CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

CHARLES TALIAFERRO AND CHAD MEISTER

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In *Contemporary Philosophical Theology*, Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister focus on key topics in contemporary philosophical theology within Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, as well as Hinduism and Buddhism. The volume begins with a discussion of key methodological tools available to the philosophical theologian, such as faith and reason, science and religion, revelation and sacred scripture, and authority and tradition. The authors use these tools to explore subjects including language, ineffability, miracles, evil, and the afterlife. They also grapple with applied philosophical theology, including environmental concerns, interreligious dialogue, and the nature and significance of political values. A concluding discussion proposes that philosophical theology can contribute to important reflections and action concerning climate change.

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INTRODUCTION

What is philosophical theology?

Let's build up a definition of *philosophical theology* by first looking at the terms "philosophical" and then "theology." A conventional usage says that to have a philosophy is simply to have a conception of reality and values. In a rough sense of the term, every thoughtful person has some philosophy insofar as she or he has some concept of what reality is (or is not) and what is valuable or important. It may be that we have more than one philosophy of life and it may also be that not many of us stop to think about what our philosophy of life is and why we believe (or assume) it to be correct or fitting. But it is difficult to imagine living without some assumptions or convictions about what is the case and what we should care about. Even a radical sceptic who claims not to know anything (maybe even claiming not to know whether or not he is actually a sceptic), still has a philosophy (for example, a sceptic may think of reality as something too remote to grasp, a terrain so distant that the only thing he knows is that it eludes his power to know).

In a further sense of the term "philosophy," the practice of philosophy is the disciplined practice of reflecting on alternative concepts of reality and values, clarifying the relevant concepts, comparing different worldviews, engaging in criticism, and raising questions about justification and evidence. Which concepts of reality are more plausible than others? What reasons do we have for thinking about life as we do? Getting to the root of the word, it should be noted that "philosophy" comes from the Greek terms for the love (*philo*) of wisdom (*sophia*), which carries the built-in implication that the practice of philosophy (ideally, if it is true to its roots) is or should be guided by what is taken to be wise to believe and act on. Put concisely then, the practice of philosophy should involve a search for ways to live wisely.

To make sure we avoid conceiving of philosophy as some emotionally barren discipline, our understanding of philosophy should be further expanded to include

what we are or should be passionate about. Reality, viewed by a person without interests or passions, would be a dull state of affairs. Passions are, as Jean-Paul Sartre observed, "magical transformations of the world" (Sartre, 1948) and philosophy needs to investigate which passions are wise for us to cultivate and follow.

"Theology" comes from the Greek words *theos*, for God, and *logos*, which may be translated as *logic of* (or *the study of*) *wisdom*. Theology, then, refers to wise reflection on the conception of God or the divine. Drawing on the above sense of "philosophy" and "theology," *philosophical theology* involves critical, disciplined reflection on the concept of God or the divine. As a field of inquiry, theology includes both historical and contemporary elements. A historical practice of theology may include a critical textual interpretation of sacred scripture, while a contemporary practice of theology may include the articulation and study of different concepts or narratives about God or the divine. What makes *philosophical theology* different from a general philosophical inquiry into religion is that philosophical theology looks at religious traditions that involve God or the divine from what may be considered both the inside and the outside. An outside or external philosophical inquiry into Christianity, for example, would naturally be thought of as employing an impartial, unbiased, even detached perspective.

Examining a religious tradition philosophically from the inside is not necessarily partial or biased, but it does involve practicing philosophy from the standpoint of some given theological tradition. Christian philosophical theology, for example, might take some key Christian teaching (about the Trinity, the incarnation, miracles, prayer, teachings about forgiveness) and consider whether such teaching can make philosophical sense. Historically and today, philosophical theology in Christianity as well as in Judaism, Islam, and in Hindu traditions that recognize a divine reality (Brahman) has produced a fascinating literature on a range of topics, including different concepts of God and the relationship between God and the cosmos, ideas about how (if at all) to reconcile the belief that God is perfect, unsurpassably excellent reality with a cosmos filled with evil, different accounts of the nature and purpose of time and space, alternative understandings of salvation and enlightenment, and much more.

Does the practice of Christian or Muslim philosophical theology actually require that one be a Christian or a Muslim? Not at all. One may be an atheist and still philosophically reflect on what to think about God or Allah from a Christian or Muslim point of view. Indeed, one might practice such philosophical theology as part of the project of arguing that both Christian and Muslim theological traditions are unjustified or perhaps even incoherent.

In a sense, the practice of putting oneself in the position of different traditions or communities or persons (with whom we might disagree) is what we very often do in the course of our ordinary thinking, ethically or politically. If we are in a debate with someone who is denying that there is climate change, we would be remiss if we were not able imaginatively to see how and why persons deny what we believe to be cogent science. If we are discussing the God—world relation with a Hindu pantheist, we would be intellectually negligent if we did not put

forth our best efforts in attempting to see and understand the evidences and arguments on offer for that view.

Can religious traditions that do not have a God or divine reality, such as Theravada Buddhism, have a philosophical theology? In other words, could there be Buddhist philosophical theology? Theravada Buddhism is commonly understood to be either non-theistic or atheistic. As noted earlier, the term "theology" identifies *theos* or the divine as its subject matter, so Theravada philosophical theology would be an oxymoron. Sacred texts in Buddhism (the *Tipitaka*, sometimes known as the Pali Canon) are not revered as revelations from God but as containing truths that may be grasped through human reason and meditation. But four points are worth noting.

First, historically and today some Buddhist philosophers engage in philosophical theology as generally practiced when they critique religious traditions that recognize God or Brahman or Allah. Buddhism originated in India where it has had to engage philosophically with the Hinduism from which it emerged in the sixth century BCE, then with Christianity, which may have reached India as early as the first century CE, and later with the influx and settlement of Muslims since the seventh century CE. Buddhist philosophical engagement historically and today has sometimes involved Buddhists adopting "for the sake of argument" positions internal to these non-Buddhist traditions in the form of offering an internal critique.

Second, there are important commonalities among the notions of God, as understood in the theistic religious traditions, and ultimate reality, as understood in non-theistic religious traditions (such as Nirvana in Buddhism or the Dao in Daoism). To cite an obvious example, theists and Buddhists agree that the material world is not all there is; both maintain that there is a transcendent reality that exists beyond the physical and that a central goal of life should be seeking union with that reality.

Third, philosophical reflection about Buddhism can share with philosophical theology the practice of examining Buddhism from the inside and outside. That is, philosophers might begin their work with a Buddhist teaching about the self or suffering by testing whether the teaching is internally coherent or whether it throws light on non-Buddhist ideas about the self and suffering.

Finally, when engaged in philosophical theology from the standpoint of traditions that recognize a divine reality, there are ample occasions when philosophers will seek to draw on or critically assess other traditions with no divine reality. A philosopher may compare the approach to suffering in the context of a comparative study of Buddhist and Hindu teaching, for example. So, philosophical theology in practice can (and we believe should) be open and expansive, rather than instituting a narrowing of focus.

In the practice of philosophical theology, what would be good tools to use? They would include those that are important in all domains of philosophical inquiry: the ability to recognize and assess arguments; analytical skills in identifying consistency and coherence as well as inconsistency and incoherence; a mastery of other disciplines from the physical and social sciences; an openness to the points of view of others; and humility, patience and imagination. Two that would be

especially important are *empathetic imagination* and what may be called *methodological pluralism*.

Empathetic imagination involves the ability to put yourself in the position of a religious practitioner who has a philosophy you may or may not share. For a non-Muslim philosopher to undertake Islamic philosophical theology would require (ideally) that the non-Muslim be able to think through some Islamic teaching from the inside, so to speak. This practice of putting yourself in the position of others is something that we believe should characterize all philosophical reflection. There is (though it is not widely acknowledged) a golden rule that we think would be good if it were more widely practiced: treat the philosophy of others as you would like your own philosophy to be treated. In philosophical theology this golden rule is especially important. To stay with our example, successful Islamic philosophical theology involves being able to engage topics through the lens of Islamic tradition even if, at the end of the day, the arguments that develop are highly critical of the tradition.

Methodological pluralism involves an appreciation for diverse philosophical methods that may include premises you do not accept. For example, you may believe there is no credence in the idea of a divine revelation. Believing in divine revelation is, fortunately, not essential in the practice of philosophical theology. But for certain projects in philosophical theology, it may be necessary to be willing to engage in reasoning in a conditional fashion; for example, an atheist may develop arguments to the effect that if the Christian Bible is indeed divine revelation, then it leads to intolerable (or incoherent or evidently false) consequences. The effectiveness of this line of reasoning will rest on the extent to which the philosopher is working with a method of interpreting divine revelation that Christians would recognize.

Historically, we believe that one of the best practitioners of philosophical theology was Al-Biruni (973–1048), a Muslim philosopher-historian who produced a systematic study of the religious and philosophical movements in India. This was a comprehensive study that included mathematics, science, and so on, but what marks this work as worthy of deep admiration is the way in which Al-Biruni offered a sympathetic, fair-minded study of non-Muslim traditions. He was one of the first Muslim scholars to master Sanskrit and to engage in personal dialogue with Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians, and others to gain an understanding of these persons and philosophies from the inside.

Among philosophers working today, William Rowe stands out as an atheist who has demonstrated extraordinary aptitude in philosophical theology. Whether treating theistic arguments, divine attributes, or the problem of evil, Rowe is a reliable, challenging guide. He, as a non-Christian, is able to see philosophical problems through the lens of Christian faith. This ability is perhaps why Rowe has described his own position as "friendly atheism" (Rowe, 1979). For Rowe, atheism is friendly when it is conjoined with the thesis that, while theism is false, it is possible for persons to be reasonable in believing it to be true. (As an aside, this kind of friendliness is not unusual in philosophy. In ethics, for example, someone

who is a Kantian rarely thinks that all philosophers who have seriously considered Kantian ethics and remained, say, utilitarians, are utterly unreasonable.)

Another form of friendliness—the absence in some atheist philosophers of any open hostility to theological traditions—is expressed in the way of regret. Michael Tooley (2008), for example, has observed: "Although I am an atheist, I should very much like it to be the case that I am mistaken in that God, as I have described him, exists" (Tooley, in debate with Alvin Plantinga). Although Rowe's friendliness and Tooley's regret may contribute to the great care they give to the arguments for and against theism, we are not suggesting that atheists who practice philosophical theology must always be friendly or regretful.

However, exemplifying a *failure* in both empathetic imagination and an appreciation for methodological pluralism is Simon Blackburn's effort to exhibit the absurdity of believing in the God of Abrahamic faiths by comparing God to a teapot. The analogy might be amusing, but it is too much of a caricature and indeed too absurd for any person of faith to find it a serious challenge. The original effort to compare belief in God to belief in a peculiar teapot that orbits the sun goes back to Bertrand Russell, who intimated that if the failure to disprove *X* was a reason for believing that *X*, then all number of absurd propositions could be justified as epistemically sound, including the assertion that a teapot was currently orbiting the earth. Blackburn elaborates on the analogy, likening the idea of God to a comic idea of a teapot!

> Now imagine, however, that the teapot undergoes a sea change. Suppose it becomes an authority (out of its spout come forth important commands and promises). Suppose it becomes a source of comfort, as earthly teapots are, but more so. Suppose it becomes the focus of national identities: it is especially one of our teapots, not theirs. And so on: it answers prayers, adopts babies, consecrates marriages, and closes grief. The teapot was cracked but rose again and is now whole.
>
> (Blackburn 2005, 18)

This use of a teapot to denote God does not get less loony than if Blackburn had substituted the word "teapot" for "God" in an English translation of the entire Bible (starting with "In the beginning, the teapot created the heavens and the earth . . . ," etc.). No Christian can take Blackburn's improvised teapot analogy seriously. It would be wiser to practice empathetic imagination and simply sidestep sarcasms that are not really interested in engaging with the actual beliefs of religious practitioners.

In practical terms, how might philosophical theology be carried out? We believe it can be practiced under a variety of conditions, ranging from one in which participants do not reveal their theological allegiances to one in which every participant discloses which (if any) theological tradition she adopts. We happen to have a preference for a mixed site: depending on their level of comfort, some might reveal their past or current views but some might not.

One way to test your own intuitions about this matter is to imagine that you come to a seminar or classroom or into a coffee house quite remote from academia and you discover three tables. Around each table there are equally energetic, intellectually gifted, witty, sensitive, articulate persons engaged in philosophical reflection on one or more theological traditions (and taking up the topic of whether secular, non-religious traditions are superior to theological ones). Each table is equally intimate and inviting, but they are different. At table A, each participant makes it very clear what each of them is committed to. The Christians, Muslims, atheists and so on are each self-identified. At table B, no one knows what the others' convictions are. Every effort is made to conceal one's theological perspective and it is difficult to pick up on any clues about who believes what. Table C is a mix. Not everyone conceals or reveals, but some do and they draw on their experience to fill out the topics. A Muslim woman reports on what it feels like to be prohibited from wearing a burqa, for example, and a Jewish male talks about the problem of believing in divine providence after the Holocaust, and so on.

One reason we prefer table C is because (as we imagine it, and as we have actually experienced it in various interreligious contexts) persons can feel free to self-identify but they can be perfectly comfortable not doing so. Table A can provide an atmosphere where, once persons identify themselves as believing or practicing X (whatever), they can be labelled or fixed as (for example) *the Muslim* or *the atheist* and so on. Table A might (or might not) make it more difficult for persons to switch positions. Table B has merits, but it can also exclude participants sharing their religious experiences face to face in a group in a way that enhances the understanding and experience of others. Table C seems best suited for a truly dialectical experience in philosophical theology.

There is currently a rise of interest in philosophical theology in the academy and theological institutes. We suggest that there are at least three reasons for this. First, there is currently no consensus philosophically about where all of us should begin to engage in philosophy. Should we begin with the sciences? Common sense? Reason? Our intuitions? Partly due to the widespread disagreement of starting points, some philosophers propose that theological tradition may be a good starting point or initial context for philosophy, as worthy or even more worthy than many alternatives. We shall be exploring this matter more fully in the first chapter.

Second, there are some misgivings about the so-called objective neutrality of the academic approach to religion. Especially in the context of secular universities (universities without current affiliations with a religious tradition), "objective" inquiry oftentimes does not seem to be religiously neutral but rather a reflection of a committed secular naturalism, which presupposes from the beginning the falsehood of the different religious traditions. This has led some philosophers to offer what they consider a more fair minded approach to religion, one that invites us to see religion in terms that are fair, even-handed, and not (from the outset) already skewed. Blackburn's teapot analogy would be a prime example of something so skewed as to be unrecognizable.

Third, there have been some important recent contributions by philosophers of religion who take seriously the passionate, affective side of religious life and

practice. Philosophical theology seems better placed to appreciate this than many other approaches. Paul Moser, for example, has argued that many philosophers insist on principles that are elaborate human attempts to explain (or explain away) God and the ways of God (or lack thereof), but that it may well be that the God in question has personal attributes and does not honour such principles. For Moser, one cannot separate the heart and will from the intellect. God can and does, he says, make Godself known through "a receptive human conscience in ways that are much more personally challenging, morally robust, and spiritually vital than the esoteric arguments of traditional and contemporary natural theology" (Moser 2011). He continues:

> In particular, I maintain that the voice of God can be heard in a receptive human conscience, in keeping with a recurring assumption in the biblical writings. This position fits both with [St.] Paul's suggestion that in human conscience God bears witness to the divine moral character as represented in the law of God, thereby holding people accountable . . . The role of human conscience in knowledge of God is widely neglected by philosophers and others, and this neglect obscures the vital experiential reality of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. It also minimizes the crucial role of prayer in evidence-conferring interaction with this God.
>
> (Moser 2011, 2)

Similarly, John Cottingham claims that religious belief is not merely about intellectual argument, but that it bears on all dimensions of life (Cottingham 2014). Eleonore Stump laments the way much philosophy about religion engages in "cognitive *hemianopia*" in which left-brain skills are taken to be the end-all of philosophical insight and practice (Stump 2012, 24 ff.). And Sarah Coakley points out that:

> recent deliverances from the fields of neuroscience and experimental psychology have yielded remarkably interesting challenges to the idea that reason and emotion can be regarded as an oppositional binary in their disciplines. The old picture of the brain's clear division into more ancient, animal-based centers of primitive emotion, and more-recently evolved centers of rational decision-making, has been questioned or refined in various ways, not least by the discovery that the brain-processes involved in rational thought are inexorably interconnected with affective function, and indeed operate quite weirdly and dysfunctionally in terms of human behaviors if artificially cut off from them.
>
> (Coakley 2012, 3)

If Coakley is right, then we have reason to think that inquiry into religion and theological traditions needs to attend to both rational and affective dimensions. Rather than assessing bloodless, abstract arguments, philosophical theology needs to look at the way in which passion and love play important roles in religious life.

So, philosophical theology is a robust, broad, and engaging discipline that comprises multiple disciplines and virtues. Practiced at its best, it is rooted in a deep understanding of the central tradition(s) in question, incorporates creative and empathetic imagination and methodological pluralism (striving to understand and take seriously the arguments and experiences of others as well as criticisms of one's own beliefs), and seeks to encompass the whole person: not only the intellect but also emotions, heart, and conscience.

With all of this in mind, here, then, is a brief overview of what follows in this book. Chapter 1 considers the challenge to philosophical theology based on the physical sciences. Has contemporary science shown all religious traditions (whether these include a belief in God or not) to be false? In our reply we stress the primacy of philosophy over the primacy of science. We put the stress on *philosophical* theology in Chapter 1, whereas in Chapter 2 the stress is on philosophical *theology*. Chapter 2 takes up a challenge to philosophical theology from a religious point of view. According to some philosophers, the very idea of God is of a reality that eludes our best human concepts and language. God is beyond our comprehension; in religious terms, God is ineffable. What does this mean for philosophical theology? Also in this chapter, we take up the idea that religious beliefs and practices involve forms of life that defy analytical exploration—the view that the religious life is to be lived, not merely philosophically investigated for truths about reality. We seek to meet these challenges on theological as well as philosophical grounds. Chapter 3 compares different forms of philosophical theology in varied contexts. How might one go about settling differences between theological traditions? The existence (and even flourishing) of more than one philosophical theology may be good news (the more traditions, perhaps the more likely that at least one of them is based on truths; or perhaps more can be learned about ultimate reality from a diversity of traditions), but it might also raise sceptical worries that none of them can be fully trusted. Chapter 4 considers several models of God and ways in which God may be revealed or disclosed to us. We look at some of the traditional and contemporary arguments for the existence of God from the standpoint of philosophical theology rather than standard work in philosophy of religion. In Chapter 5 we engage traditional and some contemporary ideas about divine attributes and their significance. Chapter 6 looks at good and evil in philosophical theology in comparison with non-theistic traditions such as Buddhism and non-theistic Hinduism, while Chapter 7 focuses on what is called the problem of evil for traditions in which God is deemed good and all powerful. Chapter 8 explores philosophical theology in the context of four religious traditions: Judaism (in which we focus on the idea of a relational monotheism and prophecy), Christianity (with a focus on the Trinity and incarnation), Islam (with a focus on a merciful God and tradition), and Hinduism (with a focus on ultimate reality and karma). Chapter 9 considers philosophical theology in the context of culture. We propose that philosophy in general, and philosophical theology in particular, can contribute to a culture that supports a democratic republic. We respond to some objections about the cultural danger of monotheism and conclude the book with reflections on how philosophical theology can contribute to important reflections and action concerning climate change.

This introduction and each chapter end with a section of further reflections. These concluding sections are not crafted as test questions in a textbook, but as material that we hope will stimulate further scholarship by students, professors, and general readers who might be led to contribute to the field of philosophical theology.

Further reflections

While we believe that philosophical theology can and should be practiced both within and outside academic institutions, James Collins contends that philosophy of religion (and thus, by implication, philosophical theology) is best practiced in the context of the university:

> In conclusion, it is important to specify the social setting within which thetasks of philosophy of religion can best be pursued. The work is carried on with maximal effectiveness in the university, and perhaps it is only in the university that the proper intellectual and moral climate exists for such an enterprise. Historically, the modern development of philosophy of religion has been bound up with the university, which furnishes the conditions of freedom within the arts faculty for an independent examination of religion.
>
> (Collins 1967, 489)

What do you think?

Those readers who are oriented toward theology primarily and philosophy second will be interested to note how some philosophers see the boundary between systematic theology and philosophical theology as quite fluid. Further reflection on Oliver Crisp's observations would be good:

> It seems to me that the boundaries between philosophical theology and systematic theology are rather porous. Systematic theology always involves appealing to some sort of metaphysical claim or other—a matter that the American Lutheran theologian, Robert Jenson, makes plain in his *Systematic Theology*. But I am not sure that "integration" is the right word. Bridge-building might be more like it. How can bridges be built between analytics and theologians that might be mutually beneficial and that might mean there is more traffic between the two disciplines? That is an important question, I think. And it is not all one-way traffic, either. There is important theological work that analytics can benefit from, e.g. the recent re-evaluation of St. Augustine of Hippo by people like Michel Barnes and Lewis Ayres.
>
> (Crisp 2010)

We claim that non-Christians can do Christian philosophical theology; we think it is possible that a non-Christian philosopher might even do better work than a Christian philosopher. But not everyone agrees. In *Divine Faith*, John Lamont argues

that "outsiders" to religious traditions are not positioned—or at least are not well positioned—to assess the reasonability of faith. Consider Lamont's claim:

> This perspective—of the believer—cannot be the same as that of an unbeliever . . . An unbeliever cannot properly evaluate the reasonableness of Christian faith, because the evidence necessary for such an evaluation is not available to him. The only way for him to find out whether faith is reasonable is to, as far as lies in him, take the venture of believing.
>
> (Lamont 2004, 216)

Perhaps in support of this position it might be argued that a philosopher working out a philosophy of romantic love is likely to be less well positioned than a philosopher who has an experience of romantic love. The German philosopher and theologian, Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), suggested that to evaluate religious experiences—which he described in terms of an awareness of the divine he referred to as the numinous—an inquirer needs herself to have some experience of it.

> [A numinous experience is a] mental state [that] is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other . . . There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it. He must be guided and led on . . . through the ways of his own mind until he reaches the point at which "the numinous" in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness . . . In other words, our X cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind.
>
> (Otto 1958, 7)

In a letter by Ludwig Wittgenstein, written to his friend Norman Malcolm, Wittgenstein said the following:

> What is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., and if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life.
>
> (Wittgenstein 1958, 93)

Do you agree with Wittgenstein on this point? What about with respect to philosophical theology?

Cook Wilson's observations about our knowledge of other minds or persons may have a bearing on the practice of philosophical theology. Cook Wilson takes note of how in friendship, one proceeds with a confident belief or assumption of our direct acquaintance with our friends, rather than relying on reflective inferences:

> If we think of the existence of our friends; it is the "direct knowledge" that we want: merely inferential knowledge seems a poor affair. To most men it

> would be as surprising as unwelcome to hear it could not be directly known whether there were such existences as their friends, and that was only a matter of (probable) empirical argument and inference from facts which are directly known. And even if we convince ourselves on reflection that this is really the case, our actions prove that we have a confidence in the existence of our friends, which can't be derived from an empirical argument (which can never be certain), for a man will risk his life for his friends. We don't want merely inferred friends. Could we possibly be satisfied with an inferred God?
>
> (Cook Wilson 1926, 853)

In philosophical theology, attention is rightly given, we maintain, when religious practitioners engage not merely in inference but when they take themselves to be experientially acquainted with the divine.

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1

SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

> Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?
> (Job 28: 12)

In the introduction we presented philosophical theology as the practice of philosophy from both the inside and outside of theological traditions. Philosophical theology may be compared to interpersonal relationships. In getting to know another person it would be odd to limit our attention to the person's external behavior and anatomy; unless our focus is medical (in some very narrow sense), presumably we want to learn of another person's thinking, emotions, experiences, memories, sensations, values, motives, the reasons for the decisions they make, and so on. In the terms that some philosophers use today, in getting to know another person we want to know *what it's like* to be that individual. Learning about ourselves and others involves using a philosophy of some kind insofar as we believe that some facts about people are more important than others. Unless we are podiatrists, shoe retailers, or runners, we rarely begin to get to know someone by deciphering the size of their feet and this is due to our philosophy of persons. If we philosophically believed that the most fundamental aspect of persons is their economic activity, or their ethnicity, or the experience of the first five years of their life, then we would centre our attention on such activities, backgrounds, or early experiences of ourselves and others.

As we begin our practice of investigating theological positions and traditions, it is natural for us to consider our philosophical view of the methods to employ (some of which we referenced in the introduction). It is at this point that we run into a significant challenge: there are some philosophers who think that we should begin with the natural or physical sciences. This need not be disastrous for philosophical theology. Some scholars argue that modern science itself was founded

on theological convictions (e.g. that we may expect science to be successful because the cosmos is created and sustained by a rational Creator), and some philosophers today think that the universe exhibits signs of "fine tuning" that provide some evidence of a divine reality. But many philosophers who stress the natural or physical sciences today emphasize their use in establishing a firmly naturalistic worldview that explicitly rejects theism (or the supernatural) at all levels and see the sciences as being the final, autonomous arbitrator for establishing claims to know of reality. More specifically, these philosophers argue that philosophy itself should be subordinate to the natural sciences. In the late twentieth century Willard Van Orman Quine, for example, contended that we should not give primacy to philosophy. He endorsed a form of naturalism that involved the "abandonment of the goal of a first philosophy."

> [Naturalism] sees natural science as an inquiry into reality, fallible and corrigible but not answerable to any supra-scientific tribunal, and not in need of any justification beyond observation and the hypothetical deductive method of doubt.
>
> (Quine 1981, 72)

The hypothetical deductive method involves constructing (or discovering) the laws of nature and being able to explain and predict events via a method in which implications are deduced from an hypothesis and an attempt is made to falsify or confirm the hypothesis. According to Quine, the methods employed in the sciences may be imperfect, but science itself is self-justifying and not in need of any deeper, philosophical justification. What might this treatment of the primacy of the physical or natural sciences mean for philosophical theology?

The great theological traditions involve claims about revelation and reason, different descriptions of God, alternative accounts of God acting on a cosmic scale and in human history, and narratives of such religious entities and experiences as incarnations, avatars, divine love, justice, mercy and forgiveness, reincarnation, life after life, and more. Sometimes in sacred texts, God or the divine is depicted in highly anthropomorphic terms (God has a face and hands; e.g., Exodus 33: 20), while other times God is said to be inscrutable and beyond human knowing (e.g., Romans 11: 33–34). Unfortunately, or fortunately, these multifaceted religious visions face an immediate and potentially overwhelming challenge. Entertaining theological traditions from the inside may be of historical interest in understanding our ancestral past or as expanding our imagination, but, according to some philosophers, it involves entertaining what science has determined to be evident falsehoods.

Some prominent philosophers argue that modern science has discredited all such theological visions. Steven Pinker observes:

> To begin with, the findings of science entail that the belief systems of all the world's traditional religions and cultures—their theories of the origins of life,

> humans, and societies—are factually mistaken. We know, but our ancestors did not, that humans belong to a single species of African primate that developed agriculture, government, and writing late in its history. We know that our species is a tiny twig of a genealogical tree that embraces all living things and that emerged from prebiotic chemicals almost four billion years ago. . . . We know that the laws governing the physical world (including accidents, disease, and other misfortunes) have no goals that pertain to human well-being. There is no such thing as fate, providence, karma, spells, curses, augury, divine retribution, or answered prayer—though the discrepancy between the laws of probability and the workings of cognition may explain why people think there is.
>
> (Pinker 2013)

Pinker's challenge is borne out of a widespread assumption that the sciences provide us with a clear understanding of physical causation. What that leaves out involves the supposedly "non-physical," which presumably includes God, the soul, nirvana, and so on.

Let us consider this challenge full on. It is the ultimate external, outsider critique that would brand philosophical theology dead on arrival. This kind of external examination is pictured by Daniel Dennett as a medical operation that might have a good outcome:

> Yes, I want to put religion on the examination table. If it is fundamentally benign, as many of its devotees insist, it should emerge just fine; suspicions will be put to rest and we can then concentrate on the few peripheral pathologies that religion, like every other natural phenomenon, falls prey to. If it is not, the sooner we identify the problems clearly the better.
>
> (Dennett 2006, 39)

After his examination of theism, however, Dennett sees the philosopher's job more in terms of performing an autopsy than engaging in a life-saving operation. But is this a foregone conclusion? Are the major religious traditions akin to corpses, lifeless carcasses decaying within the various cultures of which they are a part? Or are they instead more like life-filled bodies, perhaps in need of some medical assistance now and again, but far from requiring embalming and burial? While we prefer the metaphor of examining religion in the context of a seminar room rather than thinking of religion as a patient or corpse placed on a table for examination, nevertheless these sorts of questions point to the heart of the current science/faith interchange. We intend to tackle them head-on.

The philosophers and the philosophical points of view to be treated in this chapter vary in terms of the magnitude of their claims. We will be looking at thinkers like Pinker who believe that religion can be dismissed, but he is more reluctant to do away with some things not directly treated as physical phenomena or at least not directly in the domain of the physical sciences. Ultimately our aim in this chapter

will be to argue for the primacy of philosophy—thoughts, ideas, concepts, reasoning—as something more basic than science and more friendly to philosophical theology. We believe that Quine's proposal to supplant philosophy is based on the mistaken view that his proposal is not philosophical. More on this later in the chapter.

We divide this chapter into three sections. The first lays out the challenge made on behalf of contemporary science. The second offers our response. We propose that reflection on contemporary science brings to light reasons why philosophical theology is of such great importance today. In the third section we consider what might be learned in this opening exchange about practicing philosophical theology with depth and insight. We also get prepared to confront in Chapter 2 the next challenge to philosophical theology.

A scientific case against philosophical theology?

The Judeo-Christian Bible and Christian councils, creeds, confessions and catechisms traditionally commence with God as the Creator of all that is. The opening words of the Old Testament, for example, succinctly state that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Apostles' Creed, widely used for liturgical and catechetical purposes throughout church history, begins with "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." And the Nicene/Constantinopolitan Creed, which emerged out of the ecumenical Councils of Nicea and Constantinople in 325 and 381 CE, respectively, and is taken by the vast majority of Christians to be a canon of orthodoxy, begins with the declaration: "I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible."

These proclamations of God as divine Creator starkly contrast with the contentions of many contemporary philosophers and scientists that advances in science have eliminated any role for divine action with respect to the natural world. In their work *The Grand Design*, for example, physicists Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow argue that the notion of a Creator of the universe is dispensable. "It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going." They go further: "Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist." When later pressed, Hawking elaborated on his view by stating that "One can't prove that God doesn't exist, but science makes God unnecessary" (Hawking 2010).

Similarly, Edward O. Wilson contends that religious belief emerged in prehistory as cooperative colonies of human beings dominated and multiplied, grounding their origination in creation myths that explain all they need about deep history in order to maintain tribal unity. Holding these religious beliefs, he maintains, offers benefits such as peace and stability in times of danger and assurances of divine favor and eternal life. These benefits, though, require submission and obeisance to God, which raise fundamental questions:

> Yet let us ask frankly, to whom is such obeisance really directed? Is it to an entity that may have no meaning within reach of the human mind—or may not even exist? Yes, perhaps it really is to God. But perhaps it is to no more than a tribe united by a creation myth. If the latter, religious faith is better interpreted as an unseen trap unavoidable during the biological history of our species. And if that is correct, surely there exist ways to find spiritual fulfillment without surrender and enslavement. Humankind deserves better.
>
> (Wilson 2012, 267)

He goes on to suggest that a better way forward is a new enlightenment in which creation myths and organized religion are replaced by a rationalist morality and the scientific reconstruction of religious belief as an evolutionary biological by-product.

For a number of contemporary philosophers and scientists, including Dennett, Hawking, and Wilson, science and scientific explanations have eliminated any need to posit an active role of a divine reality in the natural world. God is out of a job, as it were, and has been replaced by natural laws. Philosophical theology, on this account, turns out to be the study of a set of false constructs. The tendency by those who affirm such a view is to set up a trenchant dichotomy between naturalism and supernaturalism:

> Naturalism on any reading is opposed to supernaturalism . . . By "supernaturalism" I mean the invocation of an agent or force that somehow stands outside the familiar natural world and whose doings cannot be understood as part of it. Most metaphysical systems of the past included some such agent. A naturalistic conception of the world would be opposed to all of them . . . Most philosophers for at least one hundred years have been naturalist in the non-supernaturalist sense.
>
> (Stroud 2004, 23)

Once the dichotomy has been established, all alleged realities, claims about causation, and explanations on the side of the supernatural are taken to be false: "No entity or explanation should be accepted whose existence or truth would contradict the laws of nature, insofar as we know them" (De Caro and Voltolini 2010, 71). One of the common convictions that unites most of the thinkers referenced so far is that they are confident that we possess a clear understanding of what it is to be physical and of physical causation and explanations. The strategy is to affirm the common sense and scientifically well-grounded understanding of the physical and to contrast it with the supernatural. Naturalists in modern times have sought to restrict explanations of events to events within the cosmos, leaving to one side the prospects of looking outside the cosmos. The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume made a point that resonates with many such naturalists today. If science can explain all things within the cosmos in terms of different cosmic events, why look outside the cosmos for some additional explanation?

> But the *whole*, you say, wants a cause. I answer that the uniting of these parts into a whole . . . is performed merely by an arbitrary act of the mind, and has no influence on the nature of things. Did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable should you afterwards ask me what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the parts.
>
> (Hume 1998, part 9)

In our further exploration of a scientific case against philosophical theology, we consider five philosophers who contend that we have a clearer understanding of what is physical—and an understanding of the outcome of the physical sciences—than we do about experience (including sensory experience), consciousness, and so on. We consider the work of Gilbert Ryle, Paul Churchland, Daniel Dennett, Evan Fales, and Herman Philipse. The first three are cited for their general affirmation of the primacy of the physical over and against the realm of ideas, concepts, thought, and so forth. There is, in each of their claims, a privileging of the physical over and against the realm of mind and ideas. Fales and Philipse drive home a critique of theism and ideas of God that go beyond the physical.

The case of Gilbert Ryle

In the passage that follows, Ryle contrasts the common-sense understanding of the physical as a spatial, public world of causal interaction with the mysterious supposition that there may be something else, a mind, that is immaterial. While Ryle is not directly targeting theological traditions, traditions that hold that there is more than the material world would come in for a Rylean critique. We cite Ryle at length:

> Material objects are situated in a common field, known as "space," and what happens to one body in one part of space is mechanically connected with what happens to other bodies in other parts of space. But mental happenings occur in insulated fields, known as "minds," and there is, apart maybe from telepathy no direct causal connection between what happens in one mind and what happens in another. Only through the medium of the public physical world can the mind of one person make a difference to the mind of another. The mind is its own place and in his inner life each of us lives the life of a ghostly Robinson Crusoe. People can see, hear, and jolt one another's bodies, but they are irremediably blind and deaf to the workings of one another's mind and inoperative upon them . . .
>
> As thus represented, minds are not merely ghosts harnessed to machines, they are themselves just spectral machines. Though the human body is an engine, it is not quite an ordinary engine, since some of its working are governed by another engine inside it—this interior governor-engine being one of a very special sort. It is invisible, inaudible and it has no size or weight.

> It cannot be taken to bits and the laws it obeys are not those known to ordinary engineers. Nothing is known of how it governs the bodily engine.
> (Ryle 2009, 3)

The above is intended to target what in philosophy of mind is known as dualism, which we may roughly characterize as the view that in addition to our having bodies, we have or are souls, (that is, we possess nonphysical components or are fundamentally nonphysical individuals). If dualism is true (which Ryle vehemently argued against), the mind is invisible and its power to control the body is utterly enigmatic. This weightless, inaudible mind is, like Robinson Crusoe, compared to an isolated castaway whose communication with other people is akin to telepathy. If Ryle rightly rejects the idea that we are ghosts in a machine, should we also reject theism as positing a spectral, ghostly presence? Does "God" turn out to be completely inscrutable?

The case of Paul Churchland

In *Matter and Consciousness*, Paul Churchland asks us to imagine a neuroscientist at work. She is able to account for behavior in chemical terms, but then she wonders about whether anything more might be involved in the physical system she is studying. Arguably, there seems to be no role for anything beyond what is "unambiguously chemical or electrical":

> Put yourself in the shoes of a neuroscientist who is concerned to trace the origins of behavior back up the motor nerves to the active cells in the motor cortex of the cerebrum, and to trace in turn their activity into inputs from other parts of the brain, and from the various sensory nerves. She finds a thoroughly physical system of awesome structure and delicacy, and much intricate activity, all of it unambiguously chemical or electrical in nature, and she finds no hint at all of any nonphysical inputs. . . . What is she to think? From the standpoint of her researches, human behavior is exhaustively a function of the activity of the physical brain.
> (Churchland 1988, 11)

Like Ryle, Churchland seems put out that there should be anything more than the "awesome structure" of the physical constitution of persons.

The case of Daniel Dennett

Dennett's statement that follows more or less captures what many, but not all, self-described naturalists (like Quine) assume to be true.

> There is only one sort of stuff, namely matter—the physical stuff of physics, chemistry and physiology—and the mind is somehow nothing but a physical

> phenomenon. In short, the mind is the brain . . . we can (in principle!) account for every mental phenomenon using the same physical principles, laws, and raw materials that suffice to explain radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, and growth.
>
> (Dennett 1991, 33)

Dennett maintains that he does not rule out the role of subjectivity and the first-person perspective in which it may appear to a subject that she reaches certain conclusions based on her reasons and subjective experience. But in an article entitled "Who's on first," Dennett claims that the only proper way of understanding what is going on subjectively in persons is by making inferences based on what we externally observe others reporting from what he calls the third person point of view. This outlook presupposes that we can be more certain of what others say than of our own thinking, hearing, reasoning, feeling, interpreting, and so on. Here is an extensive passage in which Dennett advances his position as obvious and uncontroversial, but we suggest in the next section of this chapter that it is anything but:

> This third-person methodology, dubbed heterophenomenology (phenomenology of another not oneself), is, I have claimed, the sound way to take the first-person point of view as seriously as it can be taken. . . . Most of the method is so obvious and uncontroversial that some scientists are baffled that I would even call it a method: basically, you have to take the vocal sounds emanating from the subjects' mouths (and your own mouth) and interpret them! Well of course. What else could you do? Those sounds aren't just belches and moans; they're speech acts, reporting, questioning, correcting, requesting, and so forth. Using such standard speech acts, other events such as button-presses can be set up to be interpreted as speech acts as well, with highly specific meanings and fine temporal resolution. What this interpersonal communication enables you, the investigator, to do is to compose a catalogue of what the subject believes to be true about his or her conscious experience.
>
> (Dennett 2003, 1–2)

Dennett summarizes his philosophical orientation this way: "I declare my starting point to be the objective, materialist, third-person world of the physical sciences. This is the orthodox choice in the English-speaking philosophical world" (Dennett 1987, 5).

The case of Evan Fales

Fales contends that we have a clear concept of physical causation, but we have no idea about how God might be a causal agent. Fales comments on physical causation:

> I suggest that we have evidence—abundant evidence—that the only sources of energy are natural ones. Our evidence is just this: whenever we are able

> to balance the books on the energy (and momentum) of a physical system, and find an increase or decrease, and we look hard enough for a physical explanation of that increase or decrease, we find one. There is no case in which, given sufficient understanding of a system, we have failed to find such a physical explanation. Of course, such an explanation may be lacking for a time. There are famous cases—e.g., the deviations in the orbit of Uranus, and the apparent lack of energy conservation in meson decay—that challenged this understanding. In each such case, the books have ultimately been balanced by the discovery of a physical cause—here, Neptune and the neutrino, respectively.
>
> (Fales 2010, 16)

But while our grasp of physical causation is clear, our notion of how an incorporeal, nonphysical God acts is conceptually opaque.

> There does not seem to be any sense that could be given to the suggestion that charge (or energy, or momentum) is *transmitted* from God to the world. After all, it is not that God has *zero* charge (or energy, etc.); He has no physical attributes *at all*. His not possessing any electric charge does not entail, obviously, that He is electrically neutral, like a neutrino. (And, of course, the same goes for energy and momentum.) It appears, then, that there is *no* physical quantity, invariant or not, that can be transmitted from God to the world, or exchanged between God and the world.
>
> (Fales 2010, 26)

Fales contends that if philosophical theologians appeal to omnipotence and omniscience in an effort to fill out an account of the modus operandi of God, they are engaging in a kind of magic trick:

> The theologian's appeal to these features of the divine nature [God's omnipotence and omniscience] rather resembles the waving of a magician's wand. When a magician waves his wand with his right hand, we may reasonably wonder what, while our attention is momentarily distracted, he is doing with his left. Appeal to omnipotence and omniscience does not answer our question so much as it merely repeats it. How are we to understand divine omnipotence? How is it that God can do all the things He is understood to be able to do? Or, to put the question a bit differently: Omnipotence is a dispositional property. What categorical properties of God underwrite it, and how, exactly, do they do so?
>
> (Fales 2010, 3)

Fales presses his case against theism by exposing the emptiness of theistic explanations. He asks theists to identify the mechanisms or tools that God employs in creation. Fales offers this picture of the ostensible scientific inscrutability of theism:

> Can God cause things to happen in a spatiotemporal world inhabited by matter and (if not reducible to material processes) finite minds? If God can, then it is hard to see why, in principle, this could not be discovered by scientific investigation (by which I mean here simply properly careful and controlled empirical observations and suitable inferences there from). If God cannot, then it is hard to see why He would be of any religious significance at all. He would, after all, be both impotent and unknowable.
>
> (Fales 2010, 2)

The case of Herman Philipse

Philipse offers the following critique of theism from the standpoint of how we have a meaningful, materially based understanding of human agency but no idea about how such agency would be coherent in the context of the non-physical:

> How can one meaningfully say that God listens to our prayers, loves us, speaks to us, answers (or does not answer our supplications, etcetera), if God is also assumed to be an incorporeal being? For the stipulation that God is an incorporeal being annuls the very conditions for meaningfully applying psychological expressions to another entity, to wit, that this entity is able in principle to display forms of bodily behavior which resemble patterns of human behavior. In other words, the very attempt to give a meaning and a possible referent to the word "God" as used in theism must fail, because this attempt is incoherent.
>
> (Philipse 2012, 101–102)

Defending philosophical theology by first arguing for the primacy of philosophy rather than the physical sciences

We begin by making a broad point about the effort to subordinate philosophy itself to science. We propose that the claim by Quine and others that the physical or natural sciences can replace philosophy is self-refuting for two reasons.

First, the claim that the physical or natural sciences should be our primary starting point is itself a philosophical claim. It is not a claim that can be made within the practice of physics or biology or chemistry, for none of those domains themselves either study or produce findings about what may or may not be known about reality. For example, through physics we learn of sub-atomic particles, in chemistry we study atomic and molecular action, in biology we study photosynthesis, and so on. But if we claim that these ways of knowing about reality are the only or best methods for doing so, we are making claims *about* physics, chemistry, and biology from a perspective external to the disciplines. This is a *philosophical* claim about science, not a *scientific* claim about science. (If some term other than "philosophical" is preferred, such as "theoretical," it will function the same way as "philosophical.") In fact, Quine himself seems to concede that his position is a

philosophical one when he (regretfully) concedes that he has a philosophy of science: "Philosophy of science is philosophy enough" (Quine 1976, 151). We will press home this first point about the primacy of philosophy below as we look at Ryle and the others.

A second reason for rejecting the primacy of the sciences is that the practice of the sciences themselves involves philosophical commitments. Scientists are committed to a philosophy of theories, observations, confirmation, the use of models in explaining events, a philosophy of mathematics, logic, and so on. Consider, for example, a commitment to the uniformity of the laws of nature, the idea that the laws of nature do not differ from one galaxy to another and that such laws may be reliably assumed over time. We suggest this involves a host of philosophical positions about the use of reason and the natural world. As Roger Trigg has argued:

> Without a prior belief in the order of the world, it will always be impossible to judge whether science is built on actual regularities and real cosmic processes, or on a series of local coincidences, which give us a deceptive appearance of regularity and order.
>
> (Trigg 2003)

We next further advance our point about taking philosophy (and thinking, observing, conceiving, reasoning, etc.) as our primary starting point, which is better known than what philosophers refer to as a mind-independent world. And we propose that within philosophy and our exercise of philosophy, we are more certain about the nature of what might be called mental causation (where thoughts and thinking brings about other thoughts and thinking) than mind-independent physical causation.

Let's reconsider Ryle's confident endorsement of the clarity of our idea about the common spatial world. It is amusing that Ryle refers to the world of bodies as if he is pointing out something that has been overlooked: "Material objects are situated in a common field, known as 'space' " (2009, 23). But what is actually overlooked or not seen as important is that his statement only makes sense and has clarity if we have a clear, intelligible *concept* of material objects, the *concept* of space, and the *concept* of what makes some thing (a field) common. It is plausible to believe that our concepts or ideas of space and objects are derived from our experience of space and objects, but without our having the relevant concepts or ideas, Ryle's statement would not make sense to us. Moreover, our grasp of the nature of spatial objects can only be as clear and confident as the reliability of *our concepts and awareness of spatial objects*. And, on this point, we pause to offer a brief note on something puzzling in Ryle's portrait of space.

Looking more closely at Ryle's statement, it appears that he holds (or implies) that material objects are distinct from space; space seems to be the sort of place where one should place or find a material object. As far as we know, Ryle never (at least in print) advocated the existence of absolute space. If he did, though, this would make for an interesting test of his critique of the idea of there being a self

that is non-physical on the grounds that such a self is invisible, weightless, and inaudible, because absolute space is also invisible, weightless, and inaudible (in addition to being odourless, tasteless, without temperature, lacking in any causal power, and so on). Whether or not one accepts the theory of absolute space (the position of substantivalists) or a relational theory, and we grant that being spatial may be a *necessary* condition for being a material object, an argument would be needed to establish that this is a *sufficient* condition. Ryle never offered such an argument. An argument is needed because significant philosophers have historically and today contended that some spatial objects (our sensory visual field, for example) are not physical (G.E. Moore, H.H. Price).

Dreaming experiences provide a dramatic case in which we entertain visual, three-dimensional worlds that are not themselves identical to brain states. Neuroscientists today can correlate experiences of color, for example, in both dream states and when awake with neural activity in the visual cortex, but this is correlation (as well as causal interaction between brain activity and experiencing) and not identity. When dreaming about a yellow lion, there is no observable yellowness in the brain. (Modest note on the scope of our point: we are not here arguing for dualism, we are simply noting that there are reasons for thinking that there may be experiential three-dimensional visual images that are not identical with brain activity, and thus reasons for thinking that not all spatial objects are what Ryle, Dennett and others call "physical.")

Let us move on to Ryle's further thesis about our grasping causal relations among material bodies. Ryle notes that we are aware that "what happens to one body in one part of space is mechanically connected with what happens to other bodies in other parts of space" (Ryle 2009, 23). So we grasp that when, say, a baseball is thrown at a window at a certain speed, the window is likely to shatter. Churchland's neuroscientist seems to know about the motor cortex of the cerebrum and the role of active cells and various other inputs to bring about certain effects. But, they hold, in contrast to this knowledge of the physical world, we have very little idea about how the mental, conceived of as something non-spatial, has any causal role to play in explaining events.

Apart from noting the earlier observation that the mental may include spatial objects, the most important point to appreciate here is that *we could not know any of the above unless we can trust and rely on our thinking, believing, sensing, and conceiving of the relevant objects and relations at hand*. We can think about and observe the bodies around us with confidence only so long as we have confidence in (or are not actively doubting) our thinking and observing. We assume no one could have a clear grasp of matter in motion, laws, and physical signals without satisfying the appropriate, antecedent, conceptual, and cognitive conditions ("antecedent" in the conceptual sense in that without having the relevant concepts, one cannot understand or articulate any awareness of causal relata.)

So, the first point in this reply about physical causation is that our grasping physical causation rests on our having confidence in our having a reliable use of the relevant concepts, observations, experiences, and so on. We can only follow

Ryle's observations and conclusions if we can trust our concepts and reasoning about bodies, connections, events, space. We have a firmer handle on reasoning that *if the baseball shattered a window, then a window was shattered by a baseball* than we have a firm handle on the nature of glass and material projectiles.

This point may be amplified by reconsidering Churchland's neuroscientist. As noted earlier, Churchland raises the worry that if you can explain some human behavior only when taken to be "unambiguously chemical or electrical in nature," it doesn't include any sensations, beliefs, and the like, i.e., "the mental" . . . it seems that sensations, beliefs, and the like are idle or possibly irrelevant (2013, 18). Indeed, as Alvin Plantinga points out, if we examine and explain the human brain and human anatomy in general only in terms of the physical sciences, it appears not to involve any beliefs and propositional content:

> A single neuron (or quark, electron, atom, or whatever) presumably isn't a belief; but how can belief, content, arise from physical interaction among such material entities as neurons? How can such physical interaction bring it about that a group of neurons has content? We can examine this neuronal event as carefully as we please; we can measure the number of neurons it contains, their connections, their rates of fire, the strength of the electrical impulses involved, and the potential across the synapses, with as much precision as you could possibly desire; we can consider its electro-chemical, NP [neurophysiological] properties in the most exquisite detail; but nowhere, here, will we find so much as a hint of content. Indeed, none of this seems even vaguely *relevant* to its having content. None of this so much as slyly suggests that this bunch of neurons firing away is the belief that Proust is more subtle than Louis L'Amour, as opposed, e.g. to the belief Louis L'Amour is the most widely published author from Jamestown, North Dakota.
>
> (Plantinga and Tooley 2008, 54)

What are we to do if Plantinga is correct and Churchland's neuroscientist is able to explain human behavior in only chemical and electrical terms?

In response to Churchland, we suggest that the very last thing that should be doubted is whether the neuroscientist is thinking, seeing, observing, or feeling and that, as we debate Churchland's thesis, the reason why we reach certain conclusions rather than others is because of our beliefs and inferences. In other words, if we have abundant reason for thinking that a neuroscientist has come up with a powerful chemical and electrical account of human anatomy and behavior, we have even more abundant reason for believing that mental causation occurs. Without mental causation, we could not offer a reasonable account of why Churchland's work has led to the massive movement of molecules taking place as we type this sentence.

At the risk of repetition, we emphasize the point at issue: our grasp of physical causal relations rests on our having an antecedent, reliable means of *conceiving* one thing causing another and this, in turn, rests on our having a reliable means of

reasoning and *remembering*. When we think about acting and what causes what, we must rely on reasoning that, say, if we throw the baseball at that glass, it will shatter, unless we are mistaken and what I have is a softball and the glass has been hardened to a certain thickness, and so on. All such reasoning presupposes what we earlier referred to as "mental causation," a case in which some belief accounts for why we hold a different belief.

Churchland asks us to put ourselves in the shoes of a neuroscientist and he asks us to consider what we would do under such and such circumstances. All this involves a feat of imagination and drawing conclusions based on various beliefs. And this, we suggest, is a sign that what we need to be confident about is that some beliefs account for why we are to accept other beliefs. The difficulty of Churchland bypassing the mental and replacing it with the "unambiguously" physical is evident in some of his expressions as when he refers to the "awesome structure" of the brain. Being "awesome" certainly appears to be an explicit affective, subjective-mental response to something.

The inescapability of mental causation is evident in Dennett's credo, cited earlier, about what exists. Referring to Dennett's account of what there is, we reply that none of us are able to claim to know about "the physical stuff" of physics, chemistry and physiology or practice physics, chemistry and physiology unless we are capable of thinking, conceiving of hypotheses, making predictions, making observations and drawing conclusions. All of these activities, carried out by scientists and philosophers who are reflecting on the implications of science, involve mental causation. We cannot form a clear concept of the causal relata Dennett identifies unless we have an even clearer concept of the "mental phenomena" involved in scientific accounts, namely the concepts of "radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, and growth" and our concepts of inferential relations involving our concept of the laws of nature (Dennett 1991, 33).

As for Dennett's treatment of first-person experience, we suggest that it is baffling to think you could be more sure of what vocal sounds emanate from a subject than you can be sure of your subjective experience of hearing, seeing, thinking, interpreting. Taken to an extreme, Dennett would be committed to thinking that the best, scientific way of having self-awareness would be by listening to what others infer, based on their investigation, from the vocal noises emanating from our mouths. Or, as Dennett implies, one of us might listen to ourselves say "I feel tired" and then, upon investigation, interpret this noise as a speech act one of us probably undertook because one of us subjectively feels tired. Again, how might one of us be so sure we heard one of us say anything unless we trust each of our first-person experiences of listening, thinking, feeling, interpreting?

As an aside, Dennett's initial way of describing speech as "vocal sounds emanating from the subject's mouth" (2003, 1–2) seems bizarrely detached from any common sense, ordinary way of describing or interpreting what it is to speak or be in conversation. Speaking is an activity, not a matter of noises that simply emanate or that we find rising up within us. Dennett claims (in a no doubt

intentionally amusing observation) to recognize that speech is different from belches and moans, *but it is telling that he has to point this out to his readers*. Why would one need to make this point explicitly unless this depiction of speech and self-awareness was not dangerously close to confusing speaking with belching?

We propose that a more reasonable place to begin thinking about human nature and the world than that proposed by Quine, Ryle, Churchland and Dennett is with what we know is incontrovertible, namely that we have subjective first-person experiences and that we are thinking and acting persons. We write books and go to conferences, we eat, sleep, run, make love, etc., based on certain reasons, beliefs, desires, and so on. This is firmly made evident in all experience, much more evident than the findings of contemporary physics. This—with our first-person experience—is what we believe philosophers should assume as our starting-point.

Dennett seems to have boundless confidence in "the physical stuff of physics, chemistry, and physiology" and treats "the mind" and "mental phenomena" as second-class citizens, but, as noted above, physics, chemistry, and physiology are not possible without mental phenomena: experience, observation, concepts. We are not treating physics, etc. as "second-class citizens," but we are proposing that we cannot practice physics without prior confidence in the mental and mental causation (e.g. when scientists accept or reject theories for reasons, not to mention when scientists think individually and as part of the scientific community). As Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi note: "Science is performed by somebody; it is a specific theoretical stance toward the world . . . scientific objectivity is something we strive for but it rests on the observation of individuals" (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 41). And as Stan Klein observes:

> According subjectivity, at best, "second class citizenship" in the study of mind is particularly ironic in virtue of the fact that subjectivity is the very thing that makes the scientific pursuit of such knowledge (actually any knowledge) possible. Timing devices, neuroimaging technologies, electroencephalographs, and a host of modern means of obtaining objective knowledge about mind are useless absent an experiencing subject . . . To believe otherwise has the absurd consequence of rendering our knowledge of mind (or, more generally, reality) dependent in its entirety, on the provisions of an experiential conduit stipulated either to be unworthy of study or essentially nonexistent.
>
> (Klein 2015, 42–43)

We turn now to the cases of Fales and Philipse, who claim that we have a clear concept of physical causation but that we have no idea about how God might be a causal agent or play a causal role. First, contrary to Fales and others, we propose that we have greater awareness of the mental—our ideas, experiences, concepts—than we do of what might be extra-mental. Fales seems to acknowledge this when he describes our grasp of physical causation as a matter of our experience:

> For we have direct *experience* of pushes and pulls, of their vectorial characteristics, and, quite precisely, of the balance of forces. Our understanding of causation itself is, so I have elsewhere argued, dependent upon these experiences. But these experiences are the experiences of bodily interactions of embodied creatures. Insofar as we imagine God a disembodied being, we have no analogue in terms of which suitably to extend this notion. This is not to say that there could not be any such sort of causation. But it does mean that we have no ready conceptual access to what such a causal relationship could be; and in this respect, it is certainly not on a par with our understanding of physical interactions.
>
> (Fales 2010, 17)

We propose in reply that we lack any clear understanding of what it is to be physical or what counts as physical explanations, and so the thesis of causal closure (the idea that everything that occurs in the world is caused by physical objects in the world) is suspect from the get-go. It is important to note that it is not just philosophers or philosophical theologians such as us who claim that we lack a clear understanding of the physical. For example, according to a widely held view in quantum mechanics, the quantum realm consists of virtual particles that mysteriously fluctuate in and out of existence and of nonvisible strings and superstrings that vibrate in multiple dimensions of Hilbert space. Thus, in contemporary physics, the classical materialist notion of the world being made up of miniscule chunks of matter is long gone, and any adequate account of the physical world will be quite different from the old materialist view. Without a clear understanding of the nature of matter, it seems quite an overreach to claim to know what is meant by the terms "physical" or "physical causation" or what counts as a physical explanation or even the causal closure of the physical.

Second, in further considering the objections raised in section one, it is worth noting the peculiarity of Fales's first argument, which appears to have this form: if God cannot (or is not?) knowable or discernable scientifically, then God is impotent or unknowable. Imagine we conclude that we cannot know scientifically what Shakespeare meant in all his plays. Would it follow that the Bard is impotent? That seems doubtful. What about unknowable? Perhaps some non-scientific means are sufficient for us to have reasonable beliefs about what the Bard meant.

On Fales's demand that a proper theistic account needs to offer an account of how God acts, this again seems to be employing anthropomorphism or likening God to a being who is the subject of laws of nature as opposed to being their author. Rather than viewing God as very much like a human person but with supernatural, even infinite abilities, classical theists—Jewish, Christian, and Islamic—have affirmed a view of God that is radically non-anthropomorphic both with respect to the properties that God possesses and to the way in which they are possessed. According to this tradition, going all the way back to Gregory of Nyssa, God is believed to possess divine attributes in ways that are interconnected and interdependent:

> It is generally agreed that we are to believe that God not only possesses power, but also justice, goodness, wisdom, and everything else which suggests to the mind excellence. It follows then that, in that design of His which is before our notice, no one or other of the attributes of God should tend to be manifested in the history, while another is absent. For none of these lofty titles by itself alone and separated from the rest constitutes a virtue as a whole. Good is not truly good, if it is not associated with what is just, wise, and powerful . . . Nor is power regarded as a virtue, if it is separated from what is righteous and wise. For such a form of power is brutal and tyrannical. The same statement applies to the other attributes; if what is wise passes the bounds of what is just, or if what is just is accompanied by power and goodness, such instances would more properly be called vice.
>
> (Gregory of Nyssa 1917, 69)

On this traditional view, ardently defended by such Christian luminaries as Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas, God is devoid of physical or metaphysical composition. God has no parts or divisions. Thus Augustine notes that "as regards Himself, irrespective of relation to the other, each [member of the Trinity] is what He has; thus, He is in Himself living, for He has life, and is Himself the Life which He has" (Augustine 2015, 10). On this view God is thus quite unlike human persons, or to any created beings, and certainly not subject, as creatures are, to the laws of nature.

As noted earlier, Fales contends that if philosophical theologians appeal to certain divine attributes such as omnipotence in an attempt to account for divine action, they are engaging in a kind of magic trick. Yet Fales's characterization of omnipotence as a purely dispositional property in search of a categorical property is misleading at best, insofar as traditional theism sees God's powers (of knowledge and to bring about states of affairs) as basic, and not due to the causal powers of any intermediary. Does this make them obscure or empty? It is hard to see why when one can recognize conceptually explanations in terms of intentions or purposes by created persons that are not reducible to non-intentional and non-purposive explanations. For the sake of argument, let us concede that in actual fact, human beings' intentional agency can be reduced to the non-intentional. It still does not follow that such a reduction is necessarily the case so that (a) it could not be otherwise or (b) there could not be forms of intentional agency whose intentions are not reducible. Fales's analogy with magic therefore seems misguided. Theists do not sneak rabbits into hats. Rather, they address the very nature of what counts as an ultimate, unsurpassable great or excellent reality. To complain that such a reality or being needs to meet the standards of explanation that befit beings of less excellence seems wide of the mark.

Regarding the case of Philipse, from the quotation given above it may seem that he is a behaviorist, requiring a God who hears and responds to prayers to act in ways that are similar to the way we humans listen and respond to one another. However, he is not a behaviorist per se; rather, he is a non-reductive naturalist,

and he claims that mental concepts become unintelligible when entirely stripped from the physical context of human activities. In response, first, the point made above that without mental causation we could not provide a reasonable account of why we understand and interpret physical causation the way we do, applies here as well. Second, his claim might be bolstered if he accepted some form of behaviorism, but he does not. Given that there is no obvious conceptual necessity that all and only intentional beings must be physical (as we find in most forms of behaviorism), his critique seems weak.

As we conclude this section, let us return briefly to the opening claims about science and God. Hawking and others speculate about whether God is necessary or not. If we do not rule out God, we are faced with asking if explanations only of things in the cosmos are sufficient. Alexander Pruss and Richard Gale point out that the explanation of things within a system—like the cosmos—may not amount to an explanation of the whole.

An explanation of the parts may provide a partial but not a complete explanation. The explanation in terms of parts may fail to explain why these parts exist rather than others, why they exist rather than not, or why the parts are arranged as they are. Each member or part will be explained either in terms of itself or in terms of something else that is contingent. The former would make them necessary, not contingent, beings. If they are explained in terms of something else, they still remain unaccounted for, since the explanation would invoke either an infinite regress of causes or a circular explanation. Pruss and Gale employ the chicken/egg sequence: chickens account for eggs, which account for chickens, and so on where the two are paired (Gale and Pruss 2009). But appealing to an infinite chicken/egg regress or else arguing in a circle explains neither any given chicken nor egg.

William Rowe makes a related point:

> When the existence of each member of a collection is explained by reference to some other member *of that very same collection* then it does not follow that the collection itself has an explanation. For it is one thing for there to be an explanation of the existence of each dependent being and quite another thing for there to be an explanation of why there are dependent beings at all.
>
> (Rowe 1975, 264–265)

A theist would claim that God is the final explanation of the universe; in fact, that God is an elegant and fruitful final explanation. Necessary and self-existent rather than a contingent being, God depends on nothing but Godself, and God's nonexistence is absolutely impossible. No other entity is relevant to God's coming into existence or ceasing to be because, as a necessary being, God has always been and will always be. God is thus the noncontingent originating cause of what brought about both chicken and egg—and every other contingent thing. As a final explanation, it is elegant in that from the nature of this simple, deep, unified notion, not only the existence of the universe but also its beauty, simplicity, broad consistency, and rational structure can be understood and analyzed. And it is fruitful

in that it provides a needed point of departure for explaining the rational structure of the natural world and the human endeavor to actually understand it.

To summarize, in this section we have argued that (a) the case for supplanting and subordinating philosophy to science is unsuccessful; (b) the critique of philosophical theology in the name of the primary place of the physical sciences is also unsuccessful; and (c) a full explanation of the cosmos may be inadequate without positing the necessary as well as the contingent; it may well need to include something akin to the God of theism.

Insights on science and religion from philosophical theology

So what might be learned from this exchange about practicing philosophical theology in the light of contemporary philosophy, theology, and science? Five points stand out.

First, there are important self-imposed limits to science. As currently understood and practiced, the findings of sciences do not entail the view that no significant aspects of reality stand beyond the reach of science. In fact, this is not even a scientific issue but a philosophical one. As noted earlier, to maintain that the only reason to think that something is true is that there is scientific evidence for it is a self-refuting position. (The claim that one should only believe something on the basis of scientific evidence is not itself based on scientific evidence.) There is danger in ignoring what science reveals, but there is equal danger in ignoring or denying the limits of science and of believing that science can tell us all that there is.

Also, as we explained above, the very practice of science entails certain philosophical commitments, including the various elements that make up the scientific method and the nature of the scientific enterprise itself. It includes certain assumptions and excludes others. Such self-imposed limits are helpful and even necessary for delimiting what is and is not science and for including chemistry, physics, and biology as legitimate branches of science while denying, say, alchemy and astrology.

Second, and related to the first, one should reject the primacy of the sciences and begin with philosophy as the sciences themselves involve a number of philosophical assumptions and commitments. Doing so opens up broader possibilities for what there is. For example, as we attempted to demonstrate philosophically, understanding physical causation depends on our having confidence in or having a reliable use of the relevant mental categories such as concepts, observations, and experiences and the relevant mental causal relations. Without mental causation we could not provide a reasonable account of why we understand and interpret physical causation the way we do.

Third, while some prominent philosophers have argued that modern science has discredited the multifaceted theological visions, this is clearly false. It does not follow from the sciences that religious belief is irrational or indefensible. Science, given its own self-imposed limits, cannot render religious belief false or obsolete,

for such a task is beyond the purview of the sciences. It can, though, sometimes provide criticism of religious belief. Thus there can be real value to affirming the interdependence of faith and criticism, scientific or otherwise. As Basil Mitchell insightfully noted, "Without faith in an established tradition, criticism has nothing to fasten on; without criticism the tradition ceases in the end to have any purchase on reality" (Mitchell 1994, 88). This is the approach we are taking in this book. We are in no way devaluing or deprecating science. To the contrary, science is an incredibly valuable intellectual and practical activity for understanding our world. But our point is that it is not the only valuable activity.

Fourth, on most forms of theism there are elements of reality that are not scientifically discernable, but this poses no threat to science and does not ipso facto lead to a science/faith conflict. The laws of modern science do indeed inform us about much of the natural world. Experimental science, which utilizes careful observation, concise measurement, and repeatable experimentation, does demonstrate that physical objects obey a set of general laws and thus generally behave in predictable ways. Through experimental and observation science we have learned much about the movements of celestial bodies in our own solar system and far beyond, the evolution and genetic makeup of organisms, changes in the statistical distribution of weather patterns, and a great deal more. Modern science is without question providing us vast information about the material world, and it does this without bringing into the experimental apparatus any consideration of purpose, value, or God. But from this it does not follow that this is all there is; it does not follow that there is no purpose, value, or God.

Lastly, philosophical theology proffers resources for confidence in the very practice of science. Perhaps most significantly, it provides an account for why our thoughts and concepts about the external world connect with that world. Without something akin to God as an ultimate explanation of the cosmos, something endowed with a grand conscious mind having intentions, purpose and goals intrinsic to it, it is difficult to see why human minds would have developed to have thoughts and concepts which accurately connect to that world, especially with respect to such seemingly superfluous matters (from an evolutionary perspective) as musical intervals, abstract mathematical formulas, and the like. As we move through the next chapters of this book, parsing out what we mean by God and the activities of God, we will examine further resources for understanding the complex world in which we find ourselves.

As we have seen in this chapter, modern science has not ushered in the demise of philosophical theology. While for some philosophers and scientists the practice of modern science has made the notions of God or divine action unnecessary posits or false constructs of "supernaturalism," this is not a scientific conclusion. It is a philosophical one, and one that seems not at all obvious. Instead, the self-imposed restrictions of science itself provide reasons for rejecting scientific reductionism and for allowing for the existence of realities that are beyond the purview of the hard sciences. In the next chapter we will grapple with several significant religious challenges to the coherence and usefulness of philosophical theology.

Further reflections

Consider these two additional cases of when philosophers seem to assume that we have a greater grasp of what is physical than we have of what is mental:

The case of Jaegwon Kim

Here is Kim's assessment of the clarity of the material and the complete mystery of the immaterial:

> It simply does not seem credible that an immaterial substance with no material characteristics and totally outside physical space, could causally influence and be influenced by, the motions of material bodies that are strictly governed by physical law. Just try to imagine how something that isn't anywhere in physical space could alter in the slightest degree the trajectory of even a single material particle in motion.
>
> (Kim 1996, 4)

The case of Elliot Sober

Sober's position is in the same spirit as Kim's:

> If the mind is immaterial, then it does not take up space. But if it lacks spatial location, how can it be causally connected to the body? When two events are causally connected, we normally expect there to be a physical signal that passes from one to the other. How can a physical signal emerge from or lead to the mind if the mind is no place at all?
>
> (Sober 2000, 24)

What are some reasons for affirming or rejecting the following argument by Timothy O'Connor?

> If our universe truly is contingent, the obtaining of certain fundamental facts or other will be unexplained without empirical theory, whatever the topological structure of contingent reality. An infinite regress of beings in or outside the spatiotemporal universe cannot forestall such a result. If there is to be an ultimate, or complete, explanation, it will have to ground in some way the most fundamental, contingent facts of the universe in a necessary being, something which has the reason for its existence within its own nature. It bears emphasis that such an unconditional explanation need not in any way compete with conditional, empirical explanations. Indeed, it is natural to suppose that empirical explanations will be subsumed within the larger structure of the complete explanation.
>
> (O'Connor 2008, 76)

Arthur Peacocke, himself a theist, makes the following claim:

> What characterises science is a method that is manifestly capable of producing reliable public knowledge about the natural world, sufficient for prediction and control and for producing coherent, comprehensive, conceptual interpretations of that world. The mere existence of such a method and of such a corpus of reliable knowledge resulting from it is a challenge to traditional religious attitude.
>
> (Peacocke 2001, 16)

What challenges to traditional religious attitude follow from this method?

Keith Ward argues that there are no knock-down proofs for God nor are there knock-down proofs for materialism or atheism. He then says the following:

> As Blaise Pascal said, "The heart has its reasons, of which reason is unaware." God is not known by reason, though reason has an important part to play in constructing human ideas about God. God is known by the heart, by a passionate commitment to the ultimate authenticity of a specific sort of human awareness of truth. Materialism is also known by the heart, in just the same way. But, for the theist, it is God who is believed to grasp the heart and unite it to the Divine in such a way that to deny divine reality becomes a betrayal of the deepest commitment there could be.
>
> (Ward 2008, 226–227)

Do you agree with Ward? Does this view entail fideism (the view that religious faith does not need to rely on reason for justification)?

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2

MYSTERY AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

> He has no name, no dwelling-place, no caste;
> He has no shape, or color, or outer limits.
> He is the Primal Being, Gracious and Benign,
> Unborn, ever Perfect, Eternal.
> (Hymns of Guru Gobind Singh, nam tham, seventeenth century)

In the first chapter we considered the charge that modern science, especially the natural or physical sciences, has demonstrated that the contents of philosophical theology are unacceptable. For some of the philosophers and scientists in Chapter 1, "God" is too mysterious or too transcendent to be the object of philosophical concern. In reply, we argued that the practice of science itself gives us very good reason to resist proposals of reduction and elimination that would sweep away many of the things that we appear to know experientially. We also argued that our very concept of what is physical is problematic and incomplete, and thus it does not undermine theism and other concepts of God. And at the end of the chapter we suggested that philosophical theology may have resources to bolster and offer a foundation for the confidence that we have in science.

If philosophical theology is not swept away with an appeal to the physical sciences, there is, nevertheless, a substantial religious challenge to face that we need to address. What if there is a God or some divine reality, but this reality is so awesome, so beyond our abilities to describe, picture or imagine, that philosophical theology is fruitless? Hasn't human language evolved to help us survive in our world of space and time? Using human language to describe gods like Zeus is not a problem, because such concepts of god and gods are concepts of super-human beings. The gods have bodies and are finite in power and knowledge (as well as flawed, like we are, with lust, jealousy, envy). But once we come to envision the God of the great monotheistic traditions, matters shift. If God or the divine is not

in space and time, won't we wind up inevitably distorting our very idea of God? From the standpoint of some religious thinkers, for philosophers to come up with theories of divine attributes reflects human pride or arrogance. Don't such accounts put "God" in a box? Gregory of Nyssa (1917) once observed: "Concepts create idols; only wonder comprehends anything. People kill one another over idols. Wonder makes us fall to our knees."

Many of the religious mystics have been wary to identify our thoughts or our words with the divine. Simone Weil went so far as to say that there is "nothing" in her thoughts that resembles God. In fact, in the sacred texts across the traditions, God is said to be beyond our comprehension:

> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
>
> (Isaiah 55: 8–9)

> O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
>
> (Romans 11: 33–34)

> No vision can grasp Him [God, Allah], but His grasp is over all vision. He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things.
>
> (Qur'an 6: 103)

> The Supreme Lord God is Infinite and Divine; He is Inaccessible, Incomprehensible, Invisible and Inscrutable.
>
> (Guru Granth Sahib, sacred text of Sikhism)

> Now, therefore, the instruction [about Brahman]: Neti, neti—Not this, not this [i.e., the nature of Brahman is inexpressible].
>
> (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.3.6)

If divine reality is inscrutable, as the great theistic texts and theologians have often affirmed, then clearly we will be unable to attain a comprehensive understanding of God and the ways of God. But does it follow that, from the inside of a theistic religious perspective, philosophical talk of God is inappropriate or impossible? The sixth-century theologian Pseudo-Dionysius seemed to think so when he wrote that

> [t]he inscrutable One is out of the reach of every rational process. Nor can any words come up to the inexpressible Good, this One, this Source of all unity, this supra-existent Being. Mind beyond mind, word beyond speech, it is gathered up by no discourse, by no intuition, by no name.
>
> (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 50)

The Cloud of Unknowing, the fourteenth-century Christian classic by an anonymous English mystic, is in agreement when it says that all thoughts and concepts of God should be buried beneath a "cloud of forgetting" while our love of God should rise up into a "cloud of unknowing." Theology that stresses the unknowability of God is often referred to as *apophatic* (or *negative*) *theology*. But must all discourse of the divine be by way of negation? Is it impossible to talk about God? Is philosophical theology a contradiction in terms? While we have sympathies for the apophatic theological tradition, we also take to heart the words of the Apostle Paul: "I believed, and so I spoke" (2 Corinthians 4: 13). And we affirm the value of Anselm's motto, *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding"), taken not to mean that theological understanding must be based on an irrational intellectual leap, but rather to mean an active trust that is seeking a deeper understanding of God and the ways of God. This is a faith that is open to critique and criticism, and open to rethinking and reimagining as is intellectually warranted.

In this chapter, then, we consider four religiously and conceptually oriented objections to philosophical theology. We begin with some general observations involving the philosophy of language.

The scope and limits of human language

Let's note only briefly some obvious ways in which human language is limited. The power of language will rest on the experience and conceptual powers of the language-users. It may be that if one is blind, one might master all kinds of color terms and yet not know what it is like to see blue. No amount of talking, reading or writing will convey facts about sensory color experiences themselves. Also, while there is an aboriginal belief that to speak of something is to evoke it (one can see this in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter fiction series in which saying the name of "he-who-shall-not-be-named" will bring him present), we ordinarily do not think that using referents like "dog" will produce an actual canine in the flesh.

There is also a trivial sense in which all the language we use is human insofar as it is being used by human beings. This does not mean, of course, that human beings cannot refer to nonhuman things. Philosophers sometimes employ what is called the use/mention distinction. When we *mention* a word, we refer to the word, and in doing so in writing we typically use italics or quotes to do so. But when *using* the word we do not use such devices. Thus, the "Sun" contains three letters, whereas the Sun is over 92 million miles from Earth. Moreover, some forms of communication with nonhuman animals (with such highly developed animals as dolphins) provide some evidence that we are not hopelessly stuck in an anthropocentric mind-set.

Philosophers have classified many of the uses of language. Some of the relevant distinctions involve using terms descriptively or by way of direct reference. So, we might say "The tallest spy in Europe is over four feet" without having any acquaintance with anyone in espionage. This use of language is reference by description,

whereas if we pointed out to you a fellow in a trench coat and we said, "that man is a spy" we are referencing the person by acquaintance. It is also worth noting three forms of definitions: a *reportive* definition of a term is determined by common usage; a *stipulative* definition of a term is determined by the speaker or writer (e.g. let us use the term "eco-theology" to refer to theological claims involving the environment); and *ostensive* definitions. The latter, derived from the Latin *ostendere* meaning "to show," are definitions that are fixed by examples, or, as it were, pointing out objects or events, e.g. by the color green, I mean [pointing to a lime]. Philosophers name a fourth form that a definition may take: a *persuasive* definition. This occurs when someone offers a definition that is designed to persuade us to take a (usually controversial) evaluation of a matter as when a philosopher might define "supernatural" in a way that is designed to make users of the term think that the supernatural is equivalent to something superstitious. This is hinted at in the 2006 *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (Blackwell) when the entry for "Supernatural" specifies that nothing supernatural can be disclosed or discovered by anyone at all:

> If scientists or non-scientists discover a new type of wave, a new force, a strange phenomenon in a remote galaxy, the very fact that it was there to be discovered makes it a natural phenomenon which may in due course be described in science textbooks. Supernatural beings run no risk of having their existence disclosed by scientific or everyday observation.
>
> (Mautner 1996, 416)

It is doubtful that anyone using the term "supernatural" positively in English would accept this definition. C.S. Lewis, for example, using twentieth-century English, described God as supernatural and yet disclosed to and in human experience (see, for example, *Miracles*). Because of the ostensibly pejorative usage of "supernatural" (as well as the odd implication of the definition to the effect that if something is disclosed or discovered it will be recorded in a science textbook), we use in this book the term "theism" and its cognates to refer to the God of Abrahamic theological traditions rather than "supernatural."

When it comes to language used about the divine, philosophers often distinguish between the literal (or univocal), the analogical, and the equivocal. So, it seems to be literal when the word "knowledge" is used in saying "God knows your thoughts" and "You know what you are thinking." The same general meaning of "knowledge" may be in play even if the way God knows your thoughts is (presumably) different from the way you know what you are thinking.[1] Analogical language involves some presumed similarities between referents. So, the expression "Alex is a prince among men" is analogical insofar as Alex is thought of as deserving our respect and attention. Language is used equivocally when the term has two meanings as in the use of the word "bark": "Look at the bark on the tree" and "I thought the dog would bark when it saw that rodent."

Relatedly, it is also important to note the distinction between symbols and pictures. In the religious traditions, images and concepts used of God or the divine

are often meant to be symbols rather than pictorial representations. It amazes us how often this is lost on both theoreticians and practitioners of religion. In the Bible, for example, God is sometimes described in anthropomorphic terms. Thus, Psalm 34: 15 says that "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to his cry." And Psalm 119: 73 says this, in reference to God's creation of the Psalmist: "Your hands made me and formed me." It would be a mistake to take these images as pictures of God, thus viewing God as a human-like being with literal eyes and ears and hands. Rather, they are meant to be symbols representing the care and attentiveness of the Creator toward the creation.

Could it be that our language, as well as our concepts and experience, are too terrestrial to be used of God or the divine? Perhaps our language and experience are oriented toward things in the world (or cosmos) and unfit to be used to address a being or reality that is beyond the world. In particular, maybe religious language is a form of discourse that has no basis in actual human experience, or is not testable by experience. David Hume thought that such discourse should be "committed to the flames" (Hume 2002, §12.3). Before we conclude that the discourse of philosophical theology should be so committed, we will consider and rebut four arguments made in favor of consigning it to the flames.

The divine nature argument

Some philosophers reason that if God is the Creator of all beings, then God is not a kind of being as in one being among others. This seems to lead us to think God is beyond any kind of meaningful classification. Consider Herbert McCabe's thesis:

> God must be incomprehensible to us precisely because he is Creator of all that is and, as Aquinas puts it, outside the order of all beings. God therefore cannot be classified as any kind of being. God cannot be compared to or contrasted with other things in respect of what they are like as dogs can be compared and contrasted with cats and both of them with stones or stars. God is not an inhabitant of the universe; he is the reason why there is a universe at all. God is in everything holding it constantly in existence but he is not located anywhere, nor is what it is to be God located anywhere in logical space. When you have finished classifying and counting all the things in the universe you cannot add: "And also there is God." When you have finished classifying and counting everything in the universe you have finished, period. There is no God in the world.
>
> (McCabe 2002, 37)

Some philosophers suggest that what McCabe and others have done is expose a tremendous flaw in the current debate over atheism. Many atheists seem to treat God as if God were an object that one might put on one's list of "Things that exist." So, could it be that the difference between an atheist and a theist is that they both agree to this list of things that exist:

- Atomic and subatomic particles
- Animals
- Plants
- Minerals
- Humans
- Stars
- Galaxies, etc.

But the theist adds: God.

The atheist does not agree that there is such a thing as God, of course. She maintains that there is no God, whereas an agnostic is not sure if there is a thing referred to as God. However, this understanding of God as yet another thing seems to radically underestimate the nature of God. If God were like the other items on the list, wouldn't we have a problem with overcrowding? One of the apparent features of objects in the world is that they have exclusive spatial location. Your table and your dog cannot occupy the same space at the same time. If God were a spatial object, it seems there would be few places God could be, and if God is non-spatial, how might God be anywhere? On the other hand, if God is spatial, then God would be everywhere and everything. Such a view seems to entail either pantheism or incoherence.

Reply: While we agree with the spirit of McCabe's concern not to treat God as simply one of a kind, we believe he goes too far in securing God's distinction from, to use his examples, cats, stones, and stars. In fact, there are various religious texts in which God is described (analogically) as a lion, as a great, firm, unmovable rock, or as the sun. It seems to us that "from the inside" of the theological traditions that McCabe represents—he is a Roman Catholic theologian—there is a more capacious affirmation of the many images and analogies that may be used to refer to God. To contend that God is outside "the order of being" makes sense if the claim is that God is not a created being. If the claim is that God is beyond or outside being (or existence), however, it seems that this is to claim that there is no God. Some philosophers (such as Alexius Meinong) have speculated that there might be a middle term between existence and nonexistence, but this has not met with wide assent for the (obvious?) reason that to claim that something is no-thing seems very close to claiming that something is nothing. If God is believed to be the reason why there is any universe at all, then presumably God must be thought to be real. We suggest that McCabe's language cannot itself be literal, for he writes that "God must be incomprehensible to us precisely because he is Creator of all that is" (2002, 37) but if God is truly completely incomprehensible, then it seems that we cannot comprehend that God "is Creator of all that is." McCabe claims that God does not exist anywhere, but in classical Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God is said to be everywhere or omnipresent. Because God is incorporeal—some use terms like *immaterial* or *spirit*—God is not everywhere as a material object or field. God does not compete for locations, so that God cannot co-exist with solid material objects. (More on what it might mean for God to be omnipresent in the next section.)

We are concerned about the claim that God is not "located anywhere in logical space." Conventionally, "logic" refers to claims about identity—everything is what it is—and non-contradiction—if something is *X* it is not non-*X*. If the concept of God does not adhere to logic, then it seems that the concept of God has become nonsensical. If the law of non-contradiction does not hold, then to claim that "God is merciful" does not rule out "God is not merciful." Of course, an apparent contradiction can sometimes be used to advance some non-contradictory different point. When someone reports that "sometimes boys are not boys," what is likely meant is that "young males do not always act as it is often supposed that young males act." What guides us to interpret "sometimes boys are not boys" to this other meaning is the fact that outright contradictions are necessarily false.

We suggest that the scriptural claims about God's being inscrutable or beyond our knowing are not claims to the effect that nothing of any kind can be thought or known about God. For example, in Isaiah 55—"For my thoughts are not your thoughts . . . "—God is still referred to as having thoughts. This may be a plausible case of when a distinction needs to be made between *res significata* (thoughts may truly be attributed to God and humans) and the *modus significandi* (the way or mode of God's thoughts differ profoundly in magnitude, depth, endurance, etc, from human thoughts).

Let us consider three additional challenges to philosophical theology based on the concept of God.

The boundary of space and time

Some religions think of God or the divine as non-spatial and non-temporal. Roger Scruton argues that if God is outside of space and time, then God is beyond our capacity to describe. Because Scruton believes that causation (from our point of view) is thoroughly spatio-temporal, he proposes further that God cannot be thought of as interacting causally in human history. "We cannot . . . reason beyond the limits of our own point of view, which is circumscribed by the law of causality, and by the forms of space and time" (Scruton 2014, 24). Some religious believers contend that God or the divine may guide us into recognizing God in some divine self-disclosure. In fact, as we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, there is a significant body of claims that God is shown to persons in religious experiences. If reliable, this would count as a direct awareness of God by ostension or showing (the fourteenth-century mystic, Julian of Norwich, records 16 "showings" to her of God). But Scruton thinks these showings cannot involve God's causal interaction with the world, for that would require God to be spatial and temporal. Because God cannot draw persons to recognize the divine, the explanation for why persons come to believe in God must be in causes that are biological, sociological, psychological, and so on.

> If God is a transcendent being, who lies outside the space-time continuum, then it is a deep, perhaps even a necessary truth that God has no causal role

> to play in the beliefs that target him—or in any other event in space and time . . . Monotheists are constrained by their own theology to accept that the causal explanation of their belief in God can make no reference to the God in whom they believe. That this belief must be explained in terms of biological, social, or cultural processes is a truth contained in the belief itself.
>
> (Scruton 2014, 9)

Reply: Part of the problem in assessing this position is that we currently do not have consensus on the nature of space. We do not, for example, know whether space is unified; that is, we do not know whether there may be different spatial worlds that exist simultaneously and whether they may or may not causally interact. We may readily describe abstractly what it would be like for there to be two spatial worlds: imagine that there is one world, call it *our world*, in which there are spatial objects all some distance from each other. Then imagine a distinct world, called *Narnia*, which also consists of spatial objects that are some distance from each other, but none of these in any spatial distance from the objects in our world. It seems that we can coherently describe both worlds in which there is only occasional causal interaction between the worlds.

There also seem to be "objects" such as smells, tastes, heat, and so on, that have some experiential space, but are not the same thing as mind-independent spatial objects. The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead makes this observation:

> Bodies are perceived as with qualities which in reality do not belong to them, qualities which in fact are purely the offsprings of the mind. Thus nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves; the rose for its scent; the nightingale for its song; and the sun for its radiance . . . Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless, merely the hurry of material, endless . . .
>
> (Whitehead 1925, 68–69)

Whitehead may be overplaying his position here, but his point seems plausible: that while odors, sounds, and the perceptible glow caused by the Sun are experienced as infused with our interaction with the world around us, they are very much dependent upon our minds and bodily organs. To cite Berkeley's famous thought experiment, "If a tree falls in the forest when no one is present, does it make a sound?" If there is no creature with any listening capacity in the region, there would be no sound as in *auditions* or *auditory sensations*. The sound waves would be there, but they would not make a noise in the absence of ears or other organs that enable sound to be heard. In any event, in our experience of the world, sounds do appear to us as inhabiting our world spatially. You hear thunder in some regions of space, but not others. Our point is that our spatial world, as experienced, seems suffused with mind-dependent sensory fields. If there is a divine mind that knows the cosmos, this might be understood in terms of God's maximal,

perfect grasp of all mental and all non-mental spatial and non-spatial aspects of reality.

This leads us to suggest that the concept of space is not well developed as a region that is impervious to human or divine minds, and to say, therefore, that the appeal to space is unsuccessful in arguing that God cannot causally interact with and in the cosmos. What about time and the timeless?

We suggest that the concept of time and the timeless is also not well enough defined to equip us to deny that God can causally interact with the cosmos, and thus be known in experience. Time may be thought of in terms of events or instants. According to this view, an instant is like a point in space; it has no temporal extension and takes up no time. An instant so understood is not long enough for any of us to have a thought or feeling. It is in fact shorter than the most powerful device we currently have to measure time, the cesium atomic clock, which can discern 9 billion vibrations during one astronomical second. We therefore treat instants as the boundaries of events. Events can be of any duration: this second, this hour, this decade, this century, and so on. Our intentional causal interactions all take place in the context of events. Instants come into play as they mark the boundary—the beginning or end of an event, for example—of or between or amid events. As such, our own causal interaction takes place on a level that is not tied down, strictly, to a firm time-scale. (See the passage from A.E. Taylor in the further reflections at the end of this chapter.)

We will engage the topic of eternity in Chapter 5, but for now we note that our current concepts of space or time do not seem to rule out God causing events or our experiencing God. As we will have reason to note later, not all those in the theological traditions have the same view of God's relationship to time. For some, God is temporal but in a different kind of time than ours.

By way of one more reply to Scruton as well as McCabe, we note that philosophers who defend religious experience as a mode of contact between God and creatures, defend the idea that God (as with other realities independent of ourselves) is experienced as not part of us (we are not a part of God) but as not wholly external to us (viz. there is some mediated contact with the object of our experiences). In *A Realist Conception of Truth*, William Alston observes:

> The real, independently existing world, the nature of which makes our statements true or false, is one with which we are in contact already through our experiences, thought and discourse. The constituents of the world—people, trees, animals, buildings, oceans, galaxies, God—are things we perceive or otherwise experience, think about and talk about. They are not wholly external to us and our cognitive and linguistic doings, though they don't depend (for the most part) on those doings for what they are.
>
> (Alston 1996, 148)

We return to the topic of religious experience in the next two chapters (as well as in others).

An argument from concepts and control

A third worry to be considered here is that in developing a philosophical theology of God we inevitably treat God as an object of control. Perhaps this is most evident when philosophers have sought to defend different accounts of God's power. Almost inevitably, philosophers (historically and today) make claims that this or that act is impossible for God. A list of such acts often includes: God cannot make a square circle, change the past (once it has occurred), create free creatures God cannot control, God cannot know what it is like to be ignorant, God cannot commit suicide, and so on. In multiple scriptural verses it is declared that nothing is impossible for God (Matthew 9: 26; Luke 1: 37). Moreover, in many strands of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God is said to be sovereign. Could it be that philosophical theology makes "logic" sovereign over God?

Reply: Our response is brief. We believe that this objection rests on a mistake. "Logic," in the strict sense of the word, is not a thing. Logic refers to the law of identity and noncontradiction (referenced earlier), but it is not a law like a physical law. Both laws simply state necessary conditions for anything intelligible in terms of language and thought. If it is true that something is *X*, then it is true that something is *X*. It is such a basic matter that the laws of identity and noncontradiction cannot be denied without being assumed. That is, the statement "the law of identity is false" would make no sense if it did not mean "the law of identity is false." It would also make no sense if it could be true that the law of identity is true and false at the same time. So, the very idea that logic can be a thing that menaces persons, God or gods is a conceptual confusion.

Second, when we examine the cases of what is impossible for God to do, we can see them as not really tasks, but as contradictory states of affairs. So, the claim that "God cannot commit suicide" amounts to the claim that "A necessarily existing being, for whom non-existence is not possible, cannot cease to be," which is simply unpacking conceptually God's nature. The idea that God could bring about God's non-existence would be the idea that a necessarily existing being is not a necessarily existing being.

At the risk of repetition, a contradictory claim amounts to nothing, for it advances and then withdraws a claim. The claim "Margaret is Canadian, but she is not Canadian" says nothing unless (like the claim that boys are not always boys) we are able to find some ambiguity or vagueness in the terms "Canadian" "Margaret" or the use of the copula (to be). Similarly, it makes no sense to complain that "God cannot do X" when X is something that conceptually is ruled out by God's very nature, e.g. it cannot be a defect of God's power if God cannot make it the case that there never has been, is, or will be God.

An argument from religious forms of life

A fourth and final concern of philosophical theology that we will address in this chapter is the claim that if we really take seriously religious forms of life, the practical

life of prayer and meditation, we seem to be in a realm in which philosophical arguments and positions about whether God exists are inappropriate. Howard Wettstein (2014) takes up this position. "My thought is . . . that 'existence' is . . . the wrong idea for God." Wettstein observes:

> My relation to God has come to be a pillar of my life, in prayer, in experience of the wonders and the awfulness of our world. And concepts like the supernatural and transcendence have application here. But (speaking in a theoretical mode) I understand such terms as directing attention to the sublime rather than referring to some nonphysical domain. To see God as existing in such a domain is to speak as if he had substance, just not a natural or physical substance. As if he were composed of the stuff of spirit, as are, perhaps, human souls. Such talk is unintelligible to me. I don't get it.
>
> (Wettstein 2014)

Interestingly, Wettstein is reluctant to describe himself as an atheist. "The theism-atheism-agnosticism trio presumes that the real question is whether God exists. I'm suggesting that the real question is otherwise and that I don't see my outlook in terms of that trio" (Wettstein 2014). Wettstein takes the position that religious practice such as prayer is something intelligible, though philosophical theories about God are not.

> Religious life, at least as it is for me, does not involve anything like a well-defined, or even something on the way to becoming a well-defined concept of God, a concept of that kind that a philosopher could live with. What is fundamental is no such thing, but rather the experience of God, for example in prayer or in life's stunning moments. Prayer, when it works, yields an awe-infused sense of having made contact, or almost having done so.
>
> (Wettstein 2014)

He compares his approach to religion to the way that mathematicians approach numbers:

> I do not reject the metaphysical project as wrongheaded; I argue that religious life is viable in the absence of settled metaphysical beliefs. I do so by directing attention to other domains of human reflection and knowledge in which we get along quite well in the absence of clarity about what is in some sense fundamental. Mathematics constitutes a striking example. Who is going to question the integrity of mathematics just because its epistemological and metaphysical underpinnings are less than entirely understood? . . . My attitude to religion and religious practice has similarities to the case of mathematics . . . To say that we should not start with metaphysical questions or, even more radically as I am now inclined to suppose, that the

> usual supernaturalist religious metaphysics provides a misleading picture of what the game is all about, is not to diminish the central role of God in religious life. (Compare mathematics: the centrality of numbers, sets, and the like does not depend upon a person's metaphysical views, or lack of them.)
>
> (Wettstein 2012, 7–8)

Reply: We believe that Wettstein rightly draws attention to the passions, emotions, and the sense of the sublime that is at work in the religious life. If one treated theological traditions largely as arenas for debating abstract, academic claims about the divine, we think this would be a mistake. We also believe that in philosophical theology we need to include reflection on the practical ways in which concepts of God are used to promote or inhibit matters of justice. Feminist theologians and philosophers have written with great insight on the importance of the social role of "God."

> The concept of God, on which so much energy is spent in the philosophy of religion, is a concept which needs thorough investigation from a feminist perspective, not because of some puzzles about the omnipotence or about the coherence of theism or the compatibility of omniscience with human freedom, but because it is a concept which is regularly used in ways that are oppressive of women, which perpetuates economic and racial injustice, and which imperils the earth.
>
> (Jantzen 1995, 497)

We will indeed be taking this seriously in Chapters 5 and 9.

Despite the sensitivity and breadth of Wettstein's position, we agree with those philosophers such as Sarah Coakley, Keith Ward, Richard Swinburne, Eleonore Stump and others who contend that most religious practitioners are whole-hearted realists in affirming that, when they pray, they are addressing what they believe or have faith to be a real being. We concur with Laura Ekstrom:

> It seems to me that Wettstein's analogy between mathematics and religion is inapt. I need not know whether or not numbers should be part of my ontology or in what sense numbers exist in order to perform mathematical computations. But religious activities are not like the computing of sums or products. We do not worship numbers. Participation in services of worship in traditional monotheistic religious, however, involves activities and attitudes of worship of a divine being that is claimed by the central religious doctrines and creeds to exist in fact, in a human-mind-independent way. Given that, of course the question must be asked: what is the object of one's religious worship? Does not one need to know (or have a rationally grounded conviction concerning) whether or not the objects of one's worship is *there*, in fact, external to human practices and minds, and furthermore what it is *like*, in order to know (or have a rationally grounded conviction concerning)

> whether or not it is the fit subject of worship? The right answer to this question seems to be, yes, of course one does. Worship of something non-existent is silly. Worship of something that, or someone who, is not worthy of worship is either a mistake or a wrong.
>
> (Ekstrom 2015, 100–101)

We do take seriously the further philosophical and theological criticisms of religious non-realists (and atheists and others) who have rejected realist notions of the divine due to claims that the nature and activities of a realist depiction of God are incoherent or morally unacceptable. For example, when Don Cupitt rejects the notion of a personal Creator God, the God he "took leave of" was closer to an alien autocrat—an absolute and despotic monarch who backs up his enforcement of morality with naked threats and wild promises—than to the theistic God of infinite love and compassion (Cupitt 1980). If the options were as dichotomous as Cupitt and others present them, we would concur that there is an incongruence between the metaphysics of theology on the one hand and religious praxis on the other. But we think the dichotomy is false. In the coming chapters the conception of God and divine action that we develop and defend will continue to promote the view that one need not give up the being of divine reality in order to consistently and coherently engage in religious forms of life.

In this chapter we began by exploring the scope and limits of human language and argued that while divine reality is to some extent inscrutable, philosophical God-talk is neither inappropriate nor impossible. We considered four religiously oriented objections to philosophical theology that may prima facie indicate otherwise. First, we examined the divine nature argument. We contended that while God is not merely a thing—one being along with other things that make up the universe—neither is God beyond meaningful classification. We then considered the boundaries of space and time. Here we argued that even if God is outside of space and time (and there is much current debate about the meaning of both of these concepts), it does not follow that God is beyond our capacity to describe, nor does it preclude God's interacting causally in human history. Next we argued that while there are certain limits on what God can be and do, this does not undercut God's sovereignty or control (properly understood). Finally, we explored an argument in which, if we take seriously religious forms of life, philosophical arguments and viewpoints about the nature and existence of God are deemed inappropriate. We grant and affirm the importance of the sense of the sublime in the religious life, and we agree that treating the theological traditions as merely forums for intellectual debate is a grave mistake. Yet we also believe that in philosophical theology one should not neglect the practical ways in which concepts of God are used to promote or prevent justice and the common good.

Our overall conclusion of this chapter is that while there is indeed mystery with respect to the divine, we maintain that expounding on the idea of God is linguistically and conceptually possible and important. Without a fairly clear idea of what we mean when we use the term "God," we would be unsure what reasons

there are for accepting or rejecting that idea, and so we would also be unsure what it is that one is supposed to be devoted to as a religious practitioner and adherent. Thus we also agree that such an expounding endeavor should be open to critique and criticism both from within and from the outside. As such, the practice of philosophical theology will be open to rethinking and reimagining the nature and activities of the divine as is rationally and experientially warranted.

Further reflections

Wittgenstein is often taken to stress the difference between religious and non-religious language. Consider the following:

> Suppose that someone believed in the Last Judgment, and I don't. Does this mean that I believe the opposite to him, just that there won't be such a thing? I would say: "Not at all, or not always."
>
> Suppose I say that the body will rot, and another says "No. Particles will rejoin in a thousand years, and there will be a Resurrection of you."
>
> If some said: "Wittgenstein, do you believe in this?" I'd say: "No." "Do you contradict the man?" I'd say: "No."
>
> (Wittgenstein 1967, 60)

D.Z. Phillips was a philosopher of religion very much influenced by Wittgenstein. Consider the following:

> Within religion, things are said about God of a time which precedes man's existence. That does not mean God existed before men in the sense in which mountains, rainbows or rivers did. These are all empirical phenomena and my beliefs concerning their prior existence allow me to ask questions about what they looked like, how long they had existed, whether some of these empirical phenomena have ceased to exist, and so on. Nothing of this sort makes any sense where God's reality is concerned.
>
> (Phillips 1993, 17)

Rush Rhees observes that to engage in a philosophy of God cut off from the religious contexts that gives meaning to religious language can lead to something monstrous:

> Suppose you had to explain to someone who had no idea at all of religion of what a belief in God was. Could you do it in this way?—By proving to him that there must be a first cause—a Someone—and that this something is more powerful (whatever this means) than anything else: so that you would not have been conceived or born at all but for the operation of Something and Something might wipe out the existence of everything at any given time? Would this give him any sense of the wonder and glory of God? Would he

> not be justified if he answered, "what a horrible idea! Like a Frankenstein without limits, so that you cannot escape it. The most ghastly nightmare!" On the other hand if you read to him certain of the passages in the early Isaiah which describe the beauty of the world . . . Then I think you might have given him some sense of what religious believers are talking about. I say *some* idea: I am talking of how you might make a beginning.
>
> (Rhees 1997, 36)

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, historically there has been a distinction made between the substance (*ousia*) of God and the activities of Godself (*energeia*) whereby the former is unknowable to us while the latter can be known. With regard to this distinction, the Eastern Orthodox theologian Kallistos Ware says the following:

> [Gregory of Nyssa, a fourth-century Eastern Orthodox philosopher and theologian, focused on this problem]: how to combine the two affirmations, that man knows God and that God is by nature unknowable. Gregory answered: we know the energies of God, but not His *essence*. This distinction between God's essence (*ousia*) and His energies goes back to the Cappadocian Fathers. "We know our God from His energies," wrote Saint Basil, "but we do not claim that we can draw near to His essence. For His energies come down to us, but His essence remains unapproachable" (Letter 234, 1). Gregory accepted this distinction. He affirmed, as emphatically as any exponent of negative theology, that God is in essence absolutely unknowable. "God is not a nature," he wrote, "for He is above all nature; He is not a being, for He is above all beings . . . No single thing of all that is created has or ever will have even the slightest communion with the supreme nature, or nearness to it" (*P.G.* cl, 1176c). But however remote from us in His essence, yet in His energies God has revealed Himself to men. These energies are not something that exists apart from God, not a gift which God confers upon men: they are God Himself in His action and revelation to the world. God exists complete and entire in each of His divine energies. The world, as Gerard Manley Hopkins said, is charged with the grandeur of God; all creation is a gigantic Burning Bush, permeated but not consumed by the ineffable and wondrous fire of God's energies.
>
> (Ware 1993, 67–68)

Do you find this distinction helpful? What problems might it solve? What further conundrums might it create?

In our treatment of space and time, we noted how our experience of time is not limited to instants or what would be instantaneous. We proposed that our concept of time is not sufficiently precise to rule out causal interaction with a God that is timeless or whose temporality stretches out beyond our own sense of time. For further reflection on this, consider A.E. Taylor's treatment of our experience

of the present. According to Taylor, there is a certain sense of atemporality in our own lives. That is, in what we think of the present, we occupy an event or realm in which there is (technically) a past and future:

> Within the experience of an individual experiment, there may be a before which is not properly to be called a past, and an after which cannot properly be called a future. I must at least register my own conviction that the purely "instantaneous" present, the "knife-edge," as it has been called, is a product of theory, not an experienced actuality. The briefest and most simple and uniform experiences we have "last," even if they only last for a fraction of a second, and they are never merely "static"; there is transition, and thus a before and after relating any two immediately successive notes; if there were not, or if the relation were not actually constitutive of the experience but merely "inferred" somehow "on the basis of" the experience, we should have no apprehension of melody. But, equally certainly, we should have no apprehension of it if we could not apprehend the two notes and their successiveness, with its "sense" as an ascending or descending interval, in a single pulse of present experience.
>
> (Taylor 1951, 73)

Note

1 In Latin, this distinction is sometimes made by using the term *res significata* when referring to what is predicated of, say, God, and a human when it is claimed that "God knows what you know" and the term *modus significandi* when referring to the modes of what is predicated as in "how God knows reality is different from how we know reality."

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3

PLURALISM AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGIES

> "The Jews, the Mohammedans, the Confucians, the Buddhists—what of them?" He put to himself the question he had feared to face. "Can the hundreds of millions of men be deprived of that highest blessing without which life has no meaning?" He pondered a moment, but immediately corrected himself. "But what am I questioning?" he said to himself. "I am questioning the relation of Divinity of all different religions of mankind."
>
> Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, VIII (1877)

So far, we have considered two major obstacles to philosophical theology, one based on an appeal to science in Chapter 1, and another based on religious and conceptual grounds. In this chapter let us explore further the reasons for undertaking philosophical theology at all and some reasons for practicing philosophical theology with a self-conscious awareness of the diversity of religious traditions. What reasons are there for engaging in philosophical theology from one particular religious tradition and why engage in, say, Muslim philosophical theology rather than Jewish philosophical theology?

Why bother with philosophical theology at all?

One reason for engaging in philosophical theology is that the majority of the world population either identifies with some religious tradition or is living in a culture where religious traditions have shaped their lives. This reflects, it seems, a deep-seated human religious desire. Interest in religion is indeed a global phenomenon. According to demographic studies by the Pew Research Center, based on analysis of more than 2,500 censuses, surveys and population registers, in 2010 there were roughly 2.2 billion Christians (32 percent of the world's population), 1.6 billion Muslims (23 percent), 1 billion Hindus (15 percent), nearly 500 million Buddhists

(7 percent), and 14 million Jews (0.2 percent). In addition, more than 400 million people (6 percent) practice various folk or traditional religions, including African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions. An estimated 58 million people—slightly less than 1 percent of the global population—belong to other religions, including the Baha'i faith, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, Tenrikyo, Wicca, and Zoroastrianism, to mention just a few. In addition, 1.1 billion people, roughly 1 in 6 people around the globe, have no religious affiliation whatsoever, yet many of them consider themselves to be interested in spiritual matters (Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life 2012).

A second reason is that while some philosophers urge us to focus only on the values that we observe immanently in our everyday lives, it seems that if we take such values seriously we should also take seriously what the great world religions offer us regarding the meaning of our lives, and values that are both immanently experienced and transcendently conceived. Consider the advice of Simon Blackburn, who argues for the sufficiency of immanent value:

> But there is another option for meaning . . . which is to look only within life itself. This is the immanent option. It is content with the everyday. There is sufficient meaning for human beings in the human world—the world of familiar, and even humdrum, doings and experiences. In the immanent option, the smile of the baby, the grace of the dancer, the sound of voices, the movement of a lover, give meaning to life. For some, it is activity and achievement: gaining the summit of the mountain, crossing the finish line first, finding the cure, or writing the poem. These things last only their short time, but that does not deny them meaning. A smile does not need to go on forever in order to mean what it does. There is nothing beyond or apart from the processes of life. Furthermore, there is no one goal to which all these processes tend, but we can find something precious, value and meaning, in the processes themselves.
>
> (Blackburn 2010, 190)

Blackburn's examples of what we should care about are quite sensible. He is not alone in taking as primary the goods that are immanent in our lives and foregoing the bigger questions of meaning. Consider Ronald Dworkin's observation about what is a good achievement in life:

> When you do something smaller well—play a tune or a part or a hand, throw a curve or a compliment, make a chair or a sonnet or love—your satisfaction is complete in itself. Those are achievements within life. Why can't a life also be an achievement complete in itself, with its own value in the art in living it displays?
>
> (Dworkin 2013, 158)

However, if you truly and deeply love the smiling baby and all the other things Blackburn and Dworkin list, and you are open to the possibility that the great world religions have something of value to offer humanity, then there may well be values that we find, as the religions propose, in the transcendent.

Consider the following thought-experiment. Given that you love the smiling baby (strictly speaking, Blackburn refers to "the smile of the baby," not to the baby herself, but we shall assume it would be hard to love the smile without loving the baby), which of these two realities would you hope is the case?

Reality one: The smiling baby (let's call her Mary) lives to become a graceful dancer who sings in a wonderful choir; she has a loving and intimate partner with whom she enjoys climbing mountains and competing in sports; and she also finds time to discover cures for diseases and to write poetry. At death, Mary perishes everlastingly, as does her partner and all those who loved and enjoyed her.

Reality two: The smiling baby Mary grows up to become a graceful dancer who sings in a wonderful choir; she has a loving, intimate partner, and so on, exactly as before. However, this time, the cosmos has been created and is sustained in being by the living One, who calls everyone to a life of compassion, justice, reconciliation and joyful worship. This living, loving powerful One acts to offer redemption to Mary and all persons through calling them to renounce evil and sin and to come into a great, fulfilling, loving union with the One in a life beyond this life.

It might be reasoned that one should not believe that reality two is the case because the very notion of an afterlife seems metaphysically or conceptually absurd. Even so, if you truly love Mary, would you not *hope* that the notion of a life beyond life is a metaphysical and conceptual possibility and that reality two were the case? By focusing the thought-experiment in terms of what you would do if you truly love another person, we avoid putting the stress on our self-serving or self-centered concern with what death will mean for ourselves. If Blackburn is correct and theism or its analogues is false, there will come a time when we will perish and, to put it mildly, we will no longer be important. If we desire to always be important, this seems a bit more like a Promethean desire than, say, the desire of a St. Francis of Assisi. But if we turn the tables and we think of St. Francis' love for the poor, it would be shocking if the Saint did not pray that the poor be forever important to the loving God he worships and follows. And if they are forever important to the most holy, living God or some similar conception of ultimate reality, there is also a reasonable hope that they may not find death to be the end of their very being.

Three additional points on Blackburn's immanent alternative are worth making. First, Blackburn's thesis that "a smile does not need to go on forever in order to mean what it does" is clever, for the task of holding a smile indefinitely conjures up the idea of a forced smile (the Mona Lisa might have something to contribute here). Forced smiles, like forced laughter, often feel like something faked and disingenuous. But it is another thing altogether to be indifferent about whether

the person smiling will live on, whether this is for seconds, days, and years, or beyond that in union with the God of theistic faith.

Second, Blackburn's comments might suggest that if theism is true, there is one goal to which all things (should or are made to) tend. While Jewish and Christian faith does identify inseparable common goals in human life (love of God and love of neighbor), this is not a call to homogeneity or a call for us to love God and neighbor in the same ways. Historically, Judaism and Christianity (and other theistic faiths) have always recognized the good in any number of different and meaningful ways of life that are hallowed by God.

Finally, we find the contrast between Blackburn's concept of meaning and good versus the Jewish and Christian values of faith and hope to be captured near the end of G.K. Chesterton's 1908 classic, *Orthodoxy* (with apologies about the antiquated use of masculine terms to represent humanity):

> The mass of men has been forced to be gay about the little things, but sad about the big ones. Nevertheless (I offer my last dogma defiantly) it is not native to man to be so. Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labour by which all things live. Yet, according to the apparent estate of man as seen by the pagan or the agnostic, this primary need of human nature can never be fulfilled. Joy ought to be expansive; but for the agnostic it must be contracted, it must cling to one corner of the world. Grief ought to be a concentration; but for the agnostic its desolation is spread through an unthinkable eternity. This is what I call being born upside down. The sceptic may truly be said to be topsy-turvy; for his feet are dancing upwards in idle ecstasies, while his brain is in the abyss. To the modern man the heavens are actually below the earth. The explanation is simple; he is standing on his head; which is a very weak pedestal to stand on. But when he has found his feet again he knows it. Christianity satisfies suddenly and perfectly man's ancestral instinct for being the right way up; satisfies it supremely in this; that by its creed joy becomes something gigantic and sadness something special and small. The vault above us is not deaf because the universe is an idiot; the silence is not the heartless silence of an endless and aimless world. Rather the silence around us is a small and pitiful stillness like the prompt stillness in a sick-room. We are perhaps permitted tragedy as a sort of merciful comedy: because the frantic energy of divine things would knock us down like a drunken farce. We can take our own tears more lightly than we could take the tremendous levities of the angels. So we sit perhaps in a starry chamber of silence, while the laughter of the heavens is too loud for us to hear.
>
> (Chesterton 1908, 296–298)

While Blackburn and Dworkin put a good face on treasuring what matters to us here and now, consider Bertrand Russell's assessment of life from a secular point of view:

> Year by year, comrades die, hopes prove vain, ideals fade; the enchanted land of youth grows more remote, the road of life more wearisome; the burden of the world increases, until the labour and the pain become almost too heavy to be borne; joy fades from the weary nations of the earth, and the tyranny of the future saps men's vital force; all that we love is waning, waning from the dying world. But the past, ever devouring the transient offspring of the present, lives by the universal death; steadily, irresistibly, it add new trophies to its silent temple, which all the ages build; every great deed, every splendid life, every achievement and every heroic failure is there enshrined. On the banks of the river of Time, the sad procession of human generations is marching slowly to the grave; in the quiet country of the Past, the march is ended, the tired wanderers rest, and all their weeping is hushed.
>
> (Russell 2009, 505)

Russell's outlook is a dreary one, and one clearly rooted in a secular outlook. So while we agree with Blackburn and Dworkin about the values they identify, we think that they give us good reason to explore the bigger picture of values through the lens of the great world religions. We agree with Simone Weil, who says:

> If I light an electric torch at night out of doors I don't judge its power by looking at the bulb, but by seeing how many objects it lights up. The brightness of a source of light is appreciated by the illumination it projects upon non-luminous objects. The value of a religious way of life is appreciated by the amount of illumination thrown upon the things of this world. Earthly things are the criterion of spiritual things.
>
> (Weil 1970, 147)

The light of religious insight does seem to illumine the many values of humanity and the world, and it certainly offers a brighter hope for what may lie beyond the goods and turpitudes of this life.

Diversity of religious traditions: a problem or an opportunity?

The great world religions are, obviously, religions—plural. So while we have been affirming the significance of a religious perspective with respect to human and transcendent values, one might object that such a move is unwarranted given the vast diversity of the religions and religious perspectives. One way to respond to the facts of diversity is to see them as a good thing from the perspective of knowledge

claims. After all, from the standpoint of probability, the greater spread of diversity, the more likely it is that one of these visions of reality is correct. An alternative way to see things is that if each of these visions has roughly equal justification, would that be a reason to not accept any of them? Sextus Empiricus (*c.*160–210 AD) said that if some statement of a fact is just as justified to believe as the statement denying that fact, then one should neither believe nor disbelieve the statement. Similarly, Richard Feldman argues that, in the case of conflicting, apparently equally reasonable beliefs about some phenomenon, the best response is to suspend judgment concerning it without concluding that one's own or the alternative belief is unreasonable. He supports this point with a parable:

> Suppose you and I are standing by the window looking out on the quad. We think we have comparable vision and we know each other to be honest. I seem to see what looks to me like the dean standing out in the middle of the quad. (Assume that this is not something odd. He's out there a fair amount.) I believe that the dean is standing on the quad. Meanwhile, you seem to see nothing of the kind there. You think that no one, and thus not the dean, is standing in the middle of the quad. We disagree. Prior to our saying anything, each of us believes reasonably. Then I say something about the dean's being on the quad, and we find out about our situation. In my view, once that happens, each of us should suspend judgment. We each know that something weird is going on, but we have no idea which of us has the problem. Either I am "seeing things," or you are missing something. I would not be reasonable in thinking that the problem is in mine.
>
> (Feldman 2007, 207–208)

Feldman believes that cases such as this support the following position:

> After examining this evidence, I find in myself an inclination, perhaps a strong inclination, to think that this evidence supports P. It may even be that I can't help but believe P. But I see that another person, every bit as sensible and serious as I, has an opposing reaction. Perhaps this person has some bit of evidence that cannot be shared, or perhaps he takes the evidence differently than I do. It's difficult to know everything about his mental life and thus difficult to tell exactly why he believes as he does. One of us must be making some kind of mistake or failing to see some truth. But I have no basis for thinking that the one making the mistake is him rather than me. And the same is true of him. And in that case, the right thing for both of us to do is to suspend judgment on P.
>
> (Feldman 2007, 212)

We find several problems with Feldman's position. First, the example of whether one sees a dean in a quad is quite a different scenario from the myriad contexts of religious beliefs, practices, and forms of life. Spotting a particular individual (a dean)

in a particular location (a quad) is worlds apart from someone, say, believing she has experienced the living Christ with whom she has then followed as Divine Master for years, or believing she has found true peace by following Torah over a lifetime, and then comparing notes with a friend or colleague who has had no such encounters or life experiences.

Furthermore, experiences that seem to justify a positive claim have, we propose, somewhat of an advantage over a failure to experience a presence, whether that presence is a person (including a divine one), place, or other thing. Using Feldman's example, if you seem to see the dean walking in the quad (though some distance away, her unique gate and style of dress seem to reveal her identity), why would my failing to see her provide you a reason to suspend judgment—especially if you have what seems to be evidence for your belief? Indeed, if the mere *possibility* of counter-evidence undermines belief, how would any belief be reasonable?

A final and perhaps more profound point is that the position undermines itself. Given that other well-respected thinkers deny the principle that Feldman affirms, he should suspend judgment on the very principle itself. For in this instance,

> one of us must be making some kind of mistake or failing to see some truth. But I [Feldman] have no basis for thinking that the one making the mistake is him rather than me. And the same is true of him. And in that case, the right thing for both of us to do is to suspend judgment on P.
>
> (Feldman 2007, 212)

To affirm the principle thus entails suspending judgment on the principle. This is self-contradiction in spades.

Returning to responses to the facts of religious diversity, we maintain that the extent of such diversity should give one reason to consider the vantage points taken and the goods and values espoused in the various theistic religions. This leads, then, to a third response, and one similar to the first in seeing diversity as positive from the perspective of knowledge-claims; namely, that the broad experiences across traditions provide vantage points to experience the sacred, and may even offer evidence for some of their claims being true.

Different religions provide different vantage points to experience the sacred

Over the last century or so, advances in the knowledge of the beliefs, teachings, and practices of the world's religions have led many philosophers and other scholars to conclude that, in many religious traditions, claims are made to similar core beliefs, values, and religious experiences. How are we to think about these claims and experiences of religious adherents across the spectrum of religious traditions? Diana Eck, founder and director of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, puts concisely the commonly used tripartite set of responses on offer given the reality of religious diversity:

> First, there is the exclusivist response: Our own community, our tradition, our understanding of reality, our encounter with God is the one and only truth, excluding all others. Second, there is the inclusivist response: There are, indeed, many communities, traditions, and truths, but our way of seeing things is the culmination of the others, superior to the others, or at least wide enough to include the others under our universal canopy and in our own terms. A third response is that of the pluralist: Truth is not the exclusive or inclusive possession of any one tradition or community. Therefore the diversity of communities, traditions, and visions of God is not an obstacle for us to overcome, but an opportunity for our energetic engagement with one another. It does not mean giving up our commitments; rather, it means opening up those commitments to the give-and-take of mutual discovery, understanding, and, indeed, transformation.
>
> (Eck 1993, 168)

Eck's simple and concise delineation may be seen as an oversimplification of a very complex matter. In his work on religious diversity, for example, Robert McKim insightfully spells out multiple uses of the terms exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (McKim 2012). Yet for the purposes of this chapter there is value in Eck's straightforward approach. We take the first response to diversity then, as Eck defines it, to be rather naive and myopic, but not an isolated viewpoint among religious adherents. Across religious traditions radical fundamentalists, who condemn or consign to perdition all peoples who disagree with their own narrow interpretation of their religion, frequent the headline news. Unfortunately this sort of exclusivist approach is one that critics of religion often use in an attempt to undermine *in toto* religious experience and belief.

Given the many concerns of this exclusive approach, some have abandoned it altogether and grant that while the various religious traditions exhibit different responses to the divine Reality, nevertheless they may well provide equally valid and legitimate paths to salvation. John Hick led the way in this approach. According to his pluralistic hypothesis, the major world religions provide different but valid culturally conditioned responses to "the Real" (Hick's term for ultimate, transcendent reality), providing ways of successfully transcending self-centeredness and obtaining a higher spiritual and moral state rooted in that divine Reality.

> [T]he great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the variant ways of being human; and that within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to reality-centredness is taking place. These traditions are accordingly to be regarded as alternative soteriological "spaces" within which, or "ways" along which, men and women find salvation/liberation/enlightenment.
>
> (Hick 1989, 240)

Hick's pluralism is an ingenious approach to religious diversity and the problems of inconsistency and contradiction in religion, and it is an attractive option to those who are uncomfortable maintaining that their perspective is the only correct one, for on this view no one tradition has the exclusive truth about God, humanity, and salvation. And, on this view, God has not dismissed large swaths of humanity who are ignorant of the "one true path," for there is no one true path. All of the great traditions provide their own unique insights, and everyone can be saved (achieve liberation, enlightenment, etc.) through following the path of their own sacred tradition.

As appealing as the position may be, however, it is fraught with difficulties. Wewill not rehearse them here, as the literature on the matter is vast and many of the problems are quite familiar. Yet it is worth noting that the major world faiths do indeed include truth claims—propositions that are either true or false—that contradict one another. The Islamic assertion that God is one and not a trinity of persons, contradicts the Christian assertion that God is three persons in one nature. The Buddhist claim that there is no Creator God excludes the Sikh claim that there is one God who created humankind and the world. The Hindu declarations of rebirth logically conflicts with the Jewish declarations of the creation of human life from the "dust of the ground." And so forth. Is not this problematic for a pluralist? Yes, though one could, as Hick himself does, make the move of avoiding truth-claims in religion altogether and instead focus on religion as a family-resemblance notion:

> Given this family-resemblance understanding of the concept [of religion], different scholars and communities of scholarship are free to focus their attention upon the features that especially interest them. Thus sociologists of religion legitimately focus upon one set of features, ethnologists upon another, psychologists upon another. The feature upon which I shall primarily focus in this book is belief in the transcendent. Although this is not of the essence of religion—for, as I have suggested, there is no such essence—nevertheless most forms of religion have affirmed a salvific reality that transcends . . . human beings and the world, this reality being variously conceived as a personal God or non-personal absolute, or as the cosmic structure or process or ground of the universe.
>
> (Hick 1989, 5–6)

This is a brilliant move, no doubt. Yet in doing so Hick culls what he wants from certain world religions—namely, that they affirm a salvific reality that transcends the world—and rejects what does not work for his approach. But this excludes, for instance, Confucianism, and any other religious tradition that does not make such an affirmation. That may be all well and good, given his purposes, but it also bespeaks the fact that his view is actually more akin to exclusivism than initial appearances suggest. For not only is he *de novo* excluding certain religions from the playing field, he is also asserting the proposition that there is a transcendent

reality the belief of which brings about "the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to reality-centredness" (Hick 1989, 5–6). If one is going to make an assertion, one cannot avoid the exclusiveness of doing so, for to assert some claim is to deny its opposite. Such is the way of language and thought, and Hick cannot avoid it.

Thus we maintain that there is value in taking seriously the exclusive truth claims actually affirmed in the religions, but we also value the insights proffered by inclusivist and pluralist approaches. We concur, for example, that God is able to manifest in any and all of the traditions such that humans are capable of responding to the divine presence. If God is infinite and ultimately beyond all human comprehension, as we suggested in the previous chapter, then it would not be incoherent to maintain that no one tradition holds all of the truths about the divine reality. And it would be coherent and profitable to maintain, to return to Eck's quote, that

> [t]herefore the diversity of communities, traditions, and visions of God is not an obstacle for us to overcome, but an opportunity for our energetic engagement with one another. It does not mean giving up our commitments; rather, it means opening up those commitments to the give-and-take of mutual discovery, understanding, and, indeed, transformation.
>
> (Eck 1993, 168)

The case for diversity undermining all religions

Critics of religion often do not see a value in there being different vantage points in experiencing the divine, nor do they see mutual discovery of the transcendent. Instead, they see discrepancy, contradiction, incoherence, and evidence of the falsity of religious experiences and beliefs. In this sense they are in agreement with the exclusivist approach to religious diversity as defined above by Eck, whereby religious experience in one's own tradition is the one and only truth and all others are false. Michael Martin, for example, argues this way:

> Religious experience . . . tell[s] no uniform or coherent story, and there is no plausible theory to account for discrepancies among them. Again the situation could be different. Imagine a possible world where parts of reality can only be known through religious experiences. There religious experiences would tend to tell a coherent story. Not only would the descriptions of the experiences be coherent, but the descriptions of the experiences of different people would tend to be consistent with one another. Indeed, a religious experience in one culture would generally corroborate a religious experience in another culture. When there was a lack of corroboration, there would be a plausible explanation for the discrepancy.
>
> (Martin 1990, 159)

As he sees it, there is no corroboration of religious experience in our world, and there is no way to account for this other than to deny their veracity. It is not only experience that is the problem; the very conception of ultimate reality is also contradictory among the traditions. He continues by noting a stark contrast between the notions of God in Western and Eastern religions:

> In the Western tradition, God is a person distinct from the world and from His creatures. Not surprisingly, many religious experiences within the Western tradition, especially nonmystical ones such as the experience of God speaking to someone and giving advice and counsel, convey this idea of God. On the other hand, mystical religious experience within the Eastern tradition tends to convey a pantheistic and impersonal God. The experience of God in this tradition typically is not that of a caring, loving person but of an impersonal absolute and ultimate reality. To be sure, this difference is not uniform. There are theistic trends in Hinduism and pantheistic trends in Christianity. But the differences between East and West are sufficiently widespread . . . and they certainly seem incompatible. A God that transcends the world seemingly cannot be identical with the world; a God that is a person can apparently not be impersonal.
>
> (Martin 1990, 178)

On this latter point we tend to agree with Martin and disagree with Hick. According to standard canons of logic, God cannot be both personal and impersonal, God cannot be both trinitarian and non-trinitarian, and so on. Nevertheless, there could be both personal and impersonal aspects of God. Indeed, if God is the infinite Reality that theists have traditionally affirmed, it would not be surprising if the God experiences of finite creatures like us were interpreted variously in both personal and person-transcending language. As such, it is not inconsistent for religious devotees to use both personalistic language and also to speak of the ineffable mystery of God, as we saw in the last chapter. Nor is it inconceivable that the divine reality would be understood somewhat differently in the various cultural contexts given our epistemic limitations and our vastly different customs and forms of life.

Explaining away religious experience?

A commonly held meaning of religious experience would be any experience that is formed in terms of religious concepts, such as God, Allah, Brahman, forgiveness, miracles, and so on, or that includes religious symbols, icons, or images, such as Christ on the cross, the incarnate Krishna, heaven, the Pure Land, and so on. Such experiences have been widely studied and catalogued. A well-known example of such an experience was Jonathan Edwards' personal narrative, in which he describes in vivid detail his own religious experience that occurred shortly after having a discussion with his father:

> I walked abroad alone, in a solitary place in my father's pasture, for contemplation. And as I was walking there, and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, as I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction; majesty and meekness joined together: it was a sweet, and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness.
>
> After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered: there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast or appearance of divine glory in almost everything. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water and all nature.
>
> (Edwards 1891, 374)

Oftentimes with such experiences, religious believers claim they have encountered God directly, and that this event provided meaning or purpose or direction to their lives. Yet some recent work in the study of religion has suggested that God belief can be explained scientifically without the need for positing a transcendent reality:

> If belief in God is produced by a genetically inherited trait, if the human species is "hardwired" to believe in a spirit world, this could suggest that God doesn't exist as something "out there," beyond and independent of us, but rather as the product of an inherited perception, the manifestation of an evolutionary adaptation that exists exclusively within the human brain. If true, this would imply that there is no actual spiritual reality, no Gods or gods, no soul, no afterlife. Consequently, humankind can no longer be viewed as a product of God but rather God must be viewed as a product of human cognition.
>
> (Alper 2008, 79)

But suppose you experienced the divine presence in your midst, and through this apparent encounter you found meaning and purpose for your life. Would this not be evidence that God did indeed show up? Bruce Russell argues otherwise:

> It's not clear that the best explanation of the transformation in people after they've seemed to have had an experience of Spirit in conscience is that the transformation was caused by God. Suppose someone appears to me in my dreams who, like my deceased grandmother, seems to be unselfishly loving and forgiving. Suppose she appears again and again, night after night, year after year. Suppose, further, that as a result of these dream experiences my life changes for the better, and I come to believe that my grandmother still exists in some way. Imagine that as a result of the experiences of my

> grandmother in my dreams I became a better person, more loving and forgiving, even of my enemies. Wouldn't the best explanation of those experiences be that they were somehow produced by me alone, say, by the neurons in my brain firing in certain ways, and wouldn't the best explanation of the change in my life be that *my belief* that my good and loving grandmother still exists and wants me to become more unselfishly loving somehow caused those changes? There is no need to posit the existence of my grandmother to explain either my experiences of her or the changes in my life.
>
> (Russell, 2009)

Russell is indeed right that just because one has had an experience of a presence in conscience, it does not follow that the alleged presence is real. Given some recent and recurring nightmares of one of the authors of this book, it's a good thing such a conclusion does not follow! However, Russell's argument is flawed; the grandmother analogy doesn't work. For one, the belief in a God who can and does present himself to human consciousness is rooted in a very complex worldview that has a long and rich history. My belief about experiencing God, say, within this broad and highly developed *Weltanschauung*, is quite different from my belief that my deceased grandmother is communicating with me through my dreams. There is nothing in my worldview that would suggest that this is a plausible interpretation of that occurrence. In fact, it may suggest otherwise.

It is important to note at this point that whether actual "God experiences" are possible, one must take into account other factors related to one's beliefs about the existence of God and the nature of God, for whether it is reasonable to believe that God would make God's presence known will be partly dependent upon one's worldview (that is, one's entire set of beliefs, experiences, and understanding of God and the world). If some claim *C* is improbable on a certain other claim *C2*, it does not follow that one who accepts both *C* and *C2* is irrational or guilty of epistemic or metaphysical impropriety (even granting that she believes that *C* is improbable given *C2*), for *C* may be probable with respect to other things she knows or believes or has experienced. The background information provided by one's worldview is central in this discussion.

A second point regarding the grandmother analogy is that if millions of individuals across cultures were having such experiences of my grandmother, this would undoubtedly warrant further exploration of the hypothesis that something beyond the ordinary is going on. Such a widespread phenomenon could not easily be accounted for by sleeping disorders or mass delusion.

A looming question is this: Can't we be mistaken about our religious experiences, even ones that clearly seem to be encounters with a divine reality? And if we can be mistaken, does this preclude such experiences from providing evidence or justification for our religious beliefs? It must be acknowledged that we could indeed be mistaken, but so too can we be mistaken about perceptual

experiences. Yet this does not undercut the latter from providing evidence for physical realities. Keith Yandell makes an insightful point in this regard:

> If there is experiential evidence for any existential proposition, perceptual experiences provide evidence that there are physical objects; it is arbitrary not to add that perceptual experience provides evidence that God exists, unless there is some epistemically relevant difference between sensory and numinous experience. The crucial similarities are that both sorts of experience are "intentional" and have phenomenologies, or can be expressed via "intentional" phenomenological descriptions. That perceptual experiences have sensory fillings or phenomenologies, and numinous experiences do not, by itself seems no more reason to think that numinous experience in no way supports the proposition *There is a God* than does the fact that numinous experiences have theistic fillings or phenomenologies, and perceptual experiences do not, by itself provides reason for thinking that perceptual experience in no way supports the proposition *There are physical objects*.
>
> (Yandell 1993, 28)

If one's intellectual faculties are functioning properly, and if it is plausible to believe that there is a transcendent reality as theists assert, then explaining away one's religious experiences as delusions or fantasies or as falsely reifying brain events to be more than physical occurrences may be to deny a real and fundamental aspect of human life and experience in a world that is not devoid of divine encounter after all.

A case against religious belief

It is certainly true that some leading atheist voices have advocated for the view that the central beliefs of the world religions are not only false but dangerous obstacles to moral and intellectual progress. While we do not deny that some forms of religion are obsolete, and that others are even harmful and dangerous, we suggest that much of great value would be lost if we had no access to the teachings and biographies of such spiritual luminaries as Moses, The Buddha, Ramanuja, Jesus, Mohammed, and Guru Nanak, to name a few. Much of what these spiritual leaders taught was about a transcendent Reality and transcendent virtues. For many critics of religious belief, it is the idea of the transcendent that is the rub. In this final section of the chapter, then, we tackle a major objection to religious beliefs that take seriously a transcendent realm.

We will consider Philip Kitcher's case against religious belief, which centers on his concerns with the notion of the transcendent. He offers the following account of religion: "Religions are distinguished by their invocation of something beyond the mundane physical world, some 'transcendent' realm, and they offer claims about this 'transcendent' " (Kitcher 2014, 2). Religious believers are contrasted with secularists who allow for only the physical world. "The core of secularist doubt is

skepticism about anything 'transcendent' " (Kitcher 2014, 6). Kitcher proposes that religious views of the transcendent contain incompatible diverse elements, not all of which can be true:

> The bases of belief are remarkably similar across the entire array of religious traditions . . . Often the faithful are born into a religious tradition whose lore they absorb in early childhood and continue to accept throughout their lives; sometimes, when the surrounding society contains adherents of a different doctrine, acquaintance with a rival religion prompts conversion, and a shift of allegiance. In either case, however, religious believers rely on a tradition they take to have carefully preserved insights once vouchsafed to privileged witnesses in a remote past. Because that pattern is so prevalent in undergirding religious beliefs of the present, it is very hard to declare that one of the traditions has a special status, or even that a manageable few have transmitted truth about the transcendent. The beliefs of each tradition stand on much the same footing: complete symmetry prevails.
>
> (Kitcher 2014, 7–8)

The argument, then, seems to include the following cluster of interrelated claims:

1. Religious claims about the transcendent emerge and are justified by religious education, the testimony of witnesses.
2. This educational base gives rise to and purportedly justifies conflicting incompatible claims from different groups about the transcendent, not all of which can be true. There is, in other words, a symmetrical form of justification for incompatible truth-claims.
3. No one belief about the transcendent has any more justification than another.
4. None of them are justified and in fact all of them warrant skepticism especially compared with a secular worldview which limits itself to the recognition of "the mundane physical world."
5. One should only believe in "the mundane physical world."

Let's begin by looking at the concept of *the mundane physical world*, as featured in what we have noted as 4 and 5. In the history of ideas and culture, is there a stable, long-standing concept of the mundane physical world that can be used as part of a critique in arguing against the plausibility of there being something that is not part of the mundane physical world? We doubt that there is any such concept. Some philosophers have argued for the incoherence of there being a non-physical or incorporeal Creator, but these arguments are either question-begging or they assume a highly controversial or implausible account of what is physical (as we noted in Chapter 1). But quite apart from the philosophy of theism, the history of philosophy, West and East, reveals profound disagreements about human and animal natures, the reliability and status of thought, reason, perception, memory,

space and time. The sheer diversity of philosophical positions on what Kitcher refers to as the physical world in the so-called Eastern tradition is breathtaking. (To draw on examples from Asian philosophical treatments of ourselves and the world around us, consider the hundred schools of pre-imperial China, the skepticism of Zhuangzi, the work of Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu, Dong Zhongshu, Ge Hong, Xuanzang and Chinese Buddhism, Shankara, *et al*.) And in the West, there is a massive spread of views in which philosophers have differed about what counts as physical and where (in terms of ontology and metaphysics) to place consciousness, experience, perception, thought, agency, purposes, values, and so on.

Arguably, as we noted back in Chapter 1, contemporary physics has made it even harder for self-described materialists or physicalists to suppose their concept of matter or the physical is stable. How do mathematical reasoning, numbers or the laws of logic fit in with the mundane physical world? It is even puzzling to determine what kind of thing the idea "*the mundane physical world*" is. Is it a thing that has weight, color, electric charge, spin, taste, smell? These are matters that require philosophical engagement and do not admit of resolutions in the tradition of Samuel Johnson kicking stones as a way to show that Berkeleyan idealism is on a poor footing. As Bertrand Russell observed about early twentieth-century physics: "Matter has become as ghostly as anything in a spiritual séance" (Russell 1927, 78). Noam Chomsky's position seems to reflect a widespread, current position: "The notion of "physical world" is open and evolving" (Chomsky 1980, 5). On this point, then, we suggest Kitcher's structural analysis of comparing belief in the transcendent with a problem-free conception of the mundane physical world is unacceptable. In what follows, we will focus on two types of belief: theism (the main target of Kitcher's work) versus a secular philosophical worldview.

Is the belief in theism bolstered by the same level of evidence as non-theistic beliefs, both in terms of culture at large as well as among philosophers? Are those of us who are theists—in and outside the history of philosophy and the communities that practice philosophy today—justified in our belief in theism only because, as Kitcher (2014, 7–8) purports, we were trained to have such a belief, a belief backed up by witnesses we "take to have carefully preserved insights once vouchsafed to privileged witnesses in a remote past"? It strikes us as highly unlikely that the robustness of theism would not also include appeals to the apparent purposive nature of the world, its contingency, the felt experiential sense of the divine not simply in the remote past but in the *present*. The field of natural theology (which is undergoing a revival) has sought to articulate in formal terms the common sense or at least widely held convictions that a cosmos with such order as ours and that has given rise to conscious, moral agents is better accounted for in theistic teleological terms than in terms of chance, necessity or any number of non-teleological accounts. We suggest that in order for Kitcher to be justified in believing that theism is no more supported evidentially than any other non-theistic belief, he needs to do more than propose (without, as far as we can see, any argument at all) that the evidence for theism is on a par with non-theistic alternative views of what he calls the transcendent. Furthermore, he needs to offer some reason for

thinking that his form of secularism is in some way better backed evidentially than theism or any number of alternative secular philosophical positions.

So, in terms of his own position—pragmatic naturalism—do we have reason to think that the justification for Kitcher adopting pragmatic naturalism is any better than the justification for the vast number of philosophers today and historically, who are either explicitly in opposition to pragmatic naturalism or who adopt some incompatible alternative? To appreciate the problem Kitcher faces, it is not essential for us to engage in a lengthy exposition and examination of what is involved in pragmatic naturalism and why he accepts it. All that needs to be pointed out is that his position is a minority one that many of us reject. He might have adopted any number of other minority positions such as phenomenalistic idealism or logical positivism or analytic behaviorism or Kantian transcendental idealism. The point is that he adopts a position, to which there are multiple alternatives, that appears to many to have less evidential support than other alternatives. His evidential base for his pragmatic naturalism might actually include an appeal to past philosophers whom some believe to "have carefully preserved insights once vouchsafed to privileged witnesses in a remote past" (Kitcher 2014, 7–8), e.g. John Dewey and his students in the first half of the last century. But we think it safe for us to assume that without reading all of Kitcher's work and examining all his reasons, the reasons are probably no more or less recognized as plausible than contemporary defenders of the theistic cosmological argument.

Kitcher is dismissive of there being *any* evidence for theism. "Unless 'evidence' is to be used in a radically new (and unspecified) sense, there is no present evidence for the transcendent" (Kitcher 2014, 22). We are not given any reason to think he has seriously considered contemporary versions of any theistic arguments (his formal work in philosophy has not included philosophy of religion), so it is far from obvious how much confidence we should have in Kitcher's claim. Consider, for example, the extant and articulate versions of theistic arguments today: defenders of the cosmological argument include D. Braine, W. Craig, S.T. Davis, G. Grisez, J.J. Haldane, H. Meynell, B. Miller, R. Purtill, B. Reichenbach, W. Rowe, and R. Taylor; defenders of theistic arguments from religious experience include W. Alston, C. Frank, J. Gellman, G. Gutting, R. Swinburne, W. Wainwright, and K. Yandell. Kitcher references none of this literature or the vast body of work on theistic arguments.

We propose two points, then, in response to Kitcher's argument: first, as noted earlier, his concept of a problem-free idea of the mundane physical world is unacceptable, and second, his reasons for thinking theism is undermined (because, he says, alternative, incompatible worldviews have equally good justification) would themselves undermine his own philosophical commitments. Should Kitcher give up his pragmatic naturalism on the grounds that it appears that there are many persons who think his position is unwarranted and, in fact, wrong? Kitcher rejects a priori knowledge claims; for example, he thinks that mathematical knowledge is empirically based. Many of us think this is incoherent: the law of identity must be presupposed as true (and knowable a priori) for there to be any empirical claims.

We suggest, however, that Kitcher is entitled to his position and its defense even in the face of powerful counterpoints. Similarly, we think reasons for theism (or evidence) is substantial and justificatory even if Kitcher does not think so. In any case, theism and religious views of a transcendental realm are no worse off than secular humanism and pragmatic naturalism.

We have covered much territory in this chapter. We explored further various reasons for undertaking philosophical theology and some reasons for doing so with a self-conscious awareness of the diversity of religious traditions. Philosophical theology can be an incredibly useful tool for exploring the claims and experiences of those within the various religious traditions and thus of mutually enriching religious relations through a better understanding of ourselves and of others with whom we may not always agree.

Further reflections

John Schellenberg argues that our basic sensations/perceptions are reliable but not our religious experiences. Do you agree or disagree with his analysis?

> There are ever so many ways in which a doxastic practice could be socially established and yet also the purveyor of utterly false beliefs. Indeed, plenty of actual patterns of belief formation from the world's history that have persisted for generations over large segments of the population and have been deeply entrenched, both psychologically and socially, could be called on to make this point. One need only think about false beliefs concerning the shape of the earth, or the alleged inferiority of women, or claimed conspiracies and plots engineered by the Jews or other minority groups. (We could also add a reference to "significant self-support": think about how many of a medieval flat-earther's experiences are just as they would be if the earth were flat!) And, of course, religion itself presents an obvious and uncontroversial example since the outputs of religious experiential belief-forming practices conflict, and thus not all such practices can be reliable: in virtue of this fact we *know* that *right now* there are socially established religious practices purveying mostly false beliefs, failing to put anyone in effective touch with reality, regardless of their fruits. Thus an appropriately cautious—and also curious and exploratory—investigator, when deciding how to proceed, has a reason to discriminate more sharply and sensitively than Alston, choosing to accept certain socially established practices as initially credible, but ones that do not raise such credibility-threatening and investigation-worthy issues and that are in any case universal and unavoidable.
>
> (Schellenberg 2007, 170–171)

Anthony Kenny has an argument to the effect that humility in the face of pluralistic religious claims should lead us to agnosticism. We believe that the following is well worth engaging.

> But if we look at the matter from the viewpoint of humility it seems that the agnostic is in the safer position. The general presumption that others are in the right will not help us here; for others are to be found in both camps, and there is no obvious way to decide to which of them one should bow. But there is no important difference. The theist is claiming to possess a good which the agnostic does not claim to possess: he is claiming to be in possession of knowledge; the agnostic lays claim only to ignorance. The believer will say he does not claim knowledge, only true belief; but at least he claims to have laid hold, in whatever way, of information that the agnostic does not possess. It may be said that any claim to possess gifts which others do not have is in the same situation, and yet we have admitted that such a claim may be made with truth and without prejudice to humility. But in the case of a gift such as intelligence or athletic skill, those surpassed will agree that they are surpassed; whereas in this case, the theist can only rely on the support of other theists, and the agnostic does not think that the information which the theist claims is genuine information at all. Since Socrates philosophers have realized that a claim not to know is easier to support.
>
> (Kenny 2004, 108–109)

Is it possible for someone to think Christianity is true and thus religions that explicitly deny the truth of some central Christian beliefs (such as the belief in the incarnation and Trinity, both of which are deemed false in Judaism and Islam) are in some measure false, and yet the souls of such non-Christians are not in jeopardy or religiously disadvantaged? John Hick proposes that this is the case for most religious practitioners today:

> [A] great many Christians . . . don't think that their Muslim or Sikh or Jewish or Hindu or Buddhist or Baha'i neighbor has a lower status than themselves in relation to ultimate divine reality. They don't think that the souls of these people are in jeopardy. Many of us have friends of other faiths whom we greatly admire. We simply don't believe that they are religiously disadvantaged.
>
> (Hick 2006)

If Hick is right, what are some plausible reasons for this state of affairs?

In response to Kitcher, we suggest that theological traditions come with many reasons beyond the idea that the tradition was founded by charismatic figures from the past, etc. For example, we think that some form of a design or teleological argument provides some evidence for theism and those traditions that recognize some teleological force in the cosmos. Richard Swinburne offers this portrait of a teleological argument that is derived from non-technical reasoning. Do you think that formal theistic arguments often have "common sense" or embedded pre-philosophical roles in shaping our beliefs about the divine or reality in general?

> A teleological argument . . . is, I believe, a codification by philosophers of a reaction to the world deeply embedded in the human consciousness. Humans see the comprehensibility of the world as evidence of a comprehending creator. The prophet Jeremiah lived in an age in which the existence of a creator-god or gods of some sort was taken for granted. What was at stake was whether there was only one god, and the extent of his goodness, knowledge, and power. Jeremiah argued from the order of the world that there was one powerful and reliable god, and that god was God. He argued to the power of the creator from the extent of the creation: . . . he argued that its regular behavior showed the reliability of the creator, and he spoke of the "covenant of day and night" whereby they followed each other regularly, and "the ordinances of heaven and earth," and he used their existence as an argument for the trustworthiness of the Jewish God.
>
> (Swinburne 2005, 154)

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4

REASONS AND REVELATIONS

> For a philosopher to concentrate on those [formal] arguments and ignore the living context within which speculative philosophers have elaborated their theories is to run the risk of missing the point entirely.
>
> (Stephen Clark, contemporary British philosopher of religion)

As we have noted, in philosophical theology (as with *all areas of philosophy*) it is important to avoid hostile or question-begging methods, which, in the case of this book, involves avoiding them in the description and evaluation of theological traditions. It may be especially important in philosophical theology because of the tremendous impact religion has had historically, sometimes as the source of great goods but sometimes as the source of authoritarian control, including censorship and persecution. The great philosopher-astrologer Giordano Bruno, for example, was executed for his speculative philosophy by being burned to death in 1600 under the Inquisition. For some contemporary philosophers, there is a lingering suspicion about the value and reasonability of religion. Passions can (and have) run high at the intersection of religion and philosophy.

In the last chapter we looked at religious pluralism and the importance of respecting different religions, and we will take up the related themes of the cultural impact of our concept of divine attributes in Chapter 5 and, in Chapter 9, we address cultural toleration and philosophical theology. In this chapter, we consider some of the key reasons for adopting philosophical theology in the Abrahamic traditions. This will involve our returning to matters first raised in Chapter 1, where it was suggested that theism may provide a reasonable account for the success of the sciences and considering when (as noted in Chapter 3) religious experience might provide evidence for or against religious beliefs.

This chapter has four sections. The first concerns religious epistemology. We offer a theory of belief, evidence, and appearing and distinguish between

sympathetic and unsympathetic approaches to the evidential value of religious experience. In the second section, we look at length at how Hume's epistemic and conceptual framework led him to parallel—and to our minds—unsatisfactory views about the disclosure of the divine and the disclosure of black intelligence. We do not argue that Hume's racism gives us reason to think that his anti-theistic positions are false. But we think that his approach to the ostensible evidence of God and his approach to the ostensible evidence of there being black Africans who are as gifted as white Europeans a parallel mistake. In the third section, we look at arguments from religious experience that may or may not enhance the evidential role of traditional theistic arguments (the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments). This will involve considering the "living contexts" that, as Stephen Clark observes, form the ground for assessing formal arguments. A fourth and final section considers three objections to the view that God may be revealed to us in experience.

Religious epistemology

Like many (but not all) philosophers, we adopt a basic principle of rationality or reason along with the view that beliefs involve appearances. So, we think that if someone believes X, then X appears to be the case to the person, and vice versa. We also propose that if X appears to be the case to a person, then that person has *some reason* (even if this is weak and can be overturned with a modest objection) to believe that X is the case. We clarify and defend these claims with some examples.

A first point of clarification is to note the important difference between what may be called a *mere appearing* or *bare seeming* versus one that is evidential. So the fact that you think that the Red Sox will win the next World Series is of no evidential value insofar as this thought or belief is not backed up with a host of reasons. Appearances that are evidential are those in which the object of belief appears to be disclosed to the person. The "object of belief" may be an inference (if London is bigger than Minneapolis, Minneapolis is smaller than London) or an ostensibly necessary truth (2 + 2 = 4), or one's self-awareness (you are aware of yourself existing as the same person over time). Disclosures admit of degrees in terms of evidential strength (simple mathematical reasoning is probably more reliably disclosed to you than a metaphysical thesis such as time is one directional; that is, it is impossible for an object or person to travel to the past). Also, disclosures can differ in scope; the character of a celebrity you have never met personally is probably less disclosed to you than your friend and neighbor with whom you interact daily. Presumably in our common-sense perception of the world, the way the world is disclosed or made plain to us is subject to what the philosopher Kai Man Kwan calls *critical trust*. It is through critical trust that we distinguish between mere appearing and evidential appearing, distinguishing between when the apparent seeing of water in the distance is a mirage versus an actual pool of water.

We believe that the above claims about appearance and evidence are grounded in common sense and ordinary language. It would be bizarre, in our view, to claim

that someone, Chris, believes that *most Canadians are polite*, while at the same time *it appears to Chris that it is not the case that most Canadians are polite*. Moreover, it would be very odd for *it to appear to Chris that most Canadians are polite* (imagine that Chris knows thousands of Canadians and all of them seem polite and Chris has not heard of any impolite Canadians, except for a small number of Canadian criminals) and for this not to count as *a good reason for Chris to believe that most Canadians are polite*. Obviously, as we note, appearances can be misleading, but we would not be able to conceive of something as misleading unless we had some concept of what it would be to undergo reliably appearing. For example, we recognize a grammatical error on the grounds that we can recognize what is properly grammatical.

Moreover, we can make sense when some appearances compete, and some greater presumed appearance can lead us to suspend what is less evident. To a philosopher who is deeply skeptical about perception, for example, she may grant that *it appears to her that things are as she perceives them*, but *it also appears to her that her perception is unreliable*. What of a case when a person, Chris, claims to believe that, say, her friend Pat is loyal, but it appears to Chris that Pat is unfaithful? In this case, we propose three options: First, Chris does not truly believe that Pat is faithful, but Chris hopes Pat is faithful, and thus Chris hopes that when more evidence becomes available, then Pat will appear faithful. Second, while there is *some* appearance that Pat is unfaithful, Chris's *overall awareness* of Pat is that Pat is faithful. Third, and this is perhaps the interpretation of last resort, Chris is in a state of self-deception.

The relevance of invoking the above points is that we propose that in religious contexts, appearances are evidentially charged. If it genuinely *appears to a person that God or some higher or sacred being appears to her*, then we propose *that is a reason for her to believe that such an appearance is truly of God or some higher or sacred being*. The form of appearing we have in mind here is not *mere appearing* or *bare seeming*; we are referencing instead a divine disclosure that is in a similar evidential context as when *it appears to you that you are engaged in an encounter with another person*. As with the case of Chris and Pat, there are lots of conditions that need to be brought into play. A person might have independent reason to think there is no God, and thus any appearance of God to that person would be as unreasonable to trust as the appearance of Winston Churchill still alive. Knowing that Churchill died in 1965 would be good reason to believe that any appearance that Churchill is still alive is better explained in terms of Churchill impersonators or actors playing Churchill. But if one has reason to think that the appearance of God is actually possibly veridical and has no overriding reason to doubt it, that would be a reason to consider (along with other reasons, supportive or undermining) that the experience is reliable (as we argued in Chapter 3).

In the context of religious experience, we propose that there are cases when the appearance of a divine disclosure counts as evidence that there is disclosure of the divine. We take this up with points and counterpoints throughout this chapter, but for the remainder of this section and in the next section on Hume, we note the importance of distinguishing sympathetic versus hostile versions of appealing to

religious experience as evidence. Consider, then, a portrait of religious experience advanced by Thomas Nagel contrasted with the first-person testimony of the British poet W.H. Auden.

Nagel offers the remarks below in a sympathetic review of a book by Alvin Plantinga—a Christian philosopher. Nagel writes appreciatively of the clarity Plantinga's work provokes between a secular and theistic worldview. Nagel's appreciation for theism and what he calls the religious temperament are, in our view, deeply admirable and completely free of the teapot sarcasms we observed in the Introduction with reference to Bertrand Russell and Simon Blackburn. Nonetheless, Nagel's account of what a religious experience might be like seems to us to be less than charitable:

> It is illuminating to have the starkness of the opposition between Plantinga's theism and the secular outlook so clearly explained. My instinctively atheistic perspective implies that if I ever found myself flooded with the conviction that what the Nicene Creed says is true, the most likely explanation would be that I was losing my mind, not that I was being granted the gift of faith. From Plantinga's point of view, by contrast, I suffer from a kind of spiritual blindness from which I am unwilling to be cured. This is a huge epistemological gulf, and it cannot be overcome by the cooperative employment of the cognitive faculties that we share, as is the hope with scientific disagreements.
>
> (Nagel 2012, §2)

We have enormous respect for the work of Thomas Nagel, but take note of how literally incredible his account of a transforming religious experience might be. The Nicene Creed contains highly developed theological terms that would make little sense without conceptual unpacking in the context of a Christian community. Imagine you had almost no exposure to Christianity and suddenly it struck you: it appears that there is one God, the Father the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen. The Creed goes on to refer to the only Son of God the Father and to refer to the relationship of being begotten, and so on. In a later chapter we will bring to light some philosophical theology on the Trinity that makes (or proposes to make) sense of the teaching. But Nagel's account in which he—or someone like him—comes to think the Nicene Creed is true seems fantastic (in the literal sense of being a matter of fantasy).

Contrast that sort of experience with the testimony of the British poet W.H. Auden:

> One fine summer night in June 1933 I was sitting on a lawn after dinner with three colleagues, two women and one man. We liked each other well enough, but we were certainly not intimate friends, nor had any one of us a sexual interest in another. Incidentally, we had not drunk any alcohol. We were talking casually about everyday matters when quite suddenly and unexpectedly,

> something happened. I felt myself invaded by a power which, though I consented to it, was irresistible and certainly not mine. For the first time in my life I knew exactly—because, thanks to the power, I was doing it—what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself. I was certain, though the conversation continued to be perfectly ordinary, that my three colleagues were having the same experience. (In the case of one of them, I was able to later confirm this.) My personal feelings towards them were unchanged—they were still colleagues, not intimate friends—but I felt their existences of themselves to be of infinite value and rejoiced in it. I recalled with shame the many occasions on which I had been spiteful, snobbish, selfish, but the immediate joy was greater than the shame, for I knew that, so long as I was possessed by this spirit, it would be literally impossible for me deliberately to injure another human being. I also knew that the power would, of course, be withdrawn sooner or later and that, when it did, my greeds and self-regard would return. The experience lasted at its full intensity for about two hours when we said good-night to each other and went to bed. When I awoke the next morning, it was still present, though weaker, and it did not vanish completely for two days or so. The memory of the experience has not prevented me from making use of others, grossly and often, but it has made it much more difficult for me to deceive myself about what I am up to when I do. And among the various factors which several years later brought me back to the Christian faith in which I had been brought up, the memory of this experience and asking myself what it could mean was one of the most crucial, though at the time it occurred, I thought I had done with Christianity for good.
>
> (Auden 1973, 69)

Using the example of Auden, we offer the following first-person account of a religious experience that might better connect the experience of someone like Nagel with reflection on the Nicene Creed. We will call the subject of this experience *Legan* ("Nagel" spelled backwards) to underscore that we intend this as fictional and intentionally not attributed to Thomas Nagel the philosopher:

> I, Professor Legan, am thoroughly skeptical of all religions, especially theistic ones. I have never had before what might be considered a religious experience. At least until recently. Yesterday I was surprised to learn that one of my brightest graduate students is a Christian. That made little sense to me. She seems articulate, very sharp, and her paper for my seminar on the problems facing the private language argument was among the best I have read. I was upset to learn she was just diagnosed with terminal cancer. And yet her response to the diagnosis has been more measured and emotionally stable than I could imagine. The other day, I joked with her about how I was not the kind of philosopher who might wake up one day and suddenly think the Nicene Creed is true. She told me that, while she does profess the Nicene Creed, she does not understand all that it involves.

> "I am saying things in church I do not fully understand," she told me. "But it makes more sense the more I am living in a community that is truly loving."
>
> While I am still an atheist, something totally unexpected happened to me while walking through Washington Park. I had a dim sense of there being some loving force around me. It was not like thinking that some colleague or lover or stranger was loving. It was a faint sense that perhaps my atheism was not the full story. I did not come to think that the Nicene Creed was even possibly true, but I did have an uncanny sense that perhaps there is some kind of sacred reality that is good. I was tempted to dismiss this thought as insane. But I found myself doing something odd, given my life history. I said silently what might have been a prayer: "Spirit of love, if you are a spirit and if you are loving, which I doubt . . . whether or not you are a god or whatever, please be with my student. Provide her healing and, if you do exist, lead me to understand something about you." There, I did it. Imagine an atheist saying such a prayer?! I thought it was an absurd moment. But now I am not positive which is more absurd: to believe that the kind of love that W.H. Auden claimed to experience is real or to deny that such experiences happen or, if they happen, they are rubbish in terms of evidence. On the way to my seminar, I passed in the hall Bertrand, our theatre director who remarked that his production of Hamlet was under threat by administrative cuts in funding. "Angels and ministers of grace, defend us," I replied. "Indeed," replied Bertrand. Of course, I was just citing a line from Hamlet. It was a joke. But as I climbed upstairs I wondered whether I was slowly making a transition from my secular world to one that was permeated by something else.

We suggest that something like the above would be a more plausible phenomenology of religious experience.

Because of the importance of methodology and frameworks in approaching religious experiences, we dedicate the next section to studying the ways in which David Hume so set up his notions of nature and intelligence to make both the disclosure of the divine, as well as the disclosure of intelligence among black Africans, implausible.

Closing a pathway to theism by definition: the case of David Hume

Hume advanced an impressive argument against the rationality of believing in miracles. Here is his definition of a miracle from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*:

> A miracle may be accurately defined as a transgression of a law of nature by particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent. A miracle may either be discoverable by men or not. This alters not

> its nature and essence. The raising of a house or ship into the air is a visible miracle. The raising of a feather, when the wind wants ever so little of a force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle, though not so sensible with regard to us.
>
> (Hume 2002, §10.1)

We note some minor difficulties with this characterization: defining a miracle as a transgression or violation seems to be inhospitable to theistic action. Why think it *transgresses* a law of nature if God (if there is a God) raises a dead body to life? One way to revise what Hume is getting at without the loaded language of violation is to characterize a miracle as an event in the cosmos that would not have occurred except that God willed that it occur. As to whether it is not essential to being a miracle that it is observed or not, that seems at least controversial. The term "miracle" comes from the Latin for "object of wonder" and it therefore would at least be odd for an event to be a miracle that was not an object of wonder.

Consider now Hume's characterization of how we base our beliefs on evidence, and then we will cite Hume's central case against the rationality of believing that there are miracles.

> A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the events with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full proof of the future existence of that event. In other cases, he proceeds with more caution. He weighs the opposing experiments: to that side he inclines with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgment, the evidence exceeds not what we properly call probability. All probability, then, supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence, proportioned to the superiority. A hundred instances or experiments on one side, and fifty on another affords a doubtful expectation of any event; though a hundred uniform experiments, with only one that is contradictory, reasonably begs a pretty strong degree of assurance. In all cases, we must balance the opposite experiments, where they are opposite, and deduct the smaller number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence.
>
> (Hume 2002, §10.1)

Hume's numbering instances may seem puzzling, but the main point is relatively clear: one ought to believe the preponderance of evidence. When a belief has more evidence than its denial or suspension, one should accept the belief.

Here is an extensive, but crucial text in which Hume sets forth his central case against the rationality of believing that a miracle has occurred:

> A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the

> very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Why is it more than probable, that all men must die; that lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water; unless it be, that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of these laws, or in other words, a miracle to prevent them? Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.
>
> (Hume 2002, §10.1)

A minor issue needs attention before getting to the heart of the matter. Some of Hume's critics have thought his argument here begs the question because Hume appears simply to assume no one has observed a miracle—more specifically, no one has observed a resurrection. Christians of Hume's day believed that a resurrection had indeed been witnessed and so would not accept that a resurrection "has never been observed in any age or country." To avoid the charge of begging the question (as well as to adopt a charitable reading of the text), we believe that Hume's argument is best seen as follows: the evidence that supports a report of a miracle will always be outweighed by the evidence against it. This is true, or so Hume argues, because we may easily explain why reports of miracles are made and have widespread currency; the belief in miracles is prompted by vanity, ignorance, fear, and a love for the marvelous and extraordinary. So understood, Hume's case against miracles does not beg the question, but for it to be persuasive we believe that Hume's background naturalist framework needs to be made more explicit.

When we look to that background, however, we discover an interesting parallel with a darker side to Hume's thinking. Just as Hume characterized nature as something that was foreign to any divine action, he worked with an assumption that Africans were shorn of intelligence. There is a sense in which Hume might be here reflecting on the empirical evidence as he assessed it, but we suggest that if he was working with empirical data, he did so with a tendency to ignore possible counter-evidence:

> I am apt to suspect the Negroes and in general all of the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than

> white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have all still something eminent about them, in their valor, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity, tho' low people without education will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In Jamaica indeed they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and leaning; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.
>
> (Hume 1886, 252)

To explain the parallel flaws in his reasoning, let us return to miracles again. Hume so constructed his notion of nature and put miracles in such odd juxtaposition that there could be no fair assessment:

> For I own, that otherwise, there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony; though, perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all the records of history. Thus, suppose, all authors, in all languages, agree, that, from the first of January, 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days: suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people: that all travellers, who return from foreign countries, bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction: it is evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived. The decay, corruption, and dissolution of nature, is an event rendered probable by so many analogies, that any phenomenon, which seems to have a tendency towards that catastrophe, comes within the reach of human testimony, if that testimony be very extensive and uniform.
>
> (Hume 2002, §10.2)

The event, as described, gives one no clue as to how it might serve a divine end. The total darkness (perhaps a symbol of superstition) seems ripe for naturalistic interpretation, for, from a theistic point of view, the event seems ad hoc and pointless.

Going back to the description of a miracle as a violation. We think this would be akin to describing the neurological processes that underlie and help us to see as mere disturbances of the brain. It is loaded language. In his definition of a miracle, as we saw, Hume prejudices the language when using the term "transgression"

and the phrase "interposition of some invisible agent." This suggests that a miracle is some kind of nefarious act by a fairy-like miscreant. Remove the loaded language, and much of the apparent force of the argument dissipates. It seems that prejudice and misguided assumptions plagued Hume's approach and assessment both of the possibility of divine action and of black intelligence.

Unlike the fairly rare events of miracles as commonly described, divine disclosures and other sorts of religious experience are widespread, global phenomena. We turn next to these and whether they enhance the evidential force of theistic arguments.

Cumulative, experiential theistic arguments

Consider several cases in which there is an apparent disclosure of the divine, keeping in mind that these kinds of experiences have been widely reported across cultures and times. Here is a report from St. Teresa of Avila:

> For if I say that I see Him neither with the eyes of the body, nor with those of the soul—because it was not an imaginary vision—how is it that I can understand and maintain that He stands beside me, and be more certain of it than if I saw Him? If it be supposed that it is as if a person were blind, or in the dark, and therefore unable to see another who is close to him, the comparison is not exact. There is a certain likelihood about it, however, but not much, because the other senses tell him who is blind of that presence: he hears the other speak or move, or he touches him; but in these visions there is nothing like this. The darkness is not felt; only He renders Himself present to the soul by a certain knowledge of Himself which is more clear than the sun. I do not mean that we now see either a sun or any brightness, only that there is a light not seen, which illumines the understanding so that the soul may have the fruition of so great a good.
>
> (Teresa 1904, 225–226)

Timothy Beardsworth, in his *A Sense of Presence*, provides many reported experiences, including some that are remarkably similar to the account of St. Teresa. The following (from an anonymous testimony sent to the Religious Experience Unit at Manchester College, Oxford) is representative:

> Then, in a very gentle and gradual way, not with shock at all, it began to dawn on me that I was not alone in the room. Someone else was there, located fairly precisely about two yards to my right front. Yet there was no sort of sensory hallucination. I neither saw him nor heard him in any sense of the word "see" or "hear," but there he was; I had no doubt about it. He seemed to be very good and very wise, full of sympathetic understanding, and most kindly disposed towards me.
>
> (Beardsworth 1977, 122)

More recently yet, John Hick—who we have encountered in previous chapters—describes his own powerful divine disclosure that drew him into the Christian faith:

> As a law student at University College, Hull, at the age of eighteen, I underwent a powerful evangelical conversion under the impact of the New Testament figure of Jesus. For several days I was in a state of intense mental and emotional turmoil, during which I became increasingly aware of a higher truth and greater reality pressing in upon me and claiming my recognition and response. At first this was highly unwelcome, a disturbing and challenging demand for nothing less than a revolution in personal identity. But then the disturbing claim became a liberating invitation. The reality that was pressing in upon me was not only awesomely demanding but also irresistibly attractive, and I entered with great joy and excitement into the world of Christian faith.
>
> (Hick 2002, 33)

Hick records a second experience, this one in a very public space:

> An experience of this kind which I cannot forget, even though it happened forty-two years ago [from 1982], occurred—of all places—on the top deck of a bus in the middle of the city of Hull, when I was a law student at University College, Hull. As everyone will be very conscious who can themselves remember such a moment, all descriptions are inadequate. But it was as though the skies opened up and light poured down and filled me with a sense of overflowing joy, in response to an immense transcendent goodness and love. I remember that I couldn't help smiling broadly smiling back, as it were, at God—though if any of the other passengers were looking they must have thought that I was a lunatic, grinning at nothing.
>
> (Hick 2002, 34)

Hick's disclosures are especially relevant, for, while he championed religion as a positive and valuable aspect of human and social life, he was also highly skeptical about many religious claims and beliefs, in particular the traditional arguments for the existence of God. In fact, he approvingly cites Hume's and Kant's attacks on arguments for the existence of God, concluding that there are no compelling traditional arguments. Yet he maintained that religious experience could provide evidence for the divine:

> The conviction of the reality of the Transcendent, when it is based in religious experience, is an acknowledgment of a presence or a power which impinges upon someone's consciousness, whether gently or traumatically, so that to deny it would be an act of spiritual suicide. Given such firsthand awareness of the divine, the appropriate philosophical apologetic is a defense of the

> rationality of trusting and living on the basis of compelling experience of this kind . . . I believe that such an apologetic is possible.
>
> (Hick 1982, 23–24)

In most philosophy of religion textbooks and reference guides, the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments for theism are usually considered. They are rarely treated, however, as dimensions of an overall argument from religious experience. We present them in such a context now, and address a (or the) moral argument for theism in Chapter 6. In what follows, we propose what some philosophers call a thought experiment. Imagine that you have had some religious experience of a modest sort, perhaps like the case of Professor Legan. How might that affect one's assessment of classical theistic arguments? Keep that question and the overall thought experiment in mind as we explore the arguments and objections.

Here then are brief, formal versions of three theistic arguments, along with enough objections and replies to secure them as standard arguments, which we then revisit through the lens of religious experience. The three versions of the arguments that follow have been addressed by each of us separately elsewhere. Our aim is not to deploy full, extensive theistic arguments and responses, but to see how they might be assessed first outside of, and then within, the realm of religious experience.

Ontological argument

There are dozens of versions of this argument of which we offer only one here. Premise one: The concept of God is the concept of a being who is maximally excellent, whose attributes include being supremely good, powerful, omniscient, and existing necessarily or non-contingently. There is much debate on how to understand necessity and the Godhead. We propose that, at the very least, if there is a God, then God is such that God cannot not exist. We can put this in a provisional way with an analogy to some other ostensibly necessary truth. Just as it cannot be an accident that $2 + 2 = 4$ or that everything is itself (or everything is self-identical), it cannot be an accident or contingent that God exists. Premise two: God's existence is either necessary or impossible. So, by analogy, $2 + 2 = 4$ is either necessary or impossible. Premise three: God's existence is possible. It seems that we can conceive of God's existing and consistently describe such a state of affairs. Premise four: God's existence is not impossible (from premise three). Conclusion: God's existence is necessary.

Consider some rapid objections and replies. Objection: Maybe the first premise is false and some lesser notion of necessity should be attributable to God, if there is a God. For example, could God's "necessity" be re-conceived as a conceptual point: Nothing can satisfy the title or description "God" if it were not necessary (e.g., if it had a beginning or end temporally or if it had an external cause). Reply: We think that the conceptual point is correct, but we emphasize the stronger claim that if God exists, God's existence is non-contingent or necessary. It would not

capture the necessity of 2 + 2 = 4 to claim that 2 + 2 = 5 is wrong because it does not fit the concept of 2 + 2 = 4. Rather, the wrongness of 2 + 2 = 5 amounts to its violating the law of identity: 2 is the same as 1 + 1, and while 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 is (necessarily identical with) 1 + 1 + 1 + 1, it is not (necessarily not identical with) 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1.

Objection: Existence is not a property, so necessary existence is not a property. Since it is not a property, it does not add to the concept of the thing. Reply: In saying that God exists necessarily, we simply mean than it is impossible that God fail to exist. Put modally, God exists in every possible world. Thus, existence is a modal property, and God has the property of necessary existence.

Objection: Using the structure of the ontological argument, but plugging in a perfect island (proposed by medieval monk Gaunilo) or a special fairy (proposed by Michael Martin), we should also conclude that a perfect island or a special fairy exists. Reply: Islands and fairies are physical objects, or essentially connected to physical objects, and no physical object can exist necessarily since it is possible that there are no physical objects.

Objection: While there may be some reason to think God's existence is possible, aren't there just as good reasons to think God's existence is impossible? If God's non-existence is possible then it is not impossible for God to not exist. Therefore it is not necessary for God to exist. Reply: Given the definition of *necessary existence* used in this argument, in order to rebut the argument it must be demonstrated that the notion is incoherent. We know of no such demonstration that is decisively compelling. Michael Martin and others have argued that the concept of God is indeed incoherent. We do not have the space to address these arguments here, but we find them deeply problematic.

Cosmological argument

As with the ontological argument, there are also many versions of the cosmological argument. The following argument from contingency, like the ontological argument above, includes the notions of contingent and necessary being:

1. A contingent being (a being such that if it exists it could have not-existed or could cease to) exists.
2. This contingent being has a cause of or explanation for its existence.
3. The cause of or explanation for its existence is something other than the contingent being itself.
4. What causes or explains the existence of this contingent being must either be solely other contingent beings or include a non-contingent (necessary) being.
5. Contingent beings alone cannot provide an adequate causal account or explanation for the existence of a contingent being.
6. Therefore, what causes or explains the existence of this contingent being must include a non-contingent (necessary) being.

> 7. Therefore, a necessary being (a being such that if it exists cannot not-exist) exists.
>
> (Reichenbach 2012, §3.1)

We consider the crux of two central objections and replies. Objection: While each of the premises can be challenged, the crucial premise is 5, the problem of which is that if the individual parts that make up an object are each explained, the object itself as a whole is also explained. Hume argued the point this way:

> But the *whole*, you say, wants a cause. I answer that the uniting of these parts into a whole . . . is performed merely by an arbitrary act of the mind, and has no influence on the nature of things. Did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable should you afterwards ask me what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the parts.
>
> (Hume 1998, chapter 9)

Reply: Hume has a point that sometimes an explanation of the parts of an object provides an explanation for the whole of which the parts consist, at least at one level. In reference to the building of the One World Trade Center, for example, an explanation for why it was a building project can be this: Because various builders united. But yet at another level this answer is incomplete, for one could reasonably seek the cause or reason for why the builders were united for this project. While we concede that each contingent thing in the universe exists due to the causal actions of other contingent things in the universe, the question still remains: "Why are there contingent things rather than just nothing?" As the late Catholic philosopher Frederick Copleston, put it:

> If you add up chocolates you get chocolates after all and not a sheep. If you add up chocolates to infinity, you presumably get an infinite number of chocolates. So if you add up contingent beings to infinity, you still get contingent beings, not a necessary being. An infinite series of contingent beings will be, to my way of thinking, as unable to cause itself as one contingent being.
>
> (Copleston 1964, 174)

In order to maintain that the universe as a whole doesn't need a cause, it seems that one would have to affirm that the contingent parts of which the whole consists also do not need causes. But this is just to affirm that they are not contingent after all.

Objection: As Hume, and more recently Beverley and Brian Clack maintain, it seems "strangely hubristic" that something like human thought, intention, purpose, and so on is responsible for the creation of the entire universe.

> The belief that the universe is created by something akin to personal intention might, then, be merely an illusion. And it might be primitive or superstitious illusion at that. For among primitive peoples we find that unusual events are frequently explained in terms of the personal intentions of supernatural agents.
> (Clack and Clack 2008, 27)

Reply: While it may be hubristic to affirm person-like agency to that which "created" (brought into being and sustains) the universe, it could also be hubristic to deny that that which created the universe has intentions, purposes, and so forth. Hubris can thrive either way. So we propose allowing the evidence—widely meant here to include divine encounter and experience—to be our guide. This leads to the next argument.

Teleological argument

Much of what we know about the basic structure of the universe, such as the fundamental laws and parameters of physics, has an incredibly low antecedent probability given our knowledge of nature and natural causes. In other words, by themselves their occurrences seem very unlikely. Furthermore, if any of these laws and parameters were to have been slightly altered, life—most notably conscious life—would have been impossible. Consider a few examples. It has been calculated that if gravity had been stronger or weaker by one part in 10^{40}, then life-sustaining stars like the sun could not exist. In that case, carbon-based life would have been impossible. If the electromagnetic force were slightly stronger or weaker, all life would be impossible. If the initial explosion of the Big Bang had differed in strength by as little as one part in 10^{60}, the universe would have either quickly collapsed back on itself or expanded too rapidly for stars to form. In either case, all forms of life would likely have been impossible.

It is not only theists who concede the statistical odds. Atheist and Nobel-winning physicist Steven Weinberg wrote this about fine-tuning with respect to one of the parameters:

> There may be a cosmological constant in the field equations whose value just cancels the effects of the vacuum mass density produced by quantum fluctuations. But to avoid conflict with astronomical observation, this cancellation would have to be accurate to at least 120 decimal places. Why in the world should the cosmological constant be so precisely fine-tuned?
> (Weinberg 1993, 186–187)

Similarly, Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow note the following:

> Most of the fundamental constants in our theories appear fine-tuned in the sense that if they were altered by only modest amounts, the universe would be qualitatively different, and in many cases unsuitable for the development

> of life. . . . The emergence of the complex structures capable of supporting intelligent observers seems to be very fragile. The laws of nature form a system that is extremely fine-tuned, and very little in physical law can be altered without destroying the possibility of the development of life as we know it. Were it not for a series of startling coincidences in the precise details of physical law, it seems, humans and similar life-forms would never have come into being.
>
> (Hawking and Mlodinow 2012, 160–161)

Thus, to many physicists and philosophers (both theists and atheists), the structure of the universe seems to be "balanced on a razor's edge for life to occur," as Robin Collins has often put the matter (1999). So what best explains why these conditions have the life-cultivating qualities that they do? Coincidences? Lucky accidents? One could reasonably conclude that the preponderance of evidence here points to the existence of a conscious, intelligent, purposive designer.

Objection: From the mere fact of something's being improbable that it occurred by chance, even enormously improbable, this does not by itself provide a reason to conclude that the event occurred by design. Consider this example. Suppose you take a standard deck of cards, which contains 52 cards, and shuffle it well. Then you spread the cards out in a line. The probability of getting this precise sequence is incredibly low: 8×10^{67}. To get a sense of how large that number is, note that the total number of stars in the universe is estimated to be roughly 3×10^{23}. Just the fact that the particular permutation of cards is highly improbable does not, by itself, provide a reason to conclude that it was the result of design. So too with the universe.

Reply: While mere improbability does not by itself provide a reason to suppose design, when it comes to the universe there is much more involved than mere improbability. Consider this analogy, proposed by John Leslie (though for a slightly different purpose). Suppose you are forced to stand before a firing squad of 100 trained marksmen, and all of them have rifles aimed at your heart. You hear the command to shoot and then the thundering sound of the firing weapons. After the noise subsides you stand there, in silence, realizing that you are not dead. In fact, you are not even injured. Somehow all of the marksmen missed their mark! While the firing squad's missing you by chance is extremely improbable, and highly improbable events do occur, there are factors in this example that warrant one's concluding that there was more going on here than mere improbability, coincidence, and being lucky. We see this example as more analogous to the universe and its finely tuned parameters than to the deck of cards example.

Having argued for the plausibility of three classic theistic arguments, we now suggest two points about arguments, reasons, and experience that are worthy of important consideration. First, as in many areas of philosophy, a single position may be supported by an accumulation of arguments, rather than a single line of reasoning. Someone may be utilitarian in ethics or liberal in politics or anti-realist in science in response to more than one argument. Similarly in theism, one might

accept a variety of arguments such as two to three of those just reviewed, or the argument from religious experience. Second, if any of the three arguments above (or additional ones that will be covered later) are maintained along with a theistic argument from experience, the evidential ground may favor theism significantly. Why?

First, it would be implausible to think that an experiential argument can make a poor argument good. Take a fallacious argument: Premise one, I know that a masked man robbed a bank. Premise two: I do not know that my father robbed a bank. Therefore my father is not a masked man who robbed a bank. The reasoning does not work on the grounds that the second premise is not strong enough to differentiate the masked man and your father. You may not know your father robbed a bank because you know very little about him at all. However, we can change the reasoning to avoid a fallacy if a person reasons this way: I know a masked man robbed a bank yesterday. I was with my father all day yesterday and I have evidence that he never wore a mask and we were not even close to a bank.

Second, if, reasoning from experience, one has some encounter with a transcendent, sacred, good reality and this provided some evidence that there was such a being, then one would have some reason to think it is possible that there is a God . . . and thus some reason to believe that one premise of the ontological argument holds. This is an application of the precept "From the fact that something exists, it follows that it is possible" (*ab esse ad posse valet consequentia*); reasons for thinking X is actual count as reasons for thinking X is possible. Imagine that one is genuinely undecided about whether God's existence is possible or impossible. In that situation, the argument would not be convincing. But in considering an argument for the existence of God, one would be considering an argument for the possibility of God's existence.

Two objections to divine revelation

1. The case of Fleischacker and Wildman

Samuel Fleischacker proposes that treating the revelation of God as recorded in the Hebrew Bible as authentic would be disastrous, religiously and philosophically:

> To call God speaking on Sinai (or as Jesus in the Galilee, or, through the angel Givreel, to Muhammad) an "historical fact" is to say that historical methods of investigation would suffice to establish it. But they would not. The very idea of God is the idea of a being beyond all nature, who can control nature itself . . . No amount of historical evidence could ever prove that that being appeared at a point within the natural course of things. Indeed, the mere idea that they could prove such a thing is a betrayal of the idea of God, a suggestion that God is just one being in the universe among others. For God's appearance in history to be pinned down by scientific investigation would be for God to be subject to the forces of the universe, rather than to

> be the source of or governor of those forces. A god who can be studied by science is an idol, rather than God, even if there is just one such god, and to believe that the unique God in or on whom the universe is supposed to rest can be known scientifically is to reduce monotheism to idolatry.
>
> (Fleischacker 2011, 26)

Fleischacker goes on to caricature divine revelation:

> Even if, say an apparently disembodied voice, accompanied by thunder and mysterious trumpet blasts, once uttered remarkably accurate prophecies and deep nuggets of moral wisdom, that would indicate just that there are powers in the universe beyond those with which we are acquainted. Erich von Däniken's hypothesis, in *Chariots of the Gods*, that all supposed religious revelations are really records of visits to earth by intelligent creatures from outer space is very silly, but as an empirical explanation of Sinai, it is better than the hypothesis that the speaker was God. (A better explanation is, of course, the Humean one: that the very event attested to by the Torah is excellent reason to disbelieve the testimony.) At best, evidence that the event at Sinai took place as described might be evidence for a superhero god. It is very unlikely, but we just might be able to show that a creature rather like Spiderman or Dumbledore killed all the Egyptian firstborn, split the Red Sea for the Israelites, and produced a grand sound and light show at Mount Sinai. That would fall far short of showing that an all-powerful, all-wise and all-good source of the universe had done these things, or had spoken to human beings. The notion of a power over-turning the usual course of events, whose presence can yet be determined by scientific means, is just a notion of an unusual, surprising power within the universe, a sort of magic or a force hitherto relegated to science fiction. The notion of God speaking, or otherwise intervening in human history, defies our very conception of how nature works, and of what a historical event is. So the hypothesis that God has spoken to us can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed by the findings of historians, or other scientists.
>
> (Fleishacker 2011, 27)

In *Religious and Spiritual Experiences*, Wesley Wildman similarly describes experiential revelation as conceptually impaired. According to Wildman, the experiential encounter with God in theistic tradition is the encounter with "disembodied intentionality." God is thus like angels and ghosts who are "discarnate intentional beings." In rejecting theism, naturalists hold that there are "no disembodied forms of intentionality, no disembodied powers" (Wildman 2011, 27).

Reply: First, the idea that if God is the God of nature, then God cannot be manifested in or experienced in the natural world seems entirely ungrounded. If God can control nature, wouldn't it rather seem to be a limitation of divine agency if God cannot act in the created order?

Second, describing revelation or religious experience in terms of "disembodiment" seems at the very least misleading. "Disembodiment" is the contrary of "embodiment" and it suggests something impaired, damaged or un-anchored. One may think of the experience of God as the encounter with something incorporeal but not disembodied. As with Hume earlier, the language here seems loaded.

Third, the idea that if God is experienced, then God would become or could become an idol is at least peculiar. A thing need not be experienced to be an idol (someone might even worship the absence of religion) and many things can be experienced without risk of idolatry (myself, for example!). Moreover, on some accounts, God experiences (or is at least cognitively aware of) God's self. Would that mean God might become an idol for God?

Fourth, we know of no reason to think that an experience of X entails that X is merely one thing of possibly many things of the same species. This assumes something that a sophisticated theist such as Thomas Aquinas would never grant, namely, that God, if he exists, is just another being among the totality of beings. For Aquinas, God is not an *ens* (a being) but *esse ipsum subsistens* (self-subsistent Being). God is not a being among beings, but Being itself. Admittedly, this is not an easy notion; but if the atheist is not willing to grapple with it, then his or her animadversions are just so many grapplings with a straw man.

Finally, the term "history" can be used to refer to that which is studied or confirmed through historical inquiry, but it can simply mean "the past." Someone can believe that (for example) it is a historical fact that Jesus rose from the dead without (a) claiming to prove this or (b) without claiming that it can be established through historical inquiry. We believe many things intelligibly about the past and present without claiming to prove or know or settle the matter through science or philosophy (e.g. free will, moral realism, our memories, etc.).

2. The case of Philipse

Herman Philipse uses the factual errors of scriptures to argue for their unreliability.

> The kind of life recommended to the earliest followers of Christ, for example, depended partly on the factual presupposition that the utopian kingdom of God on Earth would arrive soon during the time of their life, so that no investments in a long-term future were needed. But the kingdom of God did not arrive, which created the so-called problem of the *Postponed Parousia*. This shows that scientific and other factual presuppositions are not irrelevant to what is considered the core Christian message. A scrupulous history of what Christians throughout the ages regarded as essential revelations in the Bible will reveal that this essential content has shifted over time and, at least in developed countries, has gradually dwindled during the last centuries. For example, a good many contemporary Christians do not believe in the afterlife anymore, because they cannot reconcile the idea of spiritual survival after bodily death with the results of modern brain research, which

> show in ever greater detail the extent to which our mental life depends upon specific bodily processes.
>
> (Philipse 2012, 10)

Philipse considers and rejects one account of why God might inspire a revelation (or divinely inspired scripture) full of historical and scientific error. Could it be that an all-good God might have employed what we now know to be scientifically false beliefs, because that would have been an essential condition of communicating something revelatory? For example, imagine that God's revelation at some point implied that what we now know as a solar system is actually a planetary system in which the earth remains stationary and the sun and moon revolve around our planet. Might it be that God would have to "condescend" to our level in making some more important claim about justice, for example, and not worry about revealing that we live in a heliocentric pattern? Philipse thinks not, and if God were to make revelation claims clouded with false cosmology, then God turns out to be patronizing or simply a deceiver:

> Were the false scientific presuppositions of the outdated Weltanschauung in terms of which the revelation is formulated, part of what God communicated to the original receivers of the revelation or not? In the first case, the omniscient god deceived his audience in a somewhat patronizing manner. Instead of revealing to early believers the true view of the universe, with its trillions of galaxies and super-massive black holes, he communicated to them a false but consolingly comfortable picture of the world, in which humans play a central role. How can one trust such a patronizing deceiver with regard to the other things he is saying, which constitute the "religious content" of the message?
>
> (Philipse 2012, 10)

Reply: What should one think about these charges? First, Philipse is treating the Bible as if it were a scientific text. He is appalled that God did not reveal what we would later confirm scientifically, but to see how odd this would be, imagine the narrative of the revelation of God to Moses through the burning bush included something like this in Hebrew:

> Moses, you are actually on a planet circling around a great star, some will call the sun. Your planet and the other planets orbiting the sun make up a galaxy, about 110,000 light-years in diameter. Your planet is only one of about 300 billion stars.

Would that make any sense then? It seems entirely out of place in a story about an ancient people in captivity who are to be liberated through the power of God. We also wonder whether Philipse would have any upper limit in terms of what

he would expect of God in terms of revealing truths about the cosmos (e.g. what if God revealed the atomic theory of matter but did not disclose the reality of sub-atomic particles?).

As for Philipse's two other points about Christians adjusting their view of revelation in light of history and science—the timing of the return of Christ and belief in an afterlife—the early church and the church today believes that we should always live life in the context of the expected return of Christ (a person might well live life in terms of some expected outcome even if it seems perpetually elusive, e.g. living every day as if it is your last) and modern brain research has not ruled out (and we suggest cannot rule out) an afterlife. The brain sciences establish the causal interaction of the mental and physical, but correlation is not identity. The fact that brain damage causes damage to one's thinking and feeling does not provide any evidence that thinking and feeling are the very same thing as brain processes or events. Moreover, we suggest that no one has knowingly observed (that is, perceived with certain or near-certain knowledge) the annihilation of a person at the point of bodily death. To do that, one would have to know that a person is identical to her body and that it is impossible for a person to survive the demise of her body. Given Philipse's view about what is coherent or incoherent, we wager that he does think he *knows* survival of death is impossible.

Suppose, then, that God is revealed to us in experience. What is the nature of the divine reality? How might we describe God? We tackle these questions in the next chapter.

Further reflections

One element in Hume's case against miracles is that he adopts what some call cessationism, the idea that miracles have ceased to occur after the New Testament. C. Stephen Evans comments on how Hume's argument is weakened once one takes into account ostensible miracle narratives outside those boundaries. Evans recommends Craig Keener's work, which addresses multiple accounts of miracles. Evans writes:

> Craig Keener has provided a powerful reply to this view of Hume's [cessationism] in his massive two-volume study, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*. Keener shows how the whole debate is transformed if we reject cessationism of Hume's theological contemporaries and also recognize the clear falsity of Rudolf Bultmann's famous dictum that "it is impossible to use electrical light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles." The fact is that in today's world there are hundreds of millions (if not billions) of people who believe in spirits and miracles and who cheerfully flip light switches and use "the wireless" (cell phones included).
>
> (Evans 2015, 99–100)

In this chapter we have been concerned with reasons for thinking some view of the divine is true. However, some philosophers propose that trusting or hoping in the divine may suffice in undertaking or participating in a religious tradition. Louis Pojman writes:

> If belief-in, or trusting, can be analyzed in terms of commitment to a course of action or a disposition to act, then it seems that we do not need to believe-that X exists in order to believe-in or deeply hope in the existence of X.
>
> (Pojman 1986, 224)

Jeff Jordan fills out a case that illustrates how hope can warrant important acts. The analogy may be filled out with respect to hope in some religious tradition or hope in the divine.

> A castaway builds a bonfire hoping to catch the attention of any ship or plane that might be passing nearby. Even with no evidence that a plane or ship is nearby, he still gathers driftwood and lights a fire, enhancing the possibility of rescue. The castaway's reasoning is pragmatic. The benefit associated with fire building exceeds that of our building and, clearly, no one questions the wisdom of the action.
>
> (Jordan 2006, 1)

John Hick defends the evidential nature of religious experience, but he thinks that the evidence would be only or largely for the person who has the experience and not of evidential weight in terms of testimony providing reasons for others to form religious beliefs. Do you agree or disagree that the evidence would not admit of transference through testimony?

> This experiencing of life as a "dialogue with God" is the believer's primary reason for being sure that God is real. In testing such a reason we must be careful to ask the right question. This is not: do someone's accounts of his experience of the divine presence and activity provide an adequate reason for someone else, who has had no such experience, to be sure that God is real? Or, can one validly infer the existence of God from the reports of religious experiences? The answer in each case is no. But the proper question is whether the religious man's awareness of being in the unseen presence of God constitutes a sufficient reason for the religious man himself to be sure of the reality of God. He does not profess to infer God as the cause of his distinctively religious experience. He professes to be conscious of living in the presences of God; and this consciousness is (in the classic cases) as compelling as is his consciousness of the natural world.
>
> (Hick 1974, 209–210)

What do you make of Alvin Plantinga's notion with regard to being appeared to:

> Upon being appeared to a familiar way, I may form the belief that I perceive a branch of a peculiarly jagged shape. Here there is, of course, sensuous experience; but there is a sort of nonsensuous experience involved as well, an experience distinct from that sensuous experience but nonetheless connected with the formation of the belief in question. That belief has a certain felt attractiveness or naturalness, a sort of perceived fittingness; it feels like the *right* belief in the circumstances.
>
> (Plantinga 1993, 91–92)

Some thinkers such as Samuel Coleridge, John Hick, and Alasdair MacIntyre have argued that if creatures are to truly have freedom of the will, there must not be compelling reason for recognizing the reality of God. MacIntyre writes:

> For if we could produce logically cogent arguments we should produce the kind of certitude that leaves no room for decision; where proof is in place, decision is not. We do not decide to accept Euclid's conclusions; we merely look to the rigor of his arguments. If the existence of God were demonstrable we should be as bereft of the possibility of making a free decision to love God as we should be if every utterance of doubt or unbelief was answered by thunder-bolts from heaven.
>
> (MacIntyre 1957, 197)

Paul Moser has developed a novel defense of divine revelation involving volition. He argues that the hiddenness of God is rooted in divine love:

> Conceivably, God hides on occasion from some people for various perfectly loving divine purposes. At least the following arise: (a) to teach people to yearn for, and thus eventually to value wholeheartedly and above all else, personal volitional fellowship with God, (b) to strengthen grateful trust in God even when times look altogether bleak, (c) to remove human complacency toward God and God's redemptive purposes, (d) to shatter destructively prideful human self-reliance, and (e) to prevent people who aren't ready for fellowship with God from explicitly rejecting God. This list is by no means exhaustive; nor should we assume that an exhaustible list is available to humans. Even so, we can readily imagine that in some cases of divine hiding, some people would apprehend the ultimate emptiness of life without God's presence, and thus heighten their attentiveness to matters regarding God. A perfectly loving God could use this consideration for the good of at least some humans.
>
> (Moser 2002, 107)

Do you find Moser's reasons for divine hiddenness (as expressed in this brief paragraph) compelling?

Reread the Nagel and Hick quotations earlier in the chapter and compare Nagle's point that "the most likely explanation would be that I was losing my mind . . ." (Nagel 2012, §2) to Hick's recollection of his religious experience: "I remember that I couldn't help smiling broadly—smiling back, as it were, at God—though if any of the other passengers were looking they must have thought that I was a lunatic, grinning at nothing" (Hick 2002, 34).

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5

DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

(Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

In Chapters 1 and 2 we tackled scientific and religious challenges to philosophical theology. Chapter 3 addressed philosophical theology in the context of religious diversity, while Chapter 4 explored a positive case for divine disclosure along with a set of objections. In this chapter we focus on what is traditionally considered the divine attributes in theistic traditions, beginning with the idea of God as supremely or unsurpassably excellent or perfect. The idea that God is perfect is closely related to the idea that God is worthy of worship. This is the central claim in much of philosophy inspired by the Abrahamic faiths, for it is from such a central claim about God and values that the divine attributes are individually brought out to enrich the concept of God as essentially good, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, necessarily existing, eternal or everlasting, and more. In keeping with our understanding of philosophical theology as a philosophical operation both within and external to theological tradition, we will explore these attributes through the lens of religious practitioners from the inside as well as by skeptics. In a final section in this chapter, we examine two important Hindu understandings of the divine.

God as maximally perfect

So, we begin by philosophically exploring the idea that God is maximally perfect, followed by two sections: A feminist critique of perfect-being theology and a humanist critique of perfect being theology.

Anselm (1033/34–1109) famously referred to God as that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Of course, greatness is not envisaged here in terms of size, but of value. Does it make sense to think of values in terms of scales, and if so, is there a single scale of values? Arguably, there is an abundance of different kinds of values, with each kind involving particular sorts of values. What makes a good desk is different from what makes a good airplane or dog or poem. When it comes to the philosophy of God we may not need to suppose that all values are commensurate (meaning they may be compared on a single scale). If we had a single scale (imagine that the value of X is measurable in terms of how much pleasure it involves or is likely to produce), we could compare a dog and poem. But imagine we lack such a scale by which to compare created goods or kinds of beings. This may not be a problem. Take any list of goods: an extraordinary painting, romantic love, a magnificent poem, any kind of athletic performance, the birth of a star. Imagine there is no principled way to rank these. Still, arguably, what would be better than any one of them would be a being who could create and sustain them. A being who can bring about indefinitely many painters who do exquisite paintings, creatures who are romantically in love, poets of extraordinary power, athletes of breathtaking strength, indefinitely many stars, would seem to have a value that is greater than any one of the goods we enumerate.

Let's consider an objection: could it be that the idea of an unsurpassably great being would be like the idea of the greatest possible number? If so, the concept of an unsurpassable being would be incoherent. Some notions of there being a maximum—as with numbers—do not admit of an upper case, but we do have notions of ideas with a natural upper limit. A circle, no matter what the size, is always 360 degrees. We suggest that the idea of a being with maximal excellence is more like the idea of a circle than a series of numbers that are infinite. Consider the idea of a being that can create any number of goods (as in our earlier cases of poets, painters, etc.). We believe that it is coherent to imagine a being that can create any number of such goods, though it does not make sense to imagine a being that can create the greatest possible number of such goods. That is because the "greatest possible number" is not a number.

Let's now consider what many theistic philosophers have traditionally proposed follows from God being unsurpassably excellent—God is essentially good, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal or everlasting, and necessarily existent. In the Abrahamic traditions, more is believed about God; for example, God is believed to be the Creator and sustainer of the cosmos. But while this belief involves the divine attributes, being the Creator and being the sustainer are not (technically speaking) attributes; rather, they refer to divine acts of the unsurpassibly excellent God.

In the history of the vast amount of reflection on God and divine attributes, there are two general areas of investigation: "Are the attributes internally consistent?" and "Are the attributes compatible with the philosophy and theology of creation?" For example, is the idea that God is omnipotent and omniscient compatible with believing that creatures possess freedom? Let us consider both matters.

On internal consistency, let us consider three areas of concern: God's power, the relationship of omnipotence and essential goodness, and God's being eternal or everlasting.

God's power

This involves the philosophy of divine agency, a matter we engaged in Chapter 1 with respect to Evan Fales and Herman Philipse. We believe that this concern is worth revisiting because it brings to light the extent to which to conceive of God is not to conceive of an enlarged or transformed human ego. It will be helpful to see this if we take up some philosophical objections to theism. Consider Anthony Kenny's critique of theism from the standpoint of God as an incorporeal or "disembodied spirit":

> It is perhaps barely possible to conceive of a disembodied spirit which is individuated not by having a body but by having an individual locus or viewpoint on the world. By this I mean that we imagine it as possessing information that, in the case of a normal embodied mind, would be available only from a particular point in space and time. This limited viewpoint would mark off an individual of this kind from other possible such disembodied entities. The viewpoint would thus find expression in the content of the thoughts entertained by such a being. The being could be tracked, one might say, as an information centre. Such a being would be something like a poltergeist or a Tinkerbell. The intelligibility of the notion of pure spirit along this route seems to be in direct proportion to its triviality.
>
> Even if such a spirit is conceivable it will not help us in giving content to the notion of a God who is a non-embodied mind. For it was precisely the limitations in space and time that we imagined for such a being which made it possible to individuate it without a body. That is of no assistance towards conceiving of a personal God who is immaterial, ubiquitous and eternal. It is not just that we cannot know what thoughts are God's thoughts, but that there does not seem to be anything which would count as ascribing a thought to God in the way that we can ascribe thoughts to individual human thinkers.
>
> (Kenny 2004, 79)

Antony Flew raises similar questions about the coherence of imagining God as an incorporeal person:

> Words like "you," "I," "person," "somebody," "Flew," "woman,"—though very different in their several particular functions—are all used to refer in one way or another to objects . . . which you can point at, touch, hear, see and talk to. Person words refer to people. And how can such objects as people survive physical dissolution?
>
> (Flew 1955, 269)

Flew, like Kenny, thinks our language of persons and personhood is thoroughly embodied and thus loses its meaning when applied to God.

> In their present use person-words have logical liaisons of the very greatest importance: personal identity is the necessary condition of both accountability and expectation; which is only to say that it is unjust to reward or punish someone unless . . . he is the same person who did the deed; and also that it is absurd to expect experiences for Flew in 1984 unless . . . there is going to be a person in existence in 1984 who will be the same person as I. The difficulty is to change the use of person words so radically that it becomes significant to talk of people surviving dissolution: without changing it to such an extent that these vital logical liaisons are lost.
>
> (Flew 1955, 270–271)

Flew, and to an extent Kenny, are concerned about the coherence of personal identity beyond the biological dissolution of one's body. We will say something about this briefly, but consider the terrain first in terms of whether their reflections should have an impact upon our idea of God. The terrain as described by Kenny and Flew seems to us to be problematic. They seem to presuppose a confidence in the individuation and continuation over time of individual physical bodies. We propose that we would not have any conception of such physical individuation and continuation unless we had an antecedent confidence in our continuation and individuation of ourselves as persons. Our confidence that we see five ships sail by us is grounded in our realizing that we are the self-same person who saw five ships sail by. Clocks would do us no good unless we knew that we ourselves witnessed an hour pass. We do not come to realize we are the self-same individuals over time because we can individuate physical bodies. To "point at, touch, hear, see and talk to" physical objects, you have to have some self-awareness and confidence in personal identity that is (in our view) more fundamental than knowing whether a physical object you pointed to at 8:00 a.m. is the same thing that you are pointing to at 9:00 a.m. We of course recognize (as Kenny and Flew do) that we are embodied persons—living persons who function in the world as bodies. And we do come to recognize other persons as embodied. But the fact of our embodiment is more than what can be established by knowing only what Kenny and Flew are identifying as the physical facts. Consider a thought experiment.

Imagine you have amnesia of a radical kind and do not remember who you are, nor do you know whether or not you are Kenny, Flew, Queen Elizabeth, Cher, or any other conceivable person. Your amnesia is so complete that you have no idea of your gender, age, past, etc. . . . You could have all the information possible about the thoughts, feelings, actions of yourself and the rest of us and still not know something of vital importance: which person is you. As Thomas Nagel, Geoffrey Maddell, and others have argued, there is a fact of the matter (namely, which person is you) that is not captured in a third-person description of reality. It does not follow that human persons can exist disembodied (we address this matter in

Chapter 8), but it does mean that our certainty about "physical objects" is subordinate to our certainty about our self-awareness and continuation over time. Given these observations, it may be the case that we ourselves are physical objects, but, if so, our identity involves more than is captured in a third-person account of reality.

These critical observations help us to see how Kenny and Flew actually help us to see what is different about individual embodied persons and the divine. Although in the context of addressing the Christian understanding of the Trinity we will speculate about the individuation of divine persons, the belief that there is a single omnipresent God does not seem to be hampered by matters of individuation that we face on a terrestrial scale. One does not face the odd predicament of being able to identify "a divine thought" and then wonder whether it is attached to a specific physical object. Given that God is omniscient, God is rightly thought of as knowing all the states of affairs it is possible to know and doing so with maximal cognitive power. There is no imaginable more perfect state of knowing. From the standpoint of divine omniscience, if you have any thought at all, God knows that thought and has perfect cognition of its nature, cause, scope, and so on.

This task of considering and assessing the views of Kenny and Flew on divine power provide us with reason to be cautious in using us humans as models for God. The Abrahamic traditions do single out as divine attributes power, knowledge, goodness, and more, but note that these are not, as attributes, exclusive to humans. If nonhuman animals or extraterrestrials demonstrated that they had power, knowledge, goodness, and more, it would be preposterous to think that they are members of the human species. So, Kenny and Flew seem to think that if there is a God, God would be like a human being, only much grander and without a body. But it would be less misleading if we appreciated, first, that non-divine beings might have all kinds of bodily or non-bodily identities that are radically different from the conventional understanding of human identity and, second, that in attributing power, knowledge, goodness, and more to God we are not thereby to think we have fashioned the idea of God into the idea of a superhuman being.

As an addendum to these observations, we note here the classical treatment of divine omnipresence. To claim that God is omnipresent (or ubiquitous) is to claim that every place is created and sustained by God, that God exercises maximal divine cognitive power with respect to every place (God knows all that is possible to know of every place), and that God can exercise special acts of divine power at every place. Further, God is present in the spatial world not only by knowledge and power, but in God's very being. God is in space despite his spacelessness, but God's presence in space is very different from a spatial object in space. God's presence in space is more akin to the presence of an attribute such as solidity (a universal attribute which, in this case, is characterized by structural rigidity and resistance to changes of shape or volume). With a solid object, such as the base of the computer on which I am typing, each part of the object is solid, though it is not the case that solidity is in the object by having parts of itself scattered throughout parts of

the object. All of solidity is in every part of the solid object—in this case, my computer base. In a similar but much more complex way, God is not occupying parts of the universe with parts of Godself, but rather all of the divine reality is fully present at every point in spatial reality.

Omnipotence and essential goodness

A long-running debate on divine attributes concerns the scope of omnipotence and a possible conflict with the conviction that God, as a maximally great being, is essentially good. The problem is as follows:

1. God is maximally great—perfect, excellent.
2. God is maximally powerful.
3. God cannot do evil for its own sake.
4. God is not as powerful as a being that can bring about any event, including an evil event for its own sake.
5. Hence, God is either not maximally great, not maximally powerful, not essentially good, or there is a being more powerful than God or God does not exist.

One traditional way to address this is by challenging the idea that a being who (or that) can do evil for its own sake is exercising true power. Boethius and others have argued instead that when a subject deliberately does something evil, it is acting out of a weakness.

> Now, the supreme good is set up as the end alike for the bad and for the good; but the good seek it through the natural action of the virtues, whereas the bad try to attain this same good through all manner of concupiscence, which is not the natural way of attaining good. Or dost thou think otherwise?
>
> Nay; rather, one further consequence is clear to me: for from my admissions it must needs follow that the good have power, and the bad are impotent.
>
> [. . .]
>
> Since, then, he who can do only good is omnipotent, while they who can do evil also are not omnipotent, it is manifest that they who can do evil have less power.
>
> (Boethius 1897, IV.II)

All evil can do is destroy; this is no real power. In order to construct a house, skill, craft, design, ability, and resources are required. Any lummox with an axe can tear one down. Power is not equivalent to brute destructive force, and *perfect* power certainly is not.

The notion that omnipotence entails brute or absolute power is often assumed by critics of the classical concept of God, and it is one that a number of feminist

philosophers have objected to. Beverley Clack, for example, raises an important concern in conceiving of God in terms of such power:

> An all-powerful deity lends itself to the drive for power. Moreover, idealizing omnipotence contains the belief that absolute power is an absolute good: after all, God, as perfect, is defined as all-powerful. It would seem that in glorifying divine omnipotence, human beings—or rather human rulers—are similarly encouraged to seek after such power. [Sharon] Welch refutes the very idea that absolute power is good. We only have to consider human history to see the legacy of thinking of power in this way. As she puts it, "absolute power is a destructive trait." . . . If this is so, ideas—be they philosophical or theological—can never be considered "innocent." If God embodies absolute power (is omnipotent), consideration needs to be paid to the effect that this glorification of power has on human relationships.
>
> (Clack 2015, 9)

We agree with Clack that conceiving of God as embodying brute or absolute power can have negative effects on human relationships, and we applaud her criticisms of the view. Yet we do not agree that omnipotence entails such power, nor that it entails the ability to do evil. A better way to conceive of perfect power is in terms of praiseworthiness. A God embodying praiseworthy power would be one worthy of human devotion, which would be a God who is holy, just, good, and so on. We will examine in a later section a further and related feminist critique of perfect being theology.

Eternal or everlasting

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah declared that God is the "high and lofty One who inhabits eternity" (Isaiah 57: 15). As a prophet and not a theologian or philosopher, he did not provide an account of the nature or meaning of divine eternity. But theistic philosophers and theologians are generally agreed that God is eternal in the sense that God has neither beginning nor end. Yet there is widespread disagreement about the precise meaning of the term "eternal." The English term "eternal" is derived from the Latin term *aeturnus*, which is a derivation from the term *aevum*, which means "of an age, lasting, enduring, permanent, everlasting, endless." Historically, eternity has meant everlastingness, and most theists agree that God is everlasting in that sense. However, in more recent times the notion of everlastingness has been further developed by philosophers, and two very different concepts can be denoted by it: "eternity" (or 'atemporality' or 'timelessness') and "everlastingness" (or 'sempiternity'). So what is God's relationship to time, and God's relationship to the temporal universe? Did God create time? Does God exist through time, or does God transcend time? Philosophers and theologians answer these questions in various ways.

On the account held most widely among classical theists, such as Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas, and referred to in the literature as *divine timelessness*, God exists beyond time; God has neither temporal extension nor temporal location. In this view, God does not experience the world sequentially, moment by moment, with a time before, during, and after such and such events, as finite creatures experience it. God is beyond temporal change and dwells outside of time in an eternal now, knowing and experiencing all moments simultaneously. In his *Confessions*, Augustine put it this way:

> It is not in time that You are before all time: otherwise You would not be before all time. You are before all the past by the eminence of Your ever-present eternity: and You dominate all the future in as much as it is still to be: and once it has come it will be past: but *Thou art always the self-same, and Thy years shall not fail.* Your years neither go nor come: but our years come and go, that all may come. Your years abide all in one act of abiding: for they abide and the years that go are not thrust out by those that come, for none pass: whereas our years shall not all be, till all are no more. Your years are as a single day; and Your day comes not daily but is today, a today which does not yield place to any tomorrow or follow upon any yesterday. In You today is eternity: thus it is that You begot on co-eternal with yourself to whom you said: *Today have I begotten Thee.* You are the Maker of all time, and before all time You are, nor was there ever a time when there was no time.
>
> (Augustine 1943, Book 11, ch. 8)

Boethius offers a similar point:

> God is eternal; in this judgment all rational beings agree. Let us, then, consider what eternity is. For this word carries with it a revelation alike of the Divine nature and of the Divine knowledge. Now, eternity is the possession of endless life whole and perfect at a single moment. What this is becomes more clear and manifest from a comparison with things temporal.
> [. . .]
> For it is one thing for existence to be endlessly prolonged, which was what Plato ascribed to the world, another for the whole of an endless life to be embraced in the present, which is manifestly a property peculiar to the Divine mind.
>
> (Boethius 1897, V.VI.)

Aquinas, several centuries later, offered these related comments:

> Now God knows all contingent things not only as they are in their causes, but also as each one of them is actually in itself. And although contingent things become actual successively, nevertheless God knows contingent things

> not successively, as they are in their own being, as we do; but simultaneously. The reason is because his knowledge is measured by eternity, as is also His being; and eternity being simultaneously whole comprises all time, as said above.
>
> (Aquinas 2014, Question 10, article 2)

> Hence, all things that are in time are present to God from eternity, not only because He has the types of things present within him, as some say; but because His glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentiality.
>
> (Aquinas 2014, First Part, Question 14, Article 13)

There are many reasons why divine timelessness has been held by some of the greatest minds of the Abrahamic faiths, and we offer a few significant and compendious points on the matter. First, if God is maximally perfect, then God would have the most perfect mode of existence. Intuitively, it is *prima facie* evident that a perfect mode of existence would not be temporal, for if God were temporal there would be episodes of God's life that are gone forever and only accessible via God's memory. Consider a wonderful and very recent experience. You can recall the experience, which is very good. But recalling it is nothing like the actual experience itself. For us temporal beings, the past continually slips away, and the future is always something that we are striving for. It is only the present moment we experience, and it vanishes as quickly as it appears. It can be argued that such transitory encounters are not compatible with the perfectly divine life. And even an *exemplary* memory of life's experiences is much inferior to the present reality.

Another reason for affirming divine timelessness is that if God were not timeless, God would not be changeless, and in that case God would not be maximally perfect. An argument against divine changelessness can be traced back to Plato and the ancient Greeks and runs this way: If God is perfect in every respect, God cannot change for the better. But if God is perfect in every respect, neither can God change for the worse. Since God cannot improve or worsen in any respect, God cannot change in any way. Since the first century AD and up until the nineteenth century, western theists widely held the view of divine changelessness, and so too divine timelessness.

One further reason for affirming that God transcends the temporal dimension is that theists have generally maintained that God created time. To quote Augustine on the matter:

> For whence could innumerable ages pass by, which Thou madest not, Thou the Author and Creator of all ages? or what times should there be, which were not made by Thee? or how should they pass by, if they never were? Seeing then Thou art the Creator of all times, if any time was before Thou madest heaven and earth, why say they that Thou didst forego working? . . . Nor dost Thou by time, precede time: else shouldest Thou not precede all times. But Thou precedest all things past, by the sublimity of an ever-present

> eternity; and surpassest all future because they are future, and when they come, they shall be past; but Thou art the Same, and Thy years fail not.
>
> (Augustine 1943, Book 11)

If God had temporal duration, God would not be independent of it, and in that case God could not have created time.

An objection to divine timelessness is that it seems to run afoul of many scriptural narratives. In the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an, there are many examples of God acting in history, and these actions include temporal reference of past, present and future. God *did* create the world (Genesis 1: 19; Acts 4: 24; Sura 35: 1); God *is* sustaining the world (Psalm 65: 9–13; Colossians 1: 17; Sura 29: 60); and God *will* judge the world (Isaiah 2: 4; II Corinthians 5: 10; Sura 22: 17). If God acts in time as the scriptural traditions teach, the objection goes, then God must be in time.

Reply: Much of scriptural narrative is metaphorical, highly symbolic, and written from the perspective of temporally enclosed human beings. The Christian scriptures and creeds speak of Christ as sitting at (or on) the right hand of God. But surely this does not mean that Christ is "up there," somewhere in outer space, literally sitting down on a throne-like chair next to a large human-like god with literal eyes, hands, feet and a gray beard. There is clearly anthropomorphic language in sacred scripture; one of the central tasks in the field of hermeneutics is to attempt to differentiate between such literal depictions and metaphorical or symbolic ones. Perhaps the temporal language of scripture falls into the latter category. It may be, for example, that God eternally willed the creating, sustaining, and judging of the world. In that case, while God did will change with respect to the temporal world, it was not itself a temporal willing on the part of God, and God's inner being never changed.

Another objection to timelessness is that such a life would be boring, for both God and human beings. Consider the words of Ralph Walker:

> Life would be very strange, and very limited, in a timeless world. There would be none of the pleasures of putting right someone who has made a mistake one recognizes as such; nor would there be the more dubious, or Platonic, pleasure of being put right oneself. Life would not be exciting; but at least it would not be boring either. For us pleasure resides very largely in getting things done, not in having done them, and none of this would be available in our imaginary world. Aristotle thought that such an existence would be fun all the same; this may be doubted, but at least one could entertain a great variety of thoughts and a great complexity of mathematical argumentation, so long as one did it all at once. And tastes, after all, do vary.
>
> (Walker 1978, 41)

Reply: We think the timeless world imagined by Walker is based far too much upon anthropomorphic life. Rather than being focused on such transitory matters

as putting right someone who is mistaken, imagine instead that the timeless persons are in a timeless moment experiencing the incredible bliss depicted in the classical Christian notion of the beatific vision. Or try to imagine the even more grand case of God who experiences infinite and eternal bliss within God's own triune nature. Using the Sanskrit language of *satchitananda* (being, consciousness, bliss), commonly used in Hindu literature to describe the divine reality, David Bentley Hart offers a glimpse of the ecstasy within the Godhead:

> The restless heart that seeks its repose in God (to use the language of Augustine) expresses itself not only in the exultations and raptures of spiritual experience but also in the plain persistence of awareness. The soul's unquenchable *eros* for the divine, of which Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa and countless Christian contemplatives speak. Sufism's *ishq* or passionately ardent love for God, Jewish mysticism's *devekut*, Hinduism's *bhakti*, Sikhism's *pyaar*—these are all names for the acute manifestation of a love that, in a more chronic and subtle form, underlies all knowledge, all openness of the mind to the truth of things. This is because, in God, the fullness of being is also a perfect act of infinite consciousness that, wholly possessing the truth of being in itself, forever finds its consummation in boundless delight. The Father knows his own essence perfectly in the Mirror of Logos and rejoices in the Spirit who is the "bond of love" or "bond of glory" in which divine being and divine consciousness are perfectly joined. God's *wujud* is also his *wijdan*—his infinite being is infinite consciousness—in the unity of the *wajd*, the bliss of perfect enjoyment. The divine *sat* is always also the divine *chit*, and their perfect coincidence is the divine *ananda*.
>
> (Hart 2014, 248–249)

The life of a maximally great, timeless God is one that is supremely good and beautiful and perfect, and one in which the infinite goodness and beauty and perfection can never be nullified and will never cease to be.

All of this is not to say, however, that there are not both atemporal and temporal aspects of the God/world relation. William Lane Craig, for example, has argued that God is timeless without creation and temporal subsequent to creation. The argument runs as follows: Suppose that time begins at the very moment of creation—at the Big Bang, let us call it. In that case, God did not exist "before" the Big Bang because that would be to exist in a temporal relation. Rather, God "changelessly existed" in a mysterious way *beyond* the Big Bang ("changelessly existed" because there were no temporal events beyond the Big Bang, for if there were then time would not begin at the Big Bang). Subsequent to the Big Bang, God entered into temporal relations with the creation.

> Imagine God existing changelessly alone without creation, but with a changeless and eternal determination to create a temporal world. Since God is omnipotent, his will is done, and a temporal world begins to exist . . .

> Once time begins at the moment of creation, God either becomes temporal in virtue of his real, causal relation to time and the world or else he exists as timelessly with creation as he does sans creation. But this second alternative seems quite impossible. At the first moment of time, God stands in a new relation in which he did not stand before . . . this is a real, causal relation which is at that moment new to God and which he does not have in the state of existing sans creation.
>
> (Craig 1998, 222)

Thus God exists timelessly without creation and temporally subsequent to creation. This seems to us a plausible *via media* between the timelessness camp and the everlasting camp, though, as with all complex philosophical positions and theological doctrines, not completely free from confounding conundrums.

As we move from looking at divine attributes from the standpoint of internal consistency, let us turn to the most substantial area involving God's relationship with the creation: how should we think of God's sovereign power in relationship to what many believe is the free will of creatures?

Divine power and human will

The view that God is, in some sense, beyond time—even if experiencing extrinsic change with relation to time subsequent to the Big Bang—allows for the notion that what is for us past, present, and future, is for God an eternal present. In that case, God could *know* all past, present and future events in the universe without *foreknowing* them. This may provide a promising way forward in dealing with the problem of divine foreknowledge and human free will. Yet it also poses a problem in a way similar to affirming divine foreknowledge. The difficulty is this: If God knows all things, and if God is sovereign—meaning that God has supreme authority over the created order and all that occurs in the world is under the guidance and control of God—then how can it be that humans have free will? If human agents are free in the sense that their capacity to choose a course of action from among various alternatives is compatible with determinism, then this could be consistent with God's sovereign control. For God could simply determine every course of action that human agents choose. If, however, as we affirm, human agents are free in the libertarian sense—that is, they not only have the capacity to choose a course of action from among various alternatives, but they also have the ability to choose in a manner that is not determined—then there will undoubtedly be many cases where free actions impinge on some outcomes that God desires. This seems to place the future in the hands of God's creatures. How, then, can God maintain sovereign control?

Reply: The notion of divine sovereignty as unilaterally exercising control over all of creation is a theological mistake. As we argued earlier, a better way to conceive of divine power is in terms of praiseworthiness. A God embodying praiseworthy power would not be one who would impose absolute power and brute force on

creation. Nor would such a God exercise coercive control over that creation unless there were a morally good reason for doing so. While we grant that a maximally perfect God could and does exercise both coercive and persuasive power over the creation, we suggest that the way God generally operates is by exercising persuasive, rather than coercive, power over persons and things.

A feminist critique of perfect being theology

Consider an objection to the above, perfect being approach to the divine. Pamela Sue Anderson contends that by giving supreme perfection a central role, Christian theists wind up with a thoroughly patriarchal concept of God. She claims that "the hard core" of contemporary philosophy of God that sees God as perfect is patriarchal.

> Giving supreme perfection, and authority, to the ideal of reason ensures the man has his ultimate gender ideal: the omni-perfect Father/God. Often there is still no awareness among philosophers of religion that their ideal is problematic; and this is reinforced by divine, omni-perfect attributes; the latter serve as the core concepts and central topics in philosophy of religion. So, this patriarchal ideal ensures the dominant authority of men who remain blinded by their vision of perfection, unaware of the implications for the "rationality" of their beliefs concerning women, as well as non-patriarchal men.
>
> (Anderson 2014, 12–13)

Anderson links Christian philosophical work on God as perfect with a philosophy that denigrates those practicing philosophy in a fashion that gives a more central role to desire, *eros*, and passion (as opposed to reason) and marginalizes women and non-heterosexuals. She contends that theistic traditionalists may appear to be appealing to impartiality but that this appeal is unconvincing.

> To be fair, the deliberate sex-blindness of Christian philosophy of religion may have been assumed as the way to be unbiased. However, this can no longer be a valid assumption in philosophy with the intervention by feminist and queer theorists. In excluding from "reason" questions of bodily matters and of non-straight categories, traditional philosophy of religion turned gay philosophers to feminist philosophy of religion. Today women, whether heterosexual or lesbian, gain a great deal of new insight for feminist philosophy of religion from gay men and other male feminists!
>
> (Anderson 2014, 13)

Anderson advances the problem of evil over against an Anselmian concept of God.

> If God is omni-perfect, why has half of the human race been treated unequally? Whether we think of female fetuses being aborted precisely because they are female, not male, or think of any sex crime, the legacy of patriarchal rule over women and non-patriarchal men leaves a wake of inexplicable injustice. "Why do the innocent suffer" might be given a philosophical justification, but when it comes to females who suffer for no other reason than they are born female, any "rational" defence gives an additional reason for patriarchal man to justify his gratuitous violence against innocent women which, in light of human history, will always be out of proportion to the rest of humanity.
>
> (Anderson 2014, 13)

In reply, we suggest four points. First, Anderson and other feminist thinkers have rightfully pointed out the masculinist imagery and misogyny that often exists not only in the Abrahamic but other faiths as well. But, as we will argue below, this has nothing to do with an Anselmian perfect being theology. In fact, such a theology should lead one to the opposite conclusion. The cause, or at least one of the reasons for such imagery and patriarchy in religious thought and practice, has to do with the various cultural milieus that were predominantly patriarchal in the ancient and medieval worlds. Even a cursory read of materials from ancient cultures reveals environments in which women are seen as non-citizens, inferior to men, subject to men, and sometimes taken to be less than fully human (i.e., less than fully rational). For example, Aristotle held (based on faulty biology) that females are inferior to males in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, Aristotle's influence on this matter has been extensive, influencing views of women and men among Greek, Roman, Christian, and Islamic civilizations for many centuries.

Aristotle was not the only misogynistic thinker in the ancient world; deplorable views of women were not uncommon. Some of the Church Fathers are no less culpable in this regard. Tertullian, for example, stated that

> [t]he sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of *your* desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die.
>
> (Tertullian 1885, 1.1)

And Augustine wrote:

> Now, if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what was she to help him? She was not to till the earth with him, for there was not yet any toil to make help necessary. If there were any such need, a male helper would be better, and the same could be said

> of the comfort of another's presence if Adam were perhaps weary of solitude. How much more agreeably could two male friends, rather than a man and woman, enjoy companionship and conversation in a life shared together.
>
> (Augustine 1982, Books 7–12)

So we must grant that there have been horrendous assertions made about women by philosophers and theologians of the theistic traditions, and that they must be acknowledged and addressed. But it is also the case that the status of women was elevated by leaders of the Abrahamic faiths, notably Jesus and Muhammad.

Second, if it is the case that those who profess to subscribe to belief in God as maximally perfect advance not just imperfect concepts of what is good, but concepts that are downright oppressive and unjust—concepts that are used to dominate women (or to dominate anyone, for that matter)—then surely those persons are in profound error. Worse, they insult the God they claim to extol. On this point, it would seem that feminists have good motivation to accept an Anselmian concept of God to critique patriarchy. Perfect being theology (in its essence) focuses on great-making attributes, and insofar as any attributes are found to be poisonous and reflecting human cruelty and bias, they are anathema. Anderson appears to assume (or to depict) an Anselmian theology as not simply holding that God is maximally perfect, but holding that maximal perfection includes God's favoring male supremacy (more specifically, heterosexual male supremacy). But of course the commitment to thinking of God as perfect commits one to scrutinizing one's understanding of perfection. It asks that one vigorously reject as harmful repugnant misuses of the ideal of perfection, as unworthy of God. If a value-neutral concept of God were at the heart of philosophical theology (perhaps mixed in with theistic voluntarism in which God could make rape obligatory if God commanded it to be so), Anderson's critique would have more traction.

Third, Anderson's description of the problem of evil seems exactly the problem as it should be stated (from an Anselmian perspective). Given that God is perfect, why is there oppression, harm, wrongful inequalities, and so on? These ought to be seen as repugnant to God. Without going into our preferred approach as Anselmian theists to the problem of evil, we simply note that the feminist stance of Anderson is far more welcome than forms of naturalism that make oppression and inequality part of the very nature of reality, perhaps even fixed by deterministic laws. On the latter viewpoint, evil is part of the natural course of things and not something that is opposed to the very nature and purpose of creation.

Lastly, Anselmian theology is well positioned to assess matters of sexual orientation. An Anselmian is committed to thinking of human persons as made in the image of God and called into God's likeness. If Anderson adopted Anselmian theism, she could argue that being homosexual is part and parcel of what can be part of a good life, part of a human flourishing that would be willed by a perfect Creator and Redeemer. We are not making that point here; we are simply registering that, contrary to Anderson's suggestion, understanding God as perfect does not *ipso facto* make the concept of God patriarchal or the domain of

heterosexual males. An Anselmian perspective that is shared by Christian theists is one that is helpful for reflecting on created goods. It beckons us to think about the extent to which we use creation (including how we treat our sexuality) in a way that is worthy of the love and goodness of God.

A humanist objection to perfect being theology

Some philosophers argue that a key Anselmian idea about God is incompatible with human dignity. James Rachels is one such person. We cite him at length:

> There is a long tradition in moral philosophy, from Plato to Kant, according to which such a recognition could never be made by a moral agent. According to this tradition, to be a moral agent is to be autonomous, or self-directed. Unlike the precepts of law or social custom, moral precepts are imposed by the agent upon himself, and the penalty for their violation is, in Kant's words, "self-contempt and inner abhorrence." The virtuous person is therefore identified with the person of integrity, the person who acts according to precepts that she can, on reflection, conscientiously approve in her heart.
>
> On this view, to deliver oneself over to a moral authority for directions about what to do is simply incompatible with being a moral agent. To say "I will follow so-and-so's directions no matter what they are and no matter what my own conscience would otherwise direct me to do" is to opt out of moral thinking altogether; it is to abandon one's role as a moral agent. And it does not matter whether "so-and-so" is the law, the customs of one's society, or Jehovah. This does not, of course, preclude one from seeking advice on moral matters and even on occasion following that advice blindly, trusting in the good judgment of the adviser. But this is justified by the details of the particular case—for example, that you cannot form any reasonable judgment of your own because of ignorance or inexperience or lack of time. What is precluded is that a person should, while in possession of his wits, adopt this style of decision making (or perhaps we should say this style of abdicating decision making) as a general strategy of living or abandon his own best judgment when he can form a judgment of which he is reasonably confident.
>
> We have, then, a conflict between the role of worshiper, which by its very nature commits one to total subservience to God, and the role of moral agent, which necessarily involves autonomous decision-making. The role of worshiper takes precedence over every other role the worshiper has; when there is any conflict, the worshiper's commitment to God has priority over everything. But the first commitment of a moral agent is to do what in his own heart he thinks is right. Thus the following argument might be constructed:

a) If any being is God, he must be a fitting object of worship.
b) No being could possibly be a fitting object of worship, since worship requires the abandonment of one's role as an autonomous moral agent.
c) Therefore, there cannot be any being who is God.

(Rachels 1996, 118–119)

Reply: There are points to commend in Rachels' position. We concur that if any being is God, that being must be a fitting object of worship. In fact, as we noted earlier, the idea that God is perfect is closely related to the idea that God is worthy of worship. We, too, do not admire a person who entirely submits her or himself to some external authority involving the complete subordination, not to say, abdication, of moral judgment. As we shall see in the next chapter on good and evil, there are accounts of God's authority that might fit Rachels' view of God; according to theistic voluntarism, God can make it the case that torturing babies to death for fun is good. But this is not an account to which we subscribe. So the central problem with Rachel's argument, as we see it, is that his second premise is false. Worship does not require the abandonment of one's role as an autonomous moral agent. In fact, according to perfect being theology, our powers to reach moral truths are themselves empowered by God who is essentially good.

With respect to worship, or what he relatedly calls "praise," C.S. Lewis poignantly wrote:

> But the most obvious fact about praise—whether of God or anything—strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honour. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless . . . shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it.
>
> The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses [Romeo praising Juliet and vice versa], readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game—praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars. . . . Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible. . . . I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?" The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.
>
> My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value.
>
> (Lewis 1958, 94–95)

Some philosophers have misguided expectations for God that fail to match what, according to perfect being theology, God's purposes actually are for human agents. Such misguided expectations can land one in incoherence and contradiction with respect to the divine nature and the God–world relation. Rachels works with such expectations. We praise what we value; we worship what we value exceedingly. Worship of God is not incompatible with human dignity. It is the height of human value and dignity to express reverence and adoration to that which is exceedingly perfect in every conceivable way.

Hindu notions of perfect divine reality

We have been exploring perfect being theology from within the Abrahamic faiths. Another understanding of the divine reality—one widely adopted in the East, notably in India—is not theistic in the Abrahamic sense but is instead monistic and pantheistic. This view, rooted in the early sacred writings of what has come to be called "Hinduism," uses the Sanskrit term transliterated into English as "Brahman" to refer to the perfect and absolute divine Reality. The Vedas, the fundamental sacred writings of orthodox Hinduism, in particular the portion of the Vedas referred to as the Upanishads, are filled with explicitly philosophical musings and meditations regarding Brahman. Understanding how to interpret these musings is a challenge, and Hindu commentators are not in agreement on their hermeneutical conclusions.

To complicate matters further, Hinduism is not a monolithic belief system, for what is generally included in the concept "Hinduism" engulfs many distinct belief systems, worldviews, and forms of life. There are theistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, panentheistic, and even atheistic forms of Hinduism. Given this wide conceptual diversity, it is not easy to categorize Hindu thought on any particular matter, including the nature of ultimate reality. For the purposes of this chapter, we will home in on two important schools of philosophical Hinduism, both of which fall within the Vedanta school of Indian thought (one of the six main classical philosophical systems of the Indian traditions). What is characteristic of Vedantins is that they are committed to the view that the Vedas are sacred, revealed, authoritative scriptures. They are also committed to the view that the Vedas teach that Brahman is in some sense identical to the universe (or rather to every universe that exists). At first glance, this notion of ultimate reality seems to contradict theism whereby God and the universe are ontologically distinct realities. One reason for the distinction is grounded in a western understanding of causality. Most western theologians and philosophers affirm that an effect is both similar to and different from its cause. Thomas Aquinas, for example, argued that since God is the cause of the world, it must be different from God with respect to that of which it is made (God created matter, so God cannot be material). Yet Aquinas also affirmed an *analogia entis*, an analogy of being between God and world. As we noted earlier, on Aquinas's view, while God does exist, God is not another being along with the world. Rather, God is Being itself. By contrast, many Indian philosophers have held that the effect and the cause are the same; they are made of the same stuff,

as it were. Since material universes are caused to be from Brahman (matter eternally arises, most Vedantins maintain), matter must exist within the very being of Brahman. So what is that relation between God and the world for Vedantins?

We will examine two Vedantin schools of thought on the matter. According to the Advaita Vedanta view, all of reality is Brahman. An important passage in the Vedas states that "*Tat Tvam Asi*" ("thou art that"; *Chandogya Upanishad* 6.8.7). Our deepest, truest self is identical with Brahman. This is what the Advaitin believes. All individuals, and indeed all apparently distinct objects, are understood to be analogous to disrupted droplets of water in an eternal and boundless ocean. In reality, all is one, all is non-distinct, and all is Brahman. The Advaita Vedanta school does distinguish nirguna Brahman (Brahman without attributes) from saguna Brahman (Brahman with attributes), but the latter is the illusory Brahman, and is merely an aid for the unenlightened. Shankara (*c.*788–820 AD) was a central figure who held to and defended this view. "Brahman is," Shankara says, "the Reality, the one Existence. Because of the ignorance of our human minds, the universe seems to be composed of diverse forms; but it is Brahman alone" (Shankara 1947, 70). This is monism, the view that all of reality is ontologically one. Brahman is identical with the one, the "All that is." If Brahman is identical with all that is, and if there is no plurality or division within what is, then Brahman is an undifferentiated whole. The physical universe, then, and the various apparent distinctions within it of persons and places, experiences and events, is consequently illusory. All apparent characteristics within Brahman and between Brahman and the world are one in a quite literal and metaphysical sense.

Not all Vedantins are of the Advaita stripe, however. There are also prominent orthodox Hindu scholars who have raised such questions as "Why are we not experiencing this alleged undifferentiated unity with Brahman?" or "Why does experience seem to confirm our natural belief that we are separate, unique, individual entities, and that the distinctions we experience between self and world (including other selves) are real?" The common Advaitin reply is that we are in an unenlightened state due to the deleterious effects of *avidya*, or ignorance. We can overcome this ignorance, however, and escape the recurrences of *samsara* (the cycle of death and rebirth), by advancing to an enlightened state in which all apparent distinctions are eradicated. How is this enlightenment achieved? By following various paths or yogas—engaging in the right physical and mental yogic practices—one can escape *avidya* and the illusory power of *maya* (illusion) and achieve *moksha*, full enlightenment or understanding and experience. This may take many rebirths, Advaitins maintain, but it is the ultimate goal to be sought.

Not all Vedantins are convinced by these replies, and further difficulties linger with Advaitic monism. Perhaps most perplexingly, in what sense can the *Atman*, the I or ego, which is one's deepest self, be freed if this self is actually the unvarying, permanent, and monistic ultimate reality? If the *Atman* escapes *avidya* and obtains enlightenment, has the *Atman* changed in becoming enlightened? If so, how was it the unchanging and absolute Brahman? Furthermore, if there are no distinctions in Brahman, then *avidya* and *maya* are Brahman. If Brahman is real, then *avidya*

and *maya* are real. But how can *avidya* and *maya* be real if they are identical to Brahman and Brahman is not ignorant or illusory? Deep incoherence looms.

Objections such as these have been raised by a number of philosophers, including Vedantins themselves. Perhaps the most notable to do so is Ramanuja (1017–1137 AD), one of the most influential philosophers from the Indian subcontinent and the founder of a philosophical school of Hindu thought known as *Vishishtadvaita* (qualified non-dualism) Vedanta. Ramanuja rejected the monism of Shankara, using arguments such as those above to conclude that it is incoherent. He also argued that denying all distinctions entails denying the role of the Vedas and Upanishads in Vedantic thought. If there are no distinctions, then language itself is meaningless, for it includes many distinctions (grammatical, semantic, syntactic). But the sacred Hindu scriptures consist of language—language that makes distinctions, including between the real and unreal, the actual and the illusory. The Advaitin cannot coherently appeal to the scriptures as a guide to truth while also affirming a view that denies their validity.

Thus, in contrast to Shankara's strict monism, Ramanuja's view is a qualified monism, or a qualified non-dualism. For on his view Brahman exists, and the world (matter and souls) also exists, and Brahman is not identical to the world. Yet for Ramanuja, Brahman is not ontologically separate from the world either, as classical theists of the Abrahamic traditions maintain. Brahman, the "Supreme Self," is the Creator of the world and stands above and beyond the world. But yet Brahman is also intimately related to the world. In an attempt to elucidate his view, Ramanuja used the metaphor of the world as the body of Brahman. On his account, a body is under the absolute control of a soul, utterly dependent on the soul for its being and its becoming. The body–soul relation is similar to the Brahman-world relation for Ramanuja. The world is the body of Brahman in that it is the material expression of Brahman. In affirming this view, Ramanuja is not claiming that Brahman is limited by or bound to the world as we are limited by and bound to our physical bodies, for Brahman is also transcendent, perfect, and without limitations. Rather, the world is dependent on Brahman, and Brahman accomplishes his purposes through the world, just as (Ramanuja believed) the human body is dependent on the self (the soul), and the self often accomplishes its purposes through the body. Ramanuja's view is thus a form of panentheism (from the Greek *pan* + *en* + *theos*: "everything in God"). Ramanuja was clear on the point:

> This is the fundamental relationship between the Supreme and the universe of individual selves and physical entities. It is the relationship of soul and body, the inseparable relationship of the supporter and the supported, that of the controller and the controlled, and that of the principal entity and the subsidiary entity. That which takes possession of another entity entirely as the latter's support, controller and principal, is called the soul of that latter entity. That which, in its entirety, depends upon, is controlled by and subserves another and is therefore its inseparable mode, is called the body of the latter. Such the relation between the individual self and its body. Such

> being the relationship, the supreme Self, having all as its body, is denoted by all terms.
>
> (Ramanuja 1978)

As with most Vedantins, and indeed most Hindus, Ramanuja affirms that Brahman is *satchitananda* (a term we noted above, which can be translated as fundamental reality, absolute consciousness, and eternal bliss). But unlike the monistic/pantheistic view of Shankara, Brahman is a *personal* Reality, the *supreme* perfect person (*paramatman*), who is "removed beyond any trace of evil. He possesses a host of auspicious qualities such as knowledge and power, which are natural to Him and of matchless excellence" (Ramanuja 1974, 18.42).

To summarize this section, Vedantin Hindus agree that ultimate reality—Brahman—is the greatest possible Reality and that the Vedas are the authoritative revelations of Brahman. But they are not all of a kind, for there are fundamental disagreements about how to understand that Reality. These differences are based upon philosophical disagreements and differences of scriptural hermeneutics. The monistic view of Shankara is different in numerous respects from the classical theism of the Abrahamic faiths. Ramanuja's *Vishishtadvaita* view, on the other hand, has aspects that are similar to classical theism, notably in that God (Brahman) is maximal perfection, the greatest possible reality—eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. But his view also differs from classical theism in that God is understood panentheistically whereby the world is the embodiment of God.

One's view of ultimate reality has practical consequences. Esoteric and impersonal understandings of ultimate reality do not tend to lead to worship of and devotion to that Reality, whereas personalistic interpretations may lead to such practices. It is estimated that while three-quarters of Hindu intellectuals affirm a monistic or absolutist view of Brahman, and this view has been influential in the history of Hindu thought, yet it has never been widely popular among the general population of Hindus. In fact, most practicing Hindus are personalistic theists—either monotheists or polytheists—who, like Ramanuja, are devoted to and worship the divine Reality.

Another relevant difference between divine monism on the one hand and theism/panentheism on the other is that the former includes all of reality within the nature of the divine—including evil. This raises an immediate difficulty; namely, since all of reality is one, and there are no distinctions, all apparent distinctions between good and evil are lost. All events that occur in the world are acts of God, so to refer to some as "good" and others as "evil" is to create a false dichotomy. Evil, on this monistic view, is merely an illusion born out of ignorance. Most philosophers and others find it difficult to deny the reality of evil. Classical theists (and panentheists) generally do not have that problem. God is maximally perfect, and as such is never engaged in nefarious acts. God is thus exculpated from all evil. In fact, within the Abrahamic faiths, God battles with evil.

Yet all may not bode well for the theist. If God is the Creator of the world, and if God is maximally perfect, including being omnipotent, omniscient, and

omnibenevolent, why is there evil in the world that God created? Incoherence looms here as well. In the next two chapters we tackle the perplexing subject of evil and some of the profound theological and philosophical problems it raises.

Further reflections

For Boethius, if we were able to see things from the perspective of God, we would understand that all of the alleged "evils" are actually goods.

> But "Hard were the task, as a god, to recount all, nothing omitting." Nor, truly, is it lawful for man to compass in thought all the mechanism of the Divine work, or set it forth in speech. Let us be content to have apprehended this only—that God, the creator of universal nature, likewise disposeth all things, and guides them to good; and while He studies to preserve in likeness to Himself all that He has created, He banishes all evil from the borders of His commonweal through the links of fatal necessity. Whereby it comes to pass that, if thou look to disposing providence, thou wilt nowhere find the evils which are believed so to abound on earth.
>
> (Boethius 1897, IV.VI)

How might one respond to this idea, especially considering the evils of the Holocaust or Rwandan Genocide?

Where do you find yourself impaled on the horns of the following dilemma?

> The dilemma that arises from viewing God as having knowledge only of probabilities concerning free human action should now be apparent. Increase those probabilities and you increase the degree of God's providential control over his world; but by doing so, you emasculate the claim that God is a risk-taker and eviscerate the assertion that God *qua* risk-taker is more easily excused for the presence of evil. Lessen the probabilities God knows and you bring back all the (supposed) advantages of a deity who takes risks; but you also make a mockery of the thesis that a God with such knowledge would still be situated so as to govern his world efficiently and effectively.
>
> (Flint 1998, 104)

One of the divine attributes in theistic tradition is that God is worthy of worship. Mark Wynn proposes that "in worship the believer relates herself to the marvel of existence, by placing herself in wonder and adoration before the one in whom all existence is contained" (Wynn 1999, 151–152). Because this seems to involve the emotions, do you think it is possible for a person to worship God or any sacred being on command? Arguably, it is very difficult to directly control one's emotions.

What are some conclusions that follow from Brentano's point below?

> If anything changes, then it is not the case that all truths are eternal. God knows all truths, hence also those which are such only for today. He could not apprehend these truths yesterday, since at that time they were not truths—but there were other truths instead of them. Thus he knows, for example, that I write down these thoughts, but yesterday he knew not that, but rather that I was going to write them down later. And similarly he will know tomorrow that I have written them down.
>
> (Brentano 1976, 347)

Do you agree with Swinburne's understanding of omniscience as described below? Why or why not?

> If the theist is to maintain that there is a "perfectly free" person, omnipresent, omnipotent, creator of the universe, who is also "omniscient," he has to understand either "perfectly free" or "omniscient" in more restricted ways than those which I have outlined. It seems to me clear that he would prefer a restriction on "omniscient" . . . I therefore suggest the following understanding of omniscience. A person *P* is omniscient at a time *t* if and only if he knows of every true proposition about *t* or an earlier time that it is true and also he knows of every true proposition about a time later than *t*, such that what it reports is physically necessitated by some cause at *t* or earlier, that it is true.
>
> (Swinburne 1977, 175)

Do you agree with Wolterstorff's claim that God's actions are temporal? What are some ramifications of how you respond to this question?

> Some of God's actions must be understood as a response to the free actions of human beings—that what God does he sometimes does in response to what some human being does. I think this is in fact the case. And I think it follows, given that all human actions are temporal, that those actions of God which are "response" actions are temporal as well.
>
> (Wolterstorff 1975, 197)

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6

GOOD AND EVIL

> At the bottom of the heart of every human being, from earliest infancy until the tomb, there is something that goes on indomitably expecting, in the teeth of all experience of crimes committed, suffered, and witnessed, that good and not evil will be done to him. It is this above all that is sacred in every human being. The good is the only source of the sacred. There is nothing sacred except the good and what pertains to it.
>
> (Simone Weil)

What is good? What is evil? And why? Can God make something evil, good or vice versa? When, if ever, should love be unconditional? Is love an emotion? How might theological traditions have an impact on our moral thinking and action in practical terms involving forms of governance, medicine, sexuality, aid for the dispossessed, capital punishment, the practice of war?

We begin this chapter with general reflections on good and evil in section one, and then consider the divine command theory of ethics in section two. Sections three through five address the nature and ethics of love and friendship, a primary dimension of the good, while section six looks at applied ethics and theological tradition. In section seven we consider how matters of good and evil often presuppose a philosophy of the self.

Good and evil

We have from time to time reflected on how philosophical theology involves approaching theological traditions both from the inside and from an external point of view. When it comes to value theory, the notion of evaluations from the inside and outside seem a bit peculiar. After all, the project of stepping outside of all values seems like stepping out into thin air: is it even possible to think if one does

not presuppose some at least provisional set of values? We comment briefly on a radical skepticism about values, but shall for the most part assume that while readers may disagree about why good things are good, and we may disagree about specific cases of good and evil, most of us, most of the time, believe and assume that what we call justice, friendship, romantic and family love are good, and that torture, cruelty, vanity, murder, injustice, and so on are evil. Goodness and evil may be understood in terms of states of affairs and the relationship of better or worse. For example, most of us think it is good for the state of affairs that there be such things as friendships, and we therefore think that it is better for such a state of affairs to obtain rather than it not be the case that there are friendships. In a slightly different form, good and evil may also be thought of in terms of correct or proper or fitting love and hate. So, it is proper to love there being friendships, and it is proper to hate there being tormentors.

Notice should be made of the breadth of the ideas of good and evil: they need not involve agency. That is, it might be the case that a state of affairs is good or evil even if no agent is involved. So, we suggest that it makes sense to claim that a meteor hitting the earth and killing all life would not be good. We can make sense of the claim that it would be better that it not occur than occur, or that it would be proper to hate that such a state of affairs would ever obtain. And we might well—regardless of our more general convictions about reality—think of a state of affairs as evil even if there is no agent—god or devil—involved. But the concepts of rightness and wrongness concern agents. A murder is both wrong and evil, whereas a life-destroying collision between earth and a meteor would involve no wrongdoing and yet be evil.

We beg off here from offering a full-scale engagement with moral skeptics (those who believe that judgments about good and evil, right and wrong are neither true nor false), but we suggest that some reasons for being skeptical about ethics would lead one to be skeptical about the use of reason, and also that some skeptics exaggerate both the extent of ethical disagreement as well as the extent that such disagreement is intractable. We briefly comment on this.

On ethics and reason

Some think that the very notions of good and evil are quite odd compared to straightforward physical properties. We know what it is to attribute and measure the color, weight, mass and energy of objects, but how might we measure good and evil? We present three brief replies. First, arguably, we can, in fact, perceive or experience the goodness or badness of states of affairs. Someone being raped or subjected to torment can experience these states as violations; they are experiencing what should not occur. Second, while we may not be able to specifically quantify good and evil, we know that torture and rape are worse than, say, telling a white lie about the elegance of someone's apparel. Third, ethics is akin to reason in the sense that both involve norms. When we have a perceptual experience of the color, weight, mass and energy of objects, we have an experience that makes evident our

beliefs about the color, weight, mass and energy of objects. This evidence can—and we believe should—be understood in terms of what we should believe. Such a "should" is akin to the notion that what we judge "should" be the case in the realm of values. If the skeptic grants that the notion of what we should believe makes sense in a non-ethical context, why object to it making sense in the domain of values when our focus is on what should or should not be the case? If the skeptic extends skepticism to the arena of reasons, then it would be hard to understand the claim that *anyone should be a skeptic*.

On the breadth of disagreement historically and today on matters of value

We record here the widespread recognition of variations of the Golden Rule. Consider these claims:

> Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.
>
> Confucius

> One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of the dharma. Yielding to desire and acting differently, one becomes guilty of adharma.
>
> Mahabharato

> He who for the sake of happiness hurts others, who also wants happiness, shall not hereafter find happiness. He who for the sake of happiness does not hurt others, who also want happiness, shall hereafter find happiness.
>
> The Dhammapada

> The nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.
>
> Dabistan-i-dnik

> Love your neighbor as yourself.
>
> Gospel of Mark (12: 31)

> No man is a true believer unless he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.
>
> Muhammad, from the Hadith

Sometimes differences that are thought of as ethical turn out to be differences in identifying factual matters, as when all parties in a dispute over how to treat animals may agree that causing them suffering is bad but disagree about whether animals suffer as humans do.

On whether value judgments are intractable

Building on our last observation, we suggest that moral disagreements often come down to disagreements about fact and levels of partiality versus impartiality. Some disputes about climate change, famine relief, abortion, health care public policy, gay marriage, and so on, might come down to factual matters (are humans responsible for climate change? is the fetus a person?) and whether or not the parties in the dispute are equally impartial. If heavily invested in coal mining, we will likely be highly reluctant to take a position on climate change that will reduce our profits.

These later observations lead us to make a modest point about the relationship of our value judgments and our concept of a God's eye point of view. In our ethical disagreements, we often challenge each other about the factual basis on which we form our value judgments. These facts include facts about the affective states of those involved. For example, in a debate over health care, if someone lacks knowledge of what it is like to be suffering, uninsured, and having no access to medical attention, it's fair to say the person's value judgments are impaired by a lack of experience. The concept of God in the Abrahamic traditions entails that God is omniscient: one who knows both the affective states of all involved and all other knowable facts. God is also usually understood to be impartial. Based on this concept of God, there is a sense in which when we seek to enhance our grasp of the relevant facts and to be impartial, our striving to achieve an ideal moral point of view may be thought of as seeking to achieve a God's eye point of view.

Let us turn now to consider a substantial theory that moves beyond claiming that an ideal ethical point of view is akin to a God's eye point of view and consider an account of how the existence and nature of God might explain what makes good good, and evil evil.

Divine command theory

There are different philosophical treatments of divine commands. On one view, objective values are constituted by divine commands. This is the most substantial divine command theory. What it amounts to is the claim that cruelty is wrong is constituted and supported by God's commands that there not be cruelty or that God condemns and disapproves of cruelty. This might gain some support on analogy with laws. Arguably, it would be odd to imagine a land where there are laws but no law-maker, no ruler or ruling institution that promulgated and backed up the laws with sanctions. Perhaps this strong view receives some support from the experience some of us have in terms of our conscience. When contemplating doing some wrong, we may feel that we are violating some commanding force.

The objection that there are good atheists does not defeat this line of reasoning. Someone might recognize that one should not do X and yet not know the nature of X, just as someone might know that water is good for us but might be ignorant of (and even deny) water's atomic constitution. Along similar lines, the divine

command theory need not be committed to a particular account of how divine commands come to be known. The theory is an account of what is obligatory as opposed to an account of how persons come to know what is obligatory.

One might avoid the analogy with law and lawmaker on the grounds that norms need not be backed by a commander or maker. Just as mathematical relations may hold without supposing there is some force behind them, so too might some moral facts be evident without being commanded.

A deeper worry, however, is why divine commands should have authority. If it comes down to bare power that might provide reason enough why persons should obey what God commands. One might be obliged to do what a very powerful force imposes on you, but obligated? In fact, when faced with the threat of coercion, promises are not necessarily thought to be binding. So, if you were held up at gun point and you told your assailant that if he let you go you would return with a huge amount of money, most of us think you would have no obligation to return with the money if you could escape.

Divine commands might still have weight, however, if the appeal was to the exercise of good power. If theism is true, then our very existence at all and over time is due to God's continuous creative power. This might lead one to think of creation (and us) as belonging to God. Perhaps this would be due to a debt of gratitude.

While the latter seems sensible, it would seem to be limited. Could this give God the right to make murder good or compassion evil? We are inclined to think that theistic voluntarism (the view that what God wills is relevant to determining the moral status of some set of states of affairs) seems vulnerable to caprice. A more stable, and historically important, theistic tradition grounds values in the divine nature and the nature of creation. On this view, God's very nature is itself goodness, and in creation God creates and sustains it because of creation's goodness. In Plato's early dialogue *Euthyphro*, this view is put forth that God loves the good because it is good, so therefore God loves the world because the world is good. Furthermore, within this tradition, in order to act morally, we must function properly in the way God created us and intends for us to live. So, the matter of ethical action and the question "Why be moral?" are grounded in both the nature of the divine and of the creation itself.

In the next section let us consider a philosophy of love from the standpoint of philosophical theology.

Love and values

We now consider a challenge to our view that love from God and each other is a response to goodness rather than a foundational source of goodness. Given the central role of this subject in terms of how we think about others and its possible impact on how we treat others, we argue our position at length. We first briefly lay out our philosophy of love and then consider an objection from the work of Harry Frankfurt.

In our view, when you love another person, you love her for the value or worth she has intrinsically (or for her own sake). As Fritz Wenisch (paraphrasing Dietrich von Hildebrand) explains, "Love for another human is a response motivated by the other's intrinsic preciousness, by regarding her as what she is in herself rather than viewing her from the perspective of personal gain" (Wenisch 2012, 119). We believe that there is an important distinction between recognizing love as incorporating the desire for the good of the other (beneficent love or *intentio benevolentiae*) and as incorporating the desire to be united with the other (unitive love or the *intentio unionis*). When these conflict, theological traditions in the Abrahamic context invariably give primacy to beneficent love. In this framework, our love for our partners is not what gives either of them value in a foundational sense—and our love for our children is not what gives them value or makes them interesting. Now if lust for another person eclipses our love for our partner, we have failed in an important office of love: fidelity. Likewise, if we falter in our love for our children because of (for example) narcissism, we have failed to be loving parents. In our view, a person has reasons to love others because others have value or are precious, even if that person has no desire or inclination to love them.

We discuss one further feature of this tradition before turning to Frankfurt. The tradition we defend sees *the beloved* her- or himself as the principal object of love rather than the love itself, whether this takes the form of (to put things awkwardly) loving being loved or simply loving to love. In other words, in a healthy relationship you do not love the beloved principally because she loves you or because you enjoy being a loving person. Rather, the beloved herself is the source and reason for your love. If what you really love in a relationship is the other person's love, then when or if she stops loving you, the object of your love is no longer there. Surely it is natural and good to love being loved (*ceteris paribus*), but we suggest the more enduring and deeper love is directed upon the beloved *whether or not the love is returned*. But let us consider an objection to our position raised by Harry Frankfurt.

It should be noted at the outset that Frankfurt's position is at odds with Platonism and some other forms of moral realism (the general position from which we are coming), yet it is not so different that arguments and objections coming from within that realist camp are impossible. The heart of the matter in terms of values is that Frankfurt locates the source of values in terms of what persons care about:

> It is by caring about things that we infuse the world with importance. This provides us with stable ambitions and concerns; it marks our interests and goals. The importance that our caring creates for us defines the framework of standards and aims in terms of which we endeavor to conduct our lives. A person who cares about something is guided, as his attitudes and his actions are shaped, by his continuing interest in it. Insofar as he does care about certain things, this determines how he thinks it important for him to conduct

> his life. The totality of the various things that a person cares about—together with his ordering of how important to him they are—effectively specifies his answer to the question of how to live.
>
> (Frankfurt 2006, 23)

Unlike a Platonist who responds to a value that has an independent claim on her affection and allegiance, Frankfurt sees persons as the ones who infuse the world with importance (or at least importance for those of us doing the caring).

We have two questions at the outset before offering a further overview of Professor Frankfurt's position. First, we question the extent to which an appeal to care is truly explanatory. Arguably, Frankfurt's position seems to come close to a tautology. He proposes that our standards, aims, attitudes, actions, and conduct are the results of our caring and what we care about, but in a sense isn't the reference to our standards and so on simply a reference to different ways of caring? Imagine this exchange:

Jane: I am looking for a way to get my son to France that meets the highest standards of safety I can afford.
John: Why do you care about spending the most you can afford to get your son to France?
Jane: Because I care about my son.

We suppose there might be more reasons that are in the offing. Frankfurt allows that there may be reasons (or causes) for our caring that have a biological, evolutionary background, and Jane may have reasons for pouring more money into her son's transport than into getting him a good haircut. But once care is in place ("I care for my son") and we forego appealing to the value of the son, it seems as though caring itself is basic and not further explained in terms of justification. So, we suggest, evolutionary biology may partially account for why we love our children, but we do not think that amounts to an account of why our love is *justified* or *warranted* or *good*. We will continue to press home the importance of having reasons for caring, but let us put the matter in terms of a related question: casting aside whether Frankfurt's position amounts to an explanatory tautology (we care because we care), let us consider the extent to which Frankfurt's appeal to care matches our pre-philosophical (everyday or intuitive) understanding of care and value.

What seems to be missing in Frankfurt's account is concern with what a person *should* care about. In the passage cited above, Frankfurt refers to "his answer to the question of how to live." Evidently, the answer to the question "how should you live?" for any individual will lie in what the individual cares about. If an individual has no cares (consider the central character in Graham Greene's *The Burnt Out Case*), presumably there is no answer for that individual. In effect, Frankfurt defends this position by contending that an appeal to some kind of independent standard about how to live is problematic.

Frankfurt thinks that appeal to how we should live faces a problem of circularity. We cite this objection at length:

> In order to carry out a rational evaluation of some way of living, a person must first know what evaluative criteria to employ and how to employ them. He needs to know what considerations count in favor of choosing to live in one way rather than in another, what considerations count against, and the relative weights of each. For instance, it must be clear to him how to evaluate the fact that a certain way of living leads more than others (or less than others) to personal satisfaction, to pleasure, to power, to glory, to creativity, to spiritual depth, to a harmonious relationship with the precepts of religion, to conformity with the requirements of morality, and so on.
>
> The trouble here is a rather obvious sort of circularity. In order for a person to be able even to conceive and to initiate an inquiry into how to live, he must already have settled upon the judgments at which the inquiry aims. Identifying the question of how one should live—that is, understanding just what question it is and just how to go about answering it—requires that one specify the criteria that are to be employed in evaluating various ways of living. Identifying the question is, indeed, tantamount to specifying those criteria: what the question asks is, precisely, what way of living best satisfies them. But identifying the criteria to be employed in evaluating various ways of living is also tantamount to providing an answer to the question of how to live, for the answer to this question is simply that one should live in the way that best satisfies whatever criteria are to be employed for evaluating lives.
>
> (Frankfurt 2006, 24–25)

Just as we suggested earlier that Frankfurt's position seems close to a tautology in the wake of the question "why care?" ("we care because we care"), perhaps those of us who wish to have justificatory reasons as to why we should care about this or that do not have access to the relevant free standing or independent criteria. After all, what are the differences between "I care about that criteria about how we should live because I care about it" and "I care about that criteria because the criteria seems right to me"? If Frankfurt is right, then it seems that we would not be able to conceive of such criteria unless we were already working with a prior understanding of what kind of living is satisfying.

To some extent, we think Frankfurt is correct about one difficulty of appealing to criteria, but we suggest the use of criteria in assessing ways of living does not involve any vicious circularity. The reply we propose is similar to the reply that some philosophers make to the problem of the criterion in epistemology. Let us consider the latter and then return to the terrain of values.

In epistemology, it has been charged that one cannot know anything (X) without knowing some criterion in virtue of which X is known. But how do you know that *that* criterion is correct? Perhaps you need an additional criterion by which

to know whether the first-order criterion is correct. But then yet another criterion is needed, *ad infinitum*. Roderick Chisholm broke the regress by embracing what he called *particularism*: he held that you can know and grasp certain truths antecedent to possessing a criterion of how you know them. Chisholm's preference for particularism rather than "methodism" (the view that knowledge of particulars is only possible if you know the method you are employing is accurate) was part of his "common sense" approach to philosophical problems. Chisholm was very much of the same mind as Thomas Reid and G.E. Moore; each philosopher claimed to be more certain of such ordinary beliefs as "I have hands" than they were of skeptical arguments that would defeat or undermine such claims.

We suggest that the problem of the criterion in values should not usher in skepticism about the reality and role of values in accounting for why we love this or that any more than the problem of the criterion in epistemology should usher in skepticism about the reality and role of epistemic norms in accounting for why we should believe this or that based on evidence. So, we propose that a common sense, intuitive value that most of us can grasp is that *it is good for parents to care for their children* or, putting the point more poignantly, *parents should care for their children (whether or not they actually care)*. Obviously, all sorts of caveats may need to be introduced to take care of deviant cases, but surely something like such a principle is a decent starting point.

With any invocation of values that are not reducible to statements about "natural facts," naturalists will be most unhappy, but two points may be offered on behalf of Platonists and other moral realists.

First, as a number of philosophers from G.E.M. Anscombe to Derek Parfit have argued, without an appeal to irreducible moral truths or principles, persons who care about doing great harm (e.g. committing genocide) or care about doing what seems utterly bizarre, have reasons for doing the harm and the bizarre. Anscombe introduced the following case in which she claimed that for the agent to reply that he did the act "for no particular reason" is inappropriate. If someone hunted out all the green books in his house and spread them out carefully on the roof, and gave one of these answers ("for no particular reason," "I just felt like doing it") to the question "Why?" his words would be unintelligible unless they are taken as joking or mystification. Arguably, there are cases when reported desires and motives seem so far afield ("I am placing my watch by a tree in case it wants to know the time") when they simply fail to make any sense.

Second, on behalf of accepting irreducible moral principles, it can be argued that this is no worse than accepting irreducible epistemic principles. This is a point we made earlier in referring to the radical skeptic. Arguably, if a naturalistic account of rationality and belief is problematic, why should we think that a naturalistic account of values is unproblematic?

Consider another objection to the kind of realism we are defending here. After advancing his objection about criteria, Frankfurt raises another worry for moral realists like Platonists:

> Here is another way to bring out the difficulty. Something is important to a person only in virtue of a difference that it makes. If everything would be exactly the same with that thing as without it, then it makes no sense for anyone to care about it. It cannot really be of any importance. Of course, it cannot be enough for it merely to make *some* difference. After all, everything does make some difference; but not everything is important.
>
> (Frankfurt 2006, 25)

This is a difficult position for someone to assess who is not already committed to moral realism or its denial. We shall press forward the appeal of Platonic moral realism by an appeal to one's ordinary, common sense understanding of values.

Imagine that the parents of a child possess the economic means to raise the child and live in a society in which they also have the option of placing the child up for adoption by a family with similar economic resources. Imagine that they do not see to it that the child is raised in some other loving family but raise the child themselves with minimal care and without any affective support. They care more for parties with their peers, adult recreation, and doing crossword puzzles. Imagine the child does not realize that she is neglected, but she grows up living a stunted life, filled with a sense that she is unworthy of love. As a consequence, she takes up a high-risk activity and—though she was healthy physically and, under different circumstances, would have lived until she was 90—dies in her twenties. When the child is dying, she does not care whether she might live. She has never really cared, nor have her parents.

Let's consider this scenario through the lens of a Platonist. Were the parents good parents? No. They failed to live up to their obligations as a parent. It does not matter how much the parents cared about crossword puzzles, nor does it matter whether the child was manipulated into thinking her life had little importance. This judgment seems as reasonable as any that challenge reckless private opinions and commitments. Suppose that someone suspects that every time he disbelieves in fairies, a fairy dies. He thinks he has killed 20 fairies. Is that person a killer? Maybe in his mind, but really he is no more of a killer than the parents are good parents in the above thought-experiment.

Frankfurt makes one other point that might be interpreted as creating a difficulty for the Platonist: "What is *not* possible is for a person who does not already care at least about *something* to discover reasons for caring about anything. Nobody can pull himself up by his own bootstraps" (Frankfurt 2006, 26). This may not be a source of deep tension between Platonists and Frankfurt. Platonists simply hold that it is a rare case when persons do not recognize the intrinsic goodness of at least something that merits, justifies, or calls for our love and care. When we fail to respond to such real goods, we fail to respond to reality itself and instead live a life of fantasy or denial. It may be that, from the standpoint of an external, non-committed observer, a despondent rogue who is not a good father looks the same to someone quite independent of a commitment to Platonism or Frankfurt's position. But in a Platonist perspective there is, we think, more of a sense that there is

something of a failure to live up to what the father should be doing (regardless of what he cares about) than with Frankfurt's alternative, for, given that the person does not care about being a good father, he has no reason to be a good father.

Let us now consider the key point of conflict between Frankfurt and what we might call "theistic Platonism." It is essential to consider Frankfurt's' view at length:

> Love is often understood as being, most basically, a response to the perceived worth of the beloved. We are moved to love something, on this account, by an appreciation of what we take to be its exceptional inherent value. The appeal of that value is what captivates us and turns us into lovers. We begin loving the things that we love because we are struck by their value, and we continue to love them for the sake of their value. If we did not find the beloved valuable, we should not love it.
>
> This may well fit certain cases of what would commonly be identified as love. However, the sort of phenomenon that I have in mind when referring here to love is essentially something else. As I am construing it, love is not necessarily a response grounded in awareness of the inherent value of its object. It may sometimes arise like that, but it need not do so . . . It is not necessarily as a *result* of recognizing their value and of being captivated by it that we love things. Rather, what we love necessarily *acquires* value for us *because* we love it. The lover does invariably and necessarily perceive the beloved as valuable, but the value he sees it to possess is a value that derives from and that depends upon his love.
>
> Consider the love of parents for their children. I can declare with unequivocal confidence that I do not love my children because I am aware of some value that inheres in them independent of my love for them. The fact is that I loved them even before they were born—before I had any especially relevant information about their personal characteristics or their particular merits and virtues. Furthermore, I do not believe that the valuable qualities they do happen to possess strictly in their own rights, would really provide me with a very compelling basis for regarding them as having greater worth than many other possible objects of love that in fact I love much less. It is quite clear to me that I do not love them more than other children because I believe they are better.
>
> (Frankfurt 2006, 38–39)

Frankfurt offers an extensive further point about the parent–child relationship:

> It is not because I have noticed their value, then, that I love my children as I do. Of course I do perceive them to have value; so far as I am concerned, indeed, their value is beyond measure. That, however, is not the basis of my love. It is really the other way around. The particular value that I attribute to my children is not inherent in them but depends upon my love for them. The reason they are so precious to me is simply that I love them so much.

> As for why it is that human beings do tend generally to love their children, the explanation presumably lies in the evolutionary pressure of natural selection. In any case, it is plainly *on account of* my love for them that they have acquired in my eyes a value that otherwise they would not certainly possess.
>
> (Frankfurt 2006, 40)

We believe this to be a false reading of what it is to love another person, to love one's child in particular, and to be loved by a parent. If Frankfurt is right, then when we love our children and congratulate them (for example) on their volunteer work tutoring students, the reason such work has value is because we love our children and their work. This would mean (philosophically and from our point of view) that our children would lose value when or if we stopped loving them. It also seems to imply that our children's value would fluctuate in line with our degree and depth of care. On one morning, our children's value may be the highest yet because we are fully awake and caring, whereas by the afternoon we may be exhausted with caring and our children's value begins to diminish. This seems profoundly counterintuitive. Frankfurt's view also implies that we would cease having value should our parents, ourselves, and others cease caring about ourselves.

We suggest that Frankfurt is misinterpreting the basic, natural good of the parent–child relationship. He assumes that if he values his children more than strangers and not due to their meriting his love through successful action or superior traits, then *he*, Frankfurt, is the source of value. But this completely puts to one side the apparent *basic good of the parent–child relationship*. The recognition of such a basic good explains why we think that when Frankfurt loves his child he is doing something good and it also explains why we do not think a child's value becomes diminished or fluctuates depending on a parent's love.

Frankfurt does acknowledge that, in our experience, something like the basic account seems right. In a passage cited earlier, Frankfurt claims, "The lover does invariably and necessarily perceive the beloved as valuable, but the value he sees it to possess is a value that derives from and that depends upon his love" (2006, 38–39).

But we are not sure that this perception of value is possible if one fully believes that the value is completely derived from the lover. If we fully accept Frankfurt's account and have no doubt of its truth, how can we simultaneously perceive our children as having independent value? Imagine that the *only* reason you value a house is because you think that Brad Pitt spent the night there. And you know that your sense of the worth of the house is *wholly derived* from a visit by that handsome celebrity and not due to the house's intrinsic value. How can you perceive and know this and yet simultaneously perceive the house as possessing intrinsic value? Insofar as perceiving a house or a child as possessing intrinsic value involves believing that they are of intrinsic value, it seems Frankfurt leaves us with a case in which a person must believe his child is intrinsically valuable while believing that the child is not intrinsically valuable.

To sum up, love from God and each other is a response to intrinsic goodness rather than a foundational source of goodness. When we love another person, we love her for the value or worth she has intrinsically or for her own sake, not the other way around. Thus, our love for our partners or for our children is not what gives them value or makes them interesting.

We next explore the role that feelings or emotions play in love, both with respect to the desire for the good of the other (beneficent love) and the desire to be united with the other (unitive love).

Love and emotions

A dominant dimension of our mental life has to do with the emotions, taken here simply to be a class of feelings. While some accounts of love equate it with an emotion, Alexander Pruss has argued that love does not involve (or should not be thought of as principally involving) feelings, and he offers several reasons for thinking so. We believe his position to be mistaken both in terms of beneficent love and unitive love.

To prevent our disagreement from falling into a merely verbal dispute over the meaning of the term "feelings," we will assume what we think of as a common sense, ordinary understanding of "feelings." We believe that if we love Pruss then (*ceteris paribus*) this involves our occurrent feeling or disposition to feel delight or pleasure in his good and our occurrent feeling or disposition to feel sad when some ill befalls him. We are not using the terms "delight," "pleasure," and "sadness" in any technical fashion and recognize that other terms may be substituted (joy, happiness, gladness, etc.) and that these feelings come in degrees.

We propose that if we claim to love Pruss but feel no pleasure (or delight, or happiness, etc.) in his good, our so-called love is not truly love; rather, perhaps it is merely admiration or respect. For example, if we truly love Pruss, we will take pleasure in his writing a fine book. Similarly, if we feel no sadness or a disposition to feel sad when some ill befalls Pruss, we believe our "love" would be too cold to be considered a proper form of love. We further suggest that it would be conceptually bizarre to claim that our love for Pruss is unitive, i.e. that we long for being in his company (*ceteris paribus*) if we feel no pleasure or delight in doing so. In fact, we think that if we professed to love Pruss but felt sadness or displeasure in his good and in being in his company, then it would be much more likely that we dislike him than love him.

Before turning to Pruss's reasons for not including feelings in his account of love, we also note that hatred without feelings would also be profoundly counterintuitive. What makes hating another person so reprehensible is that hatred involves *taking pleasure* in the other's misfortune or, in an extreme case, desiring for the object of hatred to have a pointless life and a prolonged and painful death.

Consider the following reason Pruss advances for seeing love as not involving feelings. Relying on the New Testament, Pruss notes that we are commanded to love others with "agape" love:

> This implies that agape cannot indicate a loving feeling or emotion. For, first of all, feelings do not seem to be subject to direct control. While we can cause feelings in ourselves indirectly—say, rouse ourselves to feel indignation by dwelling on the wrongs someone has done—we cannot do so immediately and we cannot do so always, whereas we are always obliged to love.
>
> (Pruss 2012, 9)

Consider three replies.

First, imagine Pruss is correct, and consider a case of agape love. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a likely candidate; this is a case in which a person who is considered a social inferior comes to the aid of another who has been injured, cares for him, and insures that the injured is looked after once the Samaritan has to leave (Luke 10: 25–29). Imagine that while the Samaritan is caring for the one injured, he has no feelings of sadness or unhappiness whatever. In fact, if feelings are irrelevant, imagine that he feels great pleasure in the fact that the victim was injured so badly. In such cases, the agape love of the Samaritan clearly is at least tarnished or imperfect. We would go further, however, and claim that in such a case there is no love whatever. The Samaritan might physically care for the victim the way a person would who truly loved the injured person, but the unfeeling (or sadistic) Samaritan would not be loving.

Second, we suggest that our feelings are not entirely out of our control. We think that there are ways in which we may cultivate moral sensitivity and, sadly, there are very familiar ways in which persons can become desensitized and replace compassion with cruelty.

Third, imagine that we are wrong and that we cannot directly control our feelings. The command to love others might not be possible, then, for us to do of our own power. But isn't that what a range of Christian theologians think about our power to follow many divine precepts? In the recovery movement, it is routine for an addict to profess that he cannot give up his addiction without the help of a higher power. We conclude that there can still be a command to love in which such love involves feelings even if it is not directly in our power to obey such a command.

Pruss provides more reasons to think that love does not involve feelings: "Secondly, feelings of affection are transitory. They disappear while one sleeps, and yet no one would say: 'My wife does not love me, for she is asleep' " (Pruss 2012, 9). However, this seems very odd in our view. Why believe that feelings are any more or less transitory than thoughts or thinking or actions or intentions? Does one's wife not know that Paris is the capital of France when she is sleeping? Or has she ceased being a Christian when asleep, for is she then in a condition in which she has not beliefs or feelings of any kind? These consequences seem bizarre. Arguably, when we are asleep it makes perfect sense to think of a person as knowing and feeling all sorts of things even if these are not conscious, current states.

Otherwise, perhaps we should conclude that our enemies do not hate us all the time for, after all, when they are asleep their hatred has disappeared. Feelings of hate and love are or can be (for worse or better) deep, settled parts of our character or, if you will, our soul. If you are truly loved by your partner, then, when she is not conscious, she is not at that time consciously loving you (by definition). However, her consciously loving you while awake is probably essential in both explaining and understanding why she chose to sleep next to you. Sleeping together is so vulnerable and meaningful an act in part because one surrenders one's deliberate, conscious intentions.

Consider one more reason why Pruss proposes that love does not involve feelings: "Finally, feelings do not have the close connection to action that love has in the New Testament . . . A feeling need not be acted on, but can be ignored by force of will" (Pruss 2012, 9). We take exception to these claims. First, feelings can (at least sometimes) be thought of as an activity themselves. Someone may be feeling extreme malice or a deep, profound hatred of us right now and yet not act on it in terms of outward, physical behavior. It is still the case, however, that this fellow is involved in an activity that is corrosive to the soul. Second, while there may be some feelings that can be ignored by force of will, the same is true with thinking, thoughts, commitments, intentions, goals, and so on. While feelings may not be acted on (outwardly), acts themselves, once begun, need not continue and can be aborted due to force of will. Third, if we come to believe that someone has a feeling of, for example, great love for others, but he never acts on this feeling even when it is clear to him that there are genuine opportunities for good, beneficent action that he can perform without any counter-balancing evil, then we should doubt our belief that he truly has such great love for others.

We conclude that Pruss has not shown that love does not involve feelings as an essential component. Moreover, there seem to be clear cases when someone's claim to be loving seems to be tainted or not credible if shorn of feelings.

We now turn to briefly review and assess the related aspects of Pruss's philosophy of love in relationships, which will allow us to move even more deeply into the nature and meaning of love and the good.

Friendship and self-love

Pruss asserts that in a friendship, the true reason why we make sacrifices for our friends lies in our commitments, and not in our love:

> Why not instead act on account of the value of the other person in the context of the relationship? It is true that love may be a central part of that relationship, but I want to suggest that love is not the part of the relationship that actually does the work of justifying the sacrifice. For suppose that I stopped loving my friend. Would that *in itself* take away my obligation to stand by him in his time of need? Certainly not. The *commitment* I had

> implicitly or explicitly undertaken while loving him, a commitment that made it appropriate for him to *expect* help from me, is sufficient for the justification. If I need to advert to my own love, then something has gone wrong.
>
> (Pruss 2012, 16)

This case is a sad one, from our point of view. Although this is not the occasion for articulating a full philosophy of friendship, we suggest that if you have ceased to love someone whom you consider a friend, then you are probably no longer a friend. You may be a "friend" in some extended sense in that you can be expected to act in a friendly manner and you might even make a great sacrifice in light of the fact that you once loved him. But in such a case, you are not standing by a friend, but a former friend, much as you might stand by an ex-wife or ex-husband after the dissolution of a marriage. You might continue to stand by the ex-spouse because once upon a time you both loved each other, and that love, while no longer a reality, still gives you a reason to be loyal to him or her when in need.

To bring home our point, imagine that the case Pruss introduces is one in which you are invited to celebrate with a friend you no longer love the anniversary of the start of your friendship. However, this anniversary coincides with a wedding in which he asks you to serve as his best man, because, as he puts it, "you are my best friend!" Surely there would be something cruelly dishonest about accepting the invitation to be his best man and celebrating the anniversary if you no longer love him.

We submit that at the center of the idea of being a friend, parent, brother, or sister is the idea that the relationship of friendship, parenthood, brotherhood and sisterhood should have love as a central, essential quality. Imagine the painful case of brothers hating each other for no reason other than jealousy or envy. Such a scenario seems to be an offense against the notion of a sibling relationship, in which a relationship that should be loving has been twisted and subverted. The brother who hates us, for reasons grounded not in his moral righteousness but in his base vices, is not acting as a brother (where this secondary sense of "brother" involves how male siblings who are not dysfunctional ought to feel and act).

Let us now consider Pruss' view of unconditional love. He describes unconditional love for all persons in terms of an unconditional commitment that is due to all persons in virtue of general features that all persons share. Pruss (2012, 42) writes that "unconditional love, thus, should be understood as unconditionally *committed* love, and if I am right that what justifies unconditional love is a general feature everybody shares, then it follows that everybody is unconditionally lovable."

We would only adjust this claim that love involves a disposition to feelings of pleasure and sadness (as noted earlier), and we would add that unconditional love is always merited insofar as the following is accepted: (a) love is always anchored in the good of the beloved; (b) any unitive love (the desire to be united with the beloved, romantically or not) is subordinate to beneficent love (desiring the good of the beloved); and (c) proper self-love, which is also beneficent and unitive is essential. These conditions are necessary to prevent cases in which it seems that a

person will ruin him or herself for the sake of love of another. These conditions will also give us grounds for rejecting claims by a person that he intentionally harms the persons he loves (unless there is some compelling additional moral principle in play, e.g. if the harm was to prevent even greater, more grave harm).

Moving toward self-love, Pruss takes a fairly stern view that the love of a person for himself or herself needs to be detached from self-identity. In the example that follows, Francis is not supposed to love himself because he is Francis. He is to love Francis because Francis is lovable. Pruss puts his point as follows:

> This then suggests another way in which well-ordered love of oneself is not self-seeking. When Francis virtuously loves himself, i.e., Francis, he does not love Francis because Francis is *himself*, but he loves Francis because Francis is a human being in the image and likeness of God. Or, at least, he does not *primarily* love Francis for being himself, but primarily loves him for the attributes that Francis shares with all other humans. Virtuous people love their neighbors as they love themselves. Conversely, they love themselves as they love their neighbors, namely, for the same reason. And in this sense the love is not self-seeking, since although the beloved is oneself, the beloved is loved primarily for reasons for which one loves one's neighbor rather than for being oneself.
>
> (Pruss 2012, 47)

There seems to be something freeing about this approach to self-love. Perhaps there is something emancipatory in the sense that it would or should take our gaze off of our individual selves. We think that in certain relationships this kind of non-self-aware dimension is perfectly fitting. Especially among friends, we (Charles and Chad) might be equally delighted if one of us received some great good (such as a Nobel Prize). And in communities, such as extremely well-functioning churches or monasteries or colleges, there might be equal joy or sorrow without there being anything special about who is experiencing the joy or sorrow. That is, we might be delighted that someone in our college received an award without knowing whether that person was one of us. But if this kind of self-love were the norm, we would be missing out on what might be called the quiddity (this-ness) of love.

As noted, in our own relationship, a friendship between Charles and Chad, we are such that, as friends, we derive as much pleasure when one of us meets with some good and we feel sadness when one us meets some misfortune. We therefore have a shared commitment to each other's welfare and, when welfare is impaired, to each other's restoration. But should this be the case in all relationships? Or, putting it more generally, would we miss out on something if we were to have no love of self insofar as I (Charles) love the fact that I am Charles and I (Chad) love the fact that I am Chad? We think so. This is because of the philosophy of love that Pruss adheres to that we cited at the outset of the chapter. True love needs to be reflected in terms of the good of the beloved. To love Charles or Chad without appreciating that one of us is Charles and one of us is Chad would

be bizarre. Similarly, for either of us to love ourselves only insofar as we think Charles or Chad is lovable would be bizarre.

We certainly think that Pruss' conception of self-love is commendable, but we propose that it is incomplete insofar as it overshadows the fact that each individual (as an individual thing or being or subject) is lovable, and not just because he or she is a Francis, Clare, Charles, Chad or Alexander. Our point about the particularity of love might come to the fore if we imagine a case of fragmentation. Imagine that we become confused and are not sure whether Charles or Chad is lovable. We have heard they are both rather smug and unfeeling. Might it not still make sense under those conditions if a third party, Alexander, were to say to us: "Forget about being Charles or Chad, I love each of you and want you both to flourish."

So, we suggest, there is a particularity to love. As we concluded earlier, when you love another person, you love her for the value or worth she has intrinsically or for her own sake. But you also love her (or him) because she is so and so—that particular girl or woman (or he is so and so—that particular boy or man). This is no less true with respect to love of self.

Having provided some general reflections on good and evil in section one, focusing on divine command theory in section two, and then addressing the nature and ethics of love and friendship as key dimensions of the good in sections three through five—all within the purview of philosophical theology—we now turn our attention to applied ethics. We offer some musings on how philosophical theology tends to influence our ethics and suggest a framework of moral reasoning in light of such philosophical and theological reflection.

Applied ethics and theological traditions

One of the divisions of the broad field of ethics is known as applied ethics, where the focus is on good and evil and right and wrong in special areas of practice such as medicine, law, politics, and so on. Applied ethics generally assumes some form of moral realism as it addresses the moral permissibility of specific actions and practices. We would need multiple volumes, and certainly more than this single book, to do justice to the ways in which philosophical theology leads us to consider values that would differ from standard, secular ethics. But we do offer here a general structural point, which is that philosophical theology tends to have four sorts of influence on our ethics, leading us either to enhance, atrophy, replace, or reverse our moral reasons. Consider four cases. We treat them with brevity but hope they serve to suggest patterned, principled moral reasoning in light of philosophical theology.

A case of enhancement

Imagine that there are sound secular reasons for the affluent to assist the dispossessed. The justification might be utilitarian or on Kantian grounds or an appeal to Rawls's veil of ignorance or due to some form of moral particularism (the view that there are moral duties but these are not subject to a formal, systematic theory). The duty

to assist would, in our view, become even more substantial if there is reason to believe such assistance is commanded by the God who has created and sustains the cosmos.

A case of atrophy

Imagine that there are good, secular reasons to believe in some liberty principle to the effect that persons have the right to pursue their own goals in life when such goals do not involve any injustice. We might further restrict a plausible version of such a principle to the effect that the goals not involve profound offense to others (public urination and exposure may not involve injustice but it still might be necessary to prohibit them). To make our case vivid, imagine a young person (Chris) who is highly talented and has great potential as a medical doctor, but the person also has a fondness for surfing. Imagine that the person is in a community that lacks any stable medical resources, and that unless Chris invests in medical school and practices medicine in the community it will be vulnerable to grave health hazards. There might be good secular reasons for why Chris might forego exercising his liberty principle, but the liberty principle would atrophy even more if Chris comes to believe that the God who created and conserves the cosmos calls each person to serve others.

A case of replacement

Different theological traditions include special precepts about prayer, worship, pilgrimages, liturgy, fellowship, and so on. These practices will invariably replace some of our secular practices. In such cases it is not that the secular practices that one was involved in were necessarily immoral or evil from the perspective of the particular theological tradition in which one is now participating, but the precepts about prayer, pilgrimages and so on are understood to be spiritually or morally profitable over and above the secular practices that they replace.

A case of reversal

In some cases, theological traditions reverse our moral reasons as these are assessed in secular terms. For example, Jesus's admonition that we should love our enemies flies in the face of ordinary moral reasoning and action. This may not only have direct moral or spiritual ramifications (such as influencing you to pray for a person who has harmed you), it may even have political or statutory consequences, leading one, for example, to protest a sanctioned event such as war, to support or denounce a particular law, or to vote for one candidate over another.

The self and good and evil

When considering matters of ethics, values, good and evil, love and friendship, and so on as we have been doing, a philosophy of the self is generally presupposed.

When we engage in friendship with another, make love to another, or, God forbid, do harm to another, we seem to take it as a given that there is an "other" with whom we are engaging in such activities. If this were not the case, what would such discourse mean? If it is the case, what is the nature of this other? What is our nature? Are we merely evolved animals, by-products of chance events in a world that has, as many secularists suppose, "precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference"? (Dawkins 1995, 132). Or are we special creations of God, sacred creatures "fearfully and wonderfully made" in the *imago dei*—manifesting peculiar qualities that somehow reflect the very nature of the divine? Or are we something else? Is there even an actual "I," an ego or center of consciousness who thinks, feels, intends, loves, hates, and so on? These are important questions in philosophical theology—in fact, they are prolegomena to some of the very issues we have been addressing—and there are a variety of answers that can be given. We examine a traditional (western) account of the self below, and in Chapter 8 we return to the subject from a Buddhist perspective.

The term "dualism" has a variety of uses in the history of western philosophy, and different dualist conceptions of the self have been affirmed and defended. Going back at least as far as Plato, most of the major philosophers in the western tradition have held to some form of dualism (both with respect to the self and to fundamental reality), including Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, René Descartes, and Immanuel Kant, to name a few. Also, in one form or another, most adherents of the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have been dualists as the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an all seem, on a straightforward read at least, to affirm the reality of both body and soul. In the East, too, there are Hindu conceptions of the self in which a distinction is made between the individual soul (*atman*) and the physical matter (*prakriti*), which make up the individual.

Descartes is perhaps the most widely recognized philosophical defender of dualism. On the standard interpretation of Descartes' position, the soul is an unextended, non-spatial, non-physical substance. The body, on the other hand, is an extended, spatial, physical substance. One familiar problem with this view is how the immaterial soul/mind can exert a force on physical matter (the body). One reply on hand for theists is that if God, an immaterial reality, can causally interact with matter, then it is not inconceivable that immaterial souls could do so as well. Nevertheless, the difficulty of offering an explanation for how there could be interaction between soul and body, given their radical ontological dissimilarities, has afflicted dualists from the outset. This mystery has often been castigated as the problem of the "ghost in the machine" (as we noted in Chapter 1, British philosopher Gilbert Ryle first used the phrase as a deprecating description for Cartesian dualism), and this, among other difficulties, has led many philosophers to reject it.

But one need not affirm full-blown Cartesian dualism in order to affirm dualism. Another version—one in which the soul seems to be more deeply integrated with the body than on the Cartesian view—is attributed to the work

of Thomas Aquinas, who in turn owes much to Aristotle. On the Thomistic view, the soul is a unity of inseparable aspects, including mental states (such as feelings, thoughts, and sensations), capacities, powers, and structures. The soul, immaterial though it is, is what animates, unifies, and develops the biological functions of the physical body. The soul is the essence of a person on this view; it is an individual's source of life as well as the ordering principle of the person.

One key dualist argument arises from personal identity. With ordinary physical objects, such as a computer, one can conceive of counterfactual situations in which issues of identity are quite challenging. Imagine a scenario in which you are texting on a cellphone and consider the following counterfactual scenarios: (a) This particular phone might primarily have been made of wheat products; (b) This phone might have been made of some other synthetic materials than it is actually made of; and (c) This phone might have been made up mostly of the materials it actually was made from in addition to some other synthetic materials, including wheat products. On most accounts, (a) would be understood to be impossible and thus false; *this* phone could not have been made of wheat. But as we consider (b) and (c), it becomes less clear that they are obviously impossible and false. Whether it would be the *same* phone (and in what sense sameness would apply) given the various counterfactuals does not have a clear and obvious answer.

However, when considering conscious individuals such as us, it seems that the situation is quite different. For when a person considers her own consciousness, it does not seem to come in pieces, parts, or degrees. While it is conceivable to consider a possible world in which my present *body* was constituted by, at least in a partial way, other material bits, it seems nonsensical to consider a possible world in which my consciousness is partially mine (a bit of it here and a bit of it there). My consciousness is either *fully* mine or it is not. One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that, while material objects are complex objects, the mind must be simple. If so, it must be something akin to what dualists claim. There are rebuttals to this argument, of course, but this is one way dualists attempt to make their case.

One way this understanding of the self plays out with respect to subjectivity and emotions is that they cannot simply be a cluster of material "facts" about ourselves. The self is something more than the bare objective facts of, say, one's height, weight, location, and so on. This "something more" as subjective ego fits well within the philosophical theology of the theistic traditions in which, as we have already seen, human beings are special creations of God, sacred creatures made in the *imago dei*. Here we have individual persons with intrinsic worth—persons who reflect design and purpose, and who have the ability to manifest evil and good. Such a view fits well both synchronically, whereby the individual is a sacred individual as an individual, and diachronically, whereby the person remains the same sacred individual throughout one's lifetime.

We find this conception of the self very plausible. It is one rooted in the theistic traditions, and, as we see it, it makes sense theologically, philosophically, and scientifically. It is not the only conception, of course. One could be a strict materialist of the self. We have given some reasons within the practice of philosophical theology

for thinking that view is untenable, and we will explore the view further in the next chapter. Throughout this chapter we have been addressing issues of ethics, value, love, and friendship from within the purview of the self commonly held in Western cultures, though not exclusively so. But there are other religious views of the self that lay bare different understandings of these matters. In Chapter 8 we engage in philosophical theology from both Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic traditions, and there we will return to the notion of the self—but from a Buddhist view and the role the self plays in Buddhist notions of good and evil.

Only if there is a self can there be one who truly suffers; and only if there is a true self can there be one who loves, engages in friendship, and does what is right and good. On this, virtually all theists are in agreement. And on standard accounts of theism within the Abrahamic traditions, God created human persons in God's image (the *imago dei* as discussed earlier), and thus we have intrinsic value, we are all children of God and brothers and sisters, and so we should treat one another accordingly. But if there is a perfect divine reality that created the world, including human persons, why do we treat each other as enemies rather than family? If we are made in the image of God, why do we do the horrendous things we do? More broadly, why is there any evil and suffering at all in this world that God created? It is to those questions that we turn in the next chapter.

Further reflections

We have noted how philosophical theology involves investigating theological traditions from the inside and outside. Sometimes an external perspective may be more perceptive than the point of view of those on the "inside." Here are some observations from the atheist and French existentialist Albert Camus in an address entitled "What the world expects of Christians":

> Inasmuch as you have been so kind as to invite a man who does not share your convictions to come and answer the very general question that you are raising in these conversations, before telling you what I think unbelievers expect of Christians, I should like first to acknowledge your intellectual generosity.
>
> I shall strive not to be the person who pretends to believe that Christianity is an easy thing and asks of the Christian, on the basis of an external view of Christianity, more than he asks of himself. I believe indeed that the Christian has many obligations but that it is not up to the man who rejects them himself to recall their existence to anyone who has already accepted them. If there is anyone who can ask anything of the Christian, it is the Christian him/herself . . .
>
> What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out, loud and clear, and that they should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could rise in the heart of the simplest man. That they should get away from abstraction and confront the

> blood-stained face history has taken on today. The grouping we need is a grouping of men/women resolved to speak out clearly and to pay up personally . . .
>
> We are faced with evil. And, as for me, I feel rather as Augustine did before becoming a Christian when he said: "I tried to find the source of evil and I got nowhere." But it is also true that I, and a few others, know what must be done; if not reduce evil, at least not to add to it. Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children.
>
> And if you don't help us, who else in the world can help us do this?
>
> Between the forces of terror and the forces of dialogue, a great unequal battle has begun. I have nothing but reasonable illusions as to the outcome of that battle. But I believe it must be fought, and I know that certain men/women at least have resolved to do so. I merely fear that they will occasionally feel somewhat alone, that they are in fact alone . . .
>
> It may be that Christianity . . . will insist on losing once and for all the virtue of revolt and indignation that belonged to it long ago. In that case Christians will live and Christianity will die. . . . What I know—which sometimes creates a deep longing in me—is that if Christians made up their minds to it, millions of voices—millions, I say—throughout the world would be added to the appeal of a handful of isolated individuals who, without any sort of affiliation, today intercede almost everywhere and ceaselessly for children and for men/women.
>
> (Camus 2012, 67–74)

G.E. Moore wrote a paper "Can God be serious?" which addresses the moral status of humor:

> I am using serious as a negative predicate, denoting the absence of that particular emotion of which laughter is usually the sign, and which as it has no name, I will in future, for convenience, call "sense of humour." By God I mean a being which should be perfectly good, if such a thing is conceivable. And what I want to know is whether such a God could laugh; whether a sense of humour is consistent with perfect goodness.
>
> (Moore 1895)

What do you think?
After reading the quotation below, reflect on what it means to affirm that God is perfectly good and how we might come to such a conclusion.

> This objection rests on a misunderstanding of the idea that (necessarily) God is perfectly good. This can be intelligibly asserted only because of the principle that *no being who is not perfectly good may bear the title "God."* The catch is that we cannot determine whether some being is God without

> first checking on whether he is perfectly good; and we cannot decide whether he is perfectly good without knowing (among other things) whether his commands to us are right. Thus, our own judgment that some actions are right and others wrong is logically prior to our recognition of any being as God. The upshot is that we cannot justify the suspension of our own judgment on the grounds that we are deferring to God's command; for if, by our own best judgment, the command is wrong, this gives us good reason to withhold the title "God" from the commander.
>
> (Rachels 1996, 120)

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7

EVIL AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair.

(William Blake, *Songs of Experience*)

In this chapter, continuing to look at theological traditions both from the inside and outside, we will balance or juxtapose the different ways they see evil as a problem and the different ways in which, from an external point of view, they see evil as evidence against the truth of theological traditions.

Evil is fully recognized as real within the Abrahamic traditions, so much so that if there were evidence that evil did not exist or was not a profound abomination, it would also provide some evidence that the Abrahamic traditions are false. But the Abrahamic traditions cannot (or apparently cannot) deem evil so horrendous that any God that tolerates such evil is abominable and certainly not good, let alone not perfect. The focus of this chapter is the challenge of facing evil in terms of the Abrahamic traditions. In the next chapter, we examine evil from the standpoint of Hindu philosophical theology.

There are four sections that follow: the scope and intensity of evil; the greater good defense; the free will defense; and the significance of life beyond life.

The scope and intensity of evil

Think about rape and murder: mass atrocities like the Armenian Genocide from 1915 to 1923 killing 600,000 to 1.5 million persons; the Rape of Nanking (1937–1938) with 200,000 to 300,000 victims; the Holocaust, which, counting Jewish, homosexual and other victims, claimed 11 million victims; and the 1994 Rwandan Genocide when some estimate that 1 million people were massacred.

Deaths from starvation and disease are similarly difficult to comprehend: the Black Plague in the fourteenth century killed over 23 million people in Europe; the spread of diseases brought from Europe reduced the indigenous population of the Americas to between 5 and 10 percent of its pre-Columbian numbers; the Bengal famine in 1769–1773 caused 10 million deaths; the Great Famine in Ireland killed 1 to 1.5 million; the Spanish Flu of 1918–1920 took the lives of some 50 to 100 million worldwide; the famine Stalin engineered in the Ukraine killed 2 to 8 million; the Great Chinese Famine from 1958 to 1961 caused 20 to 30 million deaths; the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami had 230,000 to 280,000 victims. As Voltaire recounted in *Candide*, Europe was shocked by the Lisbon earthquake and tsunami in 1755, which killed 40,000 to 50,000 people. But the death toll in the Lisbon earthquake was minor compared with that of the Shaanxi earthquake, the deadliest in human history, which killed approximately 830,000 people. Add to all of this the evils of the slave trade, of seemingly constant human warfare, and the unrelenting sexual, physical, social, and economic exploitation of peoples everywhere. And this all must be seen on top of the vast amount of suffering among animals other than humans, sometimes inflicted by us, but sometimes not. The earth may not be the only planet where there is life. Given the hundreds of billions of galaxies and the countless billions of exoplanets, it would not be surprising if the universe is in fact teeming with life, and if it is, there is no doubt much more pain and suffering than is imaginable.

One's estimate of the extent of evil depends on one's identification of thresholds. William James went so far as to say that if even one cockroach is suffering from unrequited love, the cosmos is not moral. If that is a low threshold for what is unacceptable from a moral point of view, the estimation of goods may be low as well. What about cases of when cockroaches are in love, for example? To be able to have conscious experiences (so long as these do not involve undeserved suffering), as well as to have the capacities to move, learn, think, reason, possess memory, have emotions, and to be able to act, and act freely—all these and much more—we believe all these to be good, with the qualification that if all these powers are used for the sake of harming others, we would judge them as contributing to evil states of affairs.

Returning to the listing of goods, beyond basic powers, we think the bare existence, and certainly flourishing, of ecosystems to be good. Then there is a planet as a site of life, including the emergence of beings with consciousness, with the power to contribute to each others' welfare, act justly and courageously to be good. Moreover, the power to be experientially attuned to the divine we take to be a great good. Just as there is an almost limitless list of great evils (murder, rape . . .) there is an almost limitless list of great goods (making love, healthy childbirth, the healthy raising of families, friendships, cooperative creative endeavors).

As we begin thinking about evils in terms of philosophical theology, let us first consider whether there is a structural primacy between good and evil. According to a privation of the good (or *privatio boni*) thesis, good takes primacy over evil. In one version, this is clearly wrong. In the version we think to be mistaken, evils

are considered the absence of good much as darkness is considered the absence of light. Rather, from our point of view, inflicting intense suffering on an innocent person is the bringing about of a concrete state of affairs. It is a positive state of affairs, not in terms of being good, but in the sense that it involves what can be positively or concretely described as something that occurs (rather than as something that does not occur). However, there is another version of the privation thesis we think is more plausible, and that is that the existence of evil depends upon the existence of something good. So destroying a human being would not be evil if it were not the case that it is good that there are human beings. Some goods depend on evil, but we suggest it is not obvious that all goods have this dependency. The goodness of courage, for example, probably requires there be at least some danger, some threat to confront, and the goodness of compassion probably requires that there be some suffering or misfortune about which there can be concern and sympathy. But the bare existence of two persons who are in love does not (or does not obviously) require the existence of some evil.

We make this first point only to set it to one side, however. Even if we are right that the good is prior (or has primacy) over what is evil, it does not aid us in thinking about whether the existence of God is compatible with the nature and scope of evil. As a second stage of reflection, let us consider the overall point of thinking about the scope of evil.

From the inside, theological traditions implore us to reflect on evil in order to combat it. We may directly seek to combat evil when the evil originates from human beings. We may indirectly combat it when we see as evil the great harms that come from earthquakes, nonhuman sources of disease, and so on. Abrahamic theological traditions have at their core invocations to repent, to repair, to make restitution for past harms, and to succor the vulnerable.

What about cases, however, from the inside and the outside, when reflection on evil is part and parcel of understanding how the evils that seem to surround us are compatible or incompatible with the goodness of God? Some have deep worries about this theoretical endeavor for at least two reasons.

One worry concerns what might be called *justification*. Do those who defend the goodness of God in the face of evil wind up arguing that all the horrors we have just cited are actually good? This is the impression that some critics of theism project. D.Z. Phillips (2005) contends that those defending God's goodness are engaged in something offensive, something insulting or dishonoring of the victims of evil. This is not just a position among scholars; the British popular figure Stephen Fry was asked about his reaction if, upon death, he wound up in heaven. What might he say to God? Fry:

> I'd say, bone cancer in children? What's that about? How dare you? How dare you create a world in which there is such misery that is not our fault. It's not right, it's utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world that is so full of injustice and pain?
> (Fry 2015)

An interviewer prodded Fry that speaking that way to God might not be the best way of getting on with God, to which Fry replied: "But I wouldn't want to," Fry insisted. "I wouldn't want to get in on his terms. They are wrong."

> Now, if I died and it was Pluto, Hades, and if it was the 12 Greek gods then I would have more truck with it, because the Greeks didn't pretend to not be human in their appetites, in their capriciousness, and in their unreasonableness . . . they didn't present themselves as being all-seeing, all-wise, all-kind, all-beneficent, because the god that created this universe, if it was created by god, is quite clearly a maniac . . . utter maniac, totally selfish.
>
> We have to spend our life on our knees thanking him? What kind of god would do that?
>
> So, atheism is not just about not believing there's a God, but on the assumption there is one, what kind of God is he?
>
> (Fry 2015)

Fry's response makes sense if it is the case that the God we imagine is deemed as aloof and subjecting creation to a kind of balancing game, justifying seemingly unspeakable events with rewards or compensation. Fry seems right that any person who does not try to prevent a girl from getting cancer is wicked. And the idea that one should worship such a being can, on the face of it, seem positively diabolical.

A second, but related, worry is that those who argue for God's goodness in the face of grave evil face the danger that they may weaken our own motivation to combat evil. After all, if God can remain good while not preventing a rape or murder that God has the power to prevent, perhaps our goodness is not compromised when we do not prevent rape or murder on occasions when we can prevent such evil.

Three areas that are important to consider in response to those like Fry and Phillips may be referred to as divine outrage, the difference between the values of Creator and creature, and redemption. We take up serious space in developing these replies here not just in challenging Fry and Phillips, but as part of making important points about our orientation—philosophical and personal—to the problem of evil.

Divine outrage

First, the Abrahamic traditions are firmly committed to outrage when evil occurs. This is something Fry and Phillips do not seem to recognize. To try to appreciate divine outrage, imagine that the child's cancer was the result of pollution produced by human beings who knowingly harm others in the course of accumulating massive wealth, or the cancer was the result of second-hand smoke by adults who deliberately endangered the girl, or the cancer was induced by a murderer. Or imagine that cancer would not have had the devastating role it has had and continues to have if human beings were united collaboratively in combating it.

If cancer is such a great evil (and we think it is), why are we not devoting more biotechnological research into eradicating it? If the God of Abrahamic traditions exist, we are compelled to imagine that this God responds in rage at a magnitude surpassing human powers. We might imagine a retort to Fry: How dare you and others fail to spend all your disposable time and income on preventing any girl or boy or anyone at all from having cancer?

John Hick expresses vividly a position akin to the outrage due to evil voiced by Fry and Phillips that is very much at the soul of the Abrahamic faiths. He refers to evils whose

> effect seems to be purely dysteleological and destructive. They can break their victim's spirit and cause him to curse whatever gods there may be. When a child dies of cerebral meningitis, his little personality undeveloped and his life unfulfilled, leaving only an unquenchable aching void in his parents' lives; or when a charming, lively, and intelligent woman suffers from a shrinking of the brain which destroys her personality and leaves her in an asylum, barely able to recognize her nearest relatives, until death comes in middle age as a baneful blessing; or when a child is born so deformed and defective that he can never live a properly human life, but must always be an object of pity to some and revulsion to others . . . when such things happen we can see no gain to the soul, whether of the victim or others, but on the contrary only a ruthlessly destructive purpose which is utterly inimical to human values . . . Instead of enabling, affliction may crush the character and wrest from it whatever virtue it possessed.
>
> (Hick 1978, 330–331)

In following up on the outrage, here is Hick's very clear statement of a point we are making to the effect that, from an Abrahamic perspective, there is a very profound affirmation that what occurs is not in accord with, but deeply opposed to the divine will. He begins by referring to what might be the ultimate purpose of evil:

> What does that ultimate purpose mean for Auschwitz and Belsen and the other camps in which, between 1942 and 1945, between 4 and 6 million Jewish men, women and children were deliberately and scientifically murdered? Was this in any sense willed by God? The answer is obviously no. These events were utterly evil, wicked, devilish and, so far as the human mind can reach, unforgivable: they are wrongs that can never be righted, horrors which will disfigure the universe to the end of time, and in relation to which no condemnation can be strong enough, no revulsion adequate. It would have been better—much much better—if they had never happened. Most certainly God did not want those who committed these fearful crimes against humanity to act as they did. His purpose for the world was retarded by them and power of evil within it increased.
>
> (Hick 1978, 361)

Yet all of this evil did occur. Why? Why would an omnibenevolent being of vast knowledge and power allow such horrors to happen?

The values of Creator and creatures

Second, we need to keep in mind the distinction between ethics or values from the standpoint of God or a Creator versus the ethics or values of created persons. While this may seem like an "academic" distinction, we think there is a difference between thinking about values in terms of created persons preventing cancer and thinking of values about the ethics of creation in which cancer occurs. One way cancer might be prevented from a God's eye point of view would be for God not to make any creatures with cellular bodies. Maybe creatures, such as angels, might be made without any biology at all. Another option would be for God to only allow or foster creatures whose cellular life was impervious to non-harmonious, non-cooperative functions. All our bodies might be made so that when cancer cells grow, they immediately die off, making us biologically invulnerable.

Here is a version of the problem of evil from the standpoint of God as a Creator. This larger statement of the problem of evil contains elements such as libertarian freedom, the incarnation, and afterlife to be treated later in this chapter and the next. But for now let us ask: Is it compatible with the goodness of God to create and sustain a cosmos of great goods—a cosmos with the goods of life, stable laws of nature, the emergence of consciousness, and creatures with powers of sensation, movement, emotions and thoughts who have moral and religious experiences? There are also massive numbers of births and equally massive numbers of deaths and suffering due to diseases such as cancer. Great evils besiege human life, some of which are the result of free will, while other evils emerge from causes with no free agency. In this cosmos, creatures are obligated to combat evil, to cure diseases, to prevent (whenever possible) rape, murder, and the whole panoply of evils in which creatures seek to exploit and harm each other. The evils of the cosmos are a source of divine sorrow and rage, as God works to bring about great good through periods of profound evil (including the Holocaust). In this cosmos, God acts to confront evil through prophets, miracles, and an incarnation, and God seeks the redemption of all creatures including victims and victimizers in this life and an afterlife. Some persons believe they encounter the goodness of God in religious experience, but some do not despite their earnest search for a relationship with God. The cosmic evil that occurs is profoundly contrary to God's nature and in violation of God's purpose for the creation.

Taking on the problem of evil when it comes to our views on God needs to take into account this more cosmic perspective. If we go back to our list of evils, we might need to consider whether death itself is an evil. Let it be granted that premature death of innocent creatures is at least an ill and sometimes evil. But considering the problem of evil in terms of creation, must an all-good God only create creatures who never die? We later propose that the existence or nonexistence of life after death is significant in thinking about the problem of evil. But when

we are thinking on a cosmic scale, are we truly prepared to claim that an all-good God must not create persons unless they are deathless? If we are not so prepared, then the fact of death itself may not be always something evil.

Our point here is not to advance a strong thesis about the status of death itself—more on this below—but to make a point about the difference between thinking about good and evil from the standpoint of a creature vs. the standpoint of the Creator.

When we take up that greater point of view, let us revisit briefly Fry's comparatively higher view of the divine if the gods turned out to be Thor and company. Although this was for comic effect, let's entertain this as a thought experiment and then make a more realistic thought experiment. If it turns out that the cosmos is run by morally suspect gods, we might not be so cross with them. We might not blame them for giving a 7-year-old girl bone cancer. Or would we? Perhaps we might yearn for there to be someone or something or some force that might actually heal those with such diseases. In secular naturalism, in which there is no God, Richard Dawkins points out that the evils we witness are something we should expect:

> If the universe were just elections and selfish genes, meaningless tragedies . . . are exactly what we should expect, along with equally meaningless good fortune. Such a universe would be neither evil nor good in intention. . . . The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.
>
> (Dawkins 1995, 132–133)

On such a model, it would be hard to feel outrage about a child with cancer. In fact, if we fill out a form of naturalism that includes determinism—the view that all events that occur are necessary given antecedent events and the laws of nature—the 7-year-old with cancer, and all the deaths and suffering cited at the outset of this section, were necessary. For theists—as Hick expressed—evils are an outrage to God, abominable events that are against the nature and will of God. But for some secular naturalists, all such evils are built into the fabric of a pitiless natural world. We now turn to our third point in this initial response to the problem of evil.

Redemption

In the Abrahamic traditions there is indeed concern over whether God is complicit in the evils of creation. This is a central theme of the Book of Job. But there is also a major stress on redemption in a way that needs to be seen as a slightly different concern. The Abrahamic traditions are sometimes focused on how some good might come out of evil. This is not a way of justifying the evil, of making the evil good, but of salvaging and transforming persons or things that have been victimized and even the victimizers themselves into something good.

Let us use the term *justificatory good* to refer to a good that might justify some evil. So, imagine that the existence of dinosaurs was good, but after eons of time there was the massive Cretaceous-Paleocene extinction 65.5 billion years ago when one or more asteroids struck the earth. Perhaps an all-good God would have allowed this extinction because it allowed mammals to become the dominant vertebrates on earth. We are not endorsing this but noting it as a possible justificatory good. *Redemptive goods* are different. We offer two thought experiments to distinguish justification and redemption: the redeemed couple and the redeemed criminal.

Imagine that there are two couples. The first couple has a full lifetime of romantic and familial love in which both members of the couple remain faithful and live lives of compassion toward others. The second couple begins with an expectation of a full lifetime of romantic and familial love, but at some point one of them, Pat, betrays the other, Chris. Imagine that the betrayal was serious but not so damaging that Chris refused to take seriously Pat's confession, remorse, and vow not to betray Chris in the future. Imagine further that from the standpoint of commitments, Chris is not only not under any obligation to forgive Pat, but there are some reasons for Chris not doing so—why take the risk of being hurt once again? Imagine there is some other person who is courting Chris and there are very good reasons to think this other relationship might be deeply satisfying. Still, imagine further that Chris does forgive Pat and that the two of them find great love. In this rather sketchy thought experiment, we might have a case in which there is genuine redemption in that Pat and Chris might even have a love that is deeper than the couple in which there was no betrayal. Chris and Pat have the great good of showing love for one another when things were at their worst. This might be a case of a redemptive good but not a justificatory good. That is, the redemption of Pat and the relationship does not justify the betrayal, but it brings to light a great good that makes their relationship altogether worth fighting for and transforming.

The case of the criminal: Imagine a case very much like the true story of Karla Faye Tucker. Born and raised in Houston, Texas, by age 12 Ms. Tucker had already turned to drugs and sex. At 14 she dropped out of school and joined her mother as a groupie of various rock bands, and she also, along with her mother, entered into prostitution. She continued her life of drugs well into her twenties. Then, on one fateful afternoon in June of 1983, she committed a most horrendous crime. According to testimony, after a weekend of doing drugs with her boyfriend, Danny Garrett, she had consumed an astonishing quantity of drugs and alcohol. In an alleged drug-induced stupor, she and Garrett entered the home of a man named Jerry Dean, where she and Garrett intended to rob him. The three of them tussled on the floor in the bedroom, and Garrett struck Dean on the head multiple times with a hammer. Dean began making gurgling sounds (as he was choking on his own blood) and Tucker, desiring to stop the "horrific sounds," struck him multiple times with a pickaxe.

Tucker then noticed a woman hiding behind the bed. Tucker had met the woman, Deborah Thornton, earlier that afternoon at a party. Tucker took the axe and swung it at Thornton, first just grazing her shoulder. She then took the pickaxe

and struck Thornton repeatedly, landing the final blow in her chest and embedding it in her heart. Tucker later testified to committing these heinous crimes. In a tape recording played in the courtroom, she boasted to friends that she experienced sexual thrills from the attack.

Tucker and Garrett were both found guilty and sentenced to death.

Soon after being imprisoned, Tucker was offered a Bible by the prison ministry program. She describes the event this way: "I didn't know what I was reading. Before I knew it, I was in the middle of my cell floor on my knees. I was just asking God to forgive me." She became a Christian and eventually married her prison minister, the Reverend Dana Lane Brown, inside the prison walls (though it is claimed that they never consummated the marriage, even with a touch, as death-row inmates are not allowed contact with visitors).

Karla Tucker was executed by lethal injection on February 3, 1998. Here are her very last words:

> Yes sir, I would like to say to all of you—the Thornton family and Jerry Dean's family—that I am so sorry. I hope God will give you peace with this. [She looked at her husband.] Baby, I love you. [She looked at Ronald Carlson.] Ron, give Peggy a hug for me. Everybody has been so good to me. I love all of you very much. I am going to be face to face with Jesus now. Warden Baggett, thank all of you so much. You have been so good to me. I love all of you very much. I will see you all when you get there. I will wait for you.
>
> (Tucker 1998)

As the lethal chemicals worked their way into her body, she was praising God. Several minutes after receiving the injection, she was dead. She was the first woman to be executed in the state of Texas in over 125 years. While there was much outcry to have her pardoned from the death sentence, including her own clemency plea, then Governor George W. Bush declined to allow a delay of execution in order for her case to be reconsidered.

From all external signs Karla Tucker was a transformed woman. Her conversion seems to have been a legitimate turning away from evil. In fact, those who came to her defense included Deborah Thornton's own brother, the homicide detective who put her on death row, several former prosecutors, the United Nations Commissioner on Summary and Arbitrary Executions, televangelist Pat Robertson, and many citizens. Even the warden of the prison testified that she was a model prisoner and likely truly reformed. Her most resolute supporter was her husband, Dana Brown, the prison chaplain she met and married in prison.

What is especially relevant to our discussion is that we have in this case a victimizer who, despite her horrifically evil intentions and actions earlier in life, was apparently a transformed person—a truly redeemed individual. Karla Tucker's life is a redemptive good in that in and through her life something seemingly very good came out of evil. Again, redemptive goods are not ways of justifying the

evil, but of salvaging and transforming persons or things—whether the victimized or the victimizer—into something good themselves.

We hope that these cases provide a way of understanding how goods and ills are conceived in Abrahamic traditions when they are not part of a calculation of harm and compensation, a kind of bookkeeping. Consider John Hick again. He writes in terms of justification, but here the justification is understood as being "worth it" or that ultimately something good and worthy emerges out of evil, not "justification" in terms of making evil good. Hick contrasts his own view with "the view that the promised joys of heaven are to be related to man's earthly travails as a compensation or reward." Hick elaborates on this bookkeeping view:

> This suggests a divine dispensation equitably proportioning compensation to injury, so that the more an individual has suffered beyond his desert the more intense and prolonged will be the heavenly bliss that he experiences. . . . As distinct from such a book-keeping view, what is being suggested here, so far as men's suffering are concerned, is that these sufferings—which for some people are immense and for others relatively slight—will in the end lead to the enjoyment of a common good which will be unending and therefore unlimited, and which will be seen by its participants as justifying all that has been endured on the way to it. The "good eschaton" will not be a reward or a compensation proportioned to each individual's trials, but an infinite good that would render worthwhile any finite suffering endured in the course of attaining it.
>
> (Hick 1978, 340–341)

So redemptive goods and justificatory goods are both important elements in addressing the problems that arise concerning evil. We will return to the significance of the "good eschaton" later in the chapter. But another matter is worth considering. Some evils seem much worse than others. Stealing money from someone in order to buy an expensive bottle of wine, for example, is worse than telling a lie in order to avoid embarrassment. Some evils are horrendous, such as accidentally driving over and killing one's child, or torturing someone to death. How might we think about an infinite good that would render worthwhile horrendous evils that are endured in this life? Marilyn Adams suggests the following:

> The worst evils demand to be defeated by the best goods. Horrendous evils can be overcome only by the goodness of God. Relative to human nature, participation in horrendous evils and loving intimacy with God are alike disproportionate: for the former threatens to engulf the good in an individual human life with evil, while the latter guarantees the reverse engulfment of evil by good. Relative to one another, there is also disproportion, because the good that God *is*, and intimate relationship with Him, is incommensurate with created goods and evils alike. Because intimacy with God so outsells relations (good or bad) with any creatures, integration into the human person's

> relationship with God confers significant meaning and positive value even on horrendous suffering. This result coheres with basic Christian institution: that the powers of darkness are stronger than humans, but they are no match for God.
>
> (Adams 1991, 220)

In considering such evils "from the inside" of the Christian tradition, Adams uses the rich resource of eternal relationship or union with God. This is a type of justificatory good where the justification is understood as that through which ultimately something good and worthy emerges out of horrendous evil and not justification in terms of making evil good.

The greater good defense

When considering theistic responses to evil, it is helpful to distinguish between a theodicy and a defense. A *defense* can be used in two different ways: first, when deployed as a response to the logical problem of evil, in which it is argued that there is a logical inconsistency between certain claims about God and evil, it attempts to establish that it is rational to believe that God exists; and second, when it is deployed as a response to the probabilistic or evidential problem of evil, in which it is argued that it is implausible to believe certain claims about God and evil, it attempts to establish that the existence of evil does not make it improbable that God exists. With a *theodicy*, the objective is to demonstrate that it is reasonable to believe that God exists and, while not typically attempting to account for every evil, to offer an overarching structure in which to make sense of evil in the world as an aspect of an overall good.

It is not uncommon when using either a defense or a theodicy to draw on similar resources, one of which is the greater good defense/theodicy. This strategy identifies goods that might lead us to understand why there are evils in a cosmos in which there is an all good, all knowing, and all powerful God (if a plausible account, then a theodicy; if only a possible account, then a defense). It argues that evil can be understood as either a necessary or crucial aspect of bringing about greater goods or an essential constituent of these goods. These goods may include, for example, there being an ordered cosmos in which there is great organic life, even if within that order there is ineluctable evolutionary development and suffering. Peter van Inwagen writes with clarity and concision to this latter point:

> Only in a universe very much like ours could intelligent life, or even sentient life, develop by the non-miraculous operation of the laws of nature. And the natural evolution of higher sentient life in a universe like ours essentially involves suffering, or there is every reason to believe it does. The mechanisms underlying biological evolution may be just what most biologists seem to suppose—the production of new genes by random mutations and the culling of gene pools by environmental selection pressure—or they may

> be more subtle. But no one, I believe, would take seriously the idea that conscious animals, animals conscious as a dog is conscious, could evolve naturally without hundreds of millions of years of ancestral suffering. Pain is an indispensable component of the evolutionary process after organisms have reached a certain stage of complexity. And, for all we know, the amount of pain that organisms have experienced in the actual world, or some amount morally equivalent to that amount is necessary for the natural evolution of conscious animals.
>
> (van Inwagen 1991, 147)

But why would such an environment, which includes the pain of organisms as experienced in our world, be necessary for the development of conscious animals? Here we offer a speculation, specifically with regard to conscious moral animals.

Suppose that for moral development to occur, agents need the ability to make moral choices—choices that entail real consequences. Suppose further than in order to have choices that have real moral import, a proper environment is necessary, both externally and internally. With respect to a proper external environment, certain elements of it seem to be essential. John Hick argues that such an environment is a challenging one:

> The development of human personality—moral, spiritual, and intellectual—is a product of challenge and response that could not occur in a static situation demanding no exertion and no choices. So far as intellectual development is concerned, this well-established principle underlies the whole modern educational process, from preschool nurseries designed to provide a rich and stimulating environment to all forms of higher education designed to challenge the intellect. . . . I think we can safely say that the intellectual development of humanity has been due to interaction with an objective environment functioning in accordance with its own laws, an environment that we have to explore actively and cooperate with actively in order to escape its perils and exploit its benefits. In a world devoid both of dangers to be avoided and rewards to be won, we may assume that virtually no development of the human intellect and imagination would have taken place, and hence no development of the sciences, the arts, human civilization, or culture.
>
> The presence of an objective world—within which we have to learn to live on penalty of pain or death—is also basic to the development of our moral nature. For because the world is one in which men and women can suffer harm—by violence, disease, accident, starvation, etc.—our actions affecting one another have moral significance.
>
> (Hick 2001, 46)

On this matter we are in agreement with Hick; it seems reasonable to us that the emergence and development of moral agents occurs through contexts of

confronting dangers and challenges as well as the responses to recompense and rewards. Our global human environment is undoubtedly one in which such difficulties and renewals are part and parcel of daily human life.

Regarding an internal environment, it may well be that a proper environment includes one of conflicting desires and dispositions within the individual. In fact, we do find such conflict. We do find lust and aggression on the one hand, and altruism and benevolence on the other, within the psychological makeup of the human animal. Perhaps, then, the struggle we experience is a necessary constituent of moral progression. If so, something akin to aggression, disappointment, frustration, danger, and pain—all of which are essential aspects of biological development—may be necessary features of a psychological space in which real moral progress takes place. We emphasize that while this is speculation, it is not irrelevant that recent work in evolutionary psychology tends to support the view that group dynamics, minds, and culture, rather than selfish genes, propel dispositions and actions of selfishness and altruism.

The free will defense

With respect to the greater good defense, as can perhaps be inferred from what was just discussed, much hinges on the coherence of the concept of libertarian free will. There is another defense that focuses more directly on free will, referred to (unsurprisingly) as the free will defense. According to this defense, much of the evil that exists is due to free moral agents, so the goodness of God cannot be ruled out.

Making use of possible-world semantics (a semantic device that formalizes the notion of what the world might have been like) to make his case, Plantinga provides the following possibility as one, which, if true, would suggest that God's goodness is not negated by evil:

> A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.
>
> (Plantinga 1989, 30)

Given the emphasis on libertarian free will, as discussed throughout the last few sections, one can see why an appeal to freedom of this sort has had such a long and rich history in philosophical theology. Given its central role in addressing problems of evil, it is incumbent on those of us who find promise in it to provide some reasons for propounding such freedom. We do so next with Derek Parfit as our dialectical partner.

Parfit argues that none of us have libertarian freedom, that libertarian freedom is essential if we are to be punished for wrongdoing, and thus that none of us can deserve to suffer (on the grounds that libertarian freedom is incomprehensible). Let us concentrate on his case against libertarianism first and then consider his point about suffering. Parfit opposes libertarianism, in part, along the lines of what Galen Strawson calls the Basic Argument. Essentially, the thesis is that for us to be truly responsible for doing X rather than not X we have to be able to create ourselves. Our decisions cannot be due to an infinite regress of some kind: I freely do M because I freely choose to do N, and I freely do N because of freely doing P, and so on. So, because self-creation is out and infinite regresses are out, we lack a concept of how we might be accountable for free acts. Parfit writes against libertarian accounts of persons acting for reasons:

> When someone acts for some reason, however, we can ask why this person acted for this reason. In some cases, the answer is given by some further reason. My reason for telling some lie, for example, may have been to conceal my identity, and my reason for concealing my identity may have been to avoid being accused of some crime. But we shall soon reach the beginning of any such chain of motivating reasons. My ultimate reasons for telling my lie may have been to avoid being punished for my crime. When we reach someone's ultimate reason for acting in some way, we can ask why this person acted for this reason, rather than acting in some other way for some other reason. If I had a self-interested reason to try to avoid being punished, and a moral reason not to tell this lie, why did one of these reasons weigh more heavily with me, so that I chose to act as I did? This event did not occur for some further motivating reason. So the suggested . . . alternative here disappears. This event was either fully caused or partly random.
>
> (Parfit 2011, 266)

Libertarians who are incompatabilists, such as Peter van Inwagen, Roderick Chisholm, Stewart Goetz, Richard Purtill, Daniel Robinson, John Foster, and (to appeal to an earlier favorite philosopher of ours) C.A. Campbell, claim that persons have a basic (not further explicable) power to do acts and the power to do otherwise, given all antecedent and contemporary events and the prevailing laws of nature. Campbell concedes that from the outside, from a third person or external point of view, the case for libertarian agency or even its nature may seem mysterious. It is only from the first person point of view that agentive power (a term Robinson deploys for libertarian power) becomes evident. According to these libertarian

philosophers, the phenomenology of what it is to be an agent discloses or brings to light our at least apparent/ostensible power to act and to do other than what we do. As Campbell points out, libertarian agency only seems unintelligible if we rule out such first-person phenomenology:

> Those who find the Libertarian doctrine of the self's causality in more decisions inherently unintelligible find it so simply because they restrict themselves, quite arbitrarily, to an inadequate standpoint: a standpoint from which, indeed, a genuinely creative activity, if it existed, never could be apprehended.
>
> (Campbell 2004, 49)

How do we know that such a positive account of our free action is wrong? In the passage cited from Parfit's work earlier, do we have reason to believe that there cannot be a basic agentive power? Imagine someone decides to lie versus not. Might it be that the reasons for lying were her reasons because she made a decision to act that way when she could have done otherwise? Parfit, however, claims to have a decisive reason against this stance. Here it is: "When other writers try to describe some third alternative to some act's being fully caused, or partly random, *it is a decisive objection to such claims that they are incomprehensible*" (Parfit 2011, 269, emphasis ours). Interesting. We will accept that Parfit himself does not comprehend the concept of free agency defended by Chisholm, van Inwagen, Robinson, and so on, but when does that give us or others reason to believe that Chisholm, etc. do not know what they are talking about and the concept of agentive power is incomprehensible, period, full stop? And because he believes that normative reasons are irreducible, we assume Parfit does not rule out in principle the idea that there might be agentive powers that are not reducible to non-agentive power.

A thought experiment at this point might be helpful. Consider the following:

> Arthur had just given a talk against the coherence of libertarian agency. He felt good; in fact he felt very cool as he had composed his paper while working out at a gym, and he had lost that weight that was bothering him. Why, he thought to himself, even Maria had taken notice. Maria? Why, yes, she was a friend and married. But hadn't she been a bit flirty when she asked him to come by the hotel room for a drink after his talk? Why not? What could go wrong? Well, he thought, maybe I shouldn't. But his own wife had an affair 3 years ago, and he had forgiven her. Wouldn't he be forgiven? Arthur went to the lobby and called the desk: "Please put me through to Dr. Maria Taylor." His heart was racing. Should he say: "Sorry, Maria, I am exhausted, and need to call it an early night." Or: "Guess who gave the Dewey lecture and got a standing ovation? You're talking to the guy right now! Let's raise a glass, and maybe more. What's your room number?" He still had no idea what to do when Maria answered: "Disappointing news, darling, the reception for the Dewey lecturer only includes one person. But she is in

> room 320 and is most excited." "Sorry, Maria!" he found himself saying, "sorry to be a pill but I have to take an early flight"—which was a lie—and then he thought he better make the lie bigger: "I got a call from Sandy and our oldest is sick." He paused: am I going to lie out of self-interest or be honest? Do I want to live with myself as a lying, deceptive cheat or do I want to have integrity? What am I doing? Self-creating? Maybe. Maybe not. He chose honesty. He felt he could walk away from the call and stick to the lie. He decided instead: "Actually, Maria, to be honest, I think if I came to the room, things would get way out of hand." "What are you talking about?" asked Maria. "I'm pretty pathetic when it comes to self-restraint. Let's meet with Mark and Jilly over breakfast at 9 tomorrow morning instead." "You got it." Arthur closed the line.
>
> Arthur thought: I made the right decision; if I had gone to see her, there might have been no turning back. Or did he? He might—right now—be having the time of his life. Back in his room, he went to the mini-bar. After a second gin and tonic, he wondered about the feelings he had during the conversation. You know, he said to himself almost out loud, it really felt like things could have gone either way. I could have gone up there, but I decided to resist it. Did I make the right decision? Am I right in my Dewey lecture that libertarian freedom is incoherent? He was asleep soon after that. The breakfast was amusing but quite unsexy.

Although such a thought experiment is hardly enough to justify the claim to know that libertarian concepts of agency are coherent and plausible, we think the above thought experiment gives one *some* reason for thinking it is both and not at all incomprehensible. It offers a first-person account of what it is like to make a decision that appears to fit the libertarian model in which we exercise a power to act when we could do otherwise.

Consider an objection: Isn't the above thought experiment, quasi-short story a tad fatuous? As a reductio, consider this thought experiment: James was exhausted. Squaring a circle while going backwards in time is tough work. He had earlier violated the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals and finally found a green idea that sleeps furiously.

Reply: there has to be a middle ground. Even highly detailed, gripping stories about squaring a circle at the level of detail and emotion as George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is not going to make the claim coherent that you can have an object that both has and lacks four right angles at the same time. But if there is something to libertarian accounts of free agency, especially along the lines of Campbell, there will be something it is like to exercise such agency. When a philosopher denies this, a defender has an opportunity to try to bring the experience into focus. Just as a defender of moral realism may challenge someone to take more seriously the phenomenological core of our moral observations, a libertarian can challenge Parfit to reconsider his rejection of libertarian freedom as incomprehensible.

There may also be a reason to challenge Parfit in an *ad hominem* fashion. As an incompatibilist, he believes persons are not blameworthy (and therefore do not deserve to suffer due to their wrong-doing), and yet he also thinks people can deserve praise and allows for an odd sort of blame in which we do not so much blame a person for doing something they could have avoided, but a "blame" in which we express what Parfit calls "moral displeasure." "We can deserve many things, such as gratitude, praise, and the kind of blame that is merely moral dispraise. But no one can deserve to suffer"(Parfit 2011, 272). Evidently expressing dispraise is an expression of what we believe (in this case) to be wrong or in violation of normative reasons. However, it is difficult to see how a person who lacks moral responsibility can deserve praise. Arguably, if you can deserve praise, you can deserve blame and, if both practices seem reasonable, so does libertarian freedom.

Life beyond life

In attempting to reconcile the goodness of God and the evils in the world, philosophical theology provides some possible goods that exist in life beyond this life. Within the Abrahamic traditions, belief in life after death has widely been affirmed since their inception. The moral and spiritual conflicts that are engaged in during this life on earth may prove beneficial (or not) in the life beyond. That is to say that there may be ways in which some evil gives rise to some good in life after death. Returning to an earlier example, imagine a heavenly reunion in which Karla Tucker demonstrates her deep sorrow to Deborah Thornton for her atrocious and violent acts toward Deborah while on earth. And imagine Deborah responding with forgiveness and a serious desire for sororal friendship. Here is an example of postmortem goods, which would not have happened without the terrible evil that preceded them. We are not attempting to diminish the staggering evil of acts such as those perpetrated by Tucker, but the redemptive goods that may extend to life beyond death that are connected to such evils ought also to be acknowledged.

Regarding those evils, the redemptive goods of which could only be accomplished in life after death, some have argued that without such an opportunity it would be impossible to reconcile the reality of evil and the goodness of God. Rabbi and theologian Dan Cohn-Sherbok offers the following reflection on the point:

> Yet without this belief [in an afterlife], it is simply impossible to make sense of the world as the creation of an all-good, all-powerful God. Without the eventual vindication of the righteous in Paradise, there is no way to sustain the belief in a providential God who watches over His chosen people. If death means extinction, there is no way to make sense of the claim that he loves and cherishes all those who died in the concentration camps—suffering and death would ultimately triumph over each of those who perished. But if there is eternal life in a World to Come, then there is hope that the righteous will share in a divine life. Moreover, the divine attribute of justice demands

> that the righteous of Israel who met their death as innocent victims of the Nazis will reap an everlasting reward. Here then is an answer to the religious perplexities of the Holocaust. The promise of immortality offers a way of reconciling the belief in a loving and just God with the nightmare of the death camps. As we have seen, this hope sustained the Jewish people through centuries of suffering and martyrdom. Now that Jewry stands on the threshold of the twenty-first century, it must again serve as the fulcrum of religious beliefs.
>
> (Cohn-Sherbok 1990, 292–293)

It must be admitted that many of the evils that exist in the world (including some of the most horrific ones) are of the sort that demand a life beyond life if there are to be redemptive goods that emerge from them. This warrants serious consideration on the very possibility of an afterlife. Is it reasonable, then, in our modern scientific age, to believe in life after death? One reason for thinking not is that human persons do not *have* bodies but we *are* bodies. If our bodies are destroyed, we are destroyed. To quote Paul Churchland:

> [T]he important point about the standard evolutionary story is that human species and all of its features are the wholly physical outcome of a purely physical process. . . . If this is the correct account of our origins, then there seems neither need, nor room, to fit any nonphysical substances or properties into our theoretical account of ourselves. We are creatures of matter. And we should learn to live with that fact.
>
> (Churchland 1988, 21)

The most radical response to this position is to argue that in fact such a materialist position is mistaken. We made such a case in the last chapter. But let us return to consider seriously the idea that there might be a life beyond life even if it turns out that we are thoroughly material beings.

One of the more unusual developments in the contemporary philosophy of religion is the number of Christian philosophers who subscribe to some form of materialism and yet hold that there is an afterlife. Peter van Inwagen, Lynne Baker, Trenton Merricks, Bruce Reichenbach, and Kevin Corcoran all hold that while God is a nonphysical purposive being, we are exclusively physical. Traditionally, Christians have tended to believe in the soul as an immaterial center for personal identity, though there are notable exceptions (Tertullian and Thomas Hobbes) and, as we noted in the previous chapter, Thomas Aquinas affirmed the unity of soul and body in this life. In any case, some contemporary Christian philosophers believe that a materialist view of persons is better able to account for the Christian view that the death of persons is bad and the incarnation of God as an embodied being is good. Let us consider their positive case for an afterlife.

Christian materialists tend to adopt one of four models for an afterlife: resurrection, replication, re-creation, and re-constitution. We provide a sketch of all four.

The resurrection model

On this model (that is anchored in the New Testament), a person's body may dissolve and, from our vantage point, become scattered through time and space. Parts of our bodies may even become parts of other bodies (cannibalism would be a case in point). It still remains possible, if there is an *omnipotent* God, that a core identity of our body might again be brought together at a later time (the resurrection) to constitute the person. This does not seem impossible. The disassembly and reassembly of material objects seems straightforward.

Trenton Merricks comments on this option with an example:

> Consider . . . a watch that is disassembled, perhaps for cleaning. Suppose that, as a result, it ceases to exist. Suppose further that when its parts are reassembled, that watch comes back into existence. The watch thus traverses a temporal gap. Of course, the watch example is controversial. But the claim that the watch jumps through time via disassembly and reassembly—even if it makes questionable assumptions here and there—is at least coherent. It is not contradictory or obviously absurd. It is not, for example, like the claim that one has found a round square in one's pocket, next to the number seven.
>
> (Merricks 2001, 184–185)

The resurrection model may be vexed by a question about just what parts of your body are essential to identity. God might use parts of you to "resurrect" what appears to be you, but what if God were to make three of you? Would that produce just one "real you" and two replicas? If so, which two would be the replicas? These questions may not reveal insuperable difficulties (perhaps, for example, it is impossible for God to make three of you, though that raises omnipotence problems), but they invite some alternative models.

The replica model

While one may worry about the possibility of replication confusing personal identity, some philosophers seem to think replication is promising. John Hick, for example, introduces his speculative account of an afterlife by describing someone who disappears from a gathering in London and instantly appears at a similar gathering in New York:

> The person who appears in New York is exactly similar, as to both bodily and mental characteristics, to the person who disappears in London. There is continuity of memory, complete similarity of bodily features, including fingerprints, hair and eye coloration and stomach contents, and also of beliefs, habits and mental propensities. In fact there is everything that would lead us to identify the one who appeared with the one who disappeared, except continuous occupancy of space.
>
> (Hick 1978, 280)

He then changes the thought experiment to involve the death of the person in London and the person's reappearance in New York as a "replica" (Hick 1978, 284). Hick may be right that under these conditions we would identify the person in New York as the same person who died, but there remains the problem that personal identity seems to involve more than mere replication. On this point, Brian Davies presents a forceful challenge by imagining that you have poisoned the person in London.

> But, you say: "Don't worry. I've arranged for a replica of you to appear. The replica will seem to have all your memories. He will be convinced that he is you. And he will look exactly like you. He will even have your fingerprints." Should I be relieved? Speaking for myself, I would not be in the slightest bit relieved. Knowing that a *replica* of myself will be enjoying himself somewhere is not to know that *I* shall be doing so. For the continued existence of a person, more is required than replication.
>
> (Davies 2004, 300)

Hick might reply that Davies is simply adopting at the outset the view that replication is not identity, and so begging the question, whereas in many cases we are prepared to accept replication as a kind of identity. One can have multiple performances of the same poem or symphony or photograph, each of which may be said to be an authentic, identifiable example of the poem, symphony, or photograph. Maybe it is the case that being a person is like being a computer program that could be "downloaded" into a body and, if it was your program, the resulting person would have all your memories, desires, beliefs, and so on. But, arguably, persons seem to be individual beings rather than programs or a score that might be played by different musicians. Further, if being a person is like being a computer program, doesn't that seem ontologically closer to a dualist position than a materialist one?

The re-creation model

Some Christian materialists believe God can and will recreate persons after they perish. On this view, your death truly involves your ceasing to be and yet at the appointed time, God brings you back into existence. Persons have a unique essence or individuality, so God re-creates you rather than a replica. This is sometimes thought to involve "gap inclusive" continuity, according to which you can endure over time despite the fact that (for a brief time) you ceased to exist. Merricks appeals to what might be called the uniqueness of divine creation. Imagine that God did create you. In doing so, God created *you* instead of some exact replica. If God created you at some particular time, can't God recreate you at another? Merricks writes:

> To do this, God didn't need to make use of matter that had previously been mine, for none had. To do this, God didn't need to secure my continuity,

> for [sic] any kind of continuity at all, with something I had previously been continuous with, because I hadn't previously been. And if God could see to it that I—not just somebody or other—came into existence the first time around, what's to preclude God from doing it again, years after my cremation.
> (Merricks 2001, 197)

The idea that each individual person has an *essence* has some credibility. It seems plausible that each person has an essential core identity. Each of us appears to have what philosophers have called a quiddity (a *this-ness*) that is inviolable. If so, perhaps Merricks is correct and we need not worry that the person recreated would be a mere replica.

Finally, there is a fourth option that does not need to be vexed by divine acts of reassembly or recreation.

The reconstitution model

Lynne Rudder Baker has adopted a constitutional model of personhood. According to Baker human persons are constituted by their bodies without being identical with them. An analogy that is often used is that statues are constituted by pieces of marble, copper or bronze, but they are not identical with the substances that constitute them. Baker writes: "A person is not a separate thing from the constituting body, any more than a statue is a separate thing from the constituting block of marble" (Baker 2000, 91). Because constitution is not identity, Baker contends that one can maintain both that persons are physical currently (they are composed of an exclusively physical body) and that they may survive the perishing of this body. Her position may seem puzzling at first, but in a common sense context we can readily distinguish between constitution and identity. The marble making up Michelangelo's statue David can be seen as a distinct object, for one could destroy the statue but still have the marble. Imagine you reconstruct the marble as the robot R2-D2 and Michelangelo's masterpiece would be replaced by a character from the *Star Wars* epic created by George Lucas. Arguably, you might also slowly, over time, replace all the marble making up David until all the original marble was gone and yet the statue remained. These types of alterations suggest to Baker that a person might survive the desolation of her body.

> The constitution view can offer those who believe in immaterial souls . . . almost everything that they want—without the burden of making sense of how there can be immaterial souls in the natural world. For example, human persons can survive change of body; truths about persons are not exhausted by truths about bodies; persons have causal powers that their bodies would not have if they did not constitute persons; there is a fact of the matter about which, if any future person is I . . . The constitution view allows that a person's resurrection body may be nonidentical with her earthly body. According to the constitution view, it is logically possible that a person has different bodies

> at different times; whether anyone ever changes bodies or not, the logical possibility is built into the constitution view.
>
> (Baker 2005, 387)

Baker seems to offer the logical possibility of survival without abandoning a materialist stance that, prior to death, human persons are composed of their physical bodies.

If any of these alternatives turn out to be possible, and not known to be false, then observing a human person dying is not *ipso facto* to knowingly observe a person ceasing to be and there being no afterlife for that person. While these materialist views have the advantage of according well with contemporary philosophy of mind (which tends to be materialist), as we argued in the last chapter we think that at least one non-materialist account of persons and consciousness is tenable. If it is reasonable to maintain the continued existence of the self—whether in purely material form, or as disembodied selves, or as some combination thereof—then it is also reasonable to believe that there are redemptive goods that await life beyond this life. That is our (reasoned) hope.

We have been examining problems related to evil from inside and outside of theological traditions. In the next chapter we consider themes from within the Abrahamic traditions, as well as from within Hinduism and Buddhism, which have not yet been covered in detail.

Further reflections

Could there be, as Gottfried Leibniz averred, a best possible world? Some philosophers propose that the very concept of a best possible world is no more intelligible than the concept of a greatest possible number. How might the intelligibility of there being a best possible world have an influence on the problem of evil?

Some philosophers such as William Wainwright and John Hick have proposed that there is a rightful place for mystery in the religious life. Consider the following proposal:

> Our solution, then, to this baffling problem of excessive and undeserved suffering is a frank appeal to the positive value of mystery. Such suffering remains unjust and inexplicable, haphazard and cruelly excessive. The mystery of dysteleological suffering is a real mystery, impenetrable to the rationalizing human mind. It challenges Christian faith with its utterly baffling, alien, destructive meaninglessness. And yet at the same time, detached theological reflection can note that this very irrationality and this lack of ethical meaning contributes to the character of the world as a place in which true human goodness can occur and in which loving sympathy and compassionate self-sacrifice can take place.
>
> (Hick 1978, 335–336)

Some philosophers debate whether one should describe God's existence not being more evident in terms of divine hiddenness or silence. Consider Michael Rea's observations:

> The term I would prefer to use in characterizing what we seem to know about God's self-disclosure to the bulk of humanity is, therefore, not hiddenness but rather silence. To say that something is hidden implies either that it has been deliberately concealed or that it has been concealed (deliberately or not) to such a degree that those from whom it is hidden can't reasonably be expected to find it. This is why divine hiddenness would seem to require justification. If God cares about our well-being, one would think that, absent special reason for doing otherwise, he would put us in circumstances such that we could reasonably be expected eventually to find him. But inconclusive evidence and absence of religious experience don't imply that God is deliberately concealing his existence from us; nor do they imply, on their own, that we can't reasonably be expected eventually to find him. What they do imply is that God hasn't made a special effort to ensure that most of his rational creatures detect (as such) whatever signs of his existence there might be or whatever messages he might be sending us.
>
> (Rea 2009, 80)

Here is an argument for atheism based on the idea that God's reality is hidden from persons who seek to be in relationship with God. If there is a God, God is perfectly loving and good. A perfectly loving and good God would not hide from persons who genuinely seek to be in relationship with God. There are persons who seek to be in relationship with God but lack the ability to do so (e.g. they do not have sufficient evidence or reason to believe that this perfectly good and loving God exists). Therefore there is no God. For a thorough development of this argument see *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* by John Schellenberg (1993).

Marilyn Adams offers these reflections on values that involve the distinction between viewing a tradition or practice from the inside and outside. Her focus here is on martyrdom:

> For onlookers, the event of martyrdom may function as a prophetic story, the more powerful for being brought to life. The martyr who perseveres to the end presents an inspiring example. Onlookers are invited to see in the martyr the person they ought to be and to be brought to a deeper level of commitment. Alternatively, onlookers may see themselves in the persecutor and be moved to repentance. If the onlooker has ears to hear the martyr's testimony, he may receive God's redemption through it.
>
> (Adams 1986, 257)

Adams continues:

> First of all, the martyr's sacrifice can be used as an instrument of divine judgment, because it draws the persecutor an external picture of what he is really like—the more innocent the victim, the clearer the focus . . . In attempting to bring reconciliation out of judgment, God may find no more promising vehicle than martyrdom for dealing with the hardhearted.
>
> (Adams 1986, 258)

Do you agree with John Cobb that God's working in the world is compatible with natural evils, notably with respect to his view of predation?

> Is the claim that God is at work compatible with the natural evils that abound in the process of cosmic expansion? I think so. God's persuasive work with individual entities has no effect on the movements of the stars. It has negligible effect on the falling of a stone. It is trivial with most electronic occasions. To effect the breakthroughs that are so important in cosmic history, it took a lot of luring! Even with living things, God's persuasion does not work to limit their mutual destructiveness. If a lion is chasing a gazelle, I assume that God is encouraging the gazelle to escape and the lion to capture and kill it. Predation is part of that process that brings into being more complex creatures capable of greater enjoyment.
>
> (Cobb 2011, 132)

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8

PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATIONS OF JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, HINDUISM, AND BUDDHISM

> I have to be a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Jain, a Parsee, a Sikh, a Muslim, and a Jew, as well as a Christian, if I am to know the Truth and to find the point of reconciliation in all religion.
>
> (Bede Griffiths, *Return to Center*)

In this chapter let us consider themes in five theological traditions we have not covered in detail until now. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism provide important opportunities for philosophers who seek to work constructively and critically "inside" these traditions. There is considerable overlap of themes in the Abrahamic faith traditions and Hinduism, but there are also distinctive differences. The relationship of faith and reason, prophecy, divine revelation, the philosophy of prayer, and other topics, for example, might be taken up in exploring any of these four theological traditions. Buddhism is unique in this regard in that Buddhists generally do not affirm a personal God, at least not a divine reality in the theistic sense. Yet there are some commonalities among all five traditions, including Buddhism. We distribute common themes among all of them, while seeking to focus on topics that are specific to the traditions (e.g. the Incarnation and Trinity in Christianity) in an effort to constructively engage with each tradition.

In our treatment of these traditions it should be borne in mind that each admits of considerable internal diversity. Some of these diverse elements are the source of great conflict (such as the distinction in Christianity between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and in Islam between Sunni and Shia), but we will focus largely on themes that are widely shared in the traditions. Still, as a general point, it may be observed that there will be those in each tradition that are more or less conservative or liberal. For example, a traditional Christian or Muslim may believe in Satan and angels, while more "liberal" practitioners may interpret such referents to human rather than to supernatural entities (e.g. "Satan" becomes a symbol for human vice).

Philosophical explorations of Judaism: relational monotheism, prophecy and social concern, and Shoah

Jewish philosophical theology has a long and rich history, with its first real exponent being Philo of Alexandria (*c.*20 BC–40 AD). It involves enquiry that is primarily informed by the sacred texts, cultures, traditions, experiences and practices of Judaism. While there are a variety of Jewish movements (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Secular Humanistic, and more), traditional Judaism is strictly monotheistic and portrays God as uniquely calling out the people of Israel to be a just and holy people—a blessing to a world that will itself be blessed: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12: 3). This monotheism is underscored reverentially by the focal point of morning and evening Jewish prayer services—the Shema Yisrael: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6: 4).

The personal nature of and relational dimensions to this one God are also emphasized in another central prayer of Jewish liturgy—the Amidah or "Standing Prayer," which includes the following lines:

> We thankfully acknowledge that You are the Lord our God and God of our fathers forever. You are the strength of our life, the shield of our salvation in every generation. We will give thanks to You and recount Your praise, evening, morning and noon, for our lives which are committed into Your hand, for our souls which are entrusted to You, for Your miracles which are with us daily, and for Your continual wonders and beneficences. You are the Beneficent One, for Your mercies never cease; the Merciful One, for Your kindnesses never end; for we always place our hope in You.
>
> (www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/867674/jewish/Translation.htm)

There are many elements that stand out in this prayer, beginning with the importance of a collective acknowledgment. The prayer begins with "we," not "I." Addressing God as "You" implies that God is a person or person-like or personal rather than an impersonal principle or universal force. The prayer places the acknowledgment of God into a familial, generational (or ancestral) lineage. The prayer thus evokes sacred history. Interestingly, the prayer's driving force is praise, gratitude, an expression of trust, and recognition of past divine guidance and provision, rather than petitionary (involving an invocation for divine favor in the present and future). God is encountered not as a brute, omnipotent force who requires placation; rather, God is addressed as the Good and the Merciful. In reverence to the Almighty, many Jewish people do not spell out the term "God" but rather use "G-d."

The significance of addressing God as "You" has been explored with great sensitivity by Martin Buber (1878–1965) in his book *Ich und Du* (1923) translated

as *I and Thou*. From Buber's perspective, the relationship with God as understood in terms of I–Thou (or perhaps We–Thou) is relational and interpersonal, to be distinguished from I–It relations in which we objectify the object of our attention.

For Buber, Judaism was principally concerned with the dialogical relation with the divine.

> I am far from wishing to contend that the conception and the experience of the dialogical situation are confined to Judaism. But I am certain that no other community of human beings has entered with such strength and fervour into this experience as have the Jews.
>
> (Buber 1997, 16)

This relational aspect of God and people is developed as a covenant community—a holy people set apart through sacred scripture and unique custom with a special calling in a particular place. As Keith Ward avers:

> The rites and customs of Judaism define a certain community and separate it off from the rest of the world. When Jews see themselves as a "holy people," they are emphasizing precisely the fact that they are "set apart." Marriage with non-Jews is frowned upon or forbidden. One may eat with others only under the restriction of the kosher food laws. Sometimes, all unnecessary social relations with non-Jews are discouraged. Separatism is central to Jewish tradition, the preservation of a distinctive culture and society from which, at least in its fullness, others are excluded. . . . With the idea of such a distinctive culture there naturally arises the idea of a territory within which it can be sustained. The Hebrew Bible makes it unmistakably clear that God promised to the Jewish people a homeland, in which they were to worship God according to Torah, and live by the laws of justice and social life laid down therein.
>
> (Ward 2000, 12–13)

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, there is an ongoing exhortation to the people of Israel to restore themselves personally into a relationship with God, and not be distracted by religious ritual or worldly affairs, which can themselves become idols. "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7: 14); and "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6: 6). And then in Isaiah:

> Look, when you fast and still do as you like,
> And drive all your workers hard—
> Fast but go on fighting,
> Pressing your pleadings, brawling . . .

Is that the fast I want,
Folk tormenting themselves,
Heads bowed like a bulrush,
Lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
A day to please the Lord?
No, this is the fast I want:
Unlock those evil fetters,
Loose the traces of the yoke,
Free the downtrodden,
Break off every yoke!
Share your food with the hungry,
Bring home the wretched poor.
Clothe the naked when you see him,
And do not make yourself invisible
To your own flesh and blood.

(Isaiah 58)

In salvation history, as conceived in Judaism, there is a relationship between God and people that is connected to important covenants. The first is the covenant with Adam to the effect that the enjoyment and use of creation is contingent upon obedience to God (sometimes referred to as the Adamic or Edenic covenant). Arguably, there is an ecological dimension to this covenant insofar as the fruitful nature and use of the earth is contingent on humans acting in accord with the divine. The covenant with Noah (or the Noahic covenant) is important for its marking God's election not to enforce strict justice in creation. God had caused a great flood to punish human wickedness, but never again. There are at least two dimensions to the covenant in terms of values: it means that the wicked will not be justly punished in this life (or at least not receive punishment of the magnitude of another Flood) and those wronged will be treated unjustly by fellow creatures without God intervening in every matter. It is not a covenant that God promises not to act in any way in history to bring about justice, but that such divine action will not be exacting. Sometimes, in other words, though innocent persons will suffer injustice, there will not be immediate divine retribution and restitution. The covenant with Abraham (the Abrahamic covenant) has been noted as a blessing for the descendants of Abraham to be a blessing for the world. The covenant with Moses (or the Mosaic covenant) involves the people agreeing to live a lawful life, blessed by God.

Another important element in Judaism is the role of wisdom as a divine gift and as revealing God's will. In the book of Proverbs we find creative expression of wisdom herself:

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

(Proverbs 8: 22–31)

One of the most important Jewish philosophical theologians, Moses Maimonides (1138–1204), links the role of the prophet with the role of the wise sage.

> It is [one] of the foundations of [our] faith that God conveys prophecy to man. Prophecy is bestowed only upon a very wise sage of a strong character, who is never overcome by his natural inclinations in any regard. Instead, with his mind, he overcomes his natural inclinations at all times. He must [also] possess a very broad and accurate mental capacity.
>
> A person who is full of all these qualities and is physically sound [is fit for prophecy]. When he enters the *Pardes* and is drawn into these great and sublime concepts, if he possesses an accurate mental capacity to comprehend and grasp [them], he will become holy. He will advance and separate himself from the masses who proceed in the darkness of the time. He must continue and diligently train himself not to have any thoughts whatsoever about fruitless things or the vanities and intrigues of the times.
>
> Instead, his mind should constantly be directed upward, bound beneath [God's] throne [of Glory, striving] to comprehend the holy and pure forms and gazing at the wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He, in its entirety, [in its manifold manifestations] from the most elevated [spiritual] form until the navel of the earth, appreciating His greatness from them. [After these preparations,] the divine spirit will immediately rest upon him.
>
> (Maimonides 1997, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah 7.1)

As Jewish philosopher Lenn Goodman notes,

> Maimonides enlarges the traditional idea of wisdom by adding the phrase, "*gadol be-okhmah*." Taken literally that may sound redundant, as if Maimonides had said "wise, great in wisdom." But in the Hebrew of his era, *okhmah* includes science. Maimonides is reminding readers that prophecy demands not just insight or sagacity but material, reliable, critically tested knowledge.

Goodman continues:

> Prophecy, for Maimonides, depends on the imagination to translate the pure concepts of rational inspiration into the imaginative language of belief and symbol, law and ritual, making their burden accessible to all. Imagination, in medieval psychology, is sited in the brain. Hence the need for a sound and healthy body—not to mention the rigors prophets face in executing their mission, and the critical role of bodily balance in maintaining psychic equanimity and moral strength.
>
> (Goodman forthcoming, note 32)

The wise prophets also spoke regularly and passionately about social issues, notably in terms of care and concern for the poor and disenfranchised. The Mosaic notion of justice incorporated an obligation to the disadvantaged and marginalized. Throughout Torah one finds mention of safeguarding widows, orphans, and strangers. (Exodus 12: 49; 22: 21–22; Leviticus 23: 22; 25: 35–36; Deuteronomy 15: 7–8; 24: 17.) Mandates to care for those in need include Israelites and non-Israelites, and it matters not one's station in life or how one ended up in dire straits. And there are consequences for ignoring these directives for the disenfranchised: "Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow" (Deuteronomy 27: 19). In the latter prophets mandates for social justice continue. The prophet Isaiah:

> The LORD will enter into judgment
> with the elders and princes of his people:
> "It is you who have devoured the vineyard,
> the spoil of the poor is in your houses.
> What do you mean by crushing my people,
> by grinding the face of the poor?"
> declares the Lord GOD of hosts.
>
> (Isaiah 3: 14–15)

Divine concern for justice is perhaps best memorialized in the words of the prophet Amos:

> But let justice roll down like waters,
> and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
>
> (Amos 5: 24)

The Jewish notion of a personal God as providential provider, the divine caring overseer who watches over the weak and defenseless, is part and parcel of traditional Jewish religious identity. Yet in the Hebrew Bible, literature, and historical narrative, there is a continual struggle between God and the people of God. In fact, the term "Israel" means "one who struggles with God." In the last century and up through our own day, Jewish reflection on providence has been profoundly impacted by the Holocaust or the Shoah ("catastrophe"). For example, Elie Wiesel (b.1928), a survivor of the Holocaust and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, has written and spoken much about his experiences of this Jewish genocide. In reflecting on the apparent meaninglessness of the horrors of the Holocaust, in particular at Auschwitz where he witnessed the execution of his own father, he penned the following words for his play, *The Trial of God*:

> Men and women are being beaten, tortured and killed. True, they are victims of men. But the killers kill in God's name. Not all? True, but let one killer kill for God's glory, and God is guilty. Every person who suffers or causes suffering, every woman who is raped, every child who is tormented implicates Him. What, you need more? A hundred or a thousand? Listen, either he is responsible or he is not. If he is, let's judge him. If he is not, let him stop judging us.
>
> (Wiesel 1979, 54)

We have deep sympathy for Wiesel and the Jewish people who have endured so much. We condemn in the strongest terms all forms of anti-semitism and bigotry, which all too often continue against Jewish belief, custom, and practice. We find those who deny the Holocaust to be radically misinformed, if not deeply deluded or intentionally malicious. Furthermore, we agree with Rabbi Irving Greenberg when he says that "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children" (Greenberg 1977, 23). Yet we do not agree with some Jewish thinkers who maintain that the reality of evil refutes reasonable belief in the existence of an active, caring, omnibenevolent God. We have already spent two chapters focusing on evil, pain, and suffering, and so will resist the temptation to re-engage in that discussion. Instead, we close this section by briefly considering some of the key ideas of several Jewish thinkers and their reflections on the Shoah.

Richard Rubenstein (b.1924) is a Jewish American philosopher who has written much about Holocaust theology. In his early writings he affirmed a form of nihilism and argued that the Shoah proved that there is no covenant seeking, caring, Creator God. Later influenced by Kabbalistic thought, he moved toward a deistic notion of the divine. He continues to see the Shoah as decisive evidence of the falsehood

of Rabbinic Judaism for, in traditional terms where God is just and all-powerful and in a covenant relationship with the Jewish people, the Shoah would have to be seen as God's punishment on millions of people, which is absurd. In contesting the traditional Jewish understanding of God, Rubenstein does not advocate the dismantling of Judaism or Jewish identity. Jewish rituals and customs do have value, despite the fact that the Shoah has shattered traditional beliefs. In sum: one should remain Jewish but question God's existence.

Emil Fackenheim (1916–2003) was a Jewish philosopher and rabbi in the Reform tradition. Arrested by the Nazis and taken to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, he escaped with his younger brother and fled to Great Britain. Tragically, his elder brother died in the Holocaust. Upon later reflection, Fackenheim's approach to the Shoah was to resist its aims and seek an authentic response to it. He did so with his "614th commandment" (Jewish tradition counts 613 commandments in the Torah), where he maintains the importance of Jews *not* being annihilated and delineates multiple subcommands:

> We are commanded, first, to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, second, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with him or with belief in him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, would be to hand him yet other, posthumous victories.
>
> (Fackenheim 1970, 46–47)

Instead of handling Hitler a victory, Jews should find ways of keeping alive Jewish ideas, practices and beliefs. He maintained that the new identity of Jews should be the patient practice of "tikhun olam" ("to mend the world"), which is a recognition that the world is broken but not beyond mending. It will be through such mending that God will bring about a much-needed redemption for all peoples. Thus, unlike with Rubenstein, for Fackenheim there is a fundamental import in affirming the reality of the God of the Jews—one that affects not only the particularity of Jewish identity, but the universality of global salvation.

Many other important Jewish figures could be discussed. There is, for example, the French Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) who argued that pain and suffering are meaningless, or rather they are anti-meaning. There is no God, but only traces of God, so we must deeply care for one another. Doing this will create meaning. And there is Abraham Heschel (1907–1972), the Polish-American rabbi and mystic who attempted to preserve the spiritual aspects of Jewish thought and experience, finding spiritual and moral value in ritual practice and in social action—including the fight for civil rights. Some have misunderstood

Heschel, thinking that the Shoah was not central to his work and his social action. We believe this is false. As with many reflective Jews of his day, his emphasis was on moving forward—spiritually, socially, ethically.

> What should have been our answer to Auschwitz? Should this people, called to be a witness to the God of mercy and compassion, persist in its witness and cling to Job's words: "Even if He slay me yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13: 15), or should this people follow the advice of Job's wife, "Curse God and die!" (Job 2: 9), immerse itself into the anonymity of a hundred nations all over the world, and disappear once and for all? Our people's faith in God at this moment in history did not falter. At this moment in history Isaac was indeed sacrificed, his blood shed. We all died in Auschwitz, yet our faith survived. We knew that to repudiate God would be to continue the Holocaust. . . . We did not blaspheme, we built. Our people did not sally forth in flight from God. On the contrary, at that moment in history we saw the beginning of a new awakening, the emergence of a new concern for a Living God theology.
>
> (Heschel 1967, 112)

The emergence of a new concern for a living God theology . . . About two thousand years before the Shoah, within Judaism emerged what would soon become the dominant religion on the planet—one that also became focused on a concern for a living God theology. It is to that religion that we now turn.

Philosophical explorations of Christianity: incarnation, Trinity, and atonement

In this section, we look to three elements of Christian tradition that have been the object of sustained work in historical and contemporary philosophical theology. As Christianity is centered on Jesus Christ, we begin with reflection on him as God incarnate, understood in patristic and creedal terms as being fully human and fully divine.

There are lively debates about what happened to the body of the historical Jesus shortly after his death by crucifixion. It had apparently gone missing from the tomb, and most historians agree that Jesus' closest disciples believed that he had risen from the dead in vindication of his being the Messiah. Soon after his death, in any case, devout Jews were becoming believers in the resurrected Christ and were even praying to him and worshiping him as God (e.g. Acts 7: 59–60; John 20: 28). But this created an immediate problem: as devout monotheistic Jews, the disciples maintained that there is only one God. But yet they began worshiping Jesus as God. Jesus himself, before his death, had prayed to Father God and taught the disciples to do likewise. How can Jesus be God and be praying to God? And then there was the matter of the Holy Spirit. On the account offered in the Gospel According to John, Jesus said that after his departure he would send "the Advocate,"

the "Spirit of truth" who will "guide" and "speak" and "declare" and do other things that persons do (John 16). Elsewhere this Spirit is said to be the Holy Spirit of God. It took Christian theologians several centuries to develop the two fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith that arose from these experiences and teachings: the Trinity and the Incarnation. While the historical creedal formulations occurred in that order (Trinity and then Incarnation), given the centrality of Jesus Christ in Christianity we begin with the Incarnation.

The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), one of the seven ecumenical councils of early Christianity that established Christian orthodoxy, articulated the doctrine of the Incarnation in creedal form:

> We confess one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ . . . the same perfect in Godhead, the same in perfect manhood, truly God and truly man . . . acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation—the difference of natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved, and combining into one person and hypostasis—not divided or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and only begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> (Hardy 1954, 373)

We can state the doctrine even more concisely: in Jesus Christ, the Son of God—second person of the Trinity—took on human nature, thus becoming a unique individual person possessing two natures, one fully human and one fully divine. With the doctrine of the Incarnation, Jesus is not identical to God in the logical sense of identity. Jesus is *totus deus*—wholly God, but not *totum dei*—the whole of God. For the fullness of the Godhead is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons conjoined in one nature (more on the Trinity below).

In the next chapter we shall consider a view in which the world is understood to be the embodiment of God. But here, it is important to note the following: the Incarnation obviously entails theism. Theism, however, at least on the traditional view within the Abrahamic faiths, entails a non-material Creator God who brought the material world into existence. This further entails that the non-physical can causally interact with the physical. The Incarnation, then, supports ontological dualism. Trenton Merricks, however, has argued that the Incarnation points toward physicalism rather than dualism.

> The Incarnation points us toward physicalism. For the physicalist, unlike the dualist, can insist that becoming embodied is necessary for becoming human; she can insist that the Incarnation requires the Son to become incarnate. Moreover, and more importantly, the physicalist—but not the dualist—can easily and straightforwardly account for God the Son's having the body of Jesus and no other.
>
> (Merricks 2007, 299)

We offer three rapid replies. First, on the account of dualism that we have presented in this book and elsewhere, it is not at all clear that becoming embodied is not necessary for human beings. In fact, it may well be so. Second, we are not convinced that it was necessary that God the Son had the body of Jesus of Nazareth and no other. In agreement with Aquinas, it seems metaphysically possible that God could have incarnated in other persons (though Aquinas thinks that he actually only incarnated in Jesus). Given the vastness of the cosmos, with its billions and billions of stars and planets in each of its billions and billions of galaxies, there may well be other civilizations out there. If so, it would not be beyond belief that other incarnations have or are taking place. Third, physicalism creates more puzzles than it solves, so that does not seem to be a fruitful model for considering the Incarnation.

In discussing Jewish philosophical theology, we noted the singularity of God as the object of the praises of Israel. For Christians, matters are more complicated. The Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople crafted creeds about the tri-unity of God, which emerged in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (or simply the Nicene Creed, as it is often referred to), which includes these words:

> We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty . . . We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father . . . of one Being with the Father . . . We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
>
> (Schaff 1919)

There is only one God, and the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Further, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not the Father, and so on. In bringing together the teachings of the early councils and creeds and writings of the Church Fathers, we can state the classical doctrine of the Trinity concisely: Within the nature of the one God are three eternal and coequal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus the Godhead is not homogeneous but contains three persons. Peter van Inwagen observes:

> Persons are those things to which personal pronouns are applicable: a person can use the word "I" and be addressed as "thou." . . . It is evident that the Persons of the Trinity are in this sense "persons," are "someones": if the Father loves us, then someone loves us, and if the Son was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, then someone was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary . . . Is it not true that when we count Persons of the Trinity we are counting "someones"? The Father is someone. The Son is also someone. And surely, He, the Son is someone else? If He were not someone else, could He not say truly, using the personal pronoun "I," "I am the Father"?
>
> (van Inwagen 1995, 264–265)

An important question arises here in thinking of God as three persons: How are there not three Gods? Answer: because they have the same essence. Richard Swinburne argues that it is

> exactly the instantiation of the same essence of divinity that makes the Father God, as makes the Son God, as makes the Spirit God. They would be the same individual but for the relational properties which are distinct from the divine essence and which distinguish them.
>
> (Swinburne 1994, 189)

Many objections have been raised about this view, and we consider one of them in the further reflections section at the end of the chapter.

As we have seen, the concept of God as Trinity is not universal across the theistic traditions. Of the three major Abrahamic faiths, only Christianity affirms a trinitarian doctrine. Yet what is very widely held, not only among those in the Abrahamic faiths but in most known societies of the world, is the idea that there is a divine reality of immense power and wisdom that brought the world into being for a purpose. It is also widely held that something has gone wrong with this world. The many problems of pain and evil, such as those we discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, demonstrate this point. Theists, of course, generally see the problems as having in some sense thwarted the will and purposes of God. Yet God has an agenda for restoring the creation. For Christians, one central facet of that agenda is to liberate human beings from sin and selfishness—to provide the path to eternal life, to use biblical language. One of the most beloved passages in the Christian Bible, for example, is the oft-repeated line of John 3: 16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

The notion of Jesus as Savior fills the pages of the New Testament. In fact, a major facet of Christianity can be summarized in two words: Jesus saves. Through Christ we can be liberated from selfish desire, greed, pride, and so on, and brought into loving relationship, or union, or atonement (at-one-ment), with God. This is the Christian hope of salvation. On this, all Christians can agree. But explaining *how* God acts in Jesus to bring about salvation is not so straightforward. The New Testament uses various images and metaphors to describe how God is saving the world through Christ. Brenda Colijn comments on the rich and diverse yet unified biblical images of salvation:

> Despite their rich diversity, the New Testament images of salvation tell a single story—the story of God's love for his broken creation, his desire for covenant relationship, and his patient shaping of a people who would reflect his love to one another and to the world. In the story's climax, the creator enters his creation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, identifying with his creatures in both life and death, and then, through resurrection, opening the way to life eternal. . . . These images reflect a number of common themes.

> All of them assume a dire predicament that requires divine intervention. Although different images may emphasize one of the trinitarian persons more than the others, all of the images are consistent with a model in which salvation is initiated by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and actualized by the Spirit.
>
> (Colijn 2010, 313–314)

The Church Fathers, beginning with Origen, not uncommonly utilized primitive images of fishhooks and bait and of the devil as possessing legal rights over humans who need to be ransomed from him. The term "ransom" is used in several places in the New Testament with respect to Jesus. In the Gospel according to Mark, for example, it says this: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10: 45). Many of the early Christian theologians asked the question: To whom was the ransom paid? This may be a misguided question if the ransom is meant in a metaphorical manner, yet some of them took it quite literally. Gregory of Nyssa, widely recognized as one of the most important Orthodox (and "orthodox," meaning the well-established, classical, traditional view) theologians, was one such interpreter. His answer: the devil.

> [I]n order to secure that the ransom in our behalf might be easily accepted by him who required it, the Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, that so, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh, and thus, life being introduced into the house of death, and light shining in darkness, that which is diametrically opposed to light and life might vanish; for it is not in the nature of darkness to remain when light is present, or of death to exist when life is active.
>
> (Gregory of Nyssa 1893, XXIV)

Satan, the Great Adversary, swallowed the bait of flesh; that is, he had the body of Christ killed. St. Gregory the Great is even more emphatic on the point: "And so our Lord, when He came to redeem mankind, made as it were a sort of hook of Himself for the death of the devil" (*c.*595, 33: 7).

Patristic notions of the triumphant Christ were multifaceted and included more than this particular notion of ransom to Satan. There were several views or theories of Atonement in the early church. Somewhat surprisingly, however, no theory of the Atonement has ever been officially sanctioned by any ecumenical creed or council in Christian history. The Fathers and Mothers of the historic Church saw the wisdom (in our view) of allowing multiple interpretations of the various biblical images and metaphors on the matter of Christ's Atonement.

More recently, the patristic notions of the triumphant Christ have been summarily dubbed the *Christus Victor* view of Atonement. As described by Gustav Aulén in his landmark work on the topic, it is "the idea of the Atonement as a divine conflict and victory; Christ—Christus Victor—fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in

bondage and suffering" (1969, 4). The general idea of *Christus Victor* as it has been developed and debated in recent times involves a metaphorical view of ransom and views the question about to whom the ransom was paid as misguided. Christ was and is in a cosmic battle, but the battle is with evil power structures, however they are manifested. Christ in the flesh took on the evil powers of his day, but not in a militaristic sense as some (including the disciples) had expected. Christ Incarnate offered his life fully to God, and in doing so the powers sought to destroy him. In voluntarily offering his life, without resistance, he "battled" a system of violence without using violence; he responded to violent force with selfless love. This broad *Christus Victor* view of Atonement has been adopted by a number of contemporary philosophers and theologians and for a variety of reasons, including the following.

First, it seems to be consistent with the vast number of scriptural passages as well as the broad narrative of scripture. Here is a small sampling: Luke 4: 18; I Corinthians 15: 25; Colossians 1: 15–22; Hebrews 2: 14–15; and I John 2: 13–14. Second, some form of the view was held by most of the early church thinkers, including Tertullian, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, Augustine, John of Damascus, and many others. Third, the motif of Christ voluntarily offering his life on the cross, without resistance, combating violence with love and non-violence, reflects a powerful but humble hero who captures the heart and imagination of many of us. The view is and has been attractive to many of those within each of the major streams of Christianity—Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy—and to those within such diverse theological perspectives as evangelicalism, feminism, and black and liberation theologies. Fourth, a number of theological issues are addressed within its purview, including that Christ defeated the powers of evil, that he is our great exemplar to follow and imitate, that he reconciled the world to God, and that through him we have hope in life eternal.

While the view has a rich and extended history (lasting about a millennium before another significant rival emerged), it had a major critic in medieval times. Anselm of Canterbury (*c.*1033–1109) thought the view, in its particular ransom-to-the-devil manifestation, was immoral, unbiblical, and a direct affront to God. Anselm argued that the devil is an outlaw, and hence has no claim to anything—let alone the pinnacle of God's creation. Did the Almighty have to stoop to the level of deception to save the world? Surely not. Furthermore, he argued, why would God ever set up the world such that the devil could gain legal rights over humanity? No, there was no ransom offered to the devil. Yet Anselm, like many of the earlier Fathers, took the ransom motif as reflecting a real rather than a metaphorical payment. But if the ransom was not paid to the devil, then to whom? On Anselm's account, it was paid to God.

On Anselm's view, human sin creates a debt toward God. Since God deserves our full obedience, when we sin we betray God by failing to offer him what he is owed. We deserve punishment until satisfaction is made. In a nutshell, then, here is Anselm's argument:

1. Our sins against God were an offence to his perfect honor (while God cannot be harmed, God can be dishonored).
2. We accumulated a debt of obligation to God so large that we could not pay it.
3. God's perfect honor necessitated that the debt be paid.
4. It is human beings that owe the debt, so it has to be a human being who pays the debt.
5. The payment had to be of infinite worth, since the offended God is infinitely worthy.
6. Jesus Christ, as fully human, owes the debt, and Jesus Christ, as fully divine, can pay the debt.
7. Christ paid the debt for us by offering his life fully to God, thus offering satisfaction for the demands of divine honor.

Historically, Anselm's juridical model quickly became the dominant theory of Atonement in the West, though it never took hold among the Eastern Orthodox. It was later developed further through the work of John Calvin (1509–1564) and others to include a penal component in which Christ, as our substitute, suffered punishment on our behalf.

We offer four replies. First, Anselm's approach assumes a classical conception of justice in which one is required to render to each his or her due—i.e., to pay back what one owes. Critique of this notion of justice can be found all the way back to Plato and his *Republic*. And the stories of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) reflect an understanding of justice that is more akin to restoration than satisfaction (or punishment, to bring in Calvin's penal view). For Jesus, the remedy for transgression primarily seems to be the help and mercy of healers, not the satisfaction or retribution of punishers. Second, it seems rather mechanical, formulaic, and forensic, rather than primarily personal, relational, and focused on love, mercy, and compassion. Third, the formula itself seems rather problematic. Since God the Son is united with God the Father in the Holy Trinity, doesn't this account amount to God's paying God's own self—the (forgiving) Son paying the (demanding) Father? Fourth, it is a biblical theme that individuals are responsible for their own sins (c.f. Ezekiel 18: 20). While for Anselm Christ suffers *for* us and not *instead* of us, somehow Christ pays the debt on our behalf. Where is the justice in an innocent person paying the debts of the guilty?

We are not claiming that satisfaction theory is doomed. It is perhaps possible to overcome these challenges and critiques. Richard Swinburne, for example, has developed an impressive version of satisfaction theory. According to his view, making atonement for one's misbehavior with respect to human relationships has four elements: apology, repentance, reparation, and penance (penance for really serious sins). To take an example, imagine that in a fit of jealously, Chris slashed a hole in all four tires of a lover's little souped-up four-wheel drive (to borrow a line from a popular country and western song). Suppose further that after realizing it was all a mistake, Chris returned and sought forgiveness. For Chris to receive

forgiveness, it would seem that Chris would need to offer a serious apology and manifest real repentance as well. Chris should also offer to repair or replace the tires. And even this might not be enough. Perhaps Chris will need to do more than apologize, repent, and make reparations in order to demonstrate real sincerity. Maybe a gift should be sent, or an offer to wash and wax the lover's vehicle every couple of weeks for a year, or maybe something else. This additional giving of something (time, talent, treasure, etc.) is the penance portion of making atonement. But for Swinburne, this penance is not a form of punishment. It is not retribution or even recompense. Instead, it is a willingness to make a sacrifice for the purpose of restoring a relationship.

Swinburne maintains that these same four elements are involved in our reconciliation with God. We can apologize and repent ourselves. But what we cannot do, he says, is provide reparation and penance to God, for we owe God nothing less than a full life of absolute submission and devotion. We have ruined that requirement through our misdeeds. Even if it were possible to follow up with such a life, this is still not providing reparations and penance; this is only giving what was required from the beginning, before the sin occurred. Indeed, we are at a loss when it comes to making amends with the Almighty. For God to simply ignore this situation would be inappropriate. But so would it be for God to ignore our plight. God's solution, then, was to offer Christ who, being divine and human, would provide his own perfect life as reparation and penance.

This theory has hope, in our view. It retains an emphasis on the seriousness of sin—sin that God, as holy and perfect, cannot simply ignore. And it lays stress on the biblical claim that Jesus paid the price of sin with his life. Yet it still contains aspects with which we are uncomfortable. Notably, it is difficult to understand what it means to offer another person's life and death as reparation and penance.

Beyond the theories discussed here, other important theories have been developed as well, including subjective views in which the atoning work of Christ is designed primarily to bring about change in human beings. In any case, whatever the precise relationship between God and Jesus of Nazareth, about half a millennium after the death of Jesus another way of conceiving the nature of God and God's activities in the world emerged; this time in western Arabia.

Philosophical explorations of Islam: merciful God, reason and mysticism, and tradition

Islam began in the seventh century when Muhammad (who was himself raised in a pagan and polytheistic religious context) began having visions and hearing voices as he meditated in the caves near Mecca. On one occasion he maintained that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him and instructed him to recite "in the name of [your] lord." This was the first of a number of revelations that were the basis of the Qur'an—revelations that pointed to the existence of a single, merciful God and to Muhammad himself as the seal of the prophets.

Islam affirms that there is only God who is supreme in knowledge, power, and goodness. God and God alone is to be worshiped, for God is the Creator and sustainer of the created order. In a way similar to traditional Judaism, Islam also holds to a strict form of monotheism and disavows all forms of polytheism. Along with Judaism (and Christianity), it lays claim to Abraham as its forebear. Yet Islam differs from Judaism primarily in the former's claim that Muhammad is the last and final prophet of God. And while most Jews and Christians would not grant this title to Muhammad, another major disagreement between Christians and Muslims has to do with the nature of God and God's relation to the world. Islam emphasizes the radical difference of the Creator and the creation, and this leads to a denial of any real unity of the finite world with the infinite being of the divine. With the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, on the other hand, a distinction can be made within the divine being between that of God the Father, who is distinct from the finite world, and that of God the Son, who—as the human son born of the Virgin Mary—can be identified in an important sense with the finite world. This difference is not merely abstract (if not abstruse) theological bantering; it is rooted in sacred text. In the New Testament, as we discussed above, God is three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28: 19), whereas the Qur'an asserts that we should not say God is three: "And do not say, 'Three'; desist—it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God" (4: 171). Further, the New Testament asserts that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God (John 3: 16). The Qur'an forthrightly disagrees: "God forbid that He Himself should beget a son! When He decrees a thing He need only say: 'Be,' and it is" (19: 35).

So there are obvious differences of belief among the Abrahamic traditions. Yet difference need not necessarily lead to hostility. Unfortunately, however, the popular press often creates a damaging false impression that Islam is especially given over to violence. (There are a number of false impressions with respect to Islam. One less damaging is that many assume the majority of Muslims are Arabs, whereas in fact, at the time of this writing only about 20 percent of the Muslims in the world are Arab.) This impression of violence is exacerbated by the many anti-Muslim websites that cherry-pick verses in the Qur'an which, pulled out of context, seem to support violence. Consider the so-called "Sword Verse,": "fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem" (Sura: 9: 5). Anti-Muslims (and, sadly, Islamic terrorists) take this passage to be supporting violence against anyone who qualifies in their view as being a pagan or non-believer. This is a most unfortunate interpretation. Using similar hermeneutical contortions, one could use the Bible or any number of other sacred texts to support violence against the innocent.

Let's examine the verse in context. The full verse reads:

> But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular

> prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.
>
> (Sura 9: 5)

This sura or chapter is addressing the question of how to respond to an enemy when that enemy has violated a treaty that has been agreed upon by both parties. The chapter teaches that there should be a pause of several months to permit penitence and reconciliation before responding. If that does not occur, then war is allowed. Yet it also adds that if the offending party does repent and so forth, then "open the way for them." This passage has nothing to do with attacking innocent individuals or with advocating war against those who desire to coexist in peace and harmony. This is only one example, but a little research will demonstrate that the same general principle applies, if allowed a charitable read, to each of those passages in the Qur'an that are misinterpreted by some as texts of violence and terror.

Grievously, there are those who have hijacked Islam for their own political and perverse ends and attempt to force conversion to their own narrow views. But the Qur'an unequivocally states "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2: 256) and

> So if they dispute with you, say "I have submitted my whole self to Allah, and so have those who follow me." And say to the People of the Scripture and to the unlearned: "Do you also submit yourselves?" If they do, then they are on right guidance. But if they turn away, your duty is only to convey the Message. And in Allah's sight are all of His servants.
>
> (3: 20)

What is further surprising to many who are unfamiliar with the broad teachings of Islam is that God (Allah) is repeatedly depicted as gracious and merciful. Consider the opening lines of the Qur'an—a Muslim's regular prayer:

> In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful:
> All Praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Universe
> The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.
> Owner of the Day of Judgment.
> You alone do we worship, and You alone we turn to for help
> Guide us to the straight path;
> The path of those on whom You have bestowed your grace, not (the way) of those who have earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray.

The Qur'an repeats throughout its pages that Allah is "Most Gracious," "Most Merciful," and "Most Forgiving," and so on, and Islamic prayers commonly emphasize these benevolent attitudes. It is deplorable that some within the religion have co-opted and commandeered it for their own selfish and grotesque purposes, and it adds insult to injury that some critics outside of the religion have portrayed

Islam in extreme and violent terms. It is certainly true that within Islamic thought there are differing voices, as is the case with all developed religion. There are fundamentalist voices and there are progressive voices; there are conservative ideas and there are liberal ideas. In Islamic philosophical theology, there are three primary schools of thought or traditions: Peripateticism, Mysticism, and Illuminationism. We offer some brief comments on each as we consider further important themes in Islamic philosophical theology.

Peripateticism (from the Greek term "peripatetic," which means "to walk or pace"), or *falsafa* (from the Greek term *philosophia*) is an approach to philosophy and theology in Islamic thought that is based on ancient Greek ideas. It arose as a result of the translation of Greek philosophical and scientific literature into Arabic. Two central Islamic philosophers who are representative of this school are al-Farabi (*c.*872–*c.*950), who helped establish it, and Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), known in the West as Averroes. Al-Farabi utilized the Aristotelian corpus in furthering his own thinking about God, the world, and the self. He also used Greek thought, chiefly that of Aristotle, in developing a philosophy of language and logic. This appropriation of Aristotelianism threatened many Islamic theologians because it seemed to lead to conclusions that contradict the Qur'an—perhaps most notably having to do with the creation of the world in time and the nature of God's revelation to prophets. Taking his cue from Aristotle, al-Farabi for example argued that the world does not have a beginning in the finite past. He also maintained that the prophets and scripture provide the same insights that philosophers do, though the former use symbolized language that makes it more accessible to those less educated.

One notable philosopher/theologian who saw Peripateticism as a threat was al-Ghazali (*c.*1056–1111). His response to the Peripatetics, masterfully articulated in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, takes them to task by using some of their own teachings in order to refute them. While they maintain that their epistemological approach of demonstrative proof for positions is far superior to theological knowledge gleaned from divine revelation (a condescension toward scripture that led some to ignore their religious and ritual duties and laws), Al-Ghazali attempts to demonstrate that their arguments are not based on solid reasoning. One of his strategies is to show that they assume the very points they are attempting to prove. He also argues that they cannot, in fact, provide "demonstrative proof" for their positions as they claim. On al-Ghazali's view, these thinkers have been seduced by philosophy, and this has led them to destructive beliefs—even leading some away from the faith. As he states:

> The harm inflicted on religion by those who defend it in a way not proper to it is greater than the harm caused by those who attack it in the way proper to it. As it has been said, "A rational foe is better than an ignorant friend."
>
> (Al-Ghazali 2000, 6)

Islamic Mysticism, or Sufism, is a method for bringing one into union or communion with God. The Sufi experience of divine union led to a deep and

profound understanding of God and union with the divine that was inaccessible to and beyond the comprehension of those approaching Islam utilizing a purely theoretical approach, such as the Peripatetics do. Sufis strive to be always aware of the presence of God, and they emphasize contemplation over the academic exercise of analytical reflection, and spiritual intimacy over jurisprudence and legalism. It uses such ritual practices as the recitation of prayers, meditation on passages in the Qur'an, and religious poetry. Emphasizing the role of the imagination and emotion in worship, Sufis use such terms as joy, ecstasy, and spiritual intoxication to describe their encounters with the divine. But they also use the term sobriety, which is the condition one comes to after having come out of the intoxicated ecstasy of union. Both intoxication (*sukr*) and sobriety (*sahu*) are important dimensions of Sufi teaching and experience.

The third school or tradition in Islamic thought is Illuminationism (*ishraqi*). Illuminist thinkers are interested in a *via media* between the Peripatetics on the one hand and the Mystics on the other. Illuminists affirm the notion that intuitive knowledge is more important than scientific knowledge, though without disparaging the latter. As the title of the tradition suggests, they use the idea of light—think of the mind being enlightened—to examine connections between God (the Light of Lights) and the world. One conclusion of the Illuminist approach is that all of reality is a continuum, the universe being understood as an aspect of the divine. The differences among various things are thus described in degrees of luminosity rather than in terms of substance, essence, and so on. Mulla Sadra (*c.*1571–1636) is perhaps the best known Islamic philosopher of this school.

One final note about tradition (*taqlid*) in Islam. Historically there has been much discussion in Islam about the meaning and significance of following a particular tradition. This discussion has roots extending back to the early days of Islam in the debates that occurred in Mecca and Medina about who should succeed the prophet. The Qur'an makes many theological, moral, and other kinds of claims, but how are they to be interpreted? It is neither a science textbook nor a work of philosophy; neither a moral rulebook, delineating every ethical scenario and providing the answers to all moral controversies, nor a handbook on social or political practice. There is also the *hadith*, collections of sayings purported to have been uttered by Muhammad on many matters of significance. But here, too, interpretation is needed, and there are disputes about which *hadith* are the authentic sayings of the prophet. Thus, as with any major religion, tradition in Islam has a significant role to play helping to unpack what the important and relevant truths of the religion are, where religious authority lies, and how we should interpret the sacred writings and teachings that have been handed down.

Philosophical explorations of Hinduism: ultimate reality, evil, karma, and justice

We discussed Hinduism in Chapter 5 and noted two different streams of the Vedanta school of Hindu thought. As we saw, in the Advaita Vedanta stream, ultimate reality,

indeed all of reality, is divine, or Brahman, and Brahman alone. Shankara, whom we also discussed, provides a concise articulation of this view:

> Brahman is the reality—the one existence, absolutely independent of human thought or idea. Because of the ignorance of our human minds, the universe seems to be composed of diverse forms. It is Brahman alone.
>
> (Shankara 1947, 70)

As we noted earlier, the Advaitin affirms a form of *pantheism* in that all reality is fully divine, and *monism* in that there is only one reality. All apparent distinctive characteristics within Brahman and between Brahman and the world are ultimately illusory. For the Advaitin, this is true of all (apparent) distinctions, between all (apparent) things, even between one's self (Atman) and Brahman.

For non-Advaitins, it might be difficult to conceive of the absence of all distinctions, especially between oneself (or rather *apparent* self) and all other (apparent) things. We seem to be unique individuals with separate identities from other people, things, and Brahman. As we saw earlier, the reason offered by Advaitins for why we are not experiencing this undifferentiated unity with Brahman is because of the deleterious effects of karma and the ignorance and illusion brought about by it. Brahman is all, and Brahman is perfect.

How, then, can there be evil? Shankara responds to this question with a type of free will theodicy in which karma plays a central role:

> The Lord . . . cannot be reproached with inequality of dispensation and cruelty, "because he is bound by regards." If the Lord on his own account, without any extraneous regards, produced this unequal creation, he would expose himself to blame; but the fact is, that in creating he is bound by certain regards, i.e., he has to look to merit and demerit [karma]. Hence the circumstance of creation being unequal is due to the merit and the demerit of the living creatures created, and is not a fault for which the Lord is to blame.
>
> (Shankara 2004, 36)

In other words, we have created evil through our own choices and actions. Brahman has established a moral order in which karma is a fundamental aspect, but Brahman is not culpable for the evil in the system. In some ways this is very similar to the free will theodicy we examined earlier.

Yet is must be remembered that all of this, for the Advaitin, is to be considered within the paradigm of the unenlightened understanding of *saguna* Brahman (Brahman-with-attributes). For the truly enlightened, there is only *nirguna* Brahman (Brahman-without-attributes); all is one and undifferentiated. Ultimately, then, there is no difference between good and evil. At the level of the real, even merit and demerit are illusory. Such apparent distinctions are due to *avidya* and *maya*, spiritual ignorance and illusion. In response to the question of what

initiated such ignorance, some Advaitins turn to Hindu mythology where *maya* is depicted as a divine goddess, Mahamaya, who deludes us and leads us astray. Other Advaitins interpret *maya* not as a goddess but rather as the great veiling of the true Self, though it is unclear what actually brought about the veil.

Yet another question naturally arises within this view: How does one overcome this grand illusion? The Advaitin answer is that we need to advance to an enlightened state in order to overcome the veil of cosmic ignorance and so to escape the apparent evil and suffering of the experienced world. We can accomplish this by moving beyond the rational mind, and we do this most effectively through meditation on the deep truths of Atman and Brahman. Shankara clarifies:

> Brahman is neither the gross nor the subtle universe. The apparent world is caused by our imagination, in its ignorance. It is not real. It is like seeing the snake in the rope. It is like a passing dream—that is how a man should practice spiritual discrimination, and free himself from his consciousness of this objective world. Then let him meditate upon the identity of Brahman and Atman, and so realize the truth. . . .
>
> Give up the false notion that the Atman is this body, this phantom. Meditate upon the truth that the Atman is "neither gross nor subtle, neither short nor tall," that it is self-existent, free as the sky, beyond the grasp of thought. Purify the heart until you know that "I am Brahman." Realize your own Atman, the pure and infinite consciousness.
>
> Just as a clay jar or vessel is understood to be nothing but clay, so this whole universe, born of Brahman, essentially Brahman, is Brahman only—for there is nothing else but Brahman, nothing beyond That. That is the reality. That is our Atman. Therefore, "That art Thou"—pure, blissful, supreme Brahman, the one without a second.
>
> (Shankara 1947, 73–74)

By engaging in proper meditation and deep reflection on these central truths, we can finally escape the illusory power of *maya* and enter into *moksha*—the enlightened and blissful realization that reality is one, multiplicity is illusion, only the undifferentiated Absolute is real, and pain and suffering are illusory. While *moksha* is the goal, it is recognized in Advaita Vedanta (indeed in most forms of Hinduism) that full enlightenment will not be achieved in the short term. Indeed, it may not be achieved in this lifetime. It may take many rebirths before the power of ignorance and illusion and the negative influences of karma are completely expunged. But it is in this final state, this ultimate enlightenment, that evil and suffering will be understood for what they are: grand illusions brought about through a cosmic veil of ignorance.

As noted back in Chapter 5, not all Hindus are Advaitins, and, as we saw, not even all Vedantins affirm the monism of the Advaitins. In fact, the vast majority of Hindus are not monistic but are instead theistic (some affirming panentheism, some not) or polytheistic, and a number of them have concerns with the Advaitin

response to evil—perhaps most notably the claim that evil is ultimately illusory. So how do non-Advaitin Hindu philosophers consider evil?

Historically within Hinduism, the doctrines of karma and rebirth developed as an explanation for the problem of evil. Or, more specifically, as a way of explaining why there is evil *and* good, pain *and* pleasure, misery *and* happiness. At first glance these different experiences of good and evil, pain and pleasure, and so on make no sense in a world created by a perfect deity (theists of the Abrahamic traditions obviously have the same problem here). Indeed, some of them seem to be rather random. An earthquake strikes a town, causing some of its inhabitants to die and sparing others. Two children are born into a loving, caring family; one dies of cancer as a young child, the other lives into old age. Lightning strikes a tree in a dry forest and a fire ensues; some of the animals escape unscathed, while others burn to their death. Furthermore, it often occurs that good people suffer and wicked people flourish. It is not uncommon for the selfless to be taken advantage of and the selfish to prosper. It appears that much of what happens with respect to good and evil is up to chance. But on this account, it seems that there is no cosmic justice. So how is this justice problem to be solved?

The Hindu solution is karma. The term "karma" is used in various ways. It literally means deed or action, what one does. It can also mean one's intention or motivation for a given action, or what happens to an individual. Its broader meaning, sometimes referred to as the "law of karma," is a law of moral causation. Understood this way, it involves causal connections linking what an individual does to what happens to them, either immediately or, more likely, at a later time. Many people have a sense of this in the way they view the world; it's not unique to Hindus. Many people believe, for example, that what goes around comes around, or that we reap what we sow. It is not uncommon to think that there is cosmic justice—that goodness is rewarded and evil punished. In the Abrahamic traditions this entails God's moral governance of the universe. God will bring the world to rights, either in this life or in the next. For most Hindus, however, karma offers a better solution.

How does karma work? There are different explanations offered by various Hindu thinkers, but as generally understood karma is a comprehensive causal law in which an individual's actions determine the future situations and experiences of the individual. Fundamental to karma is the claim that universal justice is accomplished in that the good and evil experienced by an individual are not due to chance, but are the result of actions the individual performed in the past—either in this life or in a previous one. Karma preserves the moral order in that if one does what is right and good, there will be reward; if one does what is wrong and evil, there will be punishment. While justice does not always seem to prevail, for some who do good suffer and some who do evil flourish, nevertheless it will eventually be accomplished. For even if justice is not meted out in this life, it will be so in a future life. A person could steal from someone, for example, and yet never pay for that action in this life. But she will ultimately pay for her evil deed. The cosmic scales of justice are eventually balanced.

In its popular formulations, rebirth (or reincarnation) is the view that the conscious self transmigrates from one physical body to the next after death. Every human being has lived a former life, perhaps as another human being or perhaps as another kind of organism. Those who affirm rebirth and karma often point to a difficulty they see with the western view of justice and the inequalities experienced in this life: it seems exceedingly unfair that one child is born healthy into a wealthy, loving family, for example, whereas another child is born sickly into a poor, cruel environment. If there is a personal God who brought these two persons into the world, this God seems to be unloving and unjust. However, if the two children are reaping the consequences of actions they performed in previous lives, as the karmic view holds, this provides a justification for the inequalities. In fact, Arthur Herman in his classic work, *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*, claims that the karma/rebirth explanation is not only superior to western attempts to solve the problem of evil, but that it provides such a satisfactory answer that Indian thinkers were not terribly interested in pursuing it further:

> Since the rebirth solution is adequate for solving the theological problem of evil, this undoubtedly explains why the problem was never of much concern to the classical Indian, and why theodicy, as a philosophical way of life, was practically unknown to them.
>
> (Herman 1976, 288)

This is, in our estimation, overstating the case, as the Indian traditions are rife with theodicy myths. Beyond what the traditions affirm on the subject, we must ask whether karma does provide a satisfactory solution to the problems of evil.

There are a number of objections that have been raised against the doctrines of karma and rebirth. For one, it has been questioned whether they actually offer a plausible explanation for the inequalities found in this life. According to the karmic law of cause and effect, my present life circumstances are explained by my actions in a previous life, my life circumstances in that life are explained by my life circumstances in a life previous to that one, and so on. But two problems come to mind. First, the hoped-for solution regarding inequalities seems never to come to an end. Unless a person somehow is perfect in some future life, there will always be more bad karma being transported from the past into the future. As we saw above, Hinduism does provide an answer for escaping this cycle: enlightenment. So perhaps this is not an unsolvable problem. A related problem, though, is that in explaining one's current life conditions, karma refers to actions that were made in this and a previous life. And in explaining the conditions one had in that life, karma refers to actions that were made in a life before that, and so on ad infinitum. But how did it all begin? What was the initial wrongdoing that started the karmic process? As far as we can tell, there is no answer to this question in the karmic theodicy except to push it back into the deep mysteries of the infinite past. There never was a morally clean slate, as it were, from which we began. That seems to call the justice of the system into question.

Another problem with the karma/rebirth solution to evil and suffering is that it does not really seem fair that when a person who has lived a long life dies and is reincarnated, she must start all over again as a newborn with her maturity, life experiences, wisdom, and memories completely forgotten. (There are some alleged cases of recollecting past life experiences, but, even if they are valid, they are rare indeed.) This raises a host of difficulties, and perhaps one of the more glaring is that if one does not remember wrongs that were committed in a previous life, how is he or she to grow morally in this life? Would it not be morally advantageous for all of those memories and developments (or at least some of them) to be kept intact? Further, is it really fair to lose the moral maturity that we accrued in a past life? Perhaps one's current station in life accounts for this, but it is not clear to us that this is so.

Yet another difficulty for the karma/rebirth solution has to do with free will. As noted earlier, an asset of the karma/rebirth solution to the problem of evil is that real moral agency is preserved. In fact, moral agency is central to the solution: the moral choices that we make (self-) determine our future experiences. We are responsible for our own destiny; we are the captains of our fate. Upon further inspection, however, the view seems to run contrary to free moral agency. Imagine the following scenario. Suppose a serial killer, call him the Zodiac Killer, is thinking about his life as a murderer and is considering turning over a new leaf by turning himself in to the authorities and receiving the consequences of his actions. But just as he is pondering this possibility, a woman strolls by his house and his mad passions for rape and murder begin to burn within him. He now has the choice to continue down the path of destruction or put a stop to all of it. If he decides to attack the woman, and does so, then on the karmic account the woman was reaping the consequences of her former evil actions. In that case, the Zodiac is not truly free to act as he does, for he is simply and mechanistically following through with the effects of karmic justice. He is merely the instrumental means for meting out the justice requisite for this woman's previous transgressions. If, however, the woman does not deserve such moral recompense, then karmic justice will ensure that she does not receive it. In that case, the Zodiac will be unable to attack her.

The question that arises is this: where is the moral freedom in this system? If on the one hand the Zodiac is deterministically carrying out justice, then it seems that he is not truly a free moral agent after all. He is just simply a cog in the karmic justice machine. Furthermore, it is troubling to affirm a moral system in which we understand raped and murdered individuals to be themselves in a sense morally culpable for such acts of brutality against them. On the other hand, suppose the Zodiac really was free to attack the woman. If the woman was not deserving of such an act (which, of course, she was not), this would seem to be a serious violation of the law of karma whereby suffering occurs *because of* one's previous transgressions. If in attempting to justify such actions, the defender of the karmic system replied that the women would in a future life receive proper recompense for the morally gratuitous act, this does not appear to be consistent with karma. For this would

run counter to the central principle of karma in which evil and suffering are the effects of one's previous deeds.

One final difficulty for the karma/rebirth solution has to do with verifiability. It seems that there is no way to verify, or falsify, the doctrine. To return to the Zodiac example, if he murders the woman, the murder was the effect of karma. If he decides not to murder the woman, that too was the effect of karma. No matter what happens, the event is taken to be the effect of karma. There is no way to verify it empirically, even though the very processes of which it is constituted—cause (the choices one makes) and effect (the suffering or pleasure one experiences)—are understood empirically. Thus we have an empirical system that cannot be empirically verified. What makes this problem especially trenchant for karma/rebirth is that there is no way to challenge its moral ramifications. As one commentator puts it: "Human fallibility being what it is, the idea that all suffering is due to a previous wrongful action provides a great temptation to rationalize the status quo with reference to unverifiable claims about one's past wrongs" (Kaufman 2005, 27).

These objections to the karma/rebirth doctrine are significant, especially if it is taken to be a rational account of evil and suffering, and worthy of serious reflection and response. But many Indian thinkers reject the very notion of a rational account of matters of this world and maintain that the highest knowledge is ultimately beyond reason. In that case, perhaps karma and rebirth should not be understood as actual events in which moral calculations are literally preserved from one life to the next in some sort of mechanical matrix, but rather as metaphorical or symbolical stories reflecting deeper moral and spiritual truths. Maybe what we have is a mythical attempt to probe the unfathomable mysteries of a complex and, from a rational perspective, incomprehensible universe. In any case, further work in Hindu philosophical theology would benefit from tackling such objections.

One person born within the Hindu context saw evil and suffering as a central problem that remained unsolved in Hinduism proper. His name was Siddhartha Gautama.

Philosophical explorations of Buddhism: suffering, the (no)self, and Nirvana

We have so far been considering philosophical theology in the Abrahamic religions and Hinduism. We conclude this chapter by focusing on Buddhism.

Defining religion in a way that captures all and only what are commonly taken to be the religions of the world is notoriously difficult; nevertheless, several elements seem to be fundamental to at least those five major religions that we are discussing. A religion tends to be a broad system of beliefs and practices, including the belief in a transcendent (non-physical) reality that is ultimate and with which one may attain a unitive relation that provides ultimate meaning and purpose to life. As we shall see, this rough description captures Buddhism as well as Hinduism and the Abrahamic traditions.

To begin with a bit of background, Buddhism emerged from Hinduism sometime between the sixth and fourth centuries BC. Its founder was Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in northern India and came to be known as The Buddha ("Enlightened One") after his enlightenment. Early on, Buddhists were not especially interested in metaphysical speculations about ultimate reality (though this changed over time). And as the Hindu Vedas were not (and still are not) considered to be divinely inspired sacred texts by Buddhists, the metaphysical import of those texts played no essential role in Buddhist thought and practice. Brahman, for example, was (and is) either denied or seen as inconsequential. Yet in both its earliest and later forms, Buddhism, along with Hinduism, did and does affirm a doctrine of rebirth/reincarnation and the view that the ultimate goal of religious life is enlightenment—understood in Buddhism as Nirvana.

As with all developed religion, there are various streams or schools of thought in contemporary Buddhism. Fundamental to all of them are the central teachings of The Buddha, concisely stated in the Four Noble Truths: (1) The existence of suffering (*dukha*); (2) The arising of suffering as attachment and selfish desire (*samudaya*); (3) The cessation of suffering (*nirodha*); and (4) The way of cessation (*marga*). The way of cessation is the Eightfold Path through which one finds enlightenment or Nirvana. Thus, unlike Advaitin Hinduism, in Buddhism the notion of suffering is of paramount importance. And unlike theism, Buddhism denies the existence of a personal, perfect deity who created and sustains the world.

There are, in fact, different understandings of ultimate reality within the various streams and schools of Buddhist thought. In one major Buddhist school, referred to as Madhyamaka, (school of the "Middle Way") and developed by Nagarjuna (*c.*150–*c.*250 AD), ultimate reality is understood to be *sunyata*, which is translated as "Emptiness" or "The Void." It may seem at first glance that "Emptiness" and ultimate reality are contradictory concepts. How can something fundamentally real be empty or void? But Buddhists of the Madhyamaka school (and of most schools, in fact) understand "being real" as "being independent of other things." Fundamental reality, on typical Buddhist metaphysics, is in fact emptiness; there is no "thing" that has independent existence. All apparent substantial entities, whether galaxies, mountains, trees, or people are abstractions of events or processes, which are dependent on other events or processes. While such "things," including our very selves, appear to be substantial entities, in fact they are not. They seem to be enduring substances, but this is because we abstract from different experiences that occur and then reify substantial entities, including a substantial self, from all of this. Yet they are only processes; in reality, all is in flux. One Buddhist text, in which the following verse is ascribed to The Buddha himself, puts it this way:

> Impermanent are all component things,
> They arise and cease, that is their nature:
> They come into being and pass away,
> Release from them is bliss supreme.
>
> (Mahaa-Sudassana *Suttanta* (Diigha-Nikaaya) 2013, 16)

In another writing attributed to The Buddha:

> The five aggregates, monks, are *anicca*, impermanent; whatever is impermanent, that is *dukkha*, unsatisfactory; whatever is dukkha, that is without *attaa*, self. What is without self, that is not mine, that I am not, that is not my self. Thus should it be seen by perfect wisdom (*sammappa~n~naaya*) as it really is. Who sees by perfect wisdom, as it really is, his mind, not grasping, is detached from taints; he is liberated.
>
> (Samyutta Nikaya, 2013, 22.45)

Nagarjuna parallels these words: "When the notion of an Atman, Self or Soul cease, the notion of 'mine' also ceases and one becomes free from the idea of I and mine" (Nagarjuna 1995, xviii.2).

The Buddha understood the world to be one of transiency, and this is because all discernible entities are in fact composite; all is involved in the fluidity of universal change. Such unstable realities cannot be ultimately real. There is neither Atman nor Brahman; there is no self but Anatman or no self. In addition, all events and processes originate out of a self-sustaining causal nexus in which each link arises from another, which Buddhists call the doctrine of inter-dependent arising (*pratitya-sumutpada*). All events and processes are connected to other events and processes. Nothing in the nexus is independent; everything arises from something else. By learning this fundamental truth, we are on the path to enlightenment, and on the way to the "foundation of reality." On this point, Thich Nhat Hanh writes:

> We have to nourish our insight into impermanence every day. If we do, we will live more deeply, suffer less, and enjoy life much more. Living deeply, we will touch the foundation of reality, nirvana, the world of no-birth and no-death. Touching impermanence deeply, we touch the world beyond permanence and impermanence. We touch the ground of being and see that which we have called being and nonbeing are just notions. Nothing is ever lost. Nothing is ever gained.
>
> (Hanh 1998, 124)

One of the causes in the nexus of inter-dependent arising is karma. Because of ignorance (*avidya*), we continue to experience the effects of karma, and this keeps us within the cycle of cause and effect, death, suffering, and rebirth. In order to escape the illusory world of permanence, as Nagarjuna explains it, we need to recognize *sunyata* and so come to see that there are no finite or infinite substances—no individual or permanent selves or beings. It is in this enlightened state that we can ultimately break through the illusion of the phenomenal world, escaping the cycle of death and rebirth and experiencing *Nirvana*, the final extinction of ego and personal desire and an indescribable state of ultimate bliss.

The Buddhist doctrines of *sunyata* and Anatman are not readily apparent to human experience. Why is this so? The notions of emptiness, no-self, and the

interconnection of all things are so distant from our common experience and understanding because we are in desperate need of enlightenment. For Buddhism, the path to enlightenment is the discovery, understanding, and practice of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path mentioned above.

One important question is how to conceive of rebirth within a Buddhist doctrine of no-self. There is considerable debate among Buddhist scholars on this matter. One common reply is that at the death of consciousness (or the dissolution of the *skandhas*, which, on the Mahayana Buddhist view, are mental events or bundles that constitute what we refer to as the "ego"), a new consciousness arises, which is rebirth. This new consciousness is not identical to the former, but neither is it completely different from it. There is a causal connection between consciousnesses as they form a part of the same causal continuum. Again, the reason for the belief in an individual substantial self is ignorance (*avidya*). On most Buddhist accounts, in order to move beyond ignorance and to experience enlightenment, one must come to fully understand the central truths, including the truth of Anatman. It is admitted that embracing this teaching may be difficult, and it requires working off the negative effects of karma. Indeed, it will likely require many rebirths to attain full understanding. But it is well worth the effort, Buddhists maintain, for it leads to the *elimination* of suffering and, ultimately, to the eternal bliss of Nirvana.

While theists may grant that the Buddhist teachings noted above provide certain insights into the nature of suffering, the pursuit of its elimination, the dangers of selfish desire, and the interconnections of reality at the most basic levels—and we do grant all of this—nevertheless, fundamental questions emerge. First, if the soul or self is truly no more than an ever-changing combination of psychophysical forces (the five aggregates), and the "I" or ego is ultimately illusory, then what does it really mean for "us" to be seeking or achieving Nirvana? And what would it mean to experience Nirvana if there is no substantial, enduring self?

By the same token, there seems to be a case of self-reflexive incoherence at the heart of the doctrine of no-self, for one is encouraged to pursue and ultimately comprehend the teaching, but how can "I" comprehend anything if there is no enduring I—no real center of consciousness? Furthermore, while theism has a real difficulty with the problem of evil, Buddhism has a different problem. For evil, understood principally in Buddhism as suffering, is itself illusory. And anyway, since there is no self, there is no one to suffer! These are deep challenges to be further explored by those engaged in Buddhist philosophical theology.

So far, our project here has been to consider philosophical theology primarily in terms of overtly religious, metaphysical, moral, and theological themes. In the next chapter we consider philosophical theology with respect to culture.

Further reflections

Here is a long but interesting quotation from Dale Tuggy in which he provides an argument against the Trinity. Essentially, Tuggy argues that God is revealed

initially as a single being and yet, if God is Triune and consists of three persons, God has committed a wrongful deception.

> Little orphan Annie lived anonymously among the many other orphans in a Los Angeles orphanage. Like all orphans, she longed for the love of a parent, though she was forced to make due with shallower and less stable human connections. But one day in her eighth year she received a long-distance phone call from New York City that changed her life; on that day, she discovered that she wasn't an orphan after all! The man on the phone, named "Fred," introduced himself as her father, and initiated a wonderful parental relationship, which guided Annie all the way to adulthood. For complex reasons, the relationship had to remain long-distance. Annie stayed at the orphanage, but had frequent communications with her loving dad. Fred said he was her only dad, and that she should listen to him over all others [who, as we will see, also claimed to be her dad], and obey him, because he had her best interests in mind and loved her like no other. He taught her what to do and what to avoid, patiently nurtured her, and made her life worth living. At times he sent money, people, and other provisions to help her, though he remained in New York City. With such provision and guidance, Annie grew up, left the orphanage, went to college, and became a professor of philosophy specializing in ethics. Though like all children Annie sometimes neglected her parent, she never lost touch, and during one conversation in her thirty-fifth year, Fred told her something that made her blood boil with anticipation: he was coming to Los Angeles to visit her! Finally, she would get to know things about him that can't be discovered over the phone. She counted the days, and the night before her dad's arrival was a sleepless one. Fred told her how to recognize him at the airport; he'd exit the plane wearing a t-shirt with the words, "I love Annie." At the airport, she held her breath as people exited the plane into the terminal, and her heart leapt when a man entered wearing the expected t-shirt. But her delight was immediately clouded by confusion when two further, similar looking men entered wearing the same sort of t-shirt.
>
> "Perhaps," she thought, "my dad is playing a joke on me." She checked a nearby plant to see if it concealed a candid camera, but found none. Approaching the first man, she squeaked, "Dad? It's Annie." It turned out there was no man named Fred. The three men, strikingly similar, but having some important differences, explained their arrangement to Annie over the following days. Their names were Don, Jon, and Ron; Don was Jon's father, and she was unclear about the relation of Ron to the other two. But for some reason, which they never explained, the three had freely decided to initiate a three on one relationship with Annie, though she thought it was a one on one relationship. It seems that Don, Jon, and Ron took turns talking to her on the phone, always using a voice-disguising device to render their voices indistinguishable, and perfectly communicating to each other what

went on. Thus was born the fictional character of her dad "Fred." "Fred" was just the group of three men. While none of the three was her biological father, they were all somehow involved in her production in a way she didn't understand. "Perhaps each contributed a third of my DNA," Annie thought. At any event, there was no mother, and no one else was this involved in producing her—she was sure of that.

Annie's reactions to this discovery followed a certain progression. First, there was utter, deep shock. She had never suspected that "dad" was a committee and not a man. Second, she decided that in a way, she had three dads, and that this was a wonderful discovery. After all, during their visit in Los Angeles, she found that Don, Jon, and Ron each individually had those winsome traits she formerly ascribed to her dad—wisdom, kindness, attentiveness, humor, and so on. She was now grateful to each for his portion of the love and provision she had received. A third phase of her reaction was less happy. She realized that Don, Jon, and Ron had deceived her, and as far as she could tell, they did so without any good reason. She missed "dad," and was troubled to think that her long personal interaction with him was a sham. She had been interacting, in a sense, with a fictional character and not a person, albeit a character perfectly played by three very loving men. She felt like a wife who discovered that her "husband" was really identical triplets taking turns. Such a woman, Annie reflected, would feel she had been raped by all three. Though Annie didn't feel quite *that* violated, she did feel violated; she felt sure she had been mistreated. In the end, Don, Jon, and Ron kept up their relationships with Annie, though now on a different basis. Annie never did discover the reason for their deception, nor did they ever explain themselves. She decided that though she had three good dads (or perhaps, three fatherly friends), none of them were perfect, for they had wrongfully deceived her.

(Tuggy 2004, 270–272)

Contra Tuggy, we suggest there is no deception. What is known as the Christian Old Testament does not rule out Trinity; it is underdefined. Second, Tuggy's three humans do not come close to the tight co-inherence defended by social trinitarians. Do you agree? Why or why not?

One philosophical question that has plagued the doctrine of the Incarnation is this: If Jesus has both a fully human nature and a fully divine nature, does he have a human mind or a divine mind? Tom Morris defends a two minds view:

> In the case of God Incarnate, we must recognize something like two distinct ranges of consciousness. . . . The divine mind of God the Son contained, but was not contained by, his earthly mind, or range of consciousness. That is to say, there was what can be called an asymmetric accessing relation between the two minds.
>
> (Morris 1991, 169)

What objections come to mind when considering the idea of one person having two distinct ranges of consciousness? Consider dreaming and being aware in your dream that you are dreaming. Consider also the notion of the subconscious. Do these examples lend any support to a two-minds view?

In attempting to clarify and champion Aquinas's account of Atonement as satisfaction and meriting grace, Eleonore Stump offers the following story:

> Consider two friends, Susan and David. They have been best friends for years; but recently David has become an alcoholic, and he is given to driving with Susan's little daughter Maggie in his car, and, because in his drunken state he had neglected to buckle the child in, Maggie is killed. If Susan and David are not to be alienated despite this dreadful event, there will be two obstacles to their friendship: first, the problem of dealing with the moral wrong David has done (I will call this the problem of past sin) and, second, the problem of dealing with the moral wrong David is likely to do, given that he is still an alcoholic (I will call this the problem of future sin). . . . If we combine these two parts of Aquinas's account, Christ's passion as satisfaction and Christ's passion as meriting grace, we can see that he has a theory of the Atonement which can handle both the problem of past sin and that of future sin. Return again to the story of Susan and David, close friends who are alienated because David in his ongoing alcoholism has killed Susan's daughter. This story is in many (but certainly not all) respects analogous to the Christian view of the relationship between God and the human beings. They are alienated because humans in their ongoing post-Fall nature tend to will the contrary of what God wills, generally their own pleasure or power in preference to greater goods. To reconcile Susan and David requires first David's doing what he can to make satisfaction for the evil he has done. On Aquinas's theory of Atonement, God out of love for humans initiates this process by sending his Son to make satisfaction for a person's past sins, by offering in his passion what that person in his current state cannot offer to God, namely, an instance of human nature with perfect humility, obedience, and love of God. But making satisfaction for past sins is not enough to effect reconciliation. For David and Susan to be reconciled also requires David's abandoning his addiction, and similarly for human beings and God to be at one again requires a person's converting from his post-Fall disordered nature with its inclination to evil to a new Christ-like character inclined to righteousness. On Aquinas's theory, Christ also provides the means for effecting this conversion by his passion and its commemoration in the Eucharist. The love manifested by Christ's passion and the loving union experienced in the Eucharist call forth the believer's love of Christ, which generates a willingness to will goodness and withdraw from evil. Once the believer has been stimulated by God to this act of will, then God can give the believer's will supernatural aid, assisting and strengthening the will to will the good, without thereby violating the believer's free will.
>
> (Stump 2009, 270, 288)

What do you make of the analogy?

After reading the following parable by Philip Quinn, reflect on what it might say to justice and forgiveness.

> Imagine that a great magnate makes his two sons stewards of the two finest farms on his estate. The elder son irresponsibly neglects and thus ruins his farm, while the younger son conscientiously makes his farm flourish. As a result of his negligence, the elder son owes it to his father to make reparations by restoring his farm to its former prosperity. It would be severe but just for the father to punish him by disinheriting him if he does not repair the ruined farm. Unfortunately, the elder son is not a good enough farmer to be able to accomplish this task, though he is good enough that he could have prevented the ruin of the farm had he but tried to do so. Acknowledging his responsibility and guilt, the elder son repents of his negligence, and sincerely apologizes to his father. But as the father contemplates the now desolate fields of the ruined farm, he cannot help thinking that repentance and apology are not enough. He is poised to exercise his right to disinherit his guilty son.
>
> Then the younger son intervenes. Moved by love for his brother as well as by devotion to their father and the welfare of his estate, the younger son undertakes to restore the farm that his brother has ruined to its former prosperity. This new endeavor requires tremendous sacrifices from him; he must maintain his own farm while trying to rehabilitate another. His guilty elder brother joins with him in this undertaking. And then a senseless tragedy occurs. At harvest time the younger son has to work late into the evening to finish mowing the hay in his brother's fields. Just as he is completing this chore, marauding outlaws catch him in the open, slay him, and set the hay ablaze. His heroic attempt to restore the ruined farm ends in failure. But his sacrifices so work upon the grieving father's heart that he is persuaded to be merciful, rather than severe, toward his surviving elder son. He forgives his elder son for the damage he has done to the estate, even though that damage has not been repaired, and he mercifully refrains from exercising his right to disinherit his erring elder son.
>
> (Quinn 1994, 298–299)

Richard Purtill offers the following parable in order to provide an analogy for the Christian understanding of the atonement.

> A certain king had a jewel which he valued so highly that he had enlisted a band of knights, sworn to safeguard the jewel or die in the attempt. An enemy of the king, desiring the jewel, corrupted the knights one after another, some with bribes, some with threats, and some with promises. Then the enemy carried off the jewel. The king's son, who had been away with his squire while this was happening, returned to find the jewel gone. He went alone into the

> enemy's stronghold and after great suffering, managed to get the jewel back. On his return the king held court. The forsworn knights came before him to express their sorrow and accept their punishment. The king's son was also there, and his father praised him for his heroism, promising him whatever reward he wished. The prince said to the king, "Father, as my reward I ask that you do not punish the forsworn knights. Let my sufferings in getting back your jewel be all that anyone has to suffer in this matter." The king agreed, but the prince's squire objected, saying "This is to put these traitors on an equal footing with those of us who have not betrayed their king." However, the chief of the forsworn knights replied to him saying, "Sir, we are not on an equal footing with you, but below you in one way and above you in another. You are above us in that you have never betrayed your king, while we are forgiven traitors. But we are above you in that our prince has given us a gift which you have not received from him: his suffering has won our pardon. Therefore we have more reason to love our prince, and more motive to serve him and his father faithfully in the future."
>
> (Purtill 2009, 189–190)

Does the analogy work? Explain.

For the Advaita Vedantin, as we saw above, there are no distinctions between self and Brahman. Here is an analogy from a sacred Hindu text:

> Just as, my dear, the bees prepare honey by collecting the essences of different trees and reducing them into one essence, and as these (juices) possess no discrimination (so that they might say) "I am the essence of this tree, I am the essence of that tree," even so, indeed, my dear, all these creatures though they reach Being do not know that they have reached the Being. Whatever they are in this world, tiger or lion or wolf or boar or worm or fly or gnat or mosquito, that they become. That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its self. That is the true. That is the self. That are thou.
>
> (Raadhakrishnan 1994, 459–460)

What are some challenges that non-Advaitins face in attempting to seriously reflect on this view of self and ultimate reality? How might they be overcome?

> By the word "Brahman" is denoted the Supreme Person, who is by inherent nature free from all imperfections and possesses hosts of auspicious qualities which are countless and of matchless excellence. In all contexts the term "Brahman" is applied to whatever possesses the quality of greatness, but its primary and most significant meaning is that Being whose greatness is of matchless excellence, both in His essential nature and in His other qualities. It is only the Lord of all who is such a Being. Therefore the word "Brahman" is primarily used only to signify Him.
>
> (Ramanuja 2008, 124)

Nagarjuna affirmed a doctrine of double truth:

> The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma
> Is based on two truths:
> A truth of worldy convention
> And an ultimate truth.
> Those who do not understand
> The distinction drawn between these two truths
> Do not understand
> The Buddha's profound truth.
>
> (Nagarjuna 1995, 24: 8–9, 68–69)

For Nagarjuna, the doctrine of double truth is key to understanding Buddhism. Knowledge of conventional truth informs us of the way things are conventionally—the way things are generally understood, and as such provides the foundation for our common epistemic practices. Knowledge of ultimate truth informs us of the ways things are at the deepest levels of reality. Thus, at one level it is true that we are substantial selves, and that is how we conventionally understand the matter. But at a deeper level, it is true that we are not substantial selves. Do you find this bifurcated approach to truth and reality helpful?

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9

PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY AND OPEN SOCIETY

> Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion is.
>
> (Mahatma Gandhi)

In this chapter we consider philosophical theology in cultural terms. There are four sections. First, we contend that the practice of philosophy in general, and philosophical theology in particular, can play a vital role in democratic republics. Second, we consider the role of philosophical theology in educational institutions. Next, we contend that the practice of philosophical theology should, at its best, be nonstrategic. And finally, we suggest that philosophical theology has resources for addressing one of the most pressing challenges current and future generations face on this planet: climate change.

Philosophy and a democratic republic

One of the most important characteristics of a democratic republic is that its citizens have confidence in their use of reason, the ability to make and evaluate arguments confidently and to be able to distinguish good reasoning as opposed to manipulation. Karl Popper offers a helpful portrait of such a context for democracy in his important book *The Open Society and its Enemie*s, originally published in 1945. Popper distinguishes between closed and open societies. Closed societies are those that are marked by tribal or collective identity and the adherence to traditions and practices that do not allow for the development and flourishing of individual thinking and personal responsibility. A closed society is antidemocratic insofar as governance is not based on individuals entertaining and developing arguments to bring about change nonviolently in terms of political power and policies. In a closed society,

when the authority of the state is questioned, opposition parties are likely to be brutally silenced. In Popper's view, many of the enemies of an open, democratic society are pessimistic about average human capacities for self-governance and accountability; they take the cynical view that ordinary persons require the leadership of an elite class or group that can act paternalistically for the good of the whole.

By way of contrast, Popper finds hints of an open society's democratic ideal in Socrates' practice of engaging his fellow Athenians in dialogue. Popper hails Socrates as "the champion of the open society, and a friend of democracy" because Socrates extolled and practiced individual, critical reflection and dialogue on matters of value.

> [Socrates] demanded that individualism should not be merely the dissolution of tribalism, but that the individual should prove worthy of his liberation. This is why he insisted that man is not merely a piece of flesh—a body. There is more in man, a divine spark, reason, and a love of truth, of kindness, humaneness, a love of beauty and of goodness. It is those that make a man's life worthwhile . . . It is your reason that makes you human; that enables you to be more than a mere bundle of desires and wishes; that makes you a self-sufficient individual and entitles you to claim that you are an end in yourself.
>
> (Popper 1945, 204)

We believe that the above description gives us a portrait of what Popper would recognize as pivotal to the practice of philosophy or (literally) the love of wisdom.

From this Popper–Socrates perspective, a philosopher is an individual who loves wisdom, and this consists in such things as loving the truth about significant matters, a love that entails not loving falsehood. Because a lover of wisdom's first priority is loving goodness, beauty, humaneness, reason, and the like, secondary loves need to be subordinated. In cases of conflict, the love of goodness should trump the desire for fame, allegiance to tribe or the desire to have power over others. It is interesting that Popper sees Socrates specifically in terms of kindness.

Popper goes on to propose that the kind of culture that includes and encourages the Socratic practice of loving wisdom will rightly include critical reflection on the challenges facing democracy. "What [Socrates] criticized in democracy and democratic statesmen was their inadequate realization of [matters of importance]. He criticized them rightly for their lack of intellectual honesty, and for their obsession with power-politics" (Popper 1945, 203). The key is only to resort to power when this truly seems to be the wisest course of action after sustained, shared reflection that is honest, impartial, and unaffected by tribal desires or threats.

In this book, we have presented philosophical theology as a practice that appeals to reason and experience, deliberation and argument, in the assessing of different positions. We noted in Chapter 1 and elsewhere that some forms of philosophical theology provide reasons for accounting for and positively trusting our use of reason.

Theism does not face the daunting task of some radical naturalists who seek to explain the emergence and function of reason in non-purposive forces. For example, Dennett extols this Darwinian framework:

> Darwin explains a world of final causes and teleological laws with a principle that is entirely independent of "meaning" or "purpose." It assumes a world that is absurd in the existentialist's sense of the term: not ludicrous or pointless, and this assumption is a necessary condition of any non-question-begging account of purpose.
>
> (Dennett 1981, 73)

This project, however, risks undermining the reliability of reason. We are not here intending to revisit the whole naturalism versus theism debate, but only to take note that while theism has many challenges (why so much evil?) that it may or may not overcome, naturalism has a challenge in accounting for reason, which it may or may not meet.

Overall, the Abrahamic faiths and Hinduism have contributed to a culture that would support democratic republics insofar as they each provide reasons for persons to be confident in their use of reason, argument, and dialogue (Buddhism may also do so, but with its denial of self and so forth it is questionable on our view; the commensurability of democracy and Buddhist thought is an issue that we cannot explore here). Historically, these traditions have, of course, provided important cultural foundations for diverse forms of government, from the monarchical and tribal to the democratic. The Abrahamic traditions have each supported democratic republics, though they have not always done so. Christianity has been used to support monarchical rule (the divine right of kings), but it has also been foundational in democratic republics (e.g., the founding of the United States). Some of the treatments of royalty are far from uncritical, as we find in the Hebrew Bible, which honors but also critiques the Kingships of David and Solomon. Today, Hinduism plays a cultural role, along with many other elements that include incorporating some of Britain's parliamentary politics, in supporting the largest democracy on Earth: India. The overall point still stands: these religious traditions support a culture for persons to exercise reason in crucial ways that enable democratic republics.

In our view, a philosophical culture supports a constitutional, as opposed to merely procedural, democracy. In a narrow, procedural sense, a democracy would include any society in which its population plays a significant role in governance by voting on policies or electing leaders or representatives. Two questions arise when further identifying a democracy: what if the "majority" is composed of only a minority of those people living in the state? For example, what if a necessary condition of voting is being male? Or a landowner? Or an adult? What if certain ethnic groups are not permitted to vote? A second matter concerns the need to safeguard minorities from a majority violating their fundamental rights. For example, in the German election of March 1933, Hitler's Nazi party received 33 percent of

the votes. This was enough for Hitler to form a government with help from another party. But imagine if Hitler received 60 percent of the votes and then acted swiftly to execute his main rivals and quite openly purge Germany of its Jewish citizens, executing them in large numbers with the support of an increasing percentage of the population. As Hitler killed those who oppose him, the percentage of support he receives would grow to nearly 100 percent. Under those conditions, would we classify such a state as democratic? In some narrow, lean concept of "democracy" perhaps we would, but our reluctance to do so suggests that the concept of "democracy" today is linked to a respect for individuals and a protected multiplicity of voices . . . it does not allow for an unchecked implementation of majority rule.

In "The constitutional conception of democracy," Jeremy Waldron describes a constitutional democracy that would be supported by what we are calling a philosophical culture. In a philosophical dialogue we need to assume (unless there is clear evidence to the contrary) that all parties are competent to reflect together about the nature of justice and that each of us has a right to be part of the great debates about values, especially as this bears on matters of governance.

> The identification of someone as a right-bearer expresses a measure of confidence in that person's moral capacities—in particular his capacity to think responsibly about the moral relation between his interests and the interests of others. The possession of this capacity—a sense of justice, if you like!—is the primary basis of democratic competence. Our conviction, that ordinary men and women have what it takes to participate responsibly in the government of their society is, in fact, the same conviction as that on which the attribution of rights is based.
>
> (Waldron 1999, 282)

It is clear that this conception of democracy is not merely procedural in nature. It is the kind of society that has confidence in the morality and maturity of its citizens, and thus does not allow for the blanket denigration of the minority that, in its exercise of morality and maturity, voted against some policy favored by the majority.

> A theorist of rights should not be in the business of portraying the ordinary members of a democratic majority as selfish and irresponsible predators. But equally a theorist of democracy should not affect a pure proceduralist's nonchalance about the fate of individual rights under a system of majority-decision, for many of these rights (even those not directly implicated in the democratic ideal) are based on the respect for individual moral agency that democracy itself involves.
>
> (Waldron 1999, 282)

Waldron amplifies this morality-based approach to democracy with his insistence that persons in a democracy have a responsibility to engage in debate in the course of resolving disagreements:

> Democracy requires that when there is disagreement in a society about a matter on which a common decision is needed, every man and woman in the society has the right to participate on equal terms in the resolution of that disagreement. The processes that this involves may be complex and indirect; there may be convoluted structures of election and representation. But they are all oriented in the end toward the same ideal: participation by the people—somehow, through some mechanism—on basically equal terms. This means that there cannot be democracy unless the right to participate is upheld, and unless the complex rules of the representative political process are governed, fundamentally, by that right. If some are excluded from the process, or if the process itself is unequal or inadequate, then both rights and democracy are compromised.
>
> (Waldron 1999, 283)

Waldron's concept of a constitutional democracy seems to provide an extensive political framework that would be supported by the practices of a philosophical culture as conceived of in the Socratic–Popperian tradition.

We may see that a philosophical culture is itself good insofar as practicing philosophy (the love of wisdom) is good in itself as well as for its providing a foundation for constitutional democracy. Even if there were no feasibility of a nation or kingdom becoming a constitutional democracy, a philosophical culture would still have value insofar as it supports citizens or subjects articulating their needs and preferences. A philosophical culture need not be seditious, but it could function as a vigilant, independent realm in which persons may publicly reflect on the value of their nation's policies and practices.

In the section that follows, we offer some further reflection on the practice of philosophy and philosophical theology in particular. But before turning to the next section, consider three objections to theological traditions supporting democratic republics.

The primacy of the secular objection

Arguably, in a pluralistic political community, we should not allow any one religious tradition to have leverage to impose its values on those who are not practitioners. John Rawls, famously, made political liberalism a secular arena:

> We are to appeal only to presently accepted general beliefs and forms of reasoning found in common sense, and the methods and conclusions of science when these are not controversial. . . . We are not to appeal to comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines—to what we as individuals or members of associations see as the whole truth—nor to elaborate economic theories of general equilibrium, say, if these are in dispute.
>
> (Rawls 1993, 224–225)

Rawls' proposal has produced a vast literature. Some question the boundaries and content of "common sense" and whether or not key notions such as human rights would have any meaning without some kind of comprehensive philosophical or religious worldview. But even if those questions are put to one side, Rawls' position need not prevent religious belief and traditions playing a key role in motivating and supporting a politically liberal society. What Rawls' dictum would prohibit would be legislative rulings being justified to one another on the grounds of religious traditions. This does not rule out, however, an over-determination as when citizens might vote to ban the death penalty on the grounds that it is a case of cruelty while at the same time citizens are motivated by religious reasons.

The monotheistic moral monism objection

Stuart Hampshire charges that monotheism invariably leads to anti-democratic practices.

> Those who accept the thesis of monotheism will believe that all mankind is subject to the same moral constraints, and that only one conception of the good is finally acceptable. Even if it does not become a positive duty to proselytize, as Christian missionaries do, and to act politically in support of the one authoritative conception of the good, such believers cannot consistently accept that many different conceptions of the good are, or in principle may be, defensible.
>
> (Hampshire 1999, 51–52)

Hampshire's critique seems wide of the mark on at least three points.

First, his criticism would apply to any conception of values, according to which there are authentic, true concepts of duties and the good as well as false ones. So, there is nothing particular about monotheism to complain about that would not apply to secular, realist accounts of values. It might also be added that insofar as Hampshire wishes to dispense with realism concerning values, he may be removing the philosophical foundation to complain about when persons unfairly impose their (controversial) concept of the good on those who dissent from such a notion of the good. If there were no objective right or wrong in this manner, wouldn't the complaint be as subjective as any expression of discontent in areas where truth-values do not obtain (e.g. to take a famous example, liking or disliking the taste of strawberries)?

Second, there are forms of monotheism or the sacred or the Real (as we have seen in Chapter 3) in which religious traditions accept the value of great, distinct religious traditions. For John Hick as well as for some other universalists (monotheists who believe that, eventually, all will be brought into paradise or union with the divine), there is a recognition that there are many paths to the good. In general, Hampshire seems not to be aware of how adherents of any of the religious traditions addressed in this book may have (as we do) wide sympathies for

incompatible convictions. We record here Stephen Clark's autobiographical observation; he is an observant Christian practitioner but his sympathies are wide:

> I am an Aristotelian on Mondays and Wednesdays, a Pyrrohonian Sceptic on Tuesdays and Fridays, a Neo-Platonist on Thursdays and Saturdays and worship in the local Episcopalian church on Sundays. . . . I add that I am strongly influenced by Mahayana Buddhism.
>
> (Clark 1977, 5)

This is hardly the posture of an overly zealous proselytizer.

Third, and most importantly, Hampshire seems not to appreciate the important distinction between truth-claims and respect for reason. Edward Langerak replies to Hampshire, making the point that one can meet his worry by recognizing the relativity of reasonability without falling into a relativity of truth in ethics.

> Pace Hampshire, a monotheist can grant that a contrary view of the good is defensible, even if wrong. Depending on the situation, error can be respected as reasonably justified as in the common parlance, "I think you are wrong but you are defending a position I respect."
>
> (Langerak 2012, 417)

Nicholas Wolterstorff makes an observation that supports this recognition of the permeability of reasonable reflection.

> Rationality is always situational, in the sense that what is rational for one person to believe will not be rational for another to believe. Thus in general we cannot inquire into the rationality of some belief by asking whether one would be rational in holding that belief. We must ask whether it would be rational for this particular person to hold it, or whether it would be rational for a person of this type in this situation to hold it.
>
> (Wolterstorff 1983, 65)

The hegemony of religious values objection

Let us describe the hegemony of religious values as a pervasive set of religious values and related beliefs that dominate all dimensions of a society through the political, social, economic, moral, and cultural power that they wield. In such a context there would be no one untouched or unaffected by these values (whether one affirms them or not), including one's personal relationships, social practices, education, considerations of the environment, even one's very flourishing. As of this writing, there are cases in Europe in which Muslim "extremists," resorting to violence, are maintaining that their particular understanding of religious values are the correct ones—and the only ones that should and will be tolerated. Groups like this do indeed hold to a "hegemony of religious values" in which compliance is forcefully enacted. Those who do not comply are violated, tortured or terminated.

This is the real and present danger, the argument goes, with all religious traditions, given the commonality of zealous affirmations of religious values and the not infrequent fanatical enforcement of them.

Reply: This kind of zealotry is not peculiar to religious traditions; it can occur in secular contexts as well. The secular government of North Korea is a clear case in point. The problem of hegemony is not a religious problem; it is a human problem. Religious hegemony can be dangerous; we are not denying that fact. But so can political, ethnic, scientific, and even sexual hegemony. We certainly don't want to eliminate politics, culture, science, and sex as dimensions of human and social life simply because there are possibilities of dangerous hegemony lurking in their midst. Nor do we think they are barriers to a democratic republic. So too with religion and religious values. In fact, as we have argued here and there throughout this book, we think religious life and values contribute to human flourishing, and thus support such a republic.

Philosophical theology in the academy

Let us return to our thought experiment in the introduction when we asked which of three tables it would be more fruitful to join in which religious traditions were being engaged philosophically. Imagine, again, each table has equal energy and intelligence, but at table A everyone is explicit and self-identifies in terms of their specific religious convictions or lack of convictions. At B everyone carefully conceals (or does not reveal) their religious convictions including their possible hostility to all religions. At C there is a mix. We indicated our preference for the mix. We thought C would be the freest philosophically. There would be more opportunity to learn from each other when some (but not all) felt free to describe their religious life.

As we noted about table A, such a scenario could make it more difficult for persons to switch positions on this or that topic. For some persons, for example, the more they reveal and openly discuss their own views about a particular subject or their overall worldview, the more entrenched they feel about it in that conversation. For others, to be truly and publicly open to a contrary position can feel life threatening to some—metaphorically if not literally. Ernest Becker poignantly expresses the point:

> Each person nourishes his immortality in the ideology of self-perpetuation to which he gives his allegiance; this gives his life the only abiding significance it can have. No wonder men go into rage over fine points of belief: if your adversary wins the argument about truth, *you die*. Your immortality system has been shown to be fallible, your life becomes fallible.
>
> (Becker 1975, 64)

Probably one of the fiercest critics of table B is Paul Griffiths. In his view, the effort at universities and colleges to remain aloof and not to permit professors or

students to communicate and engage in actual religious practices is poisonous. Supposed "religious neutrality" is often disguised hostility to religion itself and not at all neutral. Here are Griffiths' words:

> Too many of the philosophers, scholars of religion, historians, literary critics (and others) created by the university remain trapped in the iron cage of the intellectual's vocation. In this captivity they share a fundamental characteristic. It is the desire to mention (but never to use) the vocabulary, conceptual tools, and the practices of what they study. Mention preserves distance; its typographic sign is the quotation mark, and its prevailing tone lies somewhere between the irony of the satirist and the affectless *obiter dictum* of the newspaper obituary writer. . . .
>
> Indologists and anthropologists have done more to destroy traditional Sanskrit learning than ever Christian missionaries could. Each one sent to "the field," as it is graphically called by anthropologists . . . is one more nail in the coffin. The same is true, mutatis mutandis, for Africanists and African, Hawaiianists and Hawaii, and so on down the line. The damage done by university scholars to religious readers is not only great and inexcusable, but also dishonest—this last because it pretends benevolence and respect while bringing only manipulation and destruction. That unreflective and naive university scholars may believe in their own benevolence, and that their religious counterparts may believe in it too, and as a result not realize their own danger and not resist it with the vigor it deserves—these things do not alter the facts. Those who welcome their own destruction should be alerted to the nature of what they welcome . . . not helped to embrace it.
>
> (Griffiths 1999, 184, 185)

It is not impossible to strongly affirm a position while respectfully and reflectively listening to and learning from others who disagree with it. In fact, often the best learning and didactic experiences occur in just this way. When one does not engage in dialectic about a position that one takes seriously, how can real progress in understanding occur?

Overall, we believe that table C allows for one to be freer in thinking through issues and in expressing her or his own ideas, questions, and forms of religious life, and that it better fosters an environment for learning from one another and for truly advancing in the critical and constructive study of the various theological and atheological beliefs and ideas. In the next section we elaborate on further ways this general approach of dialectical openness may be utilized in the practice of philosophical theology.

At its best, philosophical theology should be nonstrategic

We use the term "strategic" in its traditional sense as "the art of generals," referring to the techniques employed in the military and extended over time to business

and sports. These techniques need not involve deception, but they often do and, when they do not, they are almost always applied in ways that are not communicated to one's opponents. In battles, football games, and market competition, one party often tries to look strong when it is weak and to look weak when it is strong (to paraphrase a precept from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*) to disorient the opposition. Today, there is a massive literature promoting strategic skills in business involving components that play a large role in warfare: deception, the use of surprise, misleading opponents, and so on.

We contend that among persons who genuinely set out to practice philosophy (understood as the love of wisdom) and philosophical theology in particular, philosophical inquiry should consist of honest, truthful exchanges in which persons do not exaggerate claims beyond what they think is warranted or seek to deliberately misrepresent the position of opponents, nor engage in a false humility in an effort to throw their interlocutors off guard. If truth does not demand or entail attainable agreement in inter-belief discourse, and we believe it does not, it does call for critical introspection, an openness to the viewpoints of others with whom we disagree, and a willingness to seriously pursue the validity of those viewpoints—even if that means we could forfeit our own cherished positions. It also involves being other-concerned as well as being self-concerned.

Consider the following account of openness to other persons as articulated by Roger Scruton. We believe that it captures why it is we seek to reason with each other and to develop arguments when we engage in philosophy rather than, say, try to change people's minds through manipulation or merely to make points:

> When I am interested in someone as a person, then his own conceptions, his reasons for action and his declarations of resolve are of paramount importance to me. In seeking to change his conduct, I seek first of all to change *these*, and I accept that he may have reason on his side. If I am not interested in him as a person, however, if, for me, he is a mere human object who, for good or ill, lies in my path, then I shall give no special consideration to his reasons and resolves. If I seek to change his behaviour, I shall (if I am rational) take the most efficient course. For example, if a drug is more effective than the tiresome process of persuasion, I shall use a drug. Everything depends upon the available basis for prediction. To put it in the language made famous by Kant: I now treat him as a means, and not an end. For his ends, his reasons are no longer sovereign in dictating the ways in which I act upon him. I am alienated from him as a rational agent, and do not particularly mind if he is alienated from me.
>
> (Scruton 2006, 53)

Scruton's depiction of alienation accords with what Peter Strawson referred to as taking the objective point of view of others. In his famous 1962 essay "Freedom and Resentment," Strawson depicts what he calls the objective point of view as one that involves regarding another person as a result of chance or deterministic

causes and not fully responsible (morally) for his or her state of character and action. Strawson's intent was to propose that even when taking such an attitude, one might still resent (blame, hate, etc.) the other person. But insofar as we truly occupy such an objective, detached vantage point, we do not so much reason with each other, but engage in quarreling, seeking (as in Scruton's example) to control the other. In Scruton's account of openness, Strawson's so-called objective point of view is put aside.

From a Christian perspective, this interest in the other goes even further—into deep and genuine love. Within a philosophy of love, as we conceive it, love has multiple types—one of the most important of which is beneficent love. This type of love is when the lover desires the good or well-being of the beloved. In the New Testament, a well-known example of beneficent love is when a good Samaritan stops and kindly assists a Jewish man who had been traveling the treacherous route from Jerusalem to Jericho (Jews and Samaritans were at odds with one another at this point in history . . . while en route, the Jew is robbed and beaten and in terrible need of assistance). The story is told within the broader framework of Jesus being asked who one's neighbor is. Jesus flips the question and asks who, in the story, is being neighborly (in the story several Jewish people had simply ignored the helpless man). His point is that the Samaritan is the one being a neighbor to the person in need by seeking his good or well-being; that is, by having and manifesting beneficent love toward him. Jesus thought much about love of this sort, as the New Testament describes matters, memorializing love in his summary of the whole of Torah: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul . . . and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22: 37–39).

A second significant type of love is unitive love, which is the desire of the lover to be united with the beloved. This unity or union may be thought of as a connection of souls, in either a literal or a metaphorical sense. Robert Solomon (2006) sees this kind of love as the manner in which, through love, the lovers reformulate and redefine their identities as persons in terms of the relationship. Though Solomon's emphasis is on romantic love, his insights apply to the unitive love of friends and others as well. In the unity he describes, a shared identity emerges in which the various interests, goals, values and virtues coalesce in such a way that what was previously two separate identities unites into a more or less shared identity. While this may be too lofty a goal for purposes of philosophical inquiry and the practice of philosophical theology that we are focusing on here, nevertheless if we take seriously not only the viewpoints of others, and seek not only to be open to others but also to value others for their own sake—desiring their good and sharing broad values and goals—we believe that the practice of philosophical theology will be much richer and will offer greater potential for actually advancing in knowledge and understanding.

In this section and the previous one we have been concerned with human-to-human relationships for doing philosophical theology. In the next section we consider the God–world relation and how our understanding of it might affect our thinking about a crucial social and global matter of our age: climate change.

Philosophical theology and climate change

How might philosophical theology influence our approach to the problem of global warming? In this section we first address Sallie McFague's model of God as divine embodiment and then offer a sketch of what we consider to be a more promising model: integrative theism.

McFague's model of God

In McFague's view, as outlined in her book, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming*, the plight of global warming is exacerbated by the classical, theistic understanding of God. She argues that an alternative model of the divine in which the world turns out to be God's body is comparatively more enlightened and helpful. We begin by critically assessing McFague's model and then we highlight some of the environmental virtues of what we shall call integrative theism.

It is our position that global warming is undoubtedly occurring, that it is at least partly due to human causes, and that without radical, coordinated global action, the consequences for many, especially the poor and future generations, are dire. One would need to be a conspiracy theorist of the first rank to deny the findings of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and the abundant, clear consensus of climate scientists about the facts of global warming. Consider the conclusion of those at NASA with respect to scientific consensus on the issue:

> Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities. In addition, most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position.
>
> (NASA 2016)

McFague locates the causes in terms of worldviews. She maintains that a number of key issues are in play, rooted in a theistic outlook: we have adopted a dangerous anthropology that privileges human life above all other forms of life; we have adopted a theology of a remote God; our theology is too individualistic, too overly concerned with the interior life, and too focused on salvation in the next life. Also disturbing to her is our tendency to operate largely from self-interest in keeping with neoclassical economic theory rather than out of compassion for others. McFague offers a sustained critique of these root causes, and she develops an alternative model of God's relation to the world, the incarnation, and the church. In what follows, we reply to her critique of traditional Christian theism, and then critically assess her alternative, ecological theology. While we suggest her view of the world as God's body is deeply problematic, we offer an alternative model,

integrative theism, which is able to speak to the deep concerns she has about global warming and the articulation of an ecologically informed Christian theology.

McFague contends that "a supernatural, transcendent God is neither faithful to the [Christian] tradition's incarnationalism nor relevant for our times" (McFague 2008, 3). She highlights the danger of thinking of God as a remote reality:

> If I imagine God (deep down) to be a super-being, residing somewhere above and apart from the world, who created and judges the world but otherwise is absent from it, then I will conduct my affairs largely without day-to-day concern about God. If the God I believe in is supernatural, transcendent, and only occasionally interested in the world, then this God is not a factor in my daily actions. Whether I treat myself to that high-emissions car is certainly not relevant to such a God.
>
> (McFague 2008, 31)

Her principal case against the transcendence or otherness of God is built on her conception of the incarnation. On her view, belief in the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ gives us good reason to see ourselves as living within God. In the following passage, McFague juxtaposes the traditional picture of the God–world relation with her proposed alternative:

> God is imagined as occupying another world while we human beings are sojourners on earth, hoping to return eventually to our true home in heaven. God is seen as spirit, the earth as flesh, and our task is to leave the flesh and attain life in the spirit. This is a strange understanding for an incarnational religion. One of the most distinctive characteristics of Christianity is its insistence that God is with us in the flesh, here and now, on our earth. Jesus Christ is the paradigm, the explicit good news, that we are not alone on the earth and that we do not belong somewhere else. God is not anti-flesh or anti-world; in fact, just the opposite: the incarnation says that God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being in as fleshly, earthly creatures. God does not despise the world; God loves the world, and expects us to do so as well.
>
> (McFague 2008, 34)

She delineates four models of a transcendent God that she rejects by way of leading up to her preferred model: the deistic model, the monarchical model, the dialogic model, and the agential model. The deistic model is "sterile, distant, and impersonal . . . flat and uninteresting as well as un-Christian" (McFague 2008, 67). Thinking of God as a King is also found wanting, for "A king is both distant from the natural world and indifferent to it" (McFague 2008, 69). The dialogic model is one that she finds in Kierkegaard and others who encounter God in personal experience. Yet, "It is too narrow, excluding nature from the God–world relationship and focusing fulfillment entirely on human individuals" (McFague 2008, 68). She is

more sympathetic with conceiving of God as an agent, but only if we think of God in terms of being embodied:

> What if the model was revised so that God as "person" would be not just mind, but also body? What if we did not insist on radical dualism between God and the world, with God being all spirit and the world being all matter or body, but imagined a model with God and the world being both? That is, what if the world were seen to be God's body, which is infused by, empowered by, loved by, given life by God?
>
> (McFague 2008, 71)

This brings us to McFague's preferred model.

McFague appeals to the incarnation in articulating her ecological understanding of God. Interpreting the God–world relationship based on the belief that God is incarnate in the world implies rethinking the issues of creation and providence in light of the world as internally related to God—the world as within God or the world as God's "body"—rather than externally related as an artist is to his or her production. The thesis is, then, that the doctrines of creation and providence have implications drawn from our most basic belief about the God–world relationship, and for Christians this relationship is incarnational: God is with us here and now, in this world. Our doctrines of creation and providence do not stand alone: they are offshoots of our deepest beliefs about the nature of God's relation to the world. If we believe God and the world are wholly other, we will see creation and providence in that light; if we believe God and the world are intrinsically intimate, we will understand creation and providence from within that perspective. An incarnational context for understanding the God–world relationship has implications for our response to climate change. It means that we and God are in the same place and that we share responsibility for the world (McFague 2008, 63).

We offer a critical response to this model below, but we note that by thinking of the world as God's body, it is important to realize that McFague seems to fall short of claiming that the world is the very same thing as God. For her, it seems that there is still a recalcitrant sense in which God is not identical with the world, but its source. For example, McFague writes:

> God is the source of all existence, the one in whom we are born and reborn. In this view, the world is not just matter while God is spirit; rather, there is a continuity (though not an identity) between God and the world.
>
> (McFague 2008, 73)

McFague explicitly denies that her model is pantheistic.

> This model has been criticized by some as pantheistic, as identifying God and the world. I do not believe it is. If God is to the universe as each of us is to our bodies, then God and the world are not identical.
>
> (McFague 2008, 76)

Elsewhere she refers to her view as "panentheistic," which she defines as "a view of the God–world relationship in which all things have their origins in God and nothing exists outside God, though this does not mean that God is reduced to these things" (McFague 1987, 72). She further distances herself from pantheism by stressing human agency and relation to God as other: "We are not submerged parts of the body of God but relate to God as to another Thou" (McFague 1987, 76).

Regarding her methodology, McFague is clear that her theology is not so much a matter of metaphysics as it is a matter of metaphors:

> I accept metaphor; it is all the theologian, I believe, needs. Metaphysical language—the language of certainty, of the absolute—claims to know God. But metaphor does not; it is modest. It makes a claim, but only with "assertorial lightness" or "soft focus," undercutting it immediately with the "is not." The world is/is-not the body of God. Analogy and symbol both make much bolder assertions . . . But metaphor is more a heuristic fiction than it is a metaphysical claim.
>
> (McFague 2008, 107)

While it may be somewhat unclear about where she does stand metaphysically, she seems clearly committed to the practical consequences of her model: it means caring for the earth, opposing a merely consumer orientation to the world, and it means recognizing that, despite the evils of the cosmos, God is in charge. It is not crystal clear what she means about *God being in charge*, for she does not commit herself to the view that God is a provident agent acting in history in specific events such as freeing the people of Israel from Egypt or Christ overcoming death through the miracle of the resurrection. But McFague wants to preserve some role for the resurrection.

> All that lives depends on God or comes from God; evil does not depend on God or come from God. This does not make it less powerful, less prevalent, or less tragic, but it does suggest that evil is not in charge, all appearances to the contrary. Christians believe that ultimately God is in charge: a doctrine of creation and providence without resurrection would be a doctrine of despair. . . . In the model of the world as God's body, God does not control all events, but God is *in charge*. We are partners with God in helping the world to flourish—or we can contribute to its destruction as we are presently doing with climate change. But in ways we do not understand but believe to be true, *we* are not *finally* in charge: God is, so says the Yes of the resurrection.
>
> (McFague 2008, 78; italics in original)

We suggest that McFague has set up a false dilemma by asking us to choose either between a transcendent, largely absent God or embrace her ecological account of the world as God's body. Consider first the fact that traditional Christian theism embraces the transcendence as well as the immanence and omnipresence of God. There is no place where God is absent. We have earlier defended divine

omnipresence or ubiquity in terms of God's knowledge, power, and affective response to the creation. So, God's knowledge of the cosmos is unsurpassed, the cosmos would not exist or endure for an instant without God's ongoing creative conservation (whether God is timelessly eternal or everlasting), and God is affectively responsive to the values of the creation as God delights in cosmic goods and sorrows over cosmic ills. This last thesis reflects the notion shared by a number of contemporary theists (such as Alvin Plantinga) that God is not impassable. So, it is false to claim that traditional theists view God as "occupying another world." God is everywhere throughout the creation and never absent.

Moreover, traditional theism holds that God is internally related to the world as a matter of God's love and superabundant goodness. McFague seems completely to place to one side such matters of goodness and love when she describes the traditional account of creation.

> That story, in its simplest form, claims that an absolute, all-powerful, transcendent God created the world (universe) from nothing for entirely gratuitous reasons. God did not need creation, nor is God internally related to it; it was created solely for God's glory.
>
> (McFague 2008, 64)

Traditional theists hold that God's creation is free and not determined (and because creation was not compelled it was and is "gratuitous" in a sense), but the tradition also claims that God created and conserves the cosmos out of love. The glory of God is further traditionally understood in terms of God's goodness and love, which McFague seems to bypass.

By way of a further challenge to the dilemma that McFague poses, consider the fact that most theists who do defend the idea of an afterlife are careful not to subordinate this life as a mere passage to the next life. Many contemporary theists (such as Jerry Walls (2008)) treat the very idea of a next life as integral to this life. In a sense, heaven or hell begin right here and now. If you make your current life (or "home") hell now, this is something liable to become magnified in the next life (according to traditional theism); likewise, if you make your life or home heaven now, this in turn would be something that may be magnified in the next life. If there is a next life, it is fully integrated with this one. Moreover, many contemporary theists now embrace the Orthodox view that redemption involves a redeeming of all creation. Keith Ward provides an overview of such a comprehensive theological vision:

> One must remember that the Christian belief is that there is an existence after earthly life which is so glorious that it makes an earthly suffering pale in comparison; and that such eternal life is internally related to the acts and sufferings of worldly life, so that they contribute to, and are essential parts of, the sorts of glory which is to come. The Christian paradigm here is the resurrection body of Jesus, which is glorious beyond description, but which

> still bears the wounds of the cross. So the sufferings of this life are not just obliterated; they are transfigured by joy, but always remain as contributory factors to make us the sort of individual beings we are eternally. This must be true for the whole of creation, insofar as it has sentience at all. If there is any sentient being which suffers pain, that being—whatever it is and however it is manifested—must find that pain transfigured by a greater joy. I am quite agnostic as to how this is to happen; but that it must be asserted to be true follows from the doctrine that God is love, and would not therefore create any being whose sole destiny was to suffer pain. In the case of persons, the truth of this claim requires the existence of a continuous personal life after death. The Christian will then say that his sufferings, whatever they are, help to make him the unique individual he is. To wish for a better world is to wish for one's non-existence, as the person one is. Often one may indeed wish for that; but the Christian would say that, if one could clearly see the future which is prepared for one, such doubts and fears would disappear and the resurrection of Jesus is given to confirm this faith.
>
> (Ward 1988, 104–105)

A traditional theist may well agree with McFague when she writes: "If salvation means the redemption of individuals from their sins so that they might live eternally in another world, then economics is not a central religious concern" (McFague 2008, 36). But traditional Christians have abundant reasons to think that salvation and redemption involves action and life in this world, including our action in economic contexts.

McFague also seems to offer a false choice when it comes to the incarnation. She seems to think that traditional theists hold that the goal of salvation involves leaving the world of the flesh and embracing a life of spirit, while traditional theism holds that God's becoming incarnate was a hallowing or blessing of bodily life. Traditional Christianity opposed the Gnostic teaching that the body is evil. The traditional teaching about the resurrection of the body is an extraordinary affirmation that human flesh is good and that embodied life transcending death is a great good. But if it be granted that McFague has set up a false portrait of traditional theism, that alone does not give us reasons for preferring the traditional model to her alternative, ecologically grounded concept of God.

One of the difficulties of assessing McFague's thesis is that it is unclear in terms of metaphysics (an arena she seems to renounce). We have seen earlier that she equates metaphysics with certainty, but that is not at all in keeping with historical or contemporary usage of "metaphysics." One may adopt a metaphysic (theism, naturalism, idealism, etc.) and yet not be at all certain that one is right. But if we do try to think metaphysically or (putting matters more in line with McFague) we try to unpack the metaphors of McFague's proposal that the world is God's body, it is not clear how to do so. Does God depend on the world as we depend on bodily organs? Does God think with any or all physical processes, in which one or more or all galaxies are like a gigantic (infinite?) brain? Does God's power,

knowledge, love, and wisdom, depend on the ongoing stability of the laws of physics and chemistry? Did God come into being with the Big Bang or did God expand with the Big Bang? Also, what might McFague mean by saying "Yes" to the resurrection? She clearly rejects the notion of an afterlife, assuming only this life exists. Consider this passage in which she employs a Biblical narrative that is traditionally treated as speaking about the afterlife:

> As we try to overcome our denial about climate change and accept the lifestyle changes at personal and public levels that it demands, we know that we are not alone. We live within God and with all the others who are called to share the feast. The human task, while awesome and frightening, is not ours alone—nature and God are there before us and with us. In closing, we recall the wonderful passage about the dry bones from the book of Ezekiel in which God asks the prophet, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Ezekiel, with what we can imagine was considerable hesitation if not incredulity, answers, "O Lord God, you know." Then God says, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." Thus says the Lord God to these bones: "I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live" (Ezek 37: 3–5). And so we too ask, can these dry bones live? Can our overheating, dry, and dying planet be healthy? . . . To the question, can the power of life override the reality of death? The answer is yes, with the help of God's partners, human beings and nature itself.
>
> (McFague 2008, 80)

But if there is no afterlife, "the power of life" seems to be a reference to our corporate opportunity to act in a life-affirming fashion. There is no repairing, restoring resurrection of persons after death. In this sense, the language of resurrection seems drained of its original meaning. While McFague's identifying the world as God's body gives one a sense of God's proximity, she leaves us unclear about what kind of proximity this amounts to. Can we petition God for aid in advancing the power of life?

Some of the reasons why theists do not affirm that God is identical with the cosmos include the following: God exists necessarily, whereas the cosmos is contingent; the cosmos had a beginning, whereas God had no temporal beginning; God is the Creator of the cosmos, whereas the cosmos is created; God is all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, whereas the cosmos is not all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful. If the cosmos is God's body, then it appears that cosmic changes may impair God. McFague agrees that God is not identical with the cosmos, so perhaps such reasoning need not deter her, but they seem to undermine the motive for thinking that the world is God's body. For example: why think that a necessarily existing being (a being who cannot but exist and whose nonexistence is impossible) would have a physical, contingent body?

McFague's key reasons on behalf of viewing the world as God's body in volve an appeal to Christian revelation and ecology. Does Christian revelation

(or Christian theology in general) give us good reason for thinking that the world is God's body? Scripture and reflection on the incarnation gives one good reason to think God is not remote but present in the cosmos, but this is a point that has been upheld by traditional theology without the further claim that the world is God's body. As for the second matter, does McFague's model offer us an ecological ethic or theology missing on the traditional model? Here is where integrative theism comes into play.

Integrative dualism and the promise of integrative theism

In *Consciousness and the Mind of God*, I (Charles) sought to defend the person-body relationship as profoundly integrated and yet not a matter of strict identity. This allows for the affirmation that a person may survive the death or annihilation of her body (and her body may survive the death or annihilation of the person) and yet in a healthy embodiment a person functions as a unity. The book, and subsequently published papers, seek to overcome the widespread assumption that dualism leaves one with an implausible bifurcation of person and body. As we discussed earlier in Chapter 1, Gilbert Ryle famously depicted dualism as positing a ghost inhabiting a machine (a body), and Ryle's student, Daniel Dennett, essentially raises the same charge. Antony Flew charged that dualism is in tension with our ordinary experience of each other: we meet other people in ordinary life, not their containers. And *tout le monde* thinks dualism suffers from the fatal problem of accounting for the causal interaction of person and body. In different publications, we argue that such critics of dualism get at least one thing wrong: sometimes a person can be so damaged that she is like a ghost inhabiting a body or a person's body can be like a container or vessel. But under healthy, ordinary conditions an embodied person is a functional unity. The objection from causal interaction (we suggest) begs the question. We do not see how one can *a priori* rule out causal interaction of person and body (in dualism). Obviously a great deal more needs to be said to gain a proper hearing for dualism, but as we have argued there are serious problems facing the chief rival of dualism, materialism (especially the hard problem of accounting for consciousness), and there are a growing number of philosophers defending dualism today. The important point we are attempting to secure here is the supposition that dualism can warrant a fully integrated understanding of embodiment.

In light of this brief sketch of integrative dualism, consider integrative theism. In this view, the cosmos is not God's body insofar as God is not sustained by the cosmos (the cosmos does not enable God to have knowledge the way your body enables you to have knowledge, for example) nor is God sensorially effected by cosmic processes (an exploding star does not give God pain) nor does God's power of agency rest upon cosmic laws (the way you and we depend on our bodies, laws of nature and so on, in order to act). While integrative theism resists any full-blooded metaphysics in which God is embodied in the world (apart from the unique incarnation of God as Jesus Christ), it upholds that God's affective love of the cosmos

does support a sense in which the world functions like God's body. So, for example, when the innocent are treated with cruel injustice, this may be seen as an act that violates God's will; it is a source of divine sorrow (and perhaps rage). And, as we come to realize the profound harms we are inflicting on ourselves, other life forms, and future generations, this action may also be seen as a way in which ecological upheaval counts as a harm to God's life and love. In this model, the world is akin to God's body and this is accounted for in terms of God's goodness, love, power, knowledge, and even experience. This understanding of the God–world relationship rejects the traditional belief in divine impassibility and insists, instead, that God is passable insofar as God is affectively and ceaselessly responsive to the goods and ills of the creation. The goods in the cosmos meet with divine joy, while the ills meet with divine sorrow. God experiences the pains, the sufferings, as well as the goods and the joys of the world. In other words, integrative theism can offer reasons why the world is like God's body, but we are not given such an account by McFague. By explicitly underscoring the integration of the life of God and the life of the world, integrative theism is able to explicitly renounce the charges of distance and remoteness that McFague launches against traditional theology. Integrative theism can thereby affirm the urgency and importance of ecology here and now, without renouncing the traditional affirmation that life is such an abundant good that it is good in both this life and the next. Integrative dualism also avoids the problems facing McFague's model, for God's life does not metaphysically depend on creation. God is infinite; the world is finite. The well-being of creation matters to God in virtue of God's love and goodness, but not in virtue of God's material constitution.

In response to our proposal, Jeanine Diller writes:

> I see that, even though God is neither embodied in the world nor strictly identical with it, God's love, goodness, power and knowledge of the world make it "like" or "akin" to God"s body, I think to the point of creating recoil in God when the world is harmed (for us, "don't hurt my body"; for God, "don't hurt my world"?). But how exactly—what is the mechanism or metaphysical basis of the integration—in your words, what are the reasons why the world is like God's body, what is the account?
>
> (Diller, personal correspondence)

In Chapters 1 through 6, we have sought to defend the intelligibility of divine power, elucidating the relationship between omnipotence, omniscience, and goodness. From a classical theistic perspective, God's power is basic in the sense that it is unmediated and not dependent upon any intermediary causal powers or laws. God's causal conservation of the cosmos and knowledge, for example, do not require any mechanism, nor does God's affective response to the cosmos (God's sorrow over cosmic ills) require God to have any corporeal or incorporeal mechanisms. In our treatment of divine power, we defended the concept of unmediated action; if action always required mediation (for your choice to do A to be efficacious you had to do another act, B, and for that act to be efficacious

there must be a further act, C, *ad infinitum*) there would be no action. For similar reasons, physical causation also requires the concept of unmediated, basic causal power. If this is correct, then the fact that theism recognizes unmediated, basic divine power is not philosophically suspect or capricious.

While we have been critical of McFague's critique and proposal, we believe she has done a brilliant service by challenging us to think philosophically and theologically about the world in terms of the growing, massive danger of climate change. We hope that philosophical theists might also be moved to take climate change seriously as we reflect on the philosophy of God and our personal, moral, religious and political responsibilities. We have fortunately moved beyond the days of Lynn White and his famous 1967 essay "The historical roots of our ecological crisis" accusing historical Christianity for virtually all our modern ecological problems. A sturdy philosophy and theology of Christian stewardship has achieved a solid hearing in the contemporary literature (as one can see in the work of Holmes Rolston III, Gary Comstock and others), but the threat of global warming calls for further, focused attention.

In summary, person-body dualism can offer a non-integrated portrait of embodiment. Under difficult, perhaps damaged circumstances, a person might feel merely tied to their body or feel that their body is like some communicative learning device. But dualists can offer a completely integrated understanding of embodiment in which the embodied person functions as a unity. Similarly, classical theism can endorse a distant impassable view of the divine (as McFague contends), but if we take seriously God's affective omnipotent, all-loving, omniscient omnipresence, we can secure a profoundly integrated model of God and the cosmos. Integrated theism is even able to see the cosmos as akin to the very body of God, though not with the shortcomings of McFague's admirable but problematic model of God, and as a model offers resources for responding to the deep concerns many of us have about global warming and with articulating an ecologically informed Christian theology.

Politics, it has been said, is the science of good sense, applied to public affairs. In this chapter we have been attempting to engage in philosophical theology with good sense (by loving wisdom) focused on matters of public concern. While the chapter has been crafted from "within" a broad theistic framework, it has been done so from the perspective of an "overlapping consensus" (to borrow a phrase from Rawls) in which fundamental political convictions that are assumed are shared by all reasonable perspectives that affirm the values of an open society. It is our hope that one day free and open societies encompass the globe and that, rooted in deeply reflective thinking about matters of ultimate reality and concern, they provide concrete and sensible venues for dealing with the most challenging issues facing our planet.

Further reflections

After reading through the following paragraph, reflect on what it might mean that we are at home in the world.

> Where . . . do we get a sense that, despite the problems of alienation thrown up by science and morality, we are nevertheless at home in the world? Where else, except from a sense, at times strong, at times fleeting, that despite all the horrors and dilemmas and problems, the world and human life are beautiful, and that this sense is not mere projection on our part? . . . it is above all in aesthetic experience that we gain the fullest and most vividly lived sense that though we are creatures of Darwinian origin, our nature transcends our origin in tantalizing ways.
>
> (O'Hear 1997, 202)

Some contemporary Christian philosophers, including Richard Swinburne and Stephen Davis, believe that the three highest types of love are self-love, love of another, and the love of two for a third, and they see this (following the thought of philosopher Richard of St. Victor; d.1173) as part of the glory of God as Triune. We concur. Belief in a loving Triune God seems to offer an enhanced, richer understanding of love than in a purely secular context. The loving of other humans is very good but only a shadow of the loving of this *summum bonum*. In the following passages, Augustine reflects on the notion of love as union with God:

> For our good, about which philosophers have so keenly contended, is nothing else than to be united to God. It is, if I may say so, by spiritually embracing Him that the intellectual soul is filled and impregnated with true virtues. We are enjoined to love this good with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength. To this good we ought to be led by those who love us, and to lead those we love. Thus are fulfilled those two commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22: 37–40 For, that man might be intelligent in his self-love, there was appointed for him an end to which he might refer all his actions, that he might be blessed. For he who loves himself wishes nothing else than this. And the end set before him is to draw near to God. And so, when one who has this intelligent self-love is commanded to love his neighbor as himself, what else is enjoined than that he shall do all in his power to commend to him the love of God? This is the worship of God, this is true religion, this right piety, this the service due to God only. If any immortal power, then, no matter with what virtue endowed, loves us as himself, he must desire that we find our happiness by submitting ourselves to Him, in submission to whom he himself finds happiness.
>
> (Augustine 2015 Book X, Chapter 3)

Here is a rather long but magnificent quotation from Plato's "Ladder of Love," culled from his *Symposium*, that beautifully describes the pursuit of what he calls "beauty." When he uses the term "absolute beauty" in this passage, replace it with "Ultimate Good" or, if you like, "Triune God."

> When a person, starting from this sensible world and making his way upward by a right use of his feeling . . . he is very near his goal. This is the right way of approaching or being initiated into the mysteries of love, to begin with examples of beauty in this world, and using them as steps to ascend continually with that absolute beauty as one's aim, from one instance of physical beauty to two and from two to all, then from physical beauty to moral beauty, and from moral beauty to the beauty of knowledge, until from knowledge of various kinds one arrives at the supreme knowledge whose sole object is that absolute beauty, and knows at last what absolute beauty is . . .
>
> The man who has been guided thus far in the mysteries of love, and who has directed his thoughts toward examples of beauty in due and orderly succession, will suddenly have revealed to him as he approaches the end of his initiation a beauty whose nature is marvelous indeed, the final goal of all his previous efforts. This beauty is first of all eternal; it neither comes into being nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes; next, it is not beautiful in part and ugly in part, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in this relation and ugly in that, nor beautiful here and ugly there, as varying according to its beholders; nor again will this beauty appear to him like the beauty of a face or hands or anything else corporeal, or like the beauty of a thought or a science, or like beauty which has its seat in something other than itself, be it a living thing or the earth or the sky or anything else whatever; he will see it as absolute. Existing alone with itself, unique, eternal, and all other beautiful things as partaking of it, yet in such a manner that, while they come into being and pass away, it neither undergoes any increase or diminution nor suffers any change. . . .
>
> This above all others is the region where a person's life should be spent, in the contemplation of absolute beauty. Once you have seen that, you will not value it in terms of gold or rich clothing. . . . What may we suppose to be the felicity of the person who sees absolute beauty in its essence, pure and unalloyed, who, instead of a beauty tainted by human flesh and color and a mass of perishable rubbish, is able to apprehend divine beauty where it exists apart and alone? Do you think that it will be a poor life that a person leads who has his gaze fixed in that direction, who contemplates absolute beauty with the appropriate faculty and is in constant union with it? Do you not see that in that region alone where he sees beauty with the faculty capable of seeing it, will he be able to bring forth not mere reflected images of goodness but true goodness, because he will be in contact not with a reflection but with the truth? And having brought forth and nurtured true goodness he will have the privilege of being beloved of God, and becoming, if ever a person can, immortal himself?
>
> (Plato 1951, 92–95)

How might climbing such a "Ladder" influence our ideas about community, culture, and care for the planet?

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