6, 2023, URL = <<https://myNBC15.com/news/local/man-pleads-guilty-to-rape-of-mentally-disabled-woman-near-bienville-square>>.

<sup>80</sup> While speaking of animals, children, and mentally disabled humans, I am aware that some of them might have a different status from others, but, for simplicity, I lump them all together. Instead of talking about how the moral status of animals impacts our defense and then talking about how the moral status of children impacts our defense, I treat them together because my proposals (unless otherwise specified) are the same for each.



Additionally, even though animals, children, and mentally disabled humans cannot know, love, and rejoice in God to the same extent as properly mentally functioning adult humans, it seems that they do, to at least some extent, know things, love things, and rejoice in things. Some people have dogs, and those dogs seem to know who their owners are and where their food is, and they seem to love their owners and rejoice in them when they return home. Similarly, they seem to be able to appreciate their owners – that is, they seem to be able to understand the significance, worth, and/or value of their owners in their lives. This is, perhaps, one reason why dogs are so happy when their owners come home.<sup>81, 82</sup> If so, why couldn't they also know God, love God, and rejoice in God to at least some extent? And if they can know God, love God, and rejoice in God to at least some extent, why couldn't they also, to at least some extent, know God's (judicial) mercy, love God's (judicial) mercy, and rejoice in God's (judicial) mercy? Similarly, why couldn't they appreciate God's (judicial) mercy? Further, why couldn't they know and appreciate God's retributive justice? All of these are mental and affective goods, reflecting God's knowledge, love for, joy in, and appreciation of Himself, in which case they glorify God in the second form. Also, because, as has been said, all goods in creation are good effects that can rightly be ascribed to God, all of these mental and affective goods glorify God in the first form as well.<sup>83</sup> This gives God further reason for ordaining animals, children, and mentally disabled humans to sin. For, in sinning, they are able to acquire at least some of these mental and affective goods to a greater extent by directly experiencing the (judicial) mercy

---

<sup>81</sup> I thank Trip Glazer for comments at the beginning of my graduate school career that have helped me to see this.

<sup>82</sup> If they can't, to at least some extent, know, love, rejoice in, and appreciate some things, then do they even suffer? More substantively, can we even say that their lives are made worse off? For related material, see Robert Franciscotti, "The Problem of Animal Pain and Suffering," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), pp. 114-121.

<sup>83</sup> Can God the Holy Spirit reside within animals, children, and/or mentally disabled humans? I am unsure, but I see no reason why He couldn't take up residence within them. But, whatever we say here, any creaturely knowledge of God, love for God, joy in God, or appreciation of God is glorifying to God in the first and second forms.

and/or retributive justice of God. For example, they can have greater knowledge of God's (judicial) mercy if they directly experience the (judicial) mercy of God, but they can directly experience the (judicial) mercy of God only if they sin. Thus, in sinning, they are able to acquire a greater knowledge of God's (judicial) mercy by directly experiencing it.

Thus, it might be that God ordains animals, children, and mentally disabled humans to sin so that He can actualize even more instances of the external glory of God, namely the (judicially) merciful and/or wrathful consequences in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him, the good states of affairs in creation of (judicial) mercy and/or retributive justice, and the knowledge of, love for, joy in, and appreciation of God's (judicial) mercy and/or retributive justice. And for the same sorts of reasons listed in section A of this chapter, God ordains them to sin in numerous and heinous ways: as a creature's sins increase, either qualitatively or quantitatively, the substantiveness and goodness of the states of (judicial) mercy or retributive justice increase proportionally; and sinning more numerous and/or more heinously allows God to exhibit His infinite mercy or retributive justice more fully, thereby allowing the creature to more fully experience the infinite mercy or retributive justice of God, thereby allowing them to more fully know and appreciate God's attributes.

What about the natural and moral evils of which they are victims? Consider, first, natural evils. If animals, children, and mentally disabled humans are part of the moral community, natural evils very well could be part of the retributively just judgment of God upon them. That is, because God abstractly desires every consequence in creation that can rightly be attributed to Him, He abstractly desires to ordain every pain in the world that can rightly be attributed to His retributive justice; and because He abstractly desires every good in the world, He abstractly desires every state of a sinner getting his (retributively) just deserts, each of which is a good

thing. So, because any pains that animals, children, and mentally disabled humans directly experience that come through natural evils are pains in the world that can rightly be attributed to God's retributive justice, and because they create states of sinners getting their (retributively) just deserts, each of which is a good thing, God abstractly desires all pains that animals, children, and mentally disabled humans directly experience that come through natural evils, and some of them happen to be quite severe. So, He ordains many and substantive instances of them. And, for the same reasons listed in section A of this chapter, the more there are, and/or the more substantive they are, the more God is externally glorified. Or, if God decides to show them (judicial) mercy, I see absolutely no reason why great and numerous natural evils couldn't be means of helping them to know and appreciate more fully the retributive justice of God by helping them to know what it is like to be under the infinite wrath of God, as detailed in the same section.<sup>84</sup>

Similarly, being a victim of moral evils allows creatures to experientially know and appreciate more fully the depth of the sinfulness of the creatures of God so that they can more fully know and appreciate God's (judicial) mercy and retributive justice that has been directed towards those creatures. Thus, because, as discussed, God will ordain His creatures to commit numerous and heinous moral evils, He will also ordain animals, children, and mentally disabled humans to be victims of numerous and heinous moral evils, thereby allowing them to gain a deeper experiential knowledge and appreciation of the depth of the wickedness of the creatures of God, thereby allowing them to know and to appreciate more fully God's (judicial) mercy and retributive justice that is directed towards those creatures.

---

<sup>84</sup> Note that if properly mentally functioning adult humans, while residing in Heaven, can see the damned in Hell, I see absolutely no reason why animals, children, and mentally disabled humans couldn't also see the damned in Hell and, thereby, come to a greater knowledge and appreciation of God's retributive justice through experiencing secondarily the infinite wrath of God against those in Hell.

In summary, if animals, children, and mentally disabled humans are part of the moral community, I see absolutely no reason why the very same sort of material presented in the previous sections of this chapter could not be applied to them as well. Sure, God might not be able to be glorified *as much* through them – their knowledge of God, for example, will not be as full as it is in properly mentally functioning adult humans – but He can still be glorified through them, nevertheless.<sup>85</sup>

That said, what if they aren't part of the moral community? Well, if they aren't within the moral community, then they cannot commit moral evil, which means that we can move on to a discussion of the other evils in their lives, namely being victims of natural and moral evils. How do we explain them? Two things should be said. First, and more controversially, even if they aren't part of the moral community, I still see absolutely no reason why they couldn't know, love, rejoice in, and appreciate God's (judicial) mercy and retributive justice. Whether they are part of the moral community or not, as said above, they can still know things, love things, rejoice in things, and appreciate things.<sup>86</sup> And why couldn't God be one of those things? But if God is one of those things, why couldn't they know and appreciate His (judicial) mercy and retributive justice? Similarly, why couldn't they know and appreciate things related to His (judicial) mercy and retributive justice (e.g., the sinfulness of creatures)? And if they can know and appreciate His (judicial) mercy, His retributive justice, and things related to His (judicial) mercy and retributive justice, then being a victim of natural and moral evils has the same sort of function as mentioned above. Being a victim of numerous and substantive natural evils allows them to know

---

<sup>85</sup> For the record, I am inclined to say that all animals, children, and mentally disabled humans are part of the moral community. It seems to me, in light of my divine command theory, that one sufficient condition for a creature being part of the moral community is that God could command something of them, and I see no reason why God couldn't command animals, children, and mentally disabled humans to do certain things.

<sup>86</sup> Again, as said in footnote 82 of this chapter, if animals, children, and mentally disabled humans can't, to at least some extent, know, love, rejoice in, and appreciate some things, then do they even suffer? More substantively, can we even say that their lives are made worse off?

more fully what God's retributive justice is like, which gives them a fuller understanding and appreciation of His retributive justice and, thereby, a fuller understanding and appreciation of His (judicial) mercy in saving certain creatures from His retributive justice. Being a victim of numerous and heinous moral evils allows them to more fully experientially know and appreciate the depth of the sinfulness of the creatures of God, who commit numerous and heinous moral evils, so that they can more fully know and appreciate God's (judicial) mercy and retributive justice that has been directed towards those creatures. The same reasoning seems to apply.

Second, even if animals, children, and mentally disabled humans aren't part of the moral community, and even if they can't know or appreciate God's (judicial) mercy or retributive justice, God is still non-judicially merciful. His mercy has two features: a judicial one and a non-judicial one. He can save creatures from their sins and the consequences thereof, but He can also save them from bad circumstances that have absolutely nothing to do with their sins. So, because, as already said, God abstractly desires to comprehensively maximize the external glory of God, such that the knowledge and appreciation of God is comprehensively maximized, He also abstractly desires all knowledge and appreciation of every feature of His mercy, including, but not limited to, His non-judicial mercy; and this desire is not limited to the knowledge and appreciation within properly mentally functioning adult humans. But, again, if I fully appreciate x, I fully know x; and if I fully know x, I fully experientially know x; and if I fully experientially know x, I have fully experienced x. Or, at the least, when it comes to appreciation, if I fully appreciate x, I have fully experienced x. Thus, because God wants animals, children, and mentally disabled humans to know and to appreciate more fully His non-judicial mercy, He ordains them to directly experience it. But directly experiencing His non-judicial mercy requires there to be bad circumstances for God to save creatures from. For, without those bad

circumstances, how can God be merciful to them? Thus, God ordains bad circumstances to come to animals, children, and mentally disabled humans so that they might directly experience His non-judicial mercy and, therein, grow in their knowledge and appreciation of God.

Also, as the quality or quantity of these bad circumstances increases, their knowledge and appreciation of God's non-judicial mercy in saving them from these bad circumstances is increased to that very extent. For, when comparing (1) being saved by God from numerous and substantive bad circumstances, and (2) being saved by God from one small bad circumstance, the former allows a creature to experientially know and appreciate much more fully God's non-judicial mercy. Thus, because God wants animals, children, and mentally disabled humans to know and to appreciate more fully His non-judicial mercy, He ordains numerous and substantive bad circumstances to come upon animals, children, and mentally disabled humans.

Further, some of these bad circumstances are from natural evils, and some of them are from moral evils. This could be due to pure happenstance. God has to pick numerous and substantive bad circumstances, and some of them happen to be from natural evils and some of them happen to be from moral evils. Or it could be due to both convenience and God's desire for an ordered universe. Given that He's already going to ordain numerous and substantive natural evils to come upon His people and the damned, and given that God abstractly desires to ordain an ordered universe (as discussed in the previous section), why not just create an ordered universe (like ours) that naturally creates natural evils, some of which are directed at animals, children, and mentally disabled humans? Similarly, given that God is already going to ordain numerous and heinous sins for His people and the damned to commit, why not just have some of those moral evils directed at animals, children, and mentally disabled humans? At the least, it is plausible that God would choose to ordain numerous and substantive natural and moral evils for

animals, children, and mentally disabled humans to be saved from, given that He will ordain numerous and substantive bad circumstances to come upon them.

So far, so good. But more is needed. Why must animals, children, and mentally disabled humans *endure* these evils? The following scenario seems possible: God ordains the existence of numerous and substantive natural and moral evils, God ordains that these evils threaten His creatures, and God saves His creatures from these evils before they ever cause them harm. Why, then, do animals, children, and mentally disabled humans endure natural and moral evils? Well, actually being a victim of these numerous and substantive evils, and not just being threatened by them, allows animals, children, and mentally disabled humans to experientially know and appreciate more fully the depth of the badness of these evils, thereby allowing them more fully to know and appreciate God's non-judicial mercy towards them in saving them from these evils. Thus, God ordains animals, children, and mentally disabled humans to actually be victims of numerous and substantive natural and moral evils.<sup>87</sup>

In short, even if animals, children, and mentally disabled humans aren't part of the moral community, and even if they can't know or appreciate God's (judicial) mercy or retributive justice, the same sorts of explanations can be given for the evils in their lives. Again, God might not be able to be glorified *as much* through them – their knowledge of God, for example, will not be as full as it is in properly mentally functioning adult humans – but He can still be glorified through them, nevertheless.

Finally, I do not know how greatly God is glorified through animals, children, and mentally disabled humans. This will, to a large extent, depend upon how much they can know

---

<sup>87</sup> Note that God can save creatures from (or through) death by resurrecting them. For discussion of related material, see Thomas Talbott's "No Hell" in Jerry Walls and Thomas Talbott, "Is Eternal Damnation Compatible with the Christian Concept of God?" in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, second edition, edited by Michael Peterson and Raymond VanArragon (Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), pp. 384-386.

God and how much they can appreciate God, and I have no idea what the answers to these questions are. This, however, should not worry us. Though I did not discuss animals, children, and mentally disabled humans in my analysis of whom God loves primarily, given the arguments in section C of Chapter III, it is at least plausible that God loves Himself primarily.<sup>88</sup> And given the arguments in Chapter IV, if God does love Himself primarily, He very well might abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God. But, because the two forms of justice don't do anything to dissuade God from acting on His perfect love, and because God's perfect love leads Him to abstractly desire the comprehensive maximization of the external glory of God, God's virtues might well lead Him to ordain the material discussed in this section (or something very much like it) because God is externally glorified through it. If so, His ordination of the material discussed in this section (or something very much like it) will be perfectly virtuous. Further, given that my divine command is plausible, and given that God will likely command from His virtues, it is likely that He will command Himself in such a way that it becomes (if it is not already) morally acceptable for Him to do whatever His virtues incline Him to do (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command). Thus, God's ordination of the material discussed in this section (or something very much like it) will be not only plausibly virtuous, but also plausibly morally acceptable; for, because God's virtues plausibly incline Him to ordain the material discussed in this section (or something very much like it), it is plausible that He will command Himself in such a way that it becomes (if it is not already) morally acceptable for Him to ordain the material discussed in this section (or something very much like it) (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command). But, if this is the case, even if God is not glorified greatly through animals, children,

---

<sup>88</sup> For simplicity and to save space, I ignore here the possibility that God loves His people primarily.



and mentally disabled humans, God will still be both perfectly virtuous and perfectly righteous if He ordains the material discussed in this section (or something very much like it).

#### D. Summary of Chapter V

This chapter presents my divine glory defense. It was argued in Chapter IV that God, if He exists, very well might ordain very great instances of the external glory of God. Given this, I presented what I take to be a plausible story of God ordaining the various evils that exist in our world, including the evils of Hell, where each of these evils is connected with God ordaining certain very great instances of the external glory of God. And, though this might make the damned worse off, this should not worry us. For, God ordains the evils of our world because His virtues incline Him to ordain the evils of our world. This makes God's ordination of the evils of our world virtuous. Further, because God commands from His virtues, it is likely that He will command Himself in such a way that it becomes (if it is not already) morally acceptable for Him to do whatever His virtues incline Him to do (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command). Thus, His ordination of the evils of our world will be not only virtuous, but also morally acceptable; for, because God's virtues incline Him to ordain the evils of our world, it is likely that He will command Himself in such a way that it becomes (if it is not already) morally acceptable for Him to ordain the evils of our world (and nothing will be able to change this except a further divine command). That said, almost all philosophical positions have objections to them. So, after presenting my divine glory defense, I discussed at length how we might answer the nightmare objection, which I take to be the most powerful objection to my defense. Afterwards, I explained how my defense can be applied to address the evils in the lives of animals, children, and mentally disabled humans.

### E. Concluding Remarks for This Dissertation

The evils that exist astonish us. Because of this, it is quite natural for us to ask how God, if He exists, could allow them all to happen. How could a good, powerful, knowledgeable God ever allow atrocities such as the Holocaust? How could such a loving creator be so negligent when His creatures are suffering in extreme agony? Even more powerfully, if God ordains all contingent things (external to Him), as I have assumed in this work, how could He *ordain* the horrors of our world? In line with this questioning, I presented two arguments from evil. But the material in this dissertation says that they both fail, even if God ordains all contingent things. God, in perfect virtue, and with perfect righteousness, might well ordain all things (external to Him) (at least in part) for His own external glory,<sup>89</sup> even though this external glory requires the existence of many and various and substantive evils. We, thus, have a defense against the problem of evil that does not appeal to libertarian free will and that is consistent with the Reformed faith's claim that God ordains all contingent things (external to Him).

Further research can focus on at least the following relevant philosophical issue that has been left to the side in this work.<sup>90</sup> If God is pure act independently of creation,<sup>91</sup> it seems that God's mercy and retributive justice are fully actualized independently of creation. But this seems to require that evil exist independently of creation. For, mercy and retributive justice seem to require the existence of evil if they are to be fully actualized. But the problem is that it seems that evil does not exist independently of creation.<sup>92</sup> One route out of this tension is to say that God is

---

<sup>89</sup> I do not deny that God might have other reasons for ordaining evil that have little to nothing to do with His external glory.

<sup>90</sup> I thank A.G. Holdier and James Bruce for comments that directed my attention to this worry (and related worries).

<sup>91</sup> For some reason to think that God is pure act, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 2, a. 3; I, q. 3, a. 1-2); and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, translated by Anton Pegis (University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), pp. 100-101 (Ch. 16).

<sup>92</sup> See Justin McBrayer, "Counterpart and Appreciation Theodicies," p. 197; and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "God, Evil, and Suffering," in *Reason for the Hope Within*, edited by Michael J. Murray (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 87.

neither merciful nor retributively just independently of creation, in which case God can be pure act independently of creation, without the existence of evil. But if we take this route, why would God care to externally glorify Himself in the story described in this chapter? If God is neither merciful nor retributively just independently of creation, then His alleged mercy and retributive justice seemingly cannot shine forth and externally glorify Him.<sup>93</sup>

What should we say, then? How can we answer this problem? One option is to keep the tension in place and to appeal to the transcendence of God, which, as Michael Rea points out, “is related to and often equated with ineffability, incomprehensibility, unknowability, or some combination of these.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, perhaps we could appeal to mystery or to the idea that we can only speak of God by way of metaphor, such that God is not *truly* merciful or *truly* retributively just, but only analogously so.<sup>95</sup> Or, maybe we could appeal to a particular conception of the pure actuality of God that allows God to be both merciful and retributively just without evil, all independently of creation.<sup>96</sup> Or, maybe we could appeal to the idea that God is merciful and retributively just but only in the Incarnation.<sup>97</sup> Whatever we say, I am *much* more committed to the idea that God is internally merciful and internally retributively just, than I am to any of the following claims: that God is pure act independently of creation, that evil does not exist independently of creation, and that the inferences in the above paragraph are solid.<sup>98</sup> But if God is internally merciful and internally retributively just, and if the reasoning presented in this dissertation is (largely) correct, then God very well might ordain the existence of many and

---

<sup>93</sup> Cf. J.L. Schellenberg, “A New Logical Problem of Evil,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), pp. 34-48.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 38.

<sup>95</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 29-62.

<sup>96</sup> For material that might be helpful in formulating a response along these lines, see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Absolute Simplicity,” pp. 367-371.

<sup>97</sup> See section C of Chapter II.

<sup>98</sup> This response is, in effect, a Moorean switch. See William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” pp. 5-8.

various and substantive evils so that His mercy and retributive justice can shine forth.

Nevertheless, philosophical questions still – and probably always will – linger, but I leave them to the side because they would take far too long to address satisfactorily in an already long dissertation.<sup>99</sup> We cannot answer every question in a finite work.

With that said, I conclude this dissertation. Though, certainly, more research can and should be done, we have offered what I believe to be a successful defense against the problem of evil. Plausibly, if God exists, He virtuously and righteously ordains the evils of our world out of a pursuit of His own external glory.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

---

<sup>99</sup> While preparing my prospectus for this very dissertation, I asked Thomas Senor how long a philosophy dissertation should be, and he said, “I’d say anything under about 120 pages will seem on the short side and anything over 200 is getting long.”

## Works Cited

- Adams, Marilyn McCord. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Adams, Marilyn McCord. "Plantinga on 'Felix Culpa': Analysis and Critique." *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2008).
- Adams, Marilyn McCord. "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians." In *Reasoned Faith*, edited by Eleonore Stump, pp. 301-327. Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Adams, Robert. "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (1979).
- Adams, Robert. *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Adams, Robert. "Must God Create the Best?" *The Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (1972).
- Adelson, Edward. "Checkersshadow Proof." Perceptual Science Group @ MIT. URL = <http://persci.mit.edu/gallery/checkersshadow/proof>.
- Alexander, David. "Orthodoxy, Theological Determinism, and the Problem of Evil." In *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson, pp. 123-144. Pickwick Publications, 2016.
- Alexander, David and Daniel Johnson. "Introduction." In *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson, pp. 1-18. Pickwick Publications, 2016.
- Alston, William. "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition." In *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 97-125. Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Alston, William. "The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit." In *Divine Nature and Human Language*, pp. 223-252. Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Alston, William. "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists." In *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, edited by Michael Beaty, pp. 303-326. University of Notre Dame Press, 1990.
- Anderson, James. "Calvinism and the First Sin." In *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson, pp. 200-232. Pickwick Publications, 2016.
- Andrew of Neufchateau. *Questions on an Ethics of Divine Commands*, translated by Janine Idziak. University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

*APA Dictionary of Psychology*. The American Psychological Association. URL = <https://dictionary.apa.org>.

Aquinas, Thomas. *On Evil*, translated by John Oesterle and Jean T. Oesterle. University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, translated by Anton Pegis. University of Notre Dame Press, 1955.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Three: Providence Part I*, translated by Vernon Bourke. University of Notre Dame Press, 1956.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, second and revised edition, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 1920. Retrieved from *New Advent*. URL = <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, second edition, translated by Terence Irwin. Hackett Publishing Company, 2000. In *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan. Hackett Publishing Company, 2011.

Augustine. *The City of God*, translated by Marcus Dods. The Modern Library, 1993.

Augustine. *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford University Press, 1998.

Augustine. *The Happy Life*, translated by Ludwig Schopp. In *Writings of Saint Augustine*, Volume 1; *The Fathers of the Church*, Volume 5. CIMA Publishing Co., 1948.

Augustine. *On the Free Choice of the Will*. In *Augustine: On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, edited by Peter King. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Augustine. *On the Trinity*. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 3, edited by Philip Schaff, translated by Arthur West Haddan. Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887. Retrieved from *New Advent*. Revised and edited for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight. URL = <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1301.htm>.

Beeke, Joel R. "The Sovereignty of God and Soul Winning." *Tabletalk*, September 2017, accessed October 6, 2022. URL = <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2017/09/sovereignty-god-evangelism/>.

Bennett, Arthur (ed.). *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*. The Banner of Truth Trust, 2020.

*The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*. The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2022.

The Britannica Dictionary. S.v. “appreciate.” Accessed February 26, 2023. URL = <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/appreciate>.

Brower, Jeffrey. “Simplicity and Aseity.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas Flint and Michael Rea, pp. 105-123. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Bunyan, John. *The Saints’ Knowledge of Christ’s Love*. In *The Works of John Bunyan*, Volume 2, edited by George Offor. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991.

Cambridge Dictionary. S.v. “appreciate.” Accessed February 26, 2023. URL = <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/appreciate>.

Collins, Robin. “The Connection-Building Theodicy.” In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 222-235. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013.

Collins, Robin. “The Teleological Argument: An Exploration of the Fine-Tuning of the Universe.” In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, pp. 202-281. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Crisp, Roger. *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Mill on Utilitarianism*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2003.

Crisp, Roger. “Well-Being.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2021 edition, edited by Edward N. Zalta. URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/well-being/>.

Currie, Gregory. “Imagination and Make-Believe.” In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, edited by Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes, pp. 253-262. Routledge, 2000.

Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, second edition, edited by John Cottingham. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Draper, Paul. “Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists.” In *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 12-29. Indiana University Press, 1996.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. S.v. “levirate.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accessed October 15, 2022. URL = <https://www.britannica.com/topic/levirate>.

Edwards, Jonathan. *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, Which Is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*. In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 1. Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.

- Edwards, Jonathan. *Charity and Its Fruits*. In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey. Yale University Press, 1989.
- Edwards, Jonathan. "Concerning the Divine Decrees in General, and Election in Particular." In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2, pp. 525b-543a. Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*. In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey. Yale University Press, 1989.
- Edwards, Jonathan. "Impending Judgments Averted Only by Reformation." In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 14: *Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729*, edited by Kenneth Minkema, pp. 216-227. Yale University Press, 1997.
- Edwards, Jonathan. "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners." In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 1, pp. 668a-679b. Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *The Nature of True Virtue*. In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey. Yale University Press, 1989.
- Edwards, Jonathan. "Wicked Men Useful in Their Destruction Only." In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2, pp. 125a-129b. Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.
- Ekstrom, Laura. "Suffering as Religious Experience." In *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, edited by Peter van Inwagen, pp. 95-110. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.
- Flint, Thomas. *Divine Providence*. Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Foot, Philippa. "Euthanasia." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 6, no. 2 (1977).
- Frame, John. S.v. "Westminster Catechisms." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, second edition, edited by Walter Elwell, pp. 1270b-1271a. Baker Academic, 2001.
- Frame, John. S.v. "Westminster Confession of Faith." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, second edition, edited by Walter Elwell, pp. 1271a-1271b. Baker Academic, 2001.
- Francescotti, Robert. "The Problem of Animal Pain and Suffering." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 113-127. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013.
- Frankfurt, Harry. "The Logic of Omnipotence." *The Philosophical Review* 73, no. 2 (1964).
- Frege, Gottlob. "Sense and Reference." *The Philosophical Review* 57, no. 3 (1948).



- Funkhouser, Eric. "On Privileging God's Moral Goodness." *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2006).
- Gellman, Jerome. "On a New Logical Problem of Evil." *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2015).
- Goodwin, Thomas. *An Exposition of the Second Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, Verses 1-11*. In *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, Volume 2. Reformation Heritage Books, 2006.
- Goodwin, Thomas. *The Heart of Christ*. The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011.
- Green, Christopher. "A Compatibilist Calvinist Demonstrative-Goods Defense." In *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson, pp. 233-247. Pickwick Publications, 2016.
- Harman, Gilbert. *The Nature of Morality*. Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Hart, Matthew. "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell." In *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson, pp. 248-272. Pickwick Publications, 2016.
- Helm, Paul. *Eternal God*, second edition. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Hick, John. *Evil and the God of Love*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Hickson, Michael. "A Brief History of Problems of Evil." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 3-18. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013.
- Hohfeld, Wesley. "Some Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning." *The Yale Law Journal* 23, no. 1 (1913).
- Houghton Gospel Choir. "The Doxology - The Houghton Alumni Virtual Gospel Choir." YouTube. Published May 5, 2020, accessed October 10, 2022. URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0PBIoK7H1M>>.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil." In *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 286-310. Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. "God, Evil, and Suffering." In *Reason for the Hope Within*, edited by Michael J. Murray, pp. 76-115. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. "Introduction." In *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. xi-xx. Indiana University Press, 1996.

- Howard-Snyder, Daniel, "The Logical Problem of Evil: Mackie and Plantinga." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 19-33. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013.
- Hudson, Hud. "Best Possible World Theodicy." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 236-250. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013.
- Hume, David. *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. In *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, edited by Dorothy Coleman. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Hutcheson, Francis. *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold. Liberty Fund, 2008.
- Idziak, Janine. "Divine Command Ethics." In *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, pp. 453-459. Blackwell, 1997.
- Irby, Stephen. "Potentials, Actuals, and the Logical Problem of Evil." MA thesis, University of Arkansas, 2019.
- Jackson, Frank. "Epiphenomenal Qualia." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 127 (1982).
- John of Damascus. *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*. In *The Fathers of the Church*, Volume 37: *St. John of Damascus*, translated by Frederic H. Chase, Jr. The Catholic University of America Press, 1958.
- Johnson, Daniel. "Calvinism and the Problem of Evil." In *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson, pp. 19-55. Pickwick Publications, 2016.
- Johnson, Terry. "Love, Justice, and Wrath." *Tabletalk*, May 2022, accessed August 23, 2022. URL = <<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2022/05/love-justice-and-wrath/>>.
- Jordan, Jeff. "The Topography of Divine Love." *Faith and Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2012).
- Kant, Immanuel. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by James Ellington. Hackett Publishing Company, 1981. In *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan. Hackett Publishing Company, 2011.
- Keller, Timothy. *The Reason for God*. Riverhead Books, 2008.
- Kennedy, David. "Wesley Hohfeld." In *The Canon of American Legal Thought*, edited by David Kennedy and William Fisher III, pp. 47-51. Princeton University Press, 2006.

- King, Stephen. *The Green Mile*. Gollancz, 2008.
- Kohlberg, Lawrence. "The Development of Modes of Moral Thinking and Choice in the Years 10 to 16." PhD dissertation, the University of Chicago, 1958.
- Kraay, Klaas. "Can God Choose a World at Random?" In *New Waves in Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Yujin Nagasawa and Erik Wielenberg, pp. 22-35. Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009.
- Kretzmann, Norman. "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" In *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald, pp. 208-228. Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Kretzmann, Norman. "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" In *Being and Goodness*, edited by Scott MacDonald, pp. 229-249. Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Kripke, Saul. *Naming and Necessity*. Blackwell Publishing, 1981.
- Leftow, Brian. "God and Abstract Entities," *Faith and Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (1990).
- Leftow, Brian. "A Latin Trinity." *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (2004).
- Leftow, Brian. "A Timeless God Incarnate." In *The Incarnation*, edited by Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins, pp. 273-299. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Silver Chair*. HarperTrophy, 1981.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. HarperTrophy, 1980.
- Lister, J. Ryan. *The Presence of God*. Crossway, 2014.
- Mackie, J.L. "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955).
- Mandela, Nelson. "I Am Prepared to Die." Nelson Mandela Foundation. Accessed October 27, 2022. URL = [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS010&txtstr=prepared%20to%20die](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS010&txtstr=prepared%20to%20die).
- Mavrodes, George. "Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence," *The Philosophical Review* 72, no. 2 (1963).
- McBrayer, Justin. "Counterpart and Appreciation Theodicies." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 192-204. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013.

- McGrew, Timothy and Lydia McGrew. "The Argument from Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth." In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, pp. 593-662. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- meredithandrewsmusic. "Open Up the Heavens." YouTube. Published March 1, 2018, accessed October 6, 2022. URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfXJ0j6zsgE>>.
- Merriam-Webster. S.v. "appreciate." Accessed February 24, 2023. URL = <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/appreciate>>.
- Merriam-Webster. S.v. "doxology." Accessed October 3, 2022. URL = <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/doxology>>.
- Merriam-Webster. S.v. "duty." Accessed March 27, 2023. URL = <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/duty>>.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*, fourth edition. Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1871. In *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fifth edition, edited by Michael Morgan. Hackett Publishing Company, 2011.
- mkariobangi. "ST MARY'S COLLEGIATE CHURCH-THY KINGDOM, O GOD." YouTube. Published November 18, 2013, accessed October 8, 2022. URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oe-Vy5LkYEs>>.
- Moore, Burness and Bernard Fine (eds.). *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts*. The American Psychoanalytic Association and Yale University Press, 1990.
- Morris, Thomas. *Anselmian Explorations*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1987.
- Murphy, Mark. *God and Moral Law*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Murphy, Mark. *God's Own Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Nagasawa, Yujin. *Maximal God*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Blackwell, 1999.
- Oakes, Robert. "The Wrath of God." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 27, no. 3 (1990).
- Olson, Roger. "The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God." In *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, edited by Bruce Ware, pp. 148-172. B&H Academic, 2008.
- Ortlund, Dane. *Gentle and Lowly*. Crossway, 2020.

outofdarknessmusic. “‘Of The Father’s Love Begotten’ from Out of Darkness (OFFICIAL LYRIC VIDEO).” YouTube. Published December 19, 2016, accessed October 3, 2022. URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jICEbS4acQ>>.

*The Oxford Dictionary of English*, second edition, revised, edited by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Patterson, Jon. “How I Started Dating My Best Friend’s Widow.” *Walk by Faith* (blog). WordPress. Published January 18, 2016, accessed October 15, 2022. URL = <<https://jonepatterson.wordpress.com/2016/01/18/how-i-started-dating-my-best-friends-widow/>>.

Pennington, M. Basil. *Through the Year with the Saints*. Doubleday, 1988.

Pereboom, Derk. “Free Will, Evil, and Divine Providence.” In *God and the Ethics of Belief*, edited by Andrew Dole and Andrew Chignell, pp. 77-98. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Piper, John. *God’s Passion for His Glory*. Crossway, 1998.

Plantinga, Alvin. “Epistemic Probability and Evil.” In *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 69-96. Indiana University Press, 1996.

Plantinga, Alvin. *God and Other Minds*. Cornell University Press, 1967.

Plantinga, Alvin. *The Nature of Necessity*. Clarendon Press, 1974.

Plantinga, Alvin. “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa.’” In *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, edited by Peter van Inwagen, pp. 1-25. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Plato. *Symposium*, translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. In *Plato*, edited by John Cooper. Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Plato. *Timaeus*, translated by Donald Zeyl. In *Plato*, edited by John Cooper. Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Pruss, Alexander. “The First Sin.” In *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson, pp. 187-199. Pickwick Publications, 2016.

Pruss, Alexander. “The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument.” In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, pp. 24-100. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

- Quinn, Philip. "Divine Command Theory." In *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, second edition, edited by Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson, pp. 81-102. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013.
- Ramey, Andrea. "Man pleads guilty to rape of mentally disabled woman near Bienville Square." NBC 15 News. Published November 1, 2021, accessed January 6, 2023. URL = <<https://myNBC15.com/news/local/man-pleads-guilty-to-rape-of-mentally-disabled-woman-near-bienville-square>>.
- Ramsey, Paul. "Editor's Introduction." In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey, pp. 1-121. Yale University Press, 1989.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition. Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Rea, Michael. "Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence." In *Philosophy of Religion*, sixth edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea, pp. 266-275. Wadsworth, 2012.
- Rea, Michael. *The Hiddenness of God*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Rea, Michael. "Skeptical Theism and the 'Too Much Skepticism' Objection." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 482-506. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013.
- Red Mountain Church - Topic. "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." YouTube. Published November 10, 2015, accessed October 6, 2022, URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDLaC0N-coU>>.
- Reichenbach, Bruce. "Evil and a Reformed View of God." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 24, no. ½, The Problem of Evil (1988).
- Rowe, William. *Can God Be Free?* Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Rowe, William. "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." In *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 1-11. Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Russell, Bruce. "The Persistent Problem of Evil." *Faith and Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (1989).
- Schellenberg, J.L. "A New Logical Problem of Evil." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 34-48. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013.
- Schultz, Walter. "Jonathan Edwards's *End of Creation*: An Exposition and Defense." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (2006).

- Senor, Thomas. "Defending Divine Freedom." In *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, Volume I, edited by Jonathan Kvanvig, pp. 168-195. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Senor, Thomas. "God's Goodness Needs No Privilege: A Reply to Funkhouser." *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2006).
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie. Liberty Fund, 1982.
- Sobel, Jordan Howard. *Logic and Theism*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Speak, Daniel. "Free Will and Soul-Making Theodicies." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 205-221. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013.
- Stump, Eleonore. "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job." In *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 49-68. Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Stump, Eleonore. "God's Obligations." *Philosophical Perspectives* 6, Ethics (1992).
- Stump, Eleonore. *Wandering in Darkness*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Stump, Eleonore and Norman Kretzmann. "Absolute Simplicity." *Faith and Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (1985).
- Swinburne, Richard. "Could There Be More Than One God?" *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 3 (1988).
- Swinburne, Richard. "Some Major Strands of Theodicy." In *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 30-48. Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Titanic Movie/Película. "'Titanic will founder' - Scene HD." YouTube. Published August 15, 2018, accessed November 19, 2022. URL = <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SP7BWb1ndpA>>.
- Tomaszewski, Christopher. "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument: On an Invalid Argument Against Divine Simplicity." *Analysis* 79, no. 2 (2019).
- Tooley, Michael. "The Argument from Evil." *Philosophical Perspectives* 5, Philosophy of Religion (1991).
- Trakakis, Nick. "Does Hard Determinism Render the Problem of Evil even Harder?" *Ars Disputandi* 6, no. 1 (2006).
- Urmson, J.O. "Literature." In *Aesthetics*, edited by George Dickie and R.J. Sclafani, pp. 334-341. St. Martin's Press, 1977.

- van Inwagen, Peter. *The Problem of Evil*. Clarendon Press, 2006.
- Van Til, Cornelius. *Christian Apologetics*, second edition, edited by William Edgar. P&R Publishing, 2003.
- Wainwright, William. "Jonathan Edwards and the Doctrine of Hell." In *Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp, pp. 13-26. Ashgate, 2003.
- Wainwright, William. "Theological Determinism and the Problem of Evil: Are Arminians Any Better Off?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 50, no. 1/3 (2001).
- Walls, Jerry and Thomas Talbott. "Is Eternal Damnation Compatible with the Christian Concept of God?" In *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, second edition, edited by Michael Peterson and Raymond VanArragon, pp. 369-390. Wiley-Blackwell, 2020.
- Walzer, Michael. "Terrorism: A Critique of Excuses." In *Problems of International Justice*, edited by Steven Luper-Foy, pp. 237-247. Routledge, 2019.
- Wenar, Leif. "Rights." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2021 edition, edited by Edward N. Zalta. URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/rights/>>.
- White, Heath. "Theological Determinism and the 'Authoring Sin' Objection." In *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson, pp. 78-95. Pickwick Publications, 2016.
- Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Hill and Wang, 2006.
- Wolf, Susan. "Moral Saints." *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (1982).
- Wykstra, Stephen John. "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil." In *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, pp. 126-150. Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Zagzebski, Linda. *Divine Motivation Theory*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Zagzebski, Linda. "The Virtues of God and the Foundation of Ethics." *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (1998).



## Appendix

Is my defense Biblical?<sup>1</sup> We can philosophically speculate all day, but the human mind is weak, and, ultimately, ascertaining why God does what He does is a matter for special revelation. As Jonathan Edwards says concerning the end for which God created the world, “In order to be determined what was aimed at or designed in the creating of the astonishing fabric of the universe which we behold, it becomes us to attend to and rely on what he has told us who was the architect that built it. He best knows his own heart, and what his own ends and designs were in the wonderful works which he has wrought.”<sup>2</sup> The same should be said for God’s ordination of evil. Is there, therefore, anything in the Bible that indicates that my defense (or something very much like it) is correct? That is, is there reason to think that my defense is theodical in nature? I think there is.

Though many passages could be cited in support of the claim that God ordains all things (external to Him), including various evils, for His own external glory (e.g., Psalm 59:11-13, Isaiah 49:1-7, Ezekiel 36:22-38, John 9:2-3, and John 11:4),<sup>3</sup> because we can’t get into all of them, I direct my attention to two passages from Paul’s letter to the Romans. Our first passage is Romans 9:1-24. It would be remiss of me if I did not mention this somewhere in my dissertation (if only in the appendix). It seemingly has threads of many of the points presented in this work, from God loving some more than others, to a sovereign God being perfectly within His rights to grant a greater knowledge of Himself to His people, whom He has elected to salvation, through

---

<sup>1</sup> All the Biblical passages that I reference in this appendix are, according to the WCF 1.2, the Word of God.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8: *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989), p. 419.

<sup>3</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, pp. 467-525; and Christopher Green, “A Compatibilist Demonstrative-Goods Defense,” in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. 239-241.

exhibiting to them His wrath upon the damned, whom He has elected to destruction. Here it is, from the ESV, quoted in full:

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Though, strictly speaking, because the last paragraph is filled with questions, Paul does not unquestionably *state* in this passage that God elects some to eternal damnation for His own

glory, it, at the least, *strongly* suggests that God's desire to be glorified is an adequate explanation for His ordination of Hell.<sup>4</sup> And if it is an adequate explanation for God's ordination of Hell, the worst evil the Calvinist has to wrestle with, it might just be an equally good explanation for all (or at least many) of the other evils of our world that are less severe than Hell.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Romans 9:1-24 is followed very quickly by Romans 11:36, which reads (in the ESV), "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." Several things should be said about this verse. First, because God determines all things (external to Him) – and this is suggested by the language of "from him and through him ... are all things" – He is the one who makes it the case that all things that exist, exist. Second, the best way to understand the claim that all things are *to* God is that all things glorify Him (or facilitate the glorification of Him). If Paul were not claiming that all things glorify God, how else could we understand the language of, "to him be glory forever," when it is immediately preceded by "to him are all things"? Therefore, God is the one who makes it the case that all things that exist,

---

<sup>4</sup> See Matthew Hart, "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David Alexander and Daniel Johnson (Pickwick Publications, 2016), p. 252, footnote 14.

<sup>5</sup> In the passage, Paul references Exodus 9:16. Here is the context of that verse:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go. Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them"' (Exodus 9:13-19, ESV).

This seems to indicate that God ordains at least some evils for His own glory, specifically the plagues on Egypt. In fact, it seems that God intentionally did not wipe out Pharaoh and the Egyptians at an earlier time, which would have set His people free sooner than when they were, which means that God was allowing His people to remain slaves in Egypt, for the explicit purpose that He might be glorified through demonstrating His power by sending plagues on the Egyptians.

exist; and all these things glorify God. But, if this is true, then God is the one who makes it the case that the evils that exist, exist; and all these evils glorify Him.<sup>6</sup> And given that God ordains at least everything that is contingent (and external to Him), including, but not limited to, the evil of this world, such that God *volitionally* makes it the case that the evils that exist, exist, and given that He ordains all contingent things (external to Him), including all evils, for some sort of purpose,<sup>7</sup> it is highly likely that God ordains the existence of the various evils of our world (at least in part) for His own glory – that is, it is highly likely that the reason (or one of the reasons) why God has ordained the various evils that exist is so that He might be glorified through them.<sup>8</sup> Hence, as said in section C of Chapter I, the WLC states, “God’s decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will, whereby, from all eternity, he hath, *for his own glory*, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time, especially concerning angels and men” (WLC 12, emphasis added). This means that God ordains every evil that exists for His own

---

<sup>6</sup> Someone might object by saying that evil is not a thing, but the privation of a thing, in which case this verse says nothing about God being the one who makes it the case that the evils that exist, exist; and it says nothing about all these evils glorifying Him. For, this verse, which says, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen,” only talks about *things*, not the *privation of things*. By way of response, this objection seems to me to be too philosophically strict. The verse is not making deep metaphysical claims about the nature of evil. It is trying to communicate that whatever we find in the world, however exactly we understand it, is from God in some sense and ultimately glorifying to Him. Even if coldness is the lack of heat, and even if darkness is the lack of light, we should still say that coldness and darkness, just like heat and light, are from God in some sense and ultimately glorifying to Him. Similarly, even if evil is the privation of goodness, we should still say that evil, just like goodness, is from God in some sense (see section B of Chapter II) and ultimately glorifying to Him.

<sup>7</sup> As Proverbs 16:4 says (in the ESV), “The LORD has made everything for its purpose, / even the wicked for the day of trouble.”

<sup>8</sup> Two points should be noted. First, I leave room for God having additional reasons for ordaining the existence of the evils of our world. Second, one reason why I use the language of “*it is highly likely* that God ordains the existence of the various evils of our world (at least in part) for His own glory” is because it could be that God volitionally ordains the existence of the evils of our world for a reason that has absolutely nothing to do with His glory, such that the fact that the evils of our world glorify God is, as it were, a happy accident. In other words, the fact that the evils of our world glorify God does not automatically entail that God has ordained them for His own glory. It could be that God has volitionally ordained them for some other reason or for some other purpose. But, I find this to be extraordinarily unlikely. Why would Paul mention that all things (including the evils of our world) are from God and through God, but then mention that they all *just happen* to be glorifying to God, as though God ordained them but had no intention whatsoever to be glorified through them and, then, after, as it were, consulting His knowledge of all things, came to discover that – what do you know! – they all glorify Him? No, this seems absurd. It is *highly* likely that Paul is claiming, through divine inspiration, that God ordained all things in this world, including all the evils that exist, for His own glory. That is the most straightforward interpretation of the verse.

glory. Of course, it does not follow necessarily that this reason of God's for ordaining the evils of our world is a *morally sufficient* reason, but, given that the defense presented in this dissertation is plausible, which says that God is perfectly virtuous and perfectly righteous in ordaining the evils of our world for His own glory, it is plausible that this reason of God's for ordaining the evils of our world is God's actual morally sufficient reason for ordaining the evils of our world. We, thus, have a plausible theodicy as well.