

Liberty University

DIVINE UTILITARIANISM

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Masters of Arts in Philosophical Studies

By

Jimmy R. Lewis

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this thesis will be unique, in that the issue is not to establish the most historically accurate definition of God, or of utilitarianism, or to gain clarity regarding an age old mystery in the field of philosophy. Rather the problem that this work will address is unique, in that it is a problem that no one seems to be concerned with. This is not to say that no one has ever addressed the problem, because a few men have, but those men was died over a century ago and it seems that their pleas fell on deaf ears.

William Paley is the most purposive agent of this argument, he was a clergyman and philosopher in the eighteenth century, best known for developing the teleological argument for theism. In 1786 his renowned *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* was published. This book was so respected that it was a required reading for incoming students at Cambridge until the twentieth century. It was in this very book where Paley proposed his theory of theological utilitarianism which expressed that God is a utilitarian.

Paley arrived at this conclusion by understanding that the world humans find themselves in seems not only tuned for life, but for the flourishing of life. Furthermore, Paley believed that if God truly is omnibenevolent, then He will desire the happiness of His people. Thus, given classical theism, God must consequently be utilitarian in His dealings with mankind. So, the problem that this thesis confronts is that this area of Paley's work (namely, theological utilitarianism) has been long forgotten in the philosophy of religion. To work against this problem, this thesis will attempt to reawaken the argument for God as a utilitarian.

This endeavor is not merely an attempt to resurrect a forgotten argument, but to answer a legitimate question about the nature of God which has not been asked for quite some time- and when this question has been addressed, it has been met with unsatisfactory answers. Paley's response to the question of "*what* does God do, and *why* does He do it?" seems, to this inquirer at least, to be the most satisfying answer to date. Paley responds to this query by stating,

When God created the human species, either he wished their happiness, or he wished their misery, or he was indifferent and unconcerned about both... We conclude, therefore, that God wills and wishes the happiness of his creatures. And this conclusion being once established, we are at liberty to go on with the rule built upon it, namely, that the method of coming to the will of God, concerning any action, by the light of nature, is to inquire into the tendency of that action to promote or diminish the general happiness.¹

Thus, Paley's answer to the question at hand is that God does what he does for the happiness of His creatures.

In short, the problem addressed in this work will be that there is a question in philosophy of religion that is not being adequately answered. Given the opportunity to answer this question, one may gain valuable insight into the nature of God and how He relates to people and the world as a whole. It is difficult to dismiss Paley's proposed answer to the question. It seems more than coincidental that the man which recognized that the world is finely tuned for life also recognized the way in which God finely tuned the world for the pleasure of mankind. He not only created humans as sentient beings, but made so much of what humans interact with, pleasing to the senses. This systematic design seems to reflect the idea that God creates and sustains His creation in such a way as to maximize the happiness of sentient beings, such as humans. If this is in fact the case (as many theistic philosophers concede), it seems to follow that the God of theism is utilitarian when it comes to His interactions with mankind.

¹ William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 48.

Statement of the Purpose

The central aim of this thesis, as stated above, is to answer the question of how one should understand God's relation to mankind and why God does what He does. The official stance of the paper is clearly that God is a utilitarian in relation to His dealings with mankind, but before this belief can be presented as justified, the paper must remove a bit of the stigma often accompanies utilitarian ethics.

Critics of this ethical system seem to appeal to the naivety of its adherers or to the supposedly weak rectitude that happiness/pleasure holds as the foundation for ethics. Much in the same way that John Stuart Mill had to refute critics of his day before making a case for the legitimacy of utilitarianism, this thesis will be required to disseminate false understandings of exactly what it means to speak of *God* and to speak of *utilitarian* ethics. Mill says to his contemporary critics regarding their misconceptions of utilitarianism, "Those who know anything about the matter are aware that every writer, from Epicurus to Bentham, who maintained the theory of utility meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself."² Utilitarianism may not be as poorly understood as it was in Mill's time, but it still carries a strong stigma due to misunderstanding the term. Thus, these will be dealt with in the paper. The terms "God" and "utilitarianism" are emphasized above because there is apparently some confusion as to the exact meaning of them. This is precisely why they will each be given a respectable amount of time within the paper, so that the unfair or inaccurate

² John Troyer, *The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2003), 99.

beliefs towards God and utilitarianism may be thwarted and corrected. This will be a partial fulfillment of the purpose of this paper.

Other than simply clarifying philosophical misconceptions, this thesis will seek to fulfill the purpose of providing clarity as to what sort of being God is. This aspect of the paper will specifically address God's relation with mankind and *why* God does what He does. This will illuminate –potentially- for theologians and philosophers alike what the underlying purpose behind God's actions is and has always been. After all, if the God of theism truly is omnipotent and sovereign, one would expect His interaction with the world to be meaningful and to ultimately have a greater purpose than simple pragmatism.

Furthermore, a substantial goal for this thesis will be to express that utilitarianism is not merely a matter of good or happiness, but it is a *qualitative* matter of good and happiness. This is to say that goods and pleasures come in degrees and gradations, thus pleasure/happiness in the highest goods ought to be what is sought by individuals. So if God is the highest good, as Augustine says, then one's happiness should be found in God, and that is what divine utilitarianism believes that God is working toward when He interacts with mankind. Briefly stated, the purpose for this thesis is precisely what has been stated here, to provide clarity concerning the terms *God* and *utilitarianism*, to answer the question of why God does what he does, and to identify what the highest good and highest pleasure in the world is.

Statement of Importance of the Problem

The debate concerning the ethical system of God, can be summed up in one central question, “Why does God do what He does, particularly in relation with mankind?” A proper conception of God and an accurate understanding of ethical systems is necessary for any

individual hoping to answer this age old query. The importance of this problem can be summed up as follows.

The field of theology is defined as the study of God. Similarly, a portion of study in the field of philosophy of religion is the attempt to understand God's attributes, God's nature, and how God relates to the world and mankind. If the question noted above were satisfactorily answered, then both of these fields would stand to gain in precisely the ways that were just described. As it stands however, the leading answer to questions like this one, is divine command theory which David Baggett, Jerry Walls, and William Lane Craig are contemporary proponents of.³ Hence the importance of this problem; the queen of the sciences and its close relative (philosophy) will both be more exhaustive and accurate in their understanding of God once they are able to answer not only what God is like or what He does, but *why* He does what he does in relation to mankind.

Statement of Position on the Problem

As stated above, the problem addressed in this thesis is not only the resurging a long-forgotten theory in the philosophy, but it is answering a crucial question for theology and philosophy. That question is, “*why* does God do what He does?” Answering this question springs forth many related questions such as, how does God relate to mankind, what is the greatest good, how a being like God is ensured of the worship He deserves, and more. The position of this paper will be that God does what He does (especially in relation to people) in order to promote the maximal happiness of His creatures.

³ Their support of this theory is palpable in works such as David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls. *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994).

To claim that God acts in order to promote the maximal happiness of His creatures means, for divine utilitarianism, that God has created the world and finely tuned it not merely to make sentient life possible, but to make it a flourishing existence and experience of the world.

Paley articulates this point more thoroughly when he explains that,

When God created the human species, either he wished their happiness, or he wished their misery, or he was indifferent and unconcerned about both. If [God] had wished our misery, he might have made sure of his purpose, by forming our senses to be so many sores and pains to us, as they are now instruments of gratification and enjoyment... If he had been indifferent about our happiness or misery, we must impute to our good fortune (as all design by this supposition is excluded) both the capacity of our senses to receive pleasure, and the supply of external objects fitted to produce it. But either of these (and still more both of them) being too much to be attributed to accident, nothing remains but the first supposition, that God, when he created the human species, wished their happiness.⁴

Here, Paley explains that if an omnipotent God desired to create mankind in miserable circumstances, then he would have ensured it, and that if God was indifferent regarding human happiness, then one would not expect such gratuitous good in the world for sentient beings. Given these options, Paley's work, along with this paper conclude that God must have wished and willed the happiness of sentient beings when he created the world. Thus, divine utilitarianism is the expression of this belief, that God is gracious in His interactions with mankind and that His sovereignty is exercised in order to bring about the happiness of His creatures.

Limitations

The scope of the interrelated topics connected with utilitarianism and theism is broad and cannot adequately be covered in this thesis; nor can the depth of utilitarianism and theism be

⁴ William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 42-3.

exhausted in one paper, so this will neither be the aim or expectation of this thesis.⁵ Much of the focus will primarily gravitate toward the relationship between the God of classical theism and the ethical system of utilitarianism.

However this thesis will not be able to cover, at least in any depth, issues such as whether God is obligated to create the best possible world, the problem of evil, or theological issues of a soteriological nature. The latter of these omissions will include the sovereignty of God. This is largely a theological issue and is far too deep a subject to be included in what this paper hopes to accomplish.

The omission of these issues is for the sake of the work and the reader alike. The length of the paper will not allow for such a thorough treatment of these issues; rather this thesis will act more simply as an argument for divine utilitarianism. This is not because these issues are not important; rather the reason they cannot be included in this paper is because they are such significant theological and philosophical concepts. Although they are important topics, they are peripheral to the central aim of this particular work, therefore they will be excluded from this thesis. In short, the aim of the paper is not to provide exhaustive information of all of these areas, but to provide a case for divine utilitarianism as a plausible theory in the philosophy of religion.

Development of Thesis

The introduction of the thesis will serve as an explanation of what will be explored throughout each section of the paper. This will include elucidations in regards to what terms

⁵ While I understand that Baggett and Walls do this quite well in *Good God* (particularly in chapter one of their work), this work will be a thesis and not a 200 page book, so these exclusions will have to be made, unfortunately.

must be defined before a thorough discussion of divine utilitarianism can begin; the overall argument of the paper will also be briefly expressed here.

The terms which necessitate clarification before much progress is made in respect to the argument for divine utilitarianism itself, are God and utilitarianism. This may seem pandering, but if the definitions or views of these terms are not agreed upon beforehand, then the argument for divine utilitarianism might as well be written in an indiscernible foreign language. When the task of defining or explaining the nature of God is taken up, the views of Anselm and Thomas Aquinas will be appealed to. This will provide a classical theistic foundation for divine utilitarianism to work on. Similarly, when utilitarianism is defined, the ideas of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill will be in focus; this will ensure that classical utilitarianism is in view.

The argument for divine utilitarianism will somewhat resemble the arguments of John Gay and William Paley, both of which advocated for theological utilitarianism in the eighteenth century. The argument presented in this work will essentially follow this outline, P1) Relationship with God is the greatest good/happiness a human being can experience. P2) God desires as many human beings to have relationship with Him as possible. P3) Utilitarians desire the greatest good/happiness for as many human beings as possible. C) Therefore God is a utilitarian because He desires the greatest good for as many human beings as possible. Following this argument, the summary and conclusion of the thesis will be provided.

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS MEANT BY “DIVINE UTILITARIANISM”

Introduction

From paupers to presidents, one’s beliefs concerning God and ethics have a profound effect on one’s life. There are few subjects, if any at all, that contribute to a person’s core beliefs and overall character as substantially as these do. In an effort to more thoroughly and accurately understand both the nature of God and the approach one ought to take in regards to ethics, the (seemingly, largely ignored) subject of the ethics of God must be explored. A properly executed and narrow study of this topic will provide philosophers of religion with a greater understanding of the nature of God; likewise, it will grant theistic ethicists a stronger framework and foundation on which to build an exhaustive theory of ethics. Finally, this study concerning God and ethics (more specifically, God’s ethics) will answer a question in philosophy of religion which appears to be—at least in recent years— neglected. Although the question in view, why God does what He does in relation to man, has been “flirted” with by the Divine Command Theory; it appears however, that this theory inadvertently avoids this particular inquiry.

In order to contribute to the fields of philosophy of religion and ethics in the way and capacity aforementioned, a process consisting of specific steps will be appealed to. First, terms that will play a pivotal role in this thesis must be defined. These terms will be God and utilitarianism. These ideas need clarification before the argument of divine utilitarianism can be developed. It is quite possible that there are many different conceptions regarding what is meant by “God” or “utilitarianism”, so this section will narrow and clarify these conceptions by focusing in on the classical idea of theism which was held by Anselm and Thomas Aquinas and the classical understanding of utilitarianism as was taught by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart

Mill. Once these terms have been adequately defined for the purpose at hand, the argument for divine utilitarianism may be presented.

Under the framework of classical theism, God is not only the Creator and Sustainer of all things, but is also omnibenevolent, loves His creation, and possesses all other great-making attributes as well; and in classical utilitarianism, it is believed that goods and pleasures come in degrees. If it is in fact the case that God possesses all great-making attributes and that goods and pleasures vary in degrees, then God *is* the greatest good and pleasure. However, it is not enough for God to be the greatest intrinsic good or the greatest utility- that does not make Him utilitarian necessarily; in order for God to be utilitarian, He must desire the greatest good/pleasure possible for the greatest number of people possible, and that is precisely what the argument for divine utilitarianism strives to convey. As the greatest possible being (a being which is omnibenevolent and loves His creation), God will desire the greatest pleasure or good possible for the greatest amount of people possible. It is the very nature of God to be utilitarian- it follows from His goodness. This claim may be contested as over-reaching on the grounds that it is unknown whether God desires the greatest good for the greatest number, but this work will contend that based upon God's goodness and personal nature it can be deduced that He does desire such ends. Beyond this, an objector to Divine Utilitarianism may claim that God is not the Good, but it is evident through the lens of classical theism that God has consistently been identified as such by prominent theistic thinkers.

Finally, once the necessary terms have been defined and the argument for the theory of divine utilitarianism has been made, the need for the theory will be reinforced. Arguably the most purposive theory that attempts to explain the ethics of God is the Divine Command Theory. The final chapter of this work will contrast these two theories (Divine Utilitarianism and Divine

Command Theory) and highlight what the former is able to explain that the latter is incapable of explaining. The three main ideas that Divine Utilitarianism is able to explain, which Divine Command Theory is deficient in responding to will include, *why* God does what He does, how God's necessity to be worshipped is ultimately satisfied, and theodicies. In a very straightforward way, Divine Utilitarianism provides an adequate explanation for *why* God does what He does (to promote the greatest good for the greatest number), whereas Divine Command Theory merely expresses *what* God does. In terms of explaining God's necessity to be worshipped, Divine Utilitarianism ensures the worship of God by free agents by appealing to God's sovereignty in ensuring this outcome; however Divine Command Theory does not guarantee the satisfaction of this divine necessity. Finally, concerning theodicies, Divine Utilitarianism is capable of accepting these justifications for the acts of God as the utilitarian constructs that they are—wherein God allows the ends to justify the means, but Divine Command Theory does not allow for this Machiavellian principle quite as easily. Following the defining of necessary terms, the argument for Divine Utilitarianism, and this contrast of divine utilitarianism and Divine Command Theory, not only will Divine Utilitarianism be more accessible and understood, but it will be seen as a purposive and persuasive theory in regards to the ethics of God.

A Definition of God

Defining a term typically includes elucidating the terms' origin and expounding upon the usefulness of the term in question. However, the aim here is not to create a new definition of God; rather it is to explore two similar and *widely* accepted definitions of God that have been established and respected for centuries. The definition of God which Anselm proposed in his pivotal works *Monologion* and *Proslogion* (around 1059-1078 A.D.) has been the standard by which most theists have understood the concept of God ever since. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas'

theological stances have been somewhat of a textbook for Catholics since the fourteenth century. This being said, the definition of God that Anselm came to nearly one thousand years ago (and that Thomas carried throughout medieval times) is still the definition that most people have in view when they use the term “God”.⁶ Simply stated, Anselm’s beliefs in this regard are not only purposive, but are quite attractive as well, as his influence throughout time is evidence of.

However, in regards to Divine Utilitarianism, this definition of God accomplishes more than simply establishing what the nature of God is like; rather this classical view of God also enables one to arrive at the Augustinian notion that God is the Good. This is to say that adherence to classical theism leads one not only to the belief that God is the greatest possible being; the classical theist will consequently believe that God is the Good. By this terminology (i.e. the Good) Augustine means to communicate that God is the greatest good in existence and that relationship with Him is the greatest good/happiness that a human being can experience. This point will be discussed more thoroughly in later chapters, but it is worth noting here that the classic theistic definition of God will lay the foundation for seeing God as the Good—and will consequently lead to the theory of Divine Utilitarianism.

Anselm’s God

Anselm’s God is commonly referred to as the perfect being, the greatest conceivable being, and/or the greatest possible being.⁷ Anselm arrives at this conclusion (partially) by means

⁶ This may seem like a bit of a generalization, so here is some clarification on this claim. When theists are mentioned here, polytheists are not necessarily in view or consideration; rather monotheists are the focus. Whether a person is Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, the individual would espouse the idea that their God is in accordance with the definition that Anselm sets forth in the aforementioned texts. Given this, it is accurate to state here that a majority of theists in general would accept Anselm’s definition, but for clarity’s sake, monotheists are those (the majority) which do in fact accept this idea/definition.

⁷ Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (ed.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87.

of the Platonic idea that there is a form or a definitive standard by which all things are measured.⁸ When one would claim that “x is good” or “x is a sheep”, Plato and Anselm would say that one would never claim these things to be the case unless one had a working understanding or idea of goodness and sheepness. In the same way, Anselm says, “for example, some things that are said, relative to each other, to be, either equally, or more, or less just. They cannot be understood to be just except through justice”.⁹ Due to Anselm’s deeply rooted Platonic conviction that all things (objects, attributes, virtues, etc.) have a *form* which is definitive of what is experienced of them in this life, Anselm most likely –and very easily— saw the next logical step in this idea as identifying God as the *form* for all great-making attributes. As a Christian, Anselm wondered one day in meditation and prayer why it is that “The fool says in his heart, there is no God” (Psalm 14:1). The chief mystery to Anselm was *why* it is so foolish to believe that there is no God, after all, this stance seems to be justifiable *prima facie*. Through his meditation, prayer, and writing Anselm came to the revelation of *why* it is so foolish for one to say to oneself that there is no God—it is impossible even to think this.

The impossibility of God’s non-existence is easily conceded once Anselm’s understanding of the nature of God is expressed. As was mentioned earlier, Anselm defines God as a being, “that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought.”¹⁰ He expounds upon this phrase by clarifying his Platonic view of God in the *Monologion*,

there is something supremely good (because all good things are good through some one thing, namely that which is good through itself). But in the same way we arrive at the necessary conclusion that there is something supremely great, since whatsoever is great is great through some one thing, namely that which is great through itself...And since only

⁸ The idea of the forms is not explicitly stated in Plato’s works, rather it is more of an underlying theme. It can be found especially in *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.

⁹ Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (ed.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 87.

that which is supremely good can be supremely great, it is necessary that there is something that is best and greatest—i.e. of everything that exists, the supreme.¹¹

This excerpt from Anselm's work displays his belief in God as a necessary being. Very similarly to C. S. Lewis, Anselm postulates that mankind would have no referent or recognition of goodness, greatness, justice, etc. unless there were a standard by which these characteristics were measured by—both of these thinkers believe that standard to be God.¹² Furthermore, both Anselm and Lewis convey that because attributes such as these are in fact recognizable, there *must* be some agent, some being, some thing which not only sets the standard for great-making attributes but is the greatest being in all of existence. One recognizes that there are gradations of great-making attributes, so there must be in existence one being which is the greatest of all; this being is the standard that attributes of this nature are measured, this being (according to Anselm and Lewis) is God.

Anselm has more to say about the nature of God than that He is the standard of goodness and greatness; he also commits to the belief that it is impossible for one to contend that God does not exist, and this is precisely what makes the fool's phrase "there is no God" foolish. If it is the case that God necessarily exists, and His nature is such that He is the standard of goodness, then God necessarily is (by His nature) the standard of goodness by which all other goods are measured. This all begins with Anselm's belief that God is a *necessary* being; a being which cannot, not exist. In his *Proslogion* Anselm essentially states that God is the being that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, so God does exist, at the very least, in the mind. However, it is greater for a being to exist in reality than merely in the mind. Making this distinction, Anselm states that God necessarily exists in reality if He exists in the mind. Further

¹¹ Ibid. 13.

¹² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 38.

still, Anselm claims “that God cannot be thought not to exist”.¹³ This is a two-fold answer for Anselm; it explains that if God exists in the mind, God *must* exist in reality, and that if God is the greatest conceivable and greatest possible being, then it is impossible for Him not to exist. However, there are arguments against both of these descriptions of God, so they must be taken into consideration.

As for the necessity of God’s existence in reality following from His existence in the mind, there is some debate in the philosophy of language as to whether the term ‘exists’ has predication or not.¹⁴ That is, it is arguable to claim that stating “God exists” does not convey any information about God, therefore it is a useless statement and does not add anything to God’s nature or one’s understanding of God’s nature. It has also been argued that “every deduction from a definition is only valid hypothetically, on the assumption that the subject of the definition is real. A definition, however, cannot be used to establish this assumption.”¹⁵ Those who hold to this view would express that claiming “that lamp exists”, adds nothing to one’s understanding of the lamp since it was clearly in existence and understood to exist previous to the statement being made. In response to this criticism, the classical theist would commit that to express the existence of something (i.e. “x exists”) does convey information about the subject.

For instance, upon hearing or reading the popular story of Tom Sawyer, it may come as a surprise to hear that amid all of Tom’s attributes, there is also existence. This revelation would

¹³ Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (ed.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 88.

¹⁴ Fred Adams and Gary Fuller, “Empty Names and Pragmatic Implicatures,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 37.3 (2007), http://www.jstor.org/stable/40232330?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

Anthony Everett, “Against Fictional Realism,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 102.12 (2005): 624–649, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3655676?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

¹⁵ F. Ueberweg, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* vol. II, rev. by B. Geyer (Berlin, 1928), 199. As found in John Hick, and Arthur Chute McGill, *The Many-faced Argument: Recent Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God*, (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 35.

certainly convey something new to a reader. Likewise, if one were told of an animal which has a duck bill, webbed feet, is venomous, and has fur; it would be reasonable to assume the animal described is fictitious. To the contrary, the platypus is quite real. So, to convey that “x exists” does in fact express something new about a subject which was not previously known; and for a being to exist is better than for it not to exist; this being understood, it is correct for Anselm to claim that ‘existence’ is a necessary attribute for the greatest conceivable being to have. Furthermore, the necessary existence of Anselm’s God guarantees the existence of God as the standard of goodness.

Another objection to Anselm’s claim that it is impossible for God not to exist simply claims that it is possible for God not to exist. This objection fundamentally ignores the entire nature of God in Anselm’s ontological argument though. After all, Anselm’s argument is called the *ontological* argument; by definition Anselm’s argument rises and falls upon the nature of God. As was stated previously, Anselm believed God to be a being “something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought”¹⁶ This is the point in Anselm’s argument where one must make a crucial decision, because this is when a dilemma is presented to the skeptic. On one hand, the skeptic (or fool) can grant that Anselm’s God is possible, but “in granting that Anselm’s God as a possible thing, we are in fact granting that Anselm’s God actually exists.”¹⁷ On the other hand, Anselm claims that to imagine God as a non-existing being is either to completely misunderstand what is meant by the greatest conceivable being or is intellectually dishonest. He articulates this dilemma in the beginning of the *Proslogion* when he says,

¹⁶ Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (ed.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87.

¹⁷ William L. Rowe *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2007), 51.

Even the fool, then, is forced to agree that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-*can*-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists both in the mind and in reality.¹⁸

As Anselm plainly expresses here, it is easy for one to understand the concept of God in one's mind, but to limit God merely to existence in the mind is by definition a logical impossibility since He is the greatest conceivable being. This makes Anselm's understanding of the nature of God clear; "no one, indeed, understanding what God is can think that God does not exist...for God is that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought."¹⁹ This understanding of God as the greatest conceivable being paved the way for the great medieval thinker Thomas Aquinas who would come over a century after the death of Anselm and carry a significantly similar view of God and God's nature into modern times.

Thomas' God

Whereas Anselm's understanding and definition of God can be adequately summarized as the greatest conceivable being and he clarifies that this being is the greatest *possible* being, Thomas holds that God is –simply put– the greatest possible being.²⁰ The major difference in these two men's views of God (at least semantically) is that the former contends that God is the greatest being that the human mind can think about, and the latter, that God is the absolute

¹⁸ Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (ed.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87-8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 89.

²⁰ Thomas, *Aquinas's Shorter Summa: St. Thomas Aquinas's Own Concise Version of His Summa Theologica* (Manchester: Sophia Institute, 2002), 10.

greatest being that is capable of existing. Thomas commonly explains his view of God by conveying that God has no potentiality whatsoever, rather God is pure actuality.²¹

There are great nuances within and implications from this view of God, but the crucial concept to understand regarding this subject in Thomas' theology is that Thomas believed God to be the absolute perfect being with no potential to be greater. In relation with this concept of God, Thomas explains that because evil is the absence of good, and since God is the form of good, all evil is merely a privation of His nature. He expresses this as follows, "As the term *good* signifies 'perfect being,' so the term *evil* signifies nothing else than 'privation of perfect being.'"²² This view of God also requires Thomas to ascribe to beliefs such as God not having a body, God not having any accidental properties, and God being a "simple" being, meaning that His essential properties are indiscernible from one another.²³

Thomas clarifies his beliefs concerning God not having a body and being a simple being when he argues, "If when we say 'God is good', nothing is signified other than that God is the cause of goodness in things, in the same way it should be possible to say that God is a body because he is the cause of bodies. Similarly, in saying that God is a body, one separates that he is only a being in potentiality, as prime matter is."²⁴ In other words, matter is spatially and temporally finite as oppose to limitless; this being the nature of corporeal entities, it is an impossibility for God to be both pure actuality *and* have a body. In this same sense, Thomas argues that if God were not a simple being, then one's ability to distinguish between God's attributes would be an observation of (for instance) God's justice ending at one point and His

²¹ Ibid. 10, 29.

²² Ibid. 125.

²³ Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 96-7.

²⁴ Thomas, *Summa Theologica* Ia. 13.2. As found in, Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 95.

grace beginning at another.²⁵ This is a contradiction within the being of God according to Thomas. In order for God to be the greatest possible being, God must be simple—which makes Him indivisible.

Another characteristic of Thomas' view of God is that He has no accidental properties. The obvious antithesis to this proposal is to claim that God has only essential properties. Thomas believes that God cannot have accidental properties, because yet again this would mean that there were some type or capacity of potentiality in God.²⁶ However, since God is pure actuality, He has no accidental properties, and the properties that He does have are essential and even necessary for God to have. The necessity of these attributes is not due to some type of a dependence that God has on them; rather they are essential to His nature. Without any one of His attributes God would be a different being than He is. It is in this sense that all of God's attributes are necessary and none of which can be accidental.

The glaring similarities between Anselm and Thomas' conceptions of God were carried into modern philosophy and are chronicled by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz when he opens his *Discourse on Metaphysics* by saying, "The most widely accepted and meaningful notion that we have of God is expressed well enough in these words, that God is an absolutely perfect being...it is appropriate to remark that there are several entirely different perfections in nature, that God possesses all of them together, and that each of them belongs to him in the highest degree."²⁷ This is the foundation that Divine Utilitarianism is built upon. This definition of God is that which has been regarded and held by many throughout the centuries following Anselm and

²⁵ Thomas, *Aquinas's Shorter Summa: St. Thomas Aquinas's Own Concise Version of His Summa Theologica* (Manchester: Sophia Institute, 2002), 14-5.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 15.

²⁷ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 1686, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, English translation by R. Ariew and D. Garber in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing: 1989), Section 1.

Thomas. In fact, it is renowned enough that when discussing the “idea of God” in *Philosophy of Religion*, William Rowe includes both Anselm’s and Thomas’ views as the framework for what he understands theists meaning by “God”.²⁸ The significance of the idea that God is the greatest conceivable being as well as the greatest possible being is indispensable for the theory of Divine Utilitarianism, and this is because of what follows from this understanding of God. For those who ascribe to the Anselmian and/or Thomistic understanding of God’s nature, God ultimately becomes synonymous or identical with the greatest good in existence.

A Definition of Utility

The aim of Divine Utilitarianism (clearly) is to establish that God does all things for the sake of “the greatest good for the greatest number”, but in order to determine the validity of this conclusion one must have a correct understanding of what the greatest good is and what is meant by utility. In order to achieve this, gradations of good and the identity of the “greatest good” will be explored according to Augustine and this will be corroborated by other theistic thinkers. Following this, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill’s belief in pleasure as utility and his proposition that some pleasures are higher than others will be explicated. Once these issues are considered and a thorough understanding of God and of utility has been established, the supposed and likely utility of God may be elucidated upon.²⁹

²⁸ William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2007), 4-17.

²⁹ By “utility of God” what is meant here is not that God is the utility; rather what is being referenced is what God Himself views and utilizes as utility.

Augustine and the Good

Throughout his writings Augustine discerns different gradations of goodness and recognizes God as the pinnacle of goodness. At the beginning of his *Confessions* Augustine describes and praises God by simply identifying some of His attributes, “Most high, most excellent, most potent, most omnipotent; most merciful and most just; most secret and most truly present; most beautiful and most strong.”³⁰ By claiming that something or someone is the “most...” one is assuming that some things are lower and some are higher qualitatively, and in this case Augustine is acknowledging God as the being which displays and exemplifies the aforementioned attributes maximally. This is no odd phenomenon in Augustine’s work either; rather it is a theme throughout his writings. In his *Soliloquia* he records a philosopher’s prayer, in that prayer he refers to God repetitiously as a maximal degree or standard of great-making attributes. For instance, “O God the Truth...O God the Wisdom...O God the True and Highest Life...O God the Blessed Happiness...O God the Good and Beautiful in whom and by whom and through whom all things that are good and beautiful are good and beautiful.”³¹ A significant distinction needs to be made here between the difference in ascribing an attribute to something and identifying something as the example or standard of an attribute. To claim that a judge’s sentencing was just is quite different from saying that a judge’s sentencing is now the standard of justice throughout the land. Here, Augustine has not said that God is good; rather he has said that God is the Good. In other words, when degrees of goodness are being discussed by Bentham, Mill, and other utilitarians, Augustine would claim that God is the standard by which they are

³⁰ Augustine, and Henry Chadwick, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 12.

³¹ Augustine, *Soliloquia* I.I.2-1.3 (BA 5:26-30); as found in William Harmless, *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington: Catholic U of America, 2012), 59.

comparing and understanding “good” by. God is not only good, God is the Good, and further still, God is the distributor and sustainer of all good things according to Augustine.

Augustine (by far) is not alone when he identifies God as the distributor and sustainer of good, or more specifically as the Good. Thomas explained in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, “Nothing... will be called good except in so far as it has a certain likeness of the divine goodness.”³² Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump go further in explaining *why*—rather than merely *that*—it is that that God is commonly understood as the Good, “the actualization of a thing’s specifying potentialities is, to the extent of the actualization, that thing’s being whole, complete, free from defect—the state all things naturally aim at; it is in this sense that the thing is said to have goodness.”³³ On this notion, if God has no potentiality and is pure actuality as Thomas contends, then God is rightly identified as the Good because He exemplifies “goodness” to its maximal actuality. Therefore, under the construct of classical theism, God is the Good. This truth is echoed passionately by David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls as well,

In some important sense we wish to argue that God *just is* the ultimate Good. This view, too, has a venerable history within Christianity. Thomists, Anselmians, theistic Platonists, and theistic activists, including such contemporary analytic philosophers as Alvin Plantinga and Robert Adams, all concur that on a Christian understanding of reality, God and the ultimate Good are ontologically inseparable.³⁴

This certainly establishes that in classical theism God is the Good, but this is not enough by itself to make a compelling case for Divine Utilitarianism. As was stated at the beginning of this section, the aim of Divine Utilitarianism is to establish that God does all things for the sake of “the greatest good for the greatest number.” At this point all that has been concluded is that God

³² Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I, Chapter 40.

³³ Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, “Being and Goodness,” in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 284.

³⁴ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 92.

Himself is the greatest good; in order to discern whether God is concerned with utilitarianism whatsoever, an understanding of utility must be possessed and that utility *must* align with God's nature and desire.

Bentham and Mill on Utility

The father of utilitarianism Jeremy Bentham addressed what he meant by utility in the first chapter of his political philosophy work *An Introduction to the Principles of Moral Legislation*. This chapter is opened with a section entitled "Mankind governed by pain and pleasure."³⁵ Bentham believes pain and pleasure to be intrinsically bad and good respectively. By this he means that pleasure is something that humans associate as a good thing and not bad whatsoever, and the converse is true of pain; this is how Bentham arrives at the conclusion that utility (specifically happiness/pleasure) is the basis of most human decisions.

In a later chapter Bentham observes that all laws either have or ought to have as their end the augmenting of happiness in a community, which includes the minimization of "mischief".³⁶ Elsewhere Bentham challenges those that are averse to utilitarianism to adjudicate by which other criterion they would judge or make decisions by if not happiness. In this thought experiment the objector to utilitarianism is told, "if there be, let him examine and satisfy himself whether the principle he thinks he has found is really any separate intelligible principle; or whether it be not a mere principle in words, a kind of phrase, which at bottom expresses neither more nor less than the mere averment of his own unfounded sentiments; that is, what in another person he might be apt to call caprice?"³⁷ This interaction with a skeptic of utilitarianism reveals

³⁵ Jeremy Bentham, 1789, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 26.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 11.

that Bentham had little regard for alternative principles which guide decision-making faculties. In fact, it seems as if Bentham sees these supposed alternatives as naïve and fabricated attempts aimed at disassociating with the term “utility” rather than aiming at truth. However, Bentham chose the “greatest happiness principle” to be that by which he determined whether actions, decisions, legislations, and the like are in line with the Good or not—because pleasure/happiness is an intrinsically good thing which is (by God’s design, for theists) interwoven into every decision as a determining factor.³⁸ It may also be noted here that Bentham’s “greatest happiness principle” is reminiscent of Augustine’s understanding of the gradations of good.

In the same way that goodness has different degrees, there are higher and lower degrees of happiness as well, and this is the criterion by which utilitarians make their decisions. As Bentham argues in favor for, utilitarians adjudicate based on what they believe will bring about the greatest good (happiness) for the greatest number. Bentham’s prize student and prodigy John Stuart Mill substantially expounded upon Bentham’s utilitarian ethic throughout his career and created a more exhaustive understanding of this ethical theory. He corroborates Bentham’s association of pleasure with utility vehemently when he tells critics of utilitarianism,

Those who know anything about the matter are aware that every writer, from Epicurus to Bentham, who maintained the theory of utility meant by it, not something contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain; and instead of opposing the useful to the agreeable or the ornamental, have always declared that the useful means these among other things.³⁹

Directly following his approbation of utility and pleasure being two sides of the same coin, Mill continues his agreement with Bentham’s utilitarianism. “The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals ‘utility’ or the ‘greatest happiness principle’ holds that actions are right in

³⁸ Ibid. 21.

³⁹ John Stuart Mill, 1861, Roger Crisp, *Utilitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 99.

proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.”⁴⁰ Thus, under a utilitarian ethical construct, an action is good (or in line with the Good, one could say) insofar as it promotes happiness. This explication of utilitarian ethics connotes that one’s decisions can promote happiness in varying capacities; the capacity of happiness which is promoted is dependent on the object or activity which one is involved with and its capability to promote happiness.

Bentham acknowledges that there is an obvious distinction in capacities of goodness/happiness in his famous (or infamous) article “Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number”.⁴¹ He believed as Mill did, that one ought to strive to promote maximal happiness in one’s decisions. Different from Mill however, Bentham had a list of criteria which allowed one to quantify and measure the degree to which some thing or action promoted happiness. Some of the criteria which happiness ought to be measured by includes: its intensity, its duration, its purity, and its extent.⁴² The former two circumstances are rather self-explanatory; however the latter two have a specific meaning for Bentham. By the purity of the happiness produced, Bentham means that the degree to which happiness was produced by an action far outweighs the degree to which pain was produced. The more happiness and less pain that an action produces, increases the quality of purity that the act is measured by. The extent of the happiness produced has more to do with the quantity of people involved in and affected by the act. In this instance Bentham is “tak[ing] an account of the *number* of persons whose interests appear to be

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ First published in, Bhikhu Parekh, (ed.) *Bentham’s Political Thought* (London: Croom Helm, 1973), 309-10. It ought to be noted that most philosophers refer to this article as “The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number” because it is understood that Bentham saw happiness and good as synonymous.

⁴² Jeremy Bentham, 1789, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 19-21.

concerned.”⁴³ Considering these variables certainly gives one a much more formidable opportunity to discern *how* to promote the “greatest good” as a utilitarian, but the question of whether or not God is concerned with these variables or if God promotes the greatest good for the greatest number has yet to be addressed.

Divine Utilitarianism in the Past

In order to adjudicate whether or not God acts intentionally in order to bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, it must first be determined whether or not God acts with a particular *telos* desired or with reason(s) for acting the way that he does. Leibniz remarks regarding this matter that in all cases God must have an ends for which He acts. He ultimately provides one reason for reaching this conclusion. Before he posits his reasoning for believing that God has a purpose for all that He does, Leibniz says that by responding to this criticism he is “overlooking the fact that this seems impossible.”⁴⁴ To Leibniz, this is an absurdity for any being, especially an omniscient one. Barring this reservation, Leibniz delivers his reason for believing that God cannot perform any action without reason for doing so, “I say that this action of God is at the very least not praiseworthy; for all praise must be based on some reason, and by hypothesis there is none here. Instead I hold that God does nothing for which he does not deserve to be glorified.”⁴⁵ It is God’s perfection and holiness as the greatest possible being which ensures that He not only have reason for His actions, but that those reasons (ends) be the greatest purposes possible, His glory through the praise of His creatures.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 1686, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, English translation by R. Ariew and D. Garber in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays* (Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing: 1989), Section 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Furthermore, another explanation may be provided here which petitions that God is a better being if He does have a purpose (and a consistent purpose) for His actions rather than the contrary. For if there is no purpose for God's actions, then He is capricious and His creatures are not necessarily ensured of His will for their good. However, this would make God less than the greatest possible being, and this has been shown to be some being other than God.

Understanding that God does all things with a purpose, it must now be determined by the adherents of Divine Utilitarianism what God's underlying purpose is for His actions in relation to mankind.

The foundational question that must be asked when adjudicating if God is a utilitarian is whether or not God is concerned with human happiness whatsoever. If He is, then one must inquire if God orchestrates all things to the ends of human happiness; if He is not concerned with human happiness, then one need not look further into the matter because God by definition would not be utilitarian without concern of human happiness. William Paley, an eighteenth century English clergyman, author, and philosopher published his *Moral and Political Philosophy* in 1785 after being urged to by fellow faculty at Cambridge. Following its publication, *Moral and Political Philosophy* was required reading for admission into Cambridge until the twentieth century. While Paley is renowned for his contributions in philosophy of religion by way of his discovery of the teleological argument for the existence of God; his most famous publication *Moral and Political Philosophy* has been largely forgotten by most philosophers. It is in this work that Paley reveals his beliefs and reasons regarding God's concern for human happiness.

Ultimately Paley appeals to his teleological argument for God's existence when answering the question of God's aim or ends for His actions. He explains quite plainly, "When

God created the human species, either he wished their happiness, or he wished their misery, or he was indifferent and unconcerned about both.”⁴⁶ Paley goes on to give a fair amount of detail explaining how human beings would experience each of these possible realities. For instance, “If he had wished our misery, he might have made sure of his purpose... He might have made, for example, everything we tasted, bitter; everything we saw, loathsome; everything we touched, a sting; every smell a stench; and every sound a discord.”⁴⁷ God, an omnipotent and omniscient being is well within His capabilities to devise a world suited for mankind’s misery, and this could have been achieved in *many* more –and much more offensive— ways than those mentioned. Fortunately, this is not the world that mankind finds itself in, so God must either be indifferent concerning man’s happiness or He is in fact concerned with man’s happiness and acts in an effort to bring about this ends.

The probability of God being indifferent or unconcerned with mankind’s happiness seems unlikely *prima facie*. Ultimately, if this were the case one would expect the world to be insipid, largely void of pleasure and pain, but this is not the state of affairs that mankind experiences. Nearly all (if not all) actions have pleasurable or painful consequences. Furthermore reminiscent of his teleological argument; Paley argues that “if he had been indifferent about our happiness or misery, we must impute to our good fortune (as all design by this supposition is excluded) both the capacity of our senses to receive pleasure, and the supply of external objects fitted to produce it. But either of these (and still more both of them) [are] too much to be attributed to accident.”⁴⁸ Paley acknowledges as well that the world human beings find themselves in is not bland, rather it is fitted for mankind’s enjoyment and flourishing, but he

⁴⁶ William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 45-6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

goes a step further to say that if God was not the agent that fitted the world for mankind's enjoyment, then accident is to credit for this outstanding mishap. However, as Paley explains in his teleological argument, and as is explained in all theistic arguments for design, the probability of accident being the cause of a functioning universe is infinitesimal – much less a functioning universe that is so well suited for human pleasure.⁴⁹ It is these two weaknesses in the divine indifference hypothesis which cause Paley to claim, “Nothing remains but the first supposition, that God, when he created the human species, wished their happiness; and made for them the provision which he has made, with that view, and for that purpose.”⁵⁰

It is at this point in Paley's *Moral and Political Philosophy* that Paley has eliminated the propositions which claim that God either had nefarious or indifferent aims in creating mankind. These eliminations left only the possibility of God desiring and aiming at mankind's happiness in His act of creation. For Paley, as the father of the teleological argument it is of no surprise that he appeals to its usefulness in his effort to establish that God is not only Creator and Sustainer, but He also acts in a utilitarian way in relation with mankind. It is by this observation of the design of the universe that Paley discredited opposing views, and it is by this observation that he establishes the strength of Divine Utilitarianism,

The world abounds with contrivances: and all the contrivances which we are acquainted with, are directed to beneficial purposes. Evil, no doubt, exists; but is never, that we can perceive, the object of contrivance. Teeth are contrived to eat, not to ache; their aching now and then, is incidental to the contrivance, perhaps inseparable from it: or even, if you will, let it be called a defect in the contrivance; but it is not the *object* of it. This is a distinction which well deserves to be attended to.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Jordan Howard Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and Against Beliefs in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 238-257.

⁵⁰ William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 46.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

In short, Paley is exposing the reality that for millennia theists have espoused Augustine's doctrine that evil is merely a privation of good, but have taken for granted the reciprocal implication of this statement. Paley is uncovering a powerful yet obvious truth that God is not only good, He is the Good, and any evil in the world is a deviation from or privation of His design. Therefore it follows that an ends (telos, purpose, etc.) which God desires of His actions is the common good of mankind.

This brings Paley to his final assertion on the matter of God's will. Recall that the entire purpose of adjudicating whether God created with the purpose of human happiness, misery, or neither was to discern which of these aligns with God's will. With this in view, Paley says,

We conclude, therefore, that God wills and wishes the happiness of his creatures. And this conclusion being once established, we are at liberty to go on with the rule built upon it, namely, 'that the method of coming at the will of God, concerning any action, by the light of nature, is to inquire into the tendency of that action to promote or diminish the general happiness.'⁵²

Ultimately, Paley arrives at Divine Utilitarianism by observing the world and its regularities, and recognizing that God created intentionally with mankind's happiness and flourishing in mind. Paley rightfully determines that God would have been well within His capabilities to create a world *much* less hospitable for mankind, but that is not the state of affairs that the human species finds itself in. Rather, the world is created –seemingly— for the ends of human happiness and thriving. Leibniz records a similar understanding of a connection between God's nature and human happiness and articulates this discovery as follows, "God, possessing infinite wisdom, acts in the most perfect manner, not only metaphysically, but also morally speaking, and that, with respect to ourselves, we can say that the more enlightened and informed we are about God's

⁵² Ibid. 48.

works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and in complete conformity with what we might have desired.”⁵³ It is from this shared observation that Paley determines that God wills for the common good of mankind and that it follows that God is a utilitarian in His actions relating to mankind.

Although an unpopular stance throughout history, Divine Utilitarianism was held by another eighteenth century English philosopher as well.⁵⁴ John Gay ascribed to Divine Utilitarianism in his work *A Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle and Immediate Criterion of Virtue*.⁵⁵ Although Gay arrives at Divine Utilitarianism by means of a different argument, he expresses the same conclusion and attempts to promulgate the same understanding of God and ethics that Paley does in his treatment of the issue. Gay argues, “Now it is evident from the nature of God, viz. his being infinitely happy in himself from all eternity, and from his goodness manifested in his works, that he could have no other design in creating mankind than their happiness; and therefore he wills their happiness; therefore the means of their happiness.”⁵⁶ Whereas Paley appealed to God’s creation as evidence for his being a utilitarian; Gay appeals to God’s nature and His continued interaction with creation as evidence of Divine Utilitarianism. God was happy throughout eternity past (since God is pure actuality, and happiness/pleasure is a

⁵³ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 1686, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, English translation by R. Ariew and D. Garber in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays* (Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing: 1989), Section 1.

⁵⁴ Divine Utilitarianism was also held by Richard Cumberland of the seventeenth century, but his contribution to the theory is not as necessary for understanding the theory as Paley’s and Gay’s. However his influence ought to at the very least be noted here. His contribution may be found in, Richard Cumberland, 1672, *De Legibus Naturae Disquisitio Philosophica*, London. English translation by John Maxwell, *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature*, 1727, reprinted (New York, Garland, 1978).

⁵⁵ It is of some significance to note here that both Paley and Gay appeal to and propagate Divine Utilitarianism in moral and political works; this is to say that they are using the idea of God as a utilitarian in order to set a foundation and precedent for human morality. Nonetheless, this does not diminish their belief or reasoning for understanding God as a utilitarian being.

⁵⁶ John Gay, 1731, *A Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle and Immediate Criterion of Virtue*, In David Daiches Raphael, *British Moralists, 1650-1800: Hume* Vol. 2 (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1969), 273.

great-making attribute, one may justifiably assume this), therefore one is warranted in assuming that God desired happiness to be experienced by His creatures as well. This point is further understood by observation of God's interactions with His creation, or His "works" as Gay calls them.

One does not observe a devastating tornado or the subjugation of a body by a cancerous disease and remark upon it "what a miracle, thank God." This would equate to nonsense in this world; rather as Paley says, these instances of evil are merely privations of God's goodness in this world. This is why the term miracle is reserved for instances such as tornadoes redirecting their routes to miss a home or a crop, or for cases of terminal cancers being reversed. These are the types of situations that are coined miraculous and related with God, and these are the types of circumstances Gay is referring to when he says, "His goodness manifested in his works"⁵⁷ In Gay's eyes, it is God's nature and the occasions wherein God chooses to intervene with creation that renown His goodness and are evidence of His zeal for the happiness for mankind.

Paley and Gay's arguments for Divine Utilitarianism appeal to widely accepted beliefs in theism such as God creating, God being happy in and through Himself, and God performing miracles in the world. However, these thinkers add that God created in such a way that it promotes the common happiness of mankind, that God being Good desires mankind to experience happiness similar to the way that He does, and that miracles are evidence of God interfering with the world in order to bring about a greater intensity, duration, and/or extent of human happiness. These motivations are not averse to the nature of God; rather they are aligned with God's nature and make good sense of many of God's actions. In the same way that these

⁵⁷ Ibid.

arguments interact with God's nature in order to arrive at answers for questions such as, why does God do what He does in relation to mankind or what is God's motivation when He acts; a new argument for Divine Utilitarianism will appeal to God's nature (particularly the classical understanding of God as the Good) in an effort to answer whether God is utilitarian in His ethics and *why* God does what He does.

New Divine Utilitarianism

This new argument for Divine Utilitarianism does not counteract or cancel out the arguments on the theory's behalf from the past, rather it approaches the topic from a different angle so to speak and is therefore capable of answering different –yet germane— questions on the topic. This new Divine Utilitarianism may be summarized as follows, P1) Relationship with God is the greatest good/happiness a human being can experience. P2) God desires as many human beings to have relationship with Him as possible. P3) Utilitarians desire the greatest good/happiness for as many human beings as possible. C) Therefore God is a utilitarian because He desires the greatest good for as many human beings as possible. Although the premises of this argument have been available and even agreed upon for centuries they have never been combined in order to make an argument for God as a utilitarian. Furthermore there are arguments (such as Paley's and Gay's) for Divine Utilitarianism –as has been shown above— however they do not use the same reasons that are used in new Divine Utilitarianism. Thus although neither the premises nor the conclusion of this argument are novel, their combination and formulation as an argument are. This is precisely what makes new Divine Utilitarianism *new*. These phrases have not been argued for before, collectively. This being recognized, there must be a reason that these phrases have not been argued for collectively. This is either because their correlation was unrecognized, their conclusion was undesirable, or a component of or the entire argument is

fallacious. The aim of this presentation of new Divine Utilitarianism is to put these suppositions to rest and establish good reasons for believing that God does all things for the sake of the greatest good for the greatest number.

Relationship with God is the greatest good/happiness a human being can experience.

It was claimed earlier (corroborated by Augustine and Thomas) that God is the Good. If this is in fact the case as classical theism attests, then it is a mere tautology to claim that relationship between God and human beings is the greatest good that humans can hope to attain. A review of the literature concerning classical theism and God as the Good exhibits a clear link between these claims. This idea of relationship with God as the greatest good for sentient, rational, free beings appears to necessarily follow in classical theism for thinkers such as Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas. Each of these men express their passionate belief that relationship with God is the greatest good humans can experience.

Joseph Clair explains in his recent research on Augustine's concept of the Good that, "Augustine's conception of ethical goodness is also interwoven with his account of happiness. The highest good for humankind—a happy life—is achieved when one clings to the supreme good."⁵⁸ Augustine corroborates this when he says of God, "He is the source of our happiness and the very end of all our aspirations... We pursue Him with our love so that when we reach Him we may rest in perfect happiness in the One who is our goal."⁵⁹ Anselm dedicates the final four sections of his *Proslogion* to understanding the extent of God's goodness and the degree to

⁵⁸ Joseph Clair, "Degrees of Good," In *Discerning the Good in the Letters and Sermons of Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Scholarship Online, 2016), 3. Accessed April 4, 2017. <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198757764.001.0001/acprof-9780198757764-chapter-2>.

⁵⁹ Augustine, Gerald G. Walsh, and Grace Monahan, *The city of God Books VIII-XVI* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 121.

which relationship with Him brings joy and happiness to human beings. He begins by asking, “If particular goods are enjoyable, consider carefully how enjoyable is that good which contains the joyfulness of all goods; not such as we have experienced in created things, but as different from this as the Creator differs from the creature.”⁶⁰ He answers his own query in the following section of the *Proslogion* by expressing that, “to the degree that each one loves some other, so he will rejoice in the good of that other; therefore, just as each one in that perfect happiness will love God incomparably more than himself and all others with him, so he will rejoice immeasurably more over the happiness of God than over his own happiness and that of all the others with him.”⁶¹ Anslem’s answer as to the quantity of joy that is experienced when in relation to God is essentially that one’s joy is only limited by the capacity in which one loves God. As the source of happiness and the Good, relationship with God is an incomprehensible joy, and the closer one is to God, the more joy one will experience. Thomas corroborates this position thoroughly and concisely in his *Shorter Summa*, “This ultimate end of man we call *beatitudo*. For a man’s happiness or beatitude consists in the vision whereby he sees God in His essence. Of course, man is far below God in the perfection of his beatitude. For God has this beatitude by his very nature, whereas man attains beatitude by being admitted to a share in the divine light.”⁶² Again, it is consistently attested to that the *telos* of man is happiness and that this is found ultimately in the God of classical theism.

All human decisions result in either greater pleasure and lesser pain, or the inverse; this includes the relationships that human beings choose to participate in, these have the same effect

⁶⁰ Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (ed.) *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 101.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 103.

⁶² Thomas, *Aquinas's Shorter Summa: St. Thomas Aquinas's Own Concise Version of His Summa Theologica* (Manchester: Sophia Institute, 2002), 119.

on one's experience of pleasure and pain. God is the greatest being in existence, He is the Good and there is no privation of goodness in God since He is pure actuality. Furthermore, God is the source of happiness. Therefore relationship between human beings and God results in the greatest amount of happiness (and good) that can be experienced by human beings. John Wesley's corroboration of this theory is expressed in an anthology of his works, "no account of human flourishing is complete that doesn't include communion with God, man's *summum bonum* is impossible apart from reconciliation and fellowship with God."⁶³ This is clearly not merely an ancient or medieval concept either; happiness in God has been seen by popular theists as the purpose of human existence as recently as the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Well known Cambridge and Oxford professor as well as prolific author, C. S. Lewis ascribes to this view of human satisfaction and the happiness that relationship with God provides throughout his writings. He remarks on the subject saying that, "out of that hopeless attempt [to find a substitute for God] has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy."⁶⁴ This passage displays Lewis' understanding of history and the societies and individuals throughout that have all attempted to replace God with what is (by comparison) fleeting, frivolous, and unsatisfying. This quotation as well as others throughout Lewis' writings convey the idea that although there are actions and objects which arouse one's affections, these ultimately amount to "mud pies in a slum."⁶⁵ The actions and objects that produce happiness in human beings do so in direct proportion that they

⁶³ *The Works of John Wesley*, (ed.) Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 2:510.

⁶⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 49.

⁶⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 26.

reflect the goodness of God and the happiness that He produces.⁶⁶ God created the world in this way (according to Lewis) in order to provoke a longing within human beings that only God can fulfill. Humans consistently interact with objects and actions which bring about happiness, but only as a reflection of the happiness that Augustine, Anselm, Thomas, and Lewis claim as the *greatest* happiness. David Baggett and Jerry Walls contend that even the concept of morality is a construct built into this world that provokes longing in human beings for relationship with God. In their book dedicated to the topic of God and ethics they state that, “The voice of morality is the call of God to return to our only true and ultimate source of happiness.”⁶⁷ Given these attestations of the happiness that follows from relationship with God; it is well founded to propose that *relationship with God is the greatest good/happiness a human being can experience.*

God desires as many human beings to have relationship with Him as possible.

There are at least three major reasons for believing that the above statement is true. Firstly, God’s nature (i.e. His goodness, His benevolence, His grace, etc.) is such that He could not desire other than the maximization of these attributes as expressed in relation to other beings. Secondly, God desires the happiness of His creatures, as claimed by William Paley. Finally, one of God’s great-making attributes is that He is a personal being, meaning that He necessarily has relationships with other beings and desires these relationships. These further explanations of God’s nature taken singularly would be arguably purposive enough to merit a significant response regarding the validity of the above statement, however taken as an aggregate they work

⁶⁶ Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I, chap. 40.

⁶⁷ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 185.

to provide a cumulative case for God's desire to have relationship with as many rational, sentient, and free beings as possible.

Before these reasons are explored some explanation may be necessary for the sake of clarity. In particular, the notion of what is "possible" in regard to the issue at hand (relationship with God). Furthermore there may be some necessity for clarity as to what is meant by "relationship" with God as well. As to the former ambiguity of God desiring as many human beings to have relationship with Him *as possible*; the confusion arises in this terminology that connotes a limitation as to the quantity of human beings which may have relationship with God. One's initial impulse upon hearing this qualifier of possibility is to inquire *why* relationship with God is limited in any capacity.

This is a warranted skepticism. After all, if God truly is pure actuality and the greatest possible being, then it is contradictory to claim that there is some type of limitation to or deficiency in His goodness or power. This elicits an age-old question in philosophy. This question is usually poised in regard to God's nature and the problem of evil, but with a bit of augmenting, the question accurately addresses the concern felt when it is said that God desires as many human beings to have relationship with Him *as possible*. "Is he willing to [have relationship with man], but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then [do not all men have relationship with God]?"⁶⁸ The limitation of who or how many may have relationship with God must therefore be on the recipients (human beings) and not on the initiator (God), if God is the greatest possible being. Although God is the Good, the source of happiness, and the ends for which mankind was

⁶⁸ A paraphrase of Epicurus, by David Hume, in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, translation by R. Ariew and D. Garber in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing: 1989), 626.

created, it is inevitable that significantly free, sentient, and rational beings will forego this Source and settle for mere reflections or imitations of the happiness that relationship with God provides.⁶⁹ This is due to the human's natural propensity to inaccurately assess qualitative value in terms of goodness.

Human beings are lower than their Creator in –all regards, but particularly in view here is— rationality and morality, so their ability to correctly assess what is good and even more so what is the greatest Good is considerably diminished. It is this inability that apprehends the human mind and affections. Another explanation for this disclaimer of possibility has to do with the nature of relationships. It would be unethical for God to force anyone into relationship with Him. So for those human beings that attend to lower happiness than is found in God, He does not suppress or diminish their will in order to achieve relationship with them; rather He allows their freedom to be utilized in order that their personhood may not be suppressed in any way. This in itself is a good act of God on His creatures. Even if a human being misses the boundless happiness found only in the opportunity of relationship of God; He allows their freedom and desires to be apprehended by other means. This is not God's withholding of a good, rather it is an act of goodness from Creator to creature. In this way, the stipulation that the greatest good is only experienced by some and not *all* of the human population, is not an inhibition of God's character but evidence of His abounding goodness.

Similarly, God's nature is such that He can do no other than desire *and* display His great-making attributes to their maximal degree. If God did not desire these attributes to be carried out, then He would be less good; as He would be desiring less than the greatest good for His

⁶⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 49.

creatures. If God did not display His attributes in this way (to their maximal degree) then He would only be the greatest possible being in theory, in other words, He would have potentiality, and there is no potentiality in God since He is pure actuality.⁷⁰

Moreover, God not only desires the maximization of His attributes, God also desires the happiness of His creatures does so for the sake of joy—in them and in Himself.⁷¹ For God to create beings capable of experiencing pain and happiness in such immense degrees as human beings and then to desire other than their ultimate Good would amount to cruelty. This would (nearly) be equivalent to a mother and father that are perfectly capable of providing for their children emotionally, financially, and otherwise yet being either indifferent or outright neglectful toward their children's well-being. God is not this type of Creator, He is wholly good and loves His creatures not obligatorily but willfully. In the same sense that it is a greater good for parents to love their children and desire to bring about their greatest good for the sake of joy (in the children and parents) as oppose to obligation; it is a greater good for God to desire the happiness of His creatures in this way. As the greatest possible being, God must wish and will for the happiness of His creatures in this way, for Him to do less would make Him a less great being, thus He would not be God. So God not only desires the happiness of human beings, but He does so in the greatest possible way.

Finally, a great-making attribute is to be a *personal* being as oppose to an impersonal or isolated being, so God not only has relationships with other beings but He also desires these relationships. It is inherently good to have reciprocally desired relationship with the greatest possible being. The closer one is in relationship with God, the better that state of affairs and the

⁷⁰ Thomas, *Aquinas's Shorter Summa: St. Thomas Aquinas's Own Concise Version of His Summa Theologica*. (Manchester: Sophia Institute, 2002), 16.

⁷¹ William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 45.

benefits therein become. It is better that His attributes be experienced by the agents that He creates than not; this makes being personal a great-making attribute for God. If God created, yet harbored His goodness for Himself and not His created ones, then He would be less good than possible (as explained above). A further note to be considered in this regard, some of God's attributes could not be exemplified without creatures, for instance God's grace, forgiveness, and justice. In this way, God has relationships necessarily in order to bring about displays of His great-making attributes. God is also necessarily in relationship to created beings in that He is creator, and they, His creations.⁷² God desires relationship with human beings precisely because He desires their greatest good. This is a two-fold act of goodness on behalf of God. Firstly, His creatures are afforded an opportunity to experience the greatest reservoir of goodness in existence and become acquainted with the ends for which they were created. Secondly, God displays His great-making attributes and they are accepted and appreciated by free, rational, sentient beings. Thus, *God desires as many human beings to have relationship with Him as possible* insofar as it displays His great-making attributes and His creatures are willing to experience the greatest good in existence.

Therefore God is a utilitarian because He desires the greatest good for as many human beings as possible.

As was seen in the survey of Bentham and Mill's literature, utilitarians by definition desire and act for the greatest good of the greatest number of people possible, and it was recognized in the study of classical theism that God is the greatest Good and happiness possible.

⁷² In this relationship, God knows his creation as detailed as a painter knows his own masterpiece and as thoroughly as an architect knows his blueprints. William Lane Craig reinforces this relationship and emphasizes the necessarily personal nature of God in his kalam cosmological argument. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 152-4.

Following this line of thought, the argument for the theory of Divine Utilitarianism states that one of God's great-making attributes is to will and wish the utmost happiness of His creatures since this makes Him a greater being than the antithesis. For the sake of tolerance and the pursuit of truth, let alternatives to this hypothesis be considered. If God does not desire the greatest good/happiness for the greatest number of people possible, then He wishes either a lesser degree of happiness to be available to human beings or less people to experience the greatest degree of happiness. Neither of these alternatives are plausible for the greatest possible being; for they would make God into either a nefarious being of the worst degree or a possessive potentate authority which is in some capacity indifferent toward human happiness. In light of these considerations and their implications, that relationship with God is the greatest good one can experience and that God desires relationship with as many human beings as possible, it may be deduced that *therefore God is a utilitarian because He desires the greatest good for as many human beings as possible.*

CHAPTER THREE: THE ETHICS OF GOD

Before this case for Divine Utilitarianism is closed a comparison must be made. After all, it is not as if Divine Utilitarianism is the only theory on the topic of God's ethics. The mainstream and far more popular view concerning the ethics of God is commonly referred to as Divine Command Theory. In order to honestly represent Divine Utilitarianism one must address its' alternative and determine which of these theories more adequately explains the nature of God in this regard. In this attempt to accurately and most thoroughly understand God's ethical nature as it relates to mankind, the explanatory power of both Divine Command Theory and Divine Utilitarianism will be assessed. The aim of this juxtaposition will be to establish the superiority of Divine Utilitarianism as opposed to Divine Command Theory in its capability to convey information regarding the nature of God.

Divine Command Theory: A Juxtaposition

This view of ethics supposes (and rightly so) that “the divine will is not subject to any principle, and God controls all truths including moral truths.”⁷³ As the greatest possible being and Creator of all that exists (besides Himself), God is neither subject to nor reliant on anything. Furthermore, as the Creator and Sustainer of *all* created things, God is the Creator and Sustainer of the moral law. The nature of laws is that they are instituted by a free and intelligent agent. This means that the moral law must have been instituted (or *created*) by a free and intelligent being, and since the moral law transcends humanity and is not reliant on mankind, it must have been created by some other being—the Creator of all things, God. Divine Command Theory not

⁷³ Simin Rahimi, (2012), “Divine Command Theory and Theistic Activism,” *The Heythrop Journal*, 53 (4): 551.

only claims that God created the moral law, but that the moral law is whatever God declares.⁷⁴ In other words, as the instituter, Creator, and author of the moral law, what God says is right to do or wrong to do is in fact the case, and these declarations are moral law because they are given by the moral law giver.⁷⁵

Two criticisms that frequently arise against this theory are the claims that 1) Divine Command Theory makes it possible for God to command evil actions to become good actions and 2) that morality is arbitrary on this view. The first criticism is easily enough refuted; it merely requires that one remind oneself of the framework within which Divine Command Theory works (i.e. classical theism). God, the greatest possible being by definition, cannot wish or will evil to be done; rather He desires the greatest good possible for the greatest number of people. This can never mean that God commands evil, for this would make God less than the greatest possible being. As for the second objection to Divine Command Theory, most adherents of this theory respond in a similar fashion. Baggett and Walls provide a response which explains “that all of God’s commands are deeply resonant with his character, and that divine command theory must be built on the foundation of God’s loving nature.” They go on to explain that because this is the case, God’s “commands don’t lack good reasons” and “Divine command theory does not make God capricious.”⁷⁶ So then, it is God’s nature and His necessary goodness which ensures that all of His moral declarations are good and that they cannot be other than good.

⁷⁴ Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷⁵ William Lane Craig, (1997), "The Indispensability of Theological Meta-Ethical Foundations for Morality," *Foundations* 5: 9-12.

⁷⁶ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 126-7.

What Divine Command Theory Explains

As expressed above, Divine Command Theory communicates two major ideas concerning God and morality. Firstly, God is the Creator, sustainer, and instituter of morality. In this way, He is the moral law giver. Secondly, as the moral law giver, whatever declarations or commands that God gives concerning moral action becomes moral law due to His moral authority as Creator and instituter of the law, thus providing an explanation of what is good. So the explanatory power of Divine Command Theory may be accurately and concisely summarized by saying that the theory explains *what* God does in relation to mankind and ethics and that it effectively communicates what constitutes a good or right action as well as a reprehensible action. In effect, this theory answers the question of *what* God does by simply stating that God defines the moral law and whatever actions are aligned with this divine will are good based upon their conformity to the divine will. However, merely answering *what* God does and what is good seems to be a fairly low bar of explanatory power.

What Divine Command Theory Fails to Explain

Although Divine Command Theory articulates *what* God does in terms of morality and mankind; this is of profoundly little use in terms of what one desires an ethical system to explain. As soon as a rather thorough explication of God's nature is heard, one might expect for morality to be contingent on whatever actions reflect the nature and will of this perfect being. With this in mind, Divine Command Theory does not come as a surprise to the person that understands "God" in classical theistic terms; rather it leaves the classical theist wanting more answers. One might even appeal that Divine Command Theory is a tautology for the classical theist, because

he already understands the Good to be God and good actions to be in line with God's will. William Alston goes so far in his article "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists" as to liken the phrases "is morally wrong" and "is contrary to a command of God" with "water" and "H₂O".⁷⁷ This reinforces the previous claim that Divine Command Theory merely purports tautologies for classical theists. It is the case that Divine Command Theory also gives an explanation of what is right or good, ethically speaking.⁷⁸ However, again, this is a tautology for classical theists that follow the thought of Augustine, Anselm, or Thomas.

Alston goes further still with his criticism of Divine Command Theory by claiming that the theory suffers from at least two serious weaknesses. First, he cites the common objection to Divine Command Theory which was given a brief treatment above. This objection makes morality arbitrary depending on God's propensity toward capriciousness. Second, Alston contends that Divine Command Theory creates a type of Euthyphro dilemma.⁷⁹ He formulates this potential dilemma as follows, "Is it that: 2. We ought to, e.g., love one another because God commands us to do so. or is it that: 3. God commands us to love one another because that is what we ought to do."⁸⁰ In regards to Alston's objection of arbitrariness, what is at stake here is the objectivity or subjectivity of morality. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong expresses this same hesitation toward Divine Command Theory when he states that, "even if God in fact never would or could command us to rape, the divine command theory still implies the counterfactual that, if God did

⁷⁷ William Alston shares this same frustration with Divine Command Theory in his work, William Alston, 1990, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," In *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, (ed.) Michael Beaty, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: 303-4.

⁷⁸ C. Stephan Evans, 2014. "God and moral obligation," *Faith And Philosophy Christian Periodical Index* (January 2014), EBSCOhost (Accessed February 23, 2016), 28.

⁷⁹ William Alston, 1990, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," In *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, (Ed.) Michael Beaty. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: 304.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 304-5.

command us to rape, then we would have a moral obligation to rape. That is absurd.”⁸¹ The typical responses that Divine Command theorists provide in regard to this indictment state that the objection is predicated upon mere counterfactuals and non-possibilities, therefore the objection is irrelevant and obsolete.⁸² As for the second objection that Alston marshals against Divine Command Theory, the adherent to the theory must discern some way in which two ends are satisfied. 1) The establishing that neither the objectivity of morality nor the intrinsic goodness of God are impugned and 2) Divine Command Theory is true. This may prove to be a worthy challenge for the theory since it seems (as Alston has communicated) that the two –God and morality— are dependent upon one another in some sense.

Finally, if the answers that Divine Command Theory provides are unsatisfying and the objections to the theory are insurmountable, then one must seek to answer deeper, more substantive questions regarding the ethical framework that God utilizes in his relations with mankind. For instance, the subject of *why* God does what He does which is thoroughly dealt with in Divine Utilitarianism, but is hardly (if at all) addressed by Divine Command Theory. Furthermore, one may desire to associate an ethical theory with God which does not suffer from the objections of arbitrariness and a sort of quasi-Euthyphro dilemma.

⁸¹ Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality,” in Robert K. Garcia, and Nathan L. King, *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 106.

⁸² Baggett and Walls content this position here, David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132-3. Likewise, Craig expounds on this defense for the Divine Command theorist here, William Lane Craig. “This Most Gruesome of Guests,” in Robert K. Garcia, and Nathan L. King. *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 172.

What Divine Utilitarianism Explains

Divine Utilitarianism is deeply concerned with understanding *why* God does what He does. Although adherents of Divine Utilitarianism would agree with Divine Command Theorists that God is the moral law giver and that whatever He declares as a good or reprehensible action is as He says; the believer in Divine Utilitarianism would say that this is not substantive enough or satisfactory in explaining the ethics of God. Thus, while it does convey some information concerning the ethics of God; it does not provide an exhaustive treatment of the subject, whereas Divine Utilitarianism works to explain *why* God acts in the way that He does with mankind and ethics. The qualitative difference in *what* one does and *why* one does something can be clearly seen given a myriad of ethical situations.

For instance, it may be difficult for one to justify the actions of a person lying, stealing, or killing if one is only afforded an explanation of *what* was perpetrated (i.e. the lying, stealing killing). These actions may be swiftly accepted in certain circumstances though, such as lying to a Nazi officer in order to save the lives of Jewish citizens, stealing in an effort to feed one's starving family, or killing one nefarious person so that many righteous people may live. The only difference in the former and the latter set of actions is the context. This is to say that *what* happened did not change, however *why* the actions took place provided such a great amount of information that it often causes one to reconsider a strictly deontological view of these actions. This is precisely the reason that situations such as these are referred to as ethical dilemmas. In his "Moral Obstacles: An Alternative to the Doctrine of Double Effect" Gerhard Øverland expounds on this phenomenon of ethical dilemmas and one's responsibility to understand *why* an ethical action takes place. The totality of this article is dedicated to establishing that when an ethical action is taken by an individual in an ethical dilemma, there is a preferred option, and an option

is preferred when it minimizes cost and maximizes good. Regarding ethical actions such as these Øverland contends, “to say that it is permissible to impose a certain cost on a person just because he has a duty to bear this cost does not solve the problem of justification. We need to know *why* the person has a duty to bear cost in the first place...A [person] has a duty to bear additional cost because his presence gives rise to cost, and fairness dictates that he should bear some of it.”⁸³

This conclusion benefits the case for Divine Utilitarianism in at least two ways. Firstly, it emphasizes the significance of understanding *why* an action is taken (such as, why God does what He does in relation to mankind). Secondly, it enables one to recognize that although God does not bring all of mankind into relationship with Himself (because of man’s apprehension, not God’s—as was seen earlier), when a person does not partake in relationship with God it is because fairness dictates that they must bear the responsibility (or cost) of their denial to partake in this relationship. In short, the distinction between *what* God does and *why* He does it is not an insignificant one, and the more satisfactory answer for these inquiries is found in Divine Utilitarianism.

As expressed throughout this work, Divine Utilitarianism is the belief that God desires the greatest good for the greatest number and He acts in relation with mankind in order to bring about that end. So as for the query concerning *why* God does what He does, the abbreviated answer of Divine Utilitarianism is that he acts in order that the greatest good may come about for the greatest number of human beings—and this good is that they may have relationship with God, the Good. A more thorough response to this question on the Divine Utilitarian point of view explains that God acts in the way that He does in order to bring human beings into this

⁸³ Gerhard Øverland, "Moral Obstacles: An Alternative to the Doctrine of Double Effect," *Ethics* 124, no. 3 (April 2014): 481-506, *Academic Search Alumni Edition*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 11, 2017), 506. (Emphasis added).

relationship and that this relationship will produce worship of Himself by these rational, sentient, free agents. This reveals another issue which is addressed by Divine Utilitarianism; God's necessity to be worshipped.

'Necessity' here does not mean that God *needs* worship in order to be fulfilled or in order to maintain His existence; rather this means that a being that is good to the degree that God is, *must* be worshipped, or *demand*s worship.⁸⁴ God's ontology is not dependent or contingent on anything, including the degree to which He is worshipped. This expands the explanatory power of Divine Utilitarianism, as it is capable of elucidating upon *why* God necessitates worship and *how* this necessity is fulfilled. Brian Leftow contributes a fair amount of time and effort establishing that God is such a being that necessitates worship in his book *God and Necessity*. Working under the assumption of classical theism he says, "If something is a deity, then just *qua* a deity, it intrinsically and objectively is an appropriate object of greatest worship...anything deserving greatest worship is in a better state than anything that does not."⁸⁵ Leftow refines this definition of a being that is worthy and deserving of worship by explaining precisely what he means by *worship*. "Greatest worship is the attitude of greatest respect, admiration, honor, and awe, or the activity of expressing this attitude. So something intrinsically and objectively is an appropriate object of greatest worship only if it intrinsically and objectively deserves more of these than anything not an appropriate object of greatest worship."⁸⁶ Understanding Leftow's terminology enables one to determine whether God truly does necessitate worship or if this is simply a presupposition made by theists.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 178.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

According to this definition of worship, the only way that God could *not* be intrinsically and objectively worthy of worship (i.e. necessitate worship) would be if there were a being which were more deserving of respect, admiration, honor, and awe. However, God is the greatest possible being and He possesses and displays all great-making attributes to their maximal degree, so there is no being that is greater or more worthy of worship than God. Due to this simple albeit profound understanding of God and of worship, it is not logically possible for a being other than the classical theistic God to necessitate or be intrinsically and objectively worthy of worship. In short, Leftow expresses that God necessitates worship because He is God; He is *the* being which is so great and so good that He cannot exist without being worshipped, and there is no being in existence which could possibly force God to abdicate this role. This necessity of worship is explained two-fold in Divine Utilitarianism.

Firstly, because Divine Utilitarianism is built upon the foundation of classical theism, God *must* be worshipped because a being worthy of worship is better than one undeserving of it (as Leftow articulates). A skeptic of theism, J. N. Findlay claims that if God is in fact the being that Anselm claims Him to be, then He is an “adequate object of religious worship.”⁸⁷ While Findlay denies that God is Anselm’s greatest conceivable being; he admits that such a being would necessitate worship if it exists. This astute observation made by theists and skeptics alike (as has been adequately shown here); assists in silencing a significant objection which has been and –no doubt— will continue to be marshalled against Divine Utilitarianism.

In his two-volume treatise concerning God’s ethics, James Moody Gustafson strongly refutes the idea that God’s ethical system could be consequentialist/utilitarian in nature.

⁸⁷ J. N. Findlay, “Can God’s Existence be Disproved?” *Mind* 57 (1948): 176-83.

Gustafson contends that if God is a utilitarian, then His ethics are not theocentric; rather they are anthropocentric, and he finds this to be a terribly impious doctrine.⁸⁸ However, if God acts as a utilitarian, then He will be worshipped as a result of His actions.⁸⁹ Gustafson seems to entertain this notion of Divine Utilitarianism leading to the worship of God when he says that, “the only way in which one can have theocentric ethics which finally sustains and supports the idea that what God wills is what is good for man is to argue that the good for human beings coincides with the ultimate divine purpose. Historically, most of Christian ethics has assumed this to be the case.”⁹⁰ This observation by Gustafson brings a significant distinction of Divine Utilitarianism to light. Divine Utilitarianism does not say that all of God’s actions are ultimately aimed at anthropocentric ends; rather all that God does is ultimately done for His own glory. However, all of God’s actions in relation to human beings are aimed at the happiness of human beings, and this results in God being worshipped and glorified. So although God does all things for His own glory, His actions towards human beings are aimed at bringing about their greatest happiness/good. Thus, although God’s actions may not be as thoroughly or overtly theocentric as individuals such as Gustafson would prefer; His actions do in fact work towards the ends of His creatures’ happiness *and* worship of Himself by His creatures.

Secondly, the purpose for which God acts in Divine Utilitarianism merits and requires worship as an appropriate response. God acts in in order to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of human beings, which is relationship with their Creator. This relationship necessarily results in worship of God by human beings because this relationship gives free,

⁸⁸ James Moody Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981).

⁸⁹ This claim is corroborated by multiple philosophers in, William Schweiker, 1986, "Theocentric ethics: 'God will be God'," *The Christian Century* 103, no. 2: 36-38, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 16, 2016).

⁹⁰ James Moody Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981), 91.

rational, and sentient beings the greatest happiness possible for them and this act of God deserves praise. Although the idea of God as a utilitarian is unpopular and it is commonly seen as an impious proposal, when one recognizes the effects that God as a utilitarian has on one's theology (such as satisfying His need to be worshipped) one recognizes the immense veneration that Divine Utilitarianism conjures in the creature, for the Creator. Mill once remarked on this subject,

We not uncommonly hear the doctrine of utility inveighed against as a godless doctrine. If it be necessary to say anything at all against so mere an assumption, we may say that the question depends upon what idea we have formed of the moral character of the Deity. If it be a true belief that God desires, above all things, the happiness of his creatures, and that this was his purpose in their creation, utility is not only not a godless doctrine, but more profoundly religious than any other.⁹¹

In this way, worship of God is the action which necessarily follows when man gains relationship with God (the greatest good/happiness), and it is utilitarian for God to act in order to bring this state of affairs about. This is how God satisfies His necessity to be worshipped through the construct of Divine Utilitarianism. The explanatory power of Divine Utilitarianism may be expanded in at least one more way; by revealing that the idea of God as a utilitarian has been appealed to regularly by theists in Philosophy of religion.

This final revelation concerning the explanatory power of Divine Utilitarianism merely makes the distinction that there is already a theistic construct that frames God as a utilitarian in His ethics. A standard and widely accepted response that theists give to the problem of evil is that God allows evil to exist and occur so that greater goods may occur. Rowe explicates the nature of theodicies this way,

⁹¹ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty, and Representative Government*, with introduction by A. D. Lindsay (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1951), 26.

What a theodicy does endeavor to do is to fasten on some good (real or imaginary) and argue that achieving that good would justify an omnipotent being in permitting evils like the fawn's suffering. . . . *if* obtaining the good in question were God's aim in permitting evils like the fawn's suffering, then (given what we know) it would be reasonable to believe that an omnipotent being would be justified in permitting such evils.⁹²

Thus, the theists' best defense against the problem of evil is to hope to convince his opponent that the good which results from the occurrence of evil is of a great enough amount or quality that it justifies God allowing evil to be perpetrated in the world. In short, "God allows evils to happen in order to bring a greater good therefrom."⁹³ Charles Journet corroborates this view that "God permits, indeed, that evils come about so as to draw greater goods from them."⁹⁴

Identifying that theists appeal to God as a utilitarian in order to resolve their most prominent and challenging objection puts theists in somewhat of a dilemma. The theist may either say that God is not a utilitarian and therefore does not act in order to bring about the greatest good for the greatest number, which would cause the theist to abandon their defense of theodicies; or the theist can confer that God is in fact a utilitarian and maintain intellectual honesty in holding to the concept of theodicies.

This dilemma is quite significant for a *vast* majority of theists because most theists do not have a consequentialist ethical system, rather they are typically virtue ethicists. The most significant issue that virtue ethicists (even more so, theistic virtue ethicists) have with utilitarianism is that it allows for evil to be perpetrated in order that a greater good may be achieved. This is precisely why this dilemma is so challenging for most theists; they are being challenged to accept that their most beloved being (God) allows abhorrent actions to occur in

5. ⁹² William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2007), 124-

10. ⁹³ Jaques Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942), 9-

⁹⁴ Charles Journet, *The Meaning of Evil* (London: Chapman, 1963), 259.

order to bring about some greater good.⁹⁵ This is the most repulsive and offensive doctrine of utilitarianism to most virtue ethicists, so it is understandable that the challenge to accept this attribute or action within the ethics of God is a difficult one to accept. However, it seems that theists have been accepting God as a utilitarian all along. After all, theodicies have been common theistic defenses for millennia.⁹⁶ So, in effect, although theists have not accepted God as a utilitarian being in all of His actions; it seems that they have accepted Him as such when it has proved to be helpful.

This is a particularly difficult reality for most theists to accept because they are not comfortable with attributing the Machiavellian concept of “the ends justifying the means” to their deity.⁹⁷ However, if the ends of God’s actions are to bring about states of affairs such as, human relationship with Himself, worship of Himself by free, rational, sentient beings, and the happiness of His creatures; then the ends for which God acts do in fact justify the means. It is these ends which have been promoted and defended throughout this work, and it is these ends which God acts in accordance with.

This expansion in the explanatory power of Divine Utilitarianism has a two-fold effect for the theory itself. First, the claim that evil may not be permitted or committed in order to bring about some greater good will no doubt be an objection marshalled against Divine Utilitarianism as well, so the redirection of this objection toward theodicies will defend Divine Utilitarianism. Second, this identification of theodicies as a result of a utilitarian God will cause theists that are

⁹⁵ This frustration is expressed in Schweiker’s work, William Schweiker, 1986, "Theocentric ethics: 'God will be God'," *The Christian Century* 103, no. 2: 36-38, *ATLASerials, Religion Collection, EBSCOhost* (Accessed February 23, 2016).

⁹⁶ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 98-9.

⁹⁷ This concept comes from *The Prince* in, Niccolo Machiavelli. *The Essential Writings of Machiavelli* (New York: Modern Library, 2013).

averse to utilitarianism to objectively consider the potentiality of God having a utilitarian ethic. The objection against the allowance of evil for the outcome of a greater good will be subsided one way or another once the theist that is objecting recognizes that he already believes that God is utilitarian in exactly this way; that God allows evil in order that greater goods may come about. It is appalling to theistic virtue ethicists to think that one could cause pain in order to bring about good, but once a skeptic of theism claims that God and evil cannot coexist in the world, these theistic virtue ethicists appeal to the utilitarian concept that they find most repulsive in hopes of resolving an objection to their worldview. The theist must compromise on some front; either God is a utilitarian in His ethics and wills and acts in order to bring about the greatest good for the greatest number—which allows for evil in the world in order to bring about greater goods, or he does not view God in this way and the theist is in need of reconstructing a response to how it is that evil and God (the Good) can coexist.⁹⁸

Assessing the Juxtaposition

While Divine Command Theory explains *what* God does in regards to morality, it does not seem sufficient for explaining *why* God does what He does. This theory reveals what makes an action right or good by identifying that an action is good insofar as it reflects the nature of God. This was claimed to be a tautology for classical theists because it can be deduced or even included in one's understanding of God as a being. Divine Utilitarianism by contrast, explained *why* God does what He does, how God's necessity to be worshipped is satisfied, and identified that theodicies are a utilitarian construct that is appealed to in order to justify the coexistence of God and evil. Given this juxtaposition of these two competing theories, it appears that Divine

⁹⁸ Ibid. 11. Here Hick talks about the tension that theodicies do not alleviate between the problem of evil and the mystery of good. This issue, yet again, is resolved within Divine Utilitarianism. God allows evil to occur so that greater goods may come about.

Utilitarianism provides more of a holistic justification for his worldview, in that it explains how multiple facets and doctrines of theism are to be understood in light of the nature of God, as a utilitarian being.

CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Divine Utilitarianism can only be properly understood if one has a proper understanding of what is meant by the divine and by utilitarianism. So in order to appropriately articulate the theory of Divine Utilitarianism definitions of God and of utility were promoted. For a proper understanding of God and His nature the works of Anselm and Thomas Aquinas were examined. Anselm submitted that God is the being that-than-which-none-greater-can-be-thought,⁹⁹ and Thomas believed God to be the greatest possible being, having no potentiality and being pure actuality.¹⁰⁰ With this framework concerning God and His nature set, focus transitioned to understanding what is meant by “utility”. In this endeavor Augustine’s belief that there are degrees of goodness was addressed first, then the ethical philosophies of Bentham and Mill were discussed. It was in this section that it was discerned, if Augustine is correct in regards to degrees of goodness, then God is the greatest good, the Good. In conjunction with this belief, Bentham and Mill’s utilitarian principle of doing the greatest good for the greatest number was addressed. This foundation of terms then allowed for the theory of Divine Utilitarianism to be articulated.

William Paley commits entire sections of his *Moral and Political Philosophy* to expressing the idea that God is a utilitarian. He does this by appealing to his revered teleological argument and taking it a step further into the ethical branch of philosophy. John Gay and William Paley both contended that God not only created the world such that it is hospitable for human life but that it is designed for the flourishing of human life. They go further by saying that God wished and willed the happiness of human beings when He created them.¹⁰¹ This concept of

⁹⁹ Brian Davies, and G. R. Evans (ed.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, *Aquinas's Shorter Summa: St. Thomas Aquinas's Own Concise Version of His Summa Theologica*. (Manchester: Sophia Institute, 2002), 16.

¹⁰¹ William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 46.

Divine Utilitarianism brought about a new argument in support of the theory which is significantly different but arrives at the same conclusion of God as a utilitarian ethicist. This new Divine Utilitarianism argued that, P1) Relationship with God is the greatest good/happiness a human being can experience. P2) God desires as many human beings to have relationship with Him as possible. P3) Utilitarians desire the greatest good/happiness for as many human beings as possible. C) Therefore God is a utilitarian because He desires the greatest good for as many human beings as possible. This argument utilizes the aforementioned definitions of God and utility in order to establish that if these definitions are in fact the case, then God is a utilitarian.

The distinction was drawn however that Divine Utilitarianism is not the only ethical theory that people attempt to claim as descriptive of and applicable to God. The rival theory to Divine Utilitarianism is Divine Command Theory. Divine Command Theory is the popular stance regarding the ethics of God, and it explains that God is the moral law giver, thus whatever commands or declarations He makes concerning morality and what is right to do or wrong to do, is in fact the case due to His moral authority.¹⁰² This effort to understand morality and the ethics of God effectively educates regarding *what* God does in relation to morality and what actions are good and for what reasons are they good. However, this is not seen as satisfactory for the adherent of Divine Utilitarianism.

A juxtaposition concerned with addressing the explanatory power of these opposing theories shows that Divine Utilitarianism explicates more about God's nature and ethics than Divine Command Theory is capable of. Whereas the latter of these efforts gives understanding of *what* God does and what actions are considered morally praiseworthy or reprehensible; the

¹⁰² William Lane Craig, (1997), "The Indispensability of Theological Meta-Ethical Foundations for Morality," *Foundations* 5: 9-12.

former theory gives explanations concerning *why* God does what He does, how God's necessity to be worshipped by free, rational, sentient beings is satisfied, and how theodicies are justified as a response to the problem of evil. The explanatory power of these theories is palpably contrasted by this juxtaposition. Divine Command Theory goes much farther into its discovery of God's nature, how He relates the mankind, and how mankind relates to Him. It is this capability of providing a more satisfactory understanding of God, coupled with the purposive nature of the argument in favor of Divine Utilitarianism which reveal it to be a considerable candidate for understanding the ethics of God.

Finally, if the objective of this paper has been met, then Divine Utilitarianism has been shown to be a plausible if not outright veridical belief concerning the ethics of God. For, if relationship with God truly is the greatest good/happiness a human being can experience, God desires as many human beings to have relationship with Him as possible, and utilitarians desire the greatest good/happiness for as many human beings as possible, then God is a utilitarian because He desires the greatest good for as many human beings as possible. Further still, if this is the case, then various areas of one's theology and philosophy will yield more clarity. These areas include that one will know *why* God acts or what ends He aims to bring about when He acts. One will also have a sufficient answer for how God's necessity to be worshipped is satisfied since relationship with God intrinsically brings about worship of Him by rational, free, sentient beings. Lastly, this approach to God's ethics brings much needed clarity and fluidity to the subject of theodicies. On the contrary, if one finds Divine Utilitarianism –the way that it is argued for in this work— to be an abhorrent doctrine, or erroneous in some capacity, or even entirely fallacious, then the questions that are answered by the theory must be accounted for in one's subsequent and rebutting argument. However, it is contended here that God's desire to

bring about the greatest happiness for as many human beings as possible through relationship with Him is the most satisfactory answer to these aforementioned queries. The reality that God intentionally acts in order to bring about the greatest good and happiness for His creatures—at least admittedly in the area of theodicies—is an incredibly blessed truth that ought to not only encourage all of mankind, but rouse a desire within human beings to know God more thoroughly and intimately—for their greatest happiness and for the necessary and deserved worship of God.

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