

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A THEISTIC CRITIQUE OF SECULAR MORAL NONNATURALISM

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DALE KRATT

LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA

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## APPROVAL SHEET

### A Theistic Critique of Secular Moral Nonnaturalism

By:

Dale Kratt

READ AND APPROVED BY:

Chairperson:

\_\_\_\_\_

Ed Martin, Ph.D.

First Reader:

\_\_\_\_\_

Stephen Parrish, Ph.D.

Second Reader:

\_\_\_\_\_

C. Fred Smith, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

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Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;  
Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness;  
Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!  
Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes  
and clever in their own sight!

Isaiah 5:20-21 (NASB)

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is an exercise in Theistic moral apologetics. It will be developing both a critique of secular nonnaturalist moral theory (moral Platonism) at the level of metaethics, as well as a positive form of the moral argument for the existence of God that follows from this critique. The critique will focus on the work of five prominent metaethical theorists of secular moral non-naturalism: David Enoch, Eric Wielenberg, Russ Shafer-Landau, Michael Huemer, and Christopher Kulp. Each of these thinkers will be critically examined. Following this critique, the positive moral argument for the existence of God will be developed, combining a cumulative, abductive argument that follows from filling in the content of a succinct apagogic argument. The cumulative abductive argument and the apagogic argument together, with a transcendental and modal component, will be presented to make the case that Theism is the best explanation for the kind of moral, rational beings we are and the kind of universe in which we live, a rational intelligible universe.

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

**AC** = Absolute Creationism (sometimes referred to as Theistic Activism).

**AOs** = Abstract Objects.

**Complex ContingencyFT** = exquisitely fine-tuned, complex contingency.

**“C of U<sub>I</sub> X”**: this is to be read as “Content of Ultimate’<sub>I</sub> principles.” More specifically, X is a variable with particular content and could be read “Content of Ultimate’<sub>I</sub> X” - where the variable “X” could represent “principles,” “reasons,” “normative truths,” “substantive conceptual truths” “fundamental ethical principles” “abstract objects” “abstract propositions” or any such *content* that might work as an Ultimate Normative Principle for any given thinker in any given scheme. When used this way, I will also indicate “Ultimacy” by use of the capital letter “U” in Ultimate, hence “C<sub>(content)</sub> of U<sub>I</sub>” principles.

**CSI<sub>inf</sub>** = Complex Specified Information.

**CSI<sub>nt</sub>** = Complex Specified Integration of informationally rich living entities. This is similar to the notion of irreducible complexity as used by intelligent design thinkers but emphasizes top-down integrational properties.

**De re, de dicto** = “Attributions of necessity, contingency, impossibility, or possibility to propositions are *de dicto*; they pertain to *dicta*, that is, to *propositional* or statement-like units. On the other hand, any property of a thing can be characterized as either *necessary* to *that thing* or *contingent* to *that thing*. An attribution of this kind is *de re*; it pertains to *res*, that is, to a *thing*, rather than to a *dictum* or propositional entity.”<sup>1</sup>

**EAAN** = Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism.

**EDA** = Evolutionary Debunking Argument.

**E-knowing** = Ethical Knowing.

**ENA** = Evolutionary Naturalistic Account.

**ER** = Ethically Real, or Ethical Real. This is often paired with TR, which is Truth Real.

**ErI** = Ethical Real Indifferent.

**ErIPs** = Ethical Real Indifferent Processes. This is often paired with TrIPs, that is, Truth Real Indifferent Processes.

**GNR** = Godless Normative Realism.

**GBP** = Greatest Possible Being.

**HP** = Hidden Principles.

**IBE** = Inference to the Best Explanation.

**IOs** = Ideal Objects (in the mind of God).

**IU** = Impersonal Universe.

**MaCR** = Making as causation relation (used by Eric Wielenberg in his MoRM).

**MFPs** = Moral fixed points.

**MoRM** = Morphological Reliabilism Model. This is one of Erik Wielenberg’s acronyms.

**MP** = Moral Proposition.

**MTAP** = The modal transcendental argument of Stephen Parrish.

**NS** = Natural Selection.

**PBT** = Perfect Being Theism.

**PC** = Phenomenal Conservatism.

**PECB<sup>x</sup>** = Problem of exponential cumulative bruteness to the *n*th degree.

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, *The Divine Attributes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 77. Their entire glossary at the end of their book is quite useful.

**PMP** = Plausible Mechanism Problem.

**PFSR** = The principle of fittingly suitable reason. The emphasis here is on the right kind of reason fittingly suited to what is being explained. It is more precise than sufficient reason.

**PSR** = The principle of sufficient reason.

**PWs** = Possible Worlds.

**R-knowing** = Rational Knowing.

**S1-R** = System1 Reliable.

**SIM** = Social Intuitionist Model.

**SMNN** = Secular Moral Nonnaturalism.

**SMNNs** = Secular Moral Nonnaturalists.

**T-test** = The transcendental test.

**TC** = Theistic Conceptualism.

**TCBO** = Things could be otherwise. This is a modal notion of contingency.

**T-knowing** = Truth Knowing.

**TotIU** = A Totally Indifferent Universe.

**TR** = Truth Real.

**TrI** = Truth Indifferent.

**TrIPs** = Truth Real Indifferent Processes.

**WIBU** = Wide-Indifferent-Bottom-Up physical processes.

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## Introduction

### Outline of the Project and Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 will provide introductory material to set the context for the rest of the dissertation. It will give a brief synopsis of the history of the moral argument for God's existence. It will then briefly focus on John Stuart Mill, Henry Sidgwick, and G.E. Moore as moral thinkers that set the various ethical debates that lead into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> It will examine the historical antecedents before Moore that opened the way for fully secularized metaethics. Analyzing secularized metaethics also involves considering what secularism amounts to, what it is and how it historically unfolds, the broader historical role of the enterprise of natural theology, and the specific history of the moral argument for God's existence. Together, these elements will provide a broader historical context to understand our project, including the rise of the moral argument for God's existence and the ascendance of secular moral nonnaturalism as a powerful secular alternative to Theism well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Chapter 2 will examine the main tenants of the Robust Realism of David Enoch in detail as he has developed it in his *Taking Morality Seriously*.<sup>3</sup> It will be argued that the centerpiece of Enoch's argument for robust realism, the argument from deliberative indispensability, is not successful. It will be argued that his defense of the metaphysics of supervenience, on which all accounts of SMNN rely, succumbs to a reformulation of Plantinga's supervenience objection, has difficulty with the challenge of brute, necessary connections between discontinuous properties, and cannot, in the end, explain the relations of supervenience – supervenience states the relations but does not explain these relations. Therefore supervenience itself requires

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<sup>2</sup> G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Dover Philosophical Classics (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2004). This work was first published in 1903.

<sup>3</sup> David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

explanation. Lastly, it will be argued that his “third-factor” explanation of a godless pre-established harmony to account for epistemological correlations with the “Third Realm” of abstract normative entities is quasi-question-begging. It will be shown that the godless pre-established harmony that Enoch posits to explain these epistemological correlations itself requires explanation and that his account succumbs to what will be dubbed the plausible mechanism problem. This problem reaches back to the beginning of the actual universe, to the Grand Story, which, given a generalized naturalistic account of origins, can only be a mindless, impersonal universe of totally indifferent processes, events, and functions. The conclusion will be that the combined outcome of these arguments warrants rejecting Enoch’s version of robust realism.

Chapter 3 will undertake a critique of Eric Wielenberg’s godless normative realism (GNR) as developed in his book *Robust Ethics*.<sup>4</sup> The focus of this section will be three fundamental problems with Wielenberg’s account. First, there is the problem of the exemplification of moral properties. Wielenberg requires an account of exemplification but provides no such account. Second, there is the problem of the logical incoherence of “brute necessities.” Third, there is the problem of accommodating moral agency. Moral agency is frozen in the various necessitations of GNR. GNR cannot accommodate top-down causation, something that an adequate account of moral agency should be able to accommodate. Finally, it will be argued that Theism is able to handle all three of these issues very well.

Chapter 4 will selectively critique the secular rationalist moral realism of Russ Shafer-Landau. Shafer-Landau proposes that ethics is a part of rational philosophy. However, his secular metaphysics undercuts his endorsement of rationality itself. Contrary to Shafer-Landau’s

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<sup>4</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

arguments, it is shown that moral and natural laws require a lawmaker. It is also argued that eternal and necessary moral principles lead to a morally necessary mind, namely God. The focus of the final section critiques what Russ Shafer-Landau and Terrence Cuneo have termed the “moral fixed points” (MFPs).<sup>5</sup> The problem with the MFPs is that their supposed conceptual necessities, when indexed to various worlds, do not hold across worlds in conceptually necessary ways. The world indexing of these conceptual necessities (MFPs) is not itself a conceptual necessity. If, on this account, their necessity does not necessarily obtain, then the account is shown to be implausible.

Chapter 5 examines the nonnaturalist ethical intuitionism of Michael Huemer in his work entitled *Ethical Intuitionism*.<sup>6</sup> Theists have much in common with ethical intuitionists and, therefore, agree on many things. Historically, Theism gave birth to moral intuitionism. Huemer bases his secular version of intuitionism on his epistemology of phenomenal conservatism. More broadly, it will be argued that since moral intuitionists affirm moral intuition, they should similarly affirm the design intuition. Moral intuitionists cannot arbitrarily dismiss the design intuition. If they affirm the design intuition, they should seriously consider some form of Theism (or minimally some form of Deism) as objectively true. It will be argued that moral and design intuitions should be realistically and alethically construed, that both refer to objective features of Reality and that both should be included in any critically accepted intuitional inventory. In turn, acknowledging that God designed the world and our being in the world should influence how one understands the moral nature of humanity and the moral order of things. Affirming these truths will help set up the “design” and “fine-tuning” parts of the final argument. These will feature as important supportive elements in the more comprehensive and focused moral

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<sup>5</sup> Terence Cuneo and Russ Shafer-Landau, “The Moral Fixed Points: New Directions for Moral Nonnaturalism,” *Philosophical Studies* 171, no. 3 (December 2014): 399–443.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

argument for God's existence. This chapter also argues that the ontological argument for God's existence is logically sound and that accepting this argument is reasonable.

Chapter 6 will briefly critique the secular moral Platonism of Christopher Kulp in his two works *Metaphysics of Morality* and *Knowing Moral Truth: A Theory of Metaethics and Moral Knowledge*.<sup>7</sup> This chapter puts forward a positive argument to God from logic, a positive argument to God from propositions, examines the nature of moral propositions, and finally lays out a comprehensive comparison between Theism and SMNN about abstract objects. Finally, chapter 7 develops the positive moral argument for the existence of God, taking into account the respective critiques and the positive elements put in place in the previous sections. The positive argument will be a deductive, apagogic,<sup>8</sup> and abductively cumulative case with a transcendental and modal component. The argument proceeds from what Theistic metaethics and secular nonnaturalist metaethics agree upon. This set of shared beliefs is our CONCORD, our agreement. The argument is as follows:

CONCORD: We are moral intelligible beings that live in a rational-intelligible universe. Surely this astonishing fact cries out for explanation.

Q1: How do we explain the moral-rational beings that we are in the rational-intelligible universe in which we live?

Q2: What is the best explanatory account of our moral nature and being in the universe in which we live?

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher B. Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Christopher B. Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth: A Theory of Metaethics and Moral Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Since this term is unfamiliar to most it is explained here at the outset. Apagogic is a methodology that involves disproving mutually exclusive propositions that contradict the one to be established. Providing the mutually excluding propositions sufficiently cover all options, the proposition to be establish is thus taken to be true since it is the only one remaining. It is argument by eliminating other possible alternative propositions, a last-man standing form of argument. In the argument presented here, P1 provides the three mutually exclusive options in our argument – Chance, Necessity or a Necessary Being. These options largely follow Stephen E. Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 2001, 180, and how he utilizes this method.

Q3: What kind of ultimate possible answers are available to us, what are they, and how might they work to explain CONCORD? I find three.

P1 – Ultimately – Chance, Necessity, or a Necessary Being exist.

Given:

1. There is an answer.
2. Nothing necessary is arbitrary.
3. Nothing true requires God's non-being.
4. The logical contingency of the actual universe and our moral being.

P2 – The moral-intelligible universe and moral-rational beings we are do not exist by necessity.

P3 – Chance cannot originate, order, or sustain the moral-intelligible universe in which we live or the moral-rational beings that we are.

Therefore, there is a Necessary Being; God. It will be argued that this God is the God of Perfect Being Theism.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Simon Blackburn, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Third edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Christian B. Miller, ed., *The Continuum Companion to Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2011). Rogers is a good and accessible introduction to Perfect Being Theism, so also is Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991). *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, will be extremely helpful for looking up and accurately defining various philosophical terms for those unfamiliar with such terms. *The Continuum Companion to Ethics* is one of the best handbooks to understand specialized ethical terms and issues. For one of the better and most accessible introductions to modal metaphysics and related matters of analytic philosophy see Michael J. Loux and Thomas M. Crisp, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, Fourth edition., Routledge contemporary introductions to philosophy (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

# Chapter 1

## Introductory Material

### Contemporary Moral Apologetics

What is Theistic<sup>10</sup> moral apologetics, its aim, its rationale, how does it work, and how does it fit into the broader field of Christian apologetics and metaethics? In this work, moral apologetics is taken in the following way.

1. Contemporary Theistic moral apologetics is a specialized field of Christian apologetics that seeks to work within, draw from, and contribute to the more general area of theistic metaethics. Metaethics, broadly considered, is understood to be the critical and comparative theory of various ethical systems. It is the theory of ethical theory. As such, it is taken to be a 2nd order<sup>12</sup> discipline in the field of ethical theory. It is a relatively recent development in the area of critical ethical thinking. Theistic metaethics is a God-centered metaethics.
2. Theistic moral apologetics seeks to critically engage non-theistic metaethical thinkers of all persuasions, on all fronts, at the level of technical philosophy. The thinkers engaged might be historical or contemporary thinkers. This engagement typically requires answering standard objections that are often leveled against theistic metaethics and developing some version or element of the moral argument for the existence of God in the context of such critical

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Taliaferro maintains that the term “Theism” was coined in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Ralph Cudworth. Cudworth used it to describe the philosophy of God wherein God is taken to be “the creator and sustainer of the cosmos, all good, omnipresent, eternal or everlasting, omnipotent, omniscient, existing necessarily (or existing *a se*) and provident.” Charles Taliaferro, Victoria S. Harrison, and Stewart Goetz, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Theism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1. This is generally how the term will be used throughout this work. It should be noted that this volume is a definitive work on Theism.

<sup>12</sup> The distinction between 1<sup>st</sup> order and 2<sup>nd</sup> order moral theorizing is a common but important distinction in metaethics. The focus of a 1<sup>st</sup> order moral proposition is the question, *what is moral?* An example of a 1<sup>st</sup> order ethical/moral/normative truth would be that murder is wrong; it is immoral to murder, it is moral to refrain from murder. 2<sup>nd</sup> order metaethics focuses on the question of the nature of morality itself; *what morality itself is* and not particularly on the content of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral truths. Metaethics will be discussed in more detail below.

engagement. Because moral apologetics does not first work from revealed theology in Scripture, it is typically considered a venture into natural theology.

3. Theistic moral apologetics also seeks to critically engage 1<sup>st</sup> order ethical disputes by making explicit the moral and metaphysical assumptions often unstated in such disputes. From this, it develops a reasoned case for a theistic ethical and metaphysical perspective concerning such disputes if such a reasoned case is relevant.
4. Christian Theistic moral apologetics also seeks to develop a distinctively Trinitarian and Christ-centered metaethical perspective. By doing so, the Christian apologist moves beyond a generalized Theism to a distinctively Christian Theism. This should involve the following.
  - a. Working deliberately from the historical events of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ with the clear understanding that Christianity never reduces to a mere system of morality.
  - b. Working deliberately from the revelation of God in the Scriptures.
  - c. Engaging and thoroughly thinking through Christian ethical issues and questions unique to the believing Christian and Christian community.
  - d. Engaging and thoroughly thinking through the various distinctive areas of Christian ethical practice within the church and the world in which the church is situated.

This work should be done at two distinct but related levels. First, it should be done at the technical philosophy and theology level, as required, and second, it should be done at the non-technical lay level. This second level involves taking the complex things of the first level and making them accessible to a lay audience.

### **Natural Theology and Christian Apologetics**

Natural theology and Christian apologetics are related but distinct enterprises.<sup>13</sup> While natural theology arguably reaches back to ancient Greek philosophy<sup>14</sup> and embraces a broader range of theological positions than traditional theism, Christian apologetics must trace its origins and purposes back to the beginnings of the person of Jesus Christ. Apologetics necessarily involves the defense of the veracity of the message and meaning of Jesus and the content of the Christian faith.<sup>15</sup> Theistic moral apologetics, although part of natural theology, is not necessarily distinctively Christian. It can serve as an important step towards a distinctively Christian theism but deliberately limits its arguments to Theism proper. This limit provides certain polemical advantages. As a part of natural theology, the argument boasts a wide umbrella. It could be endorsed by any theist, whether Jewish, Islamic, non-religious, or non-traditional theists. In this respect, the moral argument for God's existence is much broader than Christian theism and can be appropriated by a larger audience. This makes the argument much more versatile and serviceable across the various areas of philosophy, metaethics, and various other disciplines. As such, it can be pitted readily against various versions of atheism. It is versatile in that it can be joined with other arguments for God's existence to generate a much stronger overall cumulative

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<sup>13</sup> For useful overviews of the history and concepts of natural theology see Russell Re Manning, John Hedley Brooke, and Fraser N. Watts, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); James Brent, "Natural Theology," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., accessed September 11, 2021, <https://iep.utm.edu/theo-nat/>; Andrew Chignell and Derk Pereboom, "Natural Theology and Natural Religion," ed. Edward N Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA, Fall 2020), accessed September 11, 2021, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/natural-theology/>>; also see Charles Taliaferro, "The Project of Natural Theology," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 1–23. C. P. Ruloff and Peter Horban, eds., *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); David Haines, *Natural Theology: A Biblical and Historical Introduction and Defense* (New York: Davenant Press, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers: The Gifford Lectures, 1936*, trans. Edward S Robinson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003/1936).

<sup>15</sup> See Jude 3 where Jude exhorts Christians to "...contend earnestly for the faith once for all handed down to the saints." (NASB). For a good overview of the history of Christian apologetics see Benjamin K. Forrest, Joshua D. Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, eds., *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2020).

case for Theism. This generality also gives the argument much wider applicability.<sup>16</sup> In any area where human moral concerns are central, the moral argument for God's existence is relevant; for example, in the various human sciences and political and economic philosophy. The argument fits nicely with questions involving the nature and basis for law and justice, the basis for human rights, endorsing human dignity, our understanding of aesthetics and beauty, religious experience, and even engaging in the rough and tumble of the practice of politics and economics as well. But the moral argument, if successful, also fills in a considerable amount of detail concerning who God is and the kind of God the view might endorse. A too vaguely thin Theism will not suffice for the moral argument. The thicker character and being of God that the argument leads to is powerfully relevant to the whole content and nature of the human moral domain in which our lives and experience are immersed.

### **The Moral Argument: A Brief Synopsis History**

Since this dissertation develops a form of the moral argument for the existence of God, it is only appropriate to have a sense of the background and history of this particular argument. Dave Baggett and Jerry Walls have written an excellent overview and analysis of the history of the moral argument for God's existence.<sup>17</sup> The history of this particular argument, rarely thoroughly considered, is interesting and impressive. As delineated above, moral apologetics interacts with Theistic metaethics, ethics proper, 1<sup>st</sup> order ethical questions, and other arguments in the field of natural theology. However, it is not to be identified with any of these. The moral argument for the existence of God is the front-and-center focus of moral apologetics. The modern form of the moral argument proper is usually traced back to Immanuel Kant (1724-

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<sup>16</sup> For a very useful summary overview of the relation of the arguments concerning God and the moral order see Anne Jeffrey, *God and Morality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Peter Byrne and Stephen Evans, "Moral Arguments for the Existence of God," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: The Metaphysics Research Lab, Spring 2013).

<sup>17</sup> David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

1804).<sup>18</sup> Among other notable thinkers that advanced a positive form of the moral argument is John Henry Newman (1801-1890) in his *Aid to a Grammar of Ascent* (1870), Arthur Balfour (1848-1930),<sup>20</sup> William Sorley (1885-1935),<sup>21</sup> Hastings Rashdall (1858-1924),<sup>22</sup> Clement Webb (1865-1954),<sup>23</sup> W.G. de Burgh (1866-1942),<sup>24</sup> A.E. Taylor (1869-1945),<sup>25</sup> W.R. Matthews (1881-1973),<sup>26</sup> A.C. Ewing (1899-1973),<sup>27</sup> C.S. Lewis (1898-1963),<sup>28</sup> and finally H.P. Owen (1926-

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 8–19. Baggett and Walls point out the contributions in moral thinking from Augustine (354-430), Aquinas (1225-1244), Descartes (1596-1650), Pascal (1632-1662), Locke (1632-1704) and Reid (1710-1796) prior to Kant. They summarize the moral arguments for God that Kant put forward in this way.

Better than anyone, Kant recognized the power and authority of the moral law. On that foundation he constructed two variants of the moral argument. 1. His argument from grace pertains to whether or not the moral life is possible. Morality requires us to achieve a stand too demanding to meet on our own. Divine assistance is needed to close the resulting gap. So rationality dictates that we postulate God's existence. 2. Kant's argument from providence pertains to the aforementioned rational need for happiness and virtue to cohere. Full rational commitment to morality requires that morality is a rationally stable enterprise, which entails the ultimate correspondence between virtue and (both individual and corporate) fulfillment. Without God's existence there's no particularly good reason to think such correspondence obtains. So rationality dictates the postulation of God's existence (Ibid. 33).

<sup>20</sup> Balfour published *Theism and Humanism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915); *Theism and Thought* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923). Baggett and Walls, *ibid.* 66-71. The focus of Balfour's argument was against ethical naturalism and its inadequacies as contrasted with Theism. C.S. Lewis noted in 1962 that Balfour's *Theism and Humanism* strongly influenced him, see the excellent work, Arthur James Balfour and Michael W. Perry, *Theism and Humanism: The Book That Influenced C.S. Lewis*, New, Enhanced edition. (Seattle, WA: Inkling Books, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> W.R. Sorley, *On The Ethics of Naturalism*, Shaw Fellowship Lectures 1884 (London, 2015); W.R. Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1918). Sorley's very early critique of the ethics of naturalism is notable. Of the later work of Sorley's Baggett and Walls comment that it is "...perhaps the most sophisticated development of the moral argument for God's existence before the present time." Ibid., 74. See appendix 1 in this work. It provides a summary form of Sorley's argument in his *Moral Values*.

<sup>22</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil: A Treatise on Moral Philosophy*, Wentworth Press Reproduction. (H. Milford: Oxford University Press, 1907).

<sup>23</sup> Clement C.J. Webb, *God and Personality* (New York: Macmillan & Co, 1918).

<sup>24</sup> W.G. De Burgh, *From Morality to Religion*, Gifford Lectures 1938 (New York: Kennikat Press, 1970/1938). De Burgh deploys a cumulative case in which he combines the cosmological and teleological argument with the moral argument for God's existence. See Baggett and Walls. Ibid., 133. See also William Lad Sessions, "A New Look at Moral Arguments for Theism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18, no. 1–2 (1985): 51–67. Sessions provides good historical context and analysis for De Burgh's moral argument.

<sup>25</sup> A.E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1930).

<sup>26</sup> W.R. Matthews, *God in Christian Thought and Experience* (London: James Nisbet, 1947).

<sup>27</sup> A.C. Ewing, *Values and Reality: The Philosophical Case for Theism* (Hyattsville MD: Alphaville Books, 1973/1931).

<sup>28</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition, with a New Introduction.*, 1st HarperCollins ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001); C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1978). The first work was originally published in 1952 and the second work in 1943. Lewis has been the most widely read and influential writer of the moral argument in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. *Mere Christianity* continues to gain in popularity. It sold over 3.5 million copies since the early 2000s.

1996)<sup>29</sup> and Basil Mitchell (1917-2011).<sup>30</sup> In the period since C.S. Lewis, there has been a resurgence in Theistic philosophy and ethics and a resurgence specifically in the moral argument for God's existence.<sup>32</sup> Several notable things stand out as one reads through the history of the moral argument.

First, it is interesting that the moral argument does not take definite form and shape as a distinct evidential argument for God until the connections from the human moral domain to God become, in some sense, problematic. David Hume (1711-1776), among others, during the period dubbed the Enlightenment, directly challenged both prevailing arguments for natural theology and religious beliefs as well as the theistic basis for morality. His work was quite effective at the time, and his efforts have had a continuing and lasting influence.<sup>33</sup> The questions and challenges

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<sup>29</sup> H.P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1965).

<sup>30</sup> Basil Mitchell, *Morality, Religious and Secular: The Dilemma of the Traditional Conscience* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2000); Basil Mitchell, *Law, Morality, and Religion in a Secular Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>32</sup> For an even smaller sample of current work in the moral argument see for example Mark Linville D., "The Moral Argument," in *The Blackwell Companion To Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 391–448; William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008); Angus Ritchie, *From Morality to Metaphysics: The Theistic Implications of Our Ethical Commitments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Stephen E. Parrish, *Atheism?: A Critical Analysis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019); C. Stephen Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). David Baggett, "Moral Arguments (Actually R1 to Rn): An Abductive Moral Argument for God," in *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, ed. Trent Dougherty, Jerry L. Walls, and Alvin Plantinga (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Martin Jakobsen, *Moral Realism and the Existence of God: Improving Parfit's Metaethics* (Leuven, Paris: Peeters, 2020). J.P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009); James Porter Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body & Soul: Human Nature & the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); William Lane Craig et al., "Wielenberg and Emergence: Borrowed Capital on the Cheap," in *A Debate on God and Morality: What Is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 93–114; Dallas Willard, *The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*, ed. Gregg Ten Elshof, Steven L. Porter, and Aaron Preston (New York: Routledge, 2018); C. Stephen Evans and Trinity O'Neill, "The Moral Argument," in *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief*, ed. C. P. Ruloff and Peter Horban (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Matthew Carey Jordan, "Some Metaethical Desiderata and the Conceptual Resources of Theism," *Sophia* 50, no. 1 (April 2011): 39–55.

<sup>33</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Ernest C. Mossner (New York: Penguin Books, 1984); *David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, the Posthumous Essays, of the Immortality of the Soul, and of Suicide, from an Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding of Miracles*, ed. Richard H. Popkin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998). For a recent assessment of Hume's impact, pro and con see James F. Sennett and Douglas R. Groothuis, eds., *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment* (Downers

to the God-and-moral-order connection persist, but many current secular thinkers refuse to engage the theistic arguments or even acknowledge this history.<sup>34</sup> They remain fully committed to *the secular moral project*. Nevertheless, the sophistication of contemporary theistic-centered philosophy, theistic metaethics, various developments in natural theology, and the moral argument are notable.

Next, from this history, it is also instructive to look carefully at how the differing arguments proceed and which particular facets of the multifaceted phenomena of the moral order each thinker has chosen to focus on. From this, it can be seen that the moral domain, and consequently the moral argument, is a very deep, wide, and rich area that continues to present new opportunities and challenges for Christian thinkers.<sup>35</sup> It is also clear that the moral argument for God's existence can legitimately be developed in a host of different ways and that it can focus on other features of moral reality and various features of the God side of the equation. The particular form of the argument developed in this project is one of many possible ways it might be legitimately crafted.

Furthermore, human beings are inescapably immersed in the moral domain since we are incorrigibly moral beings. If the God of Theism exists, then the existence of this God is not only relevant to how we understand the normative order of Reality but this order will most certainly

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Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), in particular see the chapter "Hume and the Moral Argument" by Paul Copan in this same volume.

<sup>34</sup> Breitenbach is correct in judging the impact of Kant's moral argument. He observes that "Kant's argument made an impact on the landscape of moral philosophy by forcing those who came after him to consider what implications atheism would have for the rationality of following the moral law." Zachary Breitenbach, "Evaluating the Theistic Implications of the Kantian Moral Argument that Postulating God Is Essential to Moral Rationality," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 34, no. 2 (2021): 149.

<sup>35</sup> See Trent Dougherty, Jerry L. Walls, and Alvin Plantinga, eds., *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 447. In this interview Alvin Plantinga states he thinks the moral argument for God's existence to be "the most compelling."

be misunderstood if the Living God is not taken into consideration on any broader account of this domain.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, it should be evident that the current project of the moral argument for God's existence is not only in good intellectual company, with a venerable history but also remains profoundly relevant in today's world on multiple fronts. Naturalism continues to be a challenge. From William Sorley onward, various Christian thinkers have successfully met the challenges of naturalism and naturalistic ethics. This project aims to take up the challenge of secular nonnaturalist metaethics systematically. It is acutely aware of a long lineage of Christian moral thinkers that have come before and contemporary Christian thinkers that are God-gifted and have shaped the content herein by both thinking and living.

### **The Cultural Processes of Secularization**

#### **And The Historical Opening for Secular Ethics**

None of the thinkers focused on in the following chapters refer to themselves or their work as secular. However, all of them deliberately exclude God in their respective metaethical projects. In this work, "secular" refers to God-excluding ethical thinking. The focus here will be on nonnaturalism that is either secular or Theistic.<sup>37</sup> But secularism, as part of secularization, involves much more than God excluding. The interest in this section is to briefly understand the broader and more encompassing story of secularization as it unfolds and situates the development of ethical thinking and metaethics into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>36</sup> As Alastair MacIntyre puts the matter, "To be a theist is to understand every particular as, by reason of its finitude and its contingency, pointing towards God....It is to believe that, if we try to understand finite particulars independently of their relationship to God, we are bound to misunderstand them." Alasdair C. MacIntyre, "On Being A Theistic Philosopher in a Secularized Culture," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 84 (2011): 23.

<sup>37</sup> For that matter, it could also be polytheistic, or pantheistic, to point out a few other options. As Dallas Willard rightly notes, "nonnaturalism has been the rule and not the exception in ethical theory." Willard, *The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*, 114.

The 19th-century context of British moral philosophy is vital for understanding the historical background of our particular critique. For example, almost all thinkers reviewed in our synopsis of the moral argument for God's existence worked in this broader context of British moral philosophy.<sup>38</sup> This broader context is vital for understanding G.E. Moore and his predecessors. Given his influential work *Principia Ethica*, Moore is considered a pivotal thinker who bridges late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century ethical philosophy. It will be evident, however, that each of the contemporary thinkers that this work focuses on views their work as part of a more comprehensive secular moral project. Of course, the secular need not necessarily exclude God, and it need not entail wholesale atheism. While metaphysical naturalism entails atheism, moral nonnaturalism does not. Secular moral naturalism and secular moral nonnaturalism disagree on the wider metaphysics of Reality. However, they generally agree that there is no God; or that God is of no account in systematically thinking through the moral, the ethical, the normative,<sup>39</sup> the prescriptive, the obligatory (categorical), the aesthetic, or the axiological, and just as importantly, the scientific. A more careful look at secularism and secularization is then in order. Charles Taylor begins his wide-ranging study of secularization in Western society with this incisive question.

One way to put the question that I want to answer here is this: why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?<sup>40</sup>

The secular moral project we are interested in occurs in this broader opening of secularization in Western society. Few would dispute the claim that today's Western culture is secular in a

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<sup>38</sup> Many of the books of these thinkers grew out of a presentation of the Gifford lectures. The Gifford Lectures were established in 1887 to focus on issues related to natural theology. God and the moral order has been a central theme in natural theology.

<sup>39</sup> The first order moral, ethical and the normative are taken to be roughly equivalent throughout this work.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 25. Taylor takes almost 900 pages to work out this question.

considerable measure and some general sense. But what precisely is secularization, and how is it to be understood? How did secularization of the culture occur historically, and what are its implications and impact? A brief examination of these questions is essential to establish a broader context for our critique. As is common knowledge, the details are disputed. Overall, secularization is a historically complex, fully multi-dimensional, socio-cultural process that occurs over time and ranges from a given society's macro-level institutions, middle-level organizations, the family-household, and micro-level personal experiences of the lifeworld. The personal lifeworld is a part of this broader process of secularization. The lifeworld involves the whole taken-for-granted practical world of a person's day-to-day life embedded within a wider umbrella of organizations and institutions. It is the dimension of personal, taken-for-granted beliefs, experiences, sensibilities, and everyday practices. The embedded individual's day-to-day lifeworld and wider embedding macro context is the full range of the story of secularization.

A full account of secularization would deal with this full scope. But this scope is obviously too broad and complex to be examined here. Yet awareness of this broader scope helps us point out a few common misconceptions about secularization. Clearly, secularization involves more than a mere change of ideas and beliefs. Also, it is more than simply a change of beliefs only; it is a wholesale change of life practice and worldview. The material conditions of secularization are deep and diffuse as well. Sometimes, the secularization of society is caricatured as the advancement of reason and science that results in the inevitable decline of irrational belief in God and religion. This sort of activist characterization is much too quick and involves a particular vested spin on how secularization is to be understood. Charles Taylor convincingly argues against the idea that secularization is a one-sided story of the loss of God,

the inevitable outcome of modernization, and a coming of age that has thrown God off. He calls this view the subtraction thesis.

Most importantly, the subtraction thesis cannot explain the persistence of religious belief and practice in the West and outside the Western world. But neither can it readily explain the optimistic side of secularization - a positive humanist belief in and total commitment to unbridled human powers of self-determination, human autonomy, rationality, general human flourishing as an ultimate good, and a fully human-sourced morality.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, this moral repertoire is more than mere subtraction of God.

A brief survey of some of the broader and deeper dimensional changes is helpful to situate our analysis. Historically at the macro level from the top-down, secularization involves a complex process of institutional transformation, separation, and differentiation over time. The economic dimension and the rise of capitalism involve new technologies of production, transportation, finance, energy, mechanization, architecture, warfare, and communication. In part, this is the industrial revolution. The economic order becomes rationally objectified and differentiated as a distinct order of production, consumption, commodification, and wealth; this also requires the innovative birth of modern finance. The economic order also shapes both the bottom-up content and practice of personal disciplinary virtue at the micro level that capitalism requires; workers must be disciplined and specialized to be productive and contribute to the civil and economic order. Next, it is important to consider the unfolding political dimension and the rise of the nation-state that involves new forms of the political structuring of power, social ordering, and law.

Constitutionalism is born, and its notion of political rights comes to the fore. Along with this, political, military, and economic power can be projected across the globe as never before by

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 253, 572.

various competing nation-states, hence the global Western colonialist legacy and the continued inertia towards globalization. Commodities can be sourced and extracted from across the globe. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century see the continued rise of multinationals. Then add the religious dimension - in particular, the reformation.

The reformation becomes a constant force for radical religious reform that generates religious institutional differentiation and religious organizational pluralization. The secular order comes to encompass and embeds the religious order. Some view this religious and political separation as the heart of the secularization project. The transformation of religious practice and pluralization also occur from the bottom up at the individual practice level within middle-range organizations. The reformation thinkers challenge and attenuate a sacred/secular distinction of practice and vocation. With the ascendance of the physical sciences, new forms of knowledge in the sciences, mathematics, and the arts proliferate and accumulate. These transform our understanding of the physical world, from astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, and the arts - all contributing to developing new technologies and accounts of human nature and the physical world. Evolutionary theory becomes central to the sciences from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward. Additionally, the sciences transform the dimension of education; the Academy shifts from a classical educational format to a more science and technical-based format. The human-centered place in the cosmos gives way to the peripheral human place in the more expansive but finite universe.

Of course, Taylor understands that the material conditions of modernity are important. But these conditions do not cause secularization, explain secularization, or explain the numerous changes associated with secularism.<sup>43</sup> His analysis of secularization is a wide and detailed

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<sup>43</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 310-313, 393-418.

interdisciplinary account. It is strongly interpretive. This work will build upon Taylor's analysis to further clarify the subject matter. He identifies several significant transformations in his work that are important to recognize clearly. There is a transition from a fulsome transcendent theism to a much thinner and remote providential deism.<sup>44</sup> The personal God of theism is no longer seen as an agent that speaks and acts in history.<sup>45</sup> In this shift in belief, the broadest horizon of Reality and humanity's relationship to it is transformed. The relation of God and the created world and the relation of God to the human order of things are reconceived and reconstituted in different ways<sup>46</sup> In part, this results from what Taylor calls the "great disembedding" in which the social and ritual facets of religious practice and experience are transformed and broken up by decisively shifting towards the individual.<sup>47</sup> The reformation contributes to this shift. In many ways, this is a positive shift. However, with the eclipse of a personal God, the new order in many ways also becomes a complex, impersonal order; a vast sea of governing cosmic natural laws, impersonal causes and mechanisms, formulas and functions, impersonal social and historical laws, impersonal moral ideals, codes, and requirements.<sup>48</sup> However, that the world was made for human beneficence remains central to both theism and deism. Also, religion becomes narrowed to a diffuse but rather thin moralism in deism.<sup>49</sup>

From the shift to providential deism, only one step away from atheism, there is the related transition to see the world in which one lives as disenchanted instead of enchanted. I describe these changes this way. A "disenchanted world" is a world in which a barrier exists between the lifeworld and what is referred to here as World2. By World2 is meant the immaterial

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<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 221–269. Taylor also notes the move to atheism by the intermediary stage of deism, p.293.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 274–275.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 146–158.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 270–293.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

world that includes God, who is Spirit, the gods, spirits, angels, demons, invisible powers, and even the dead, including the world of the afterlife.<sup>50</sup> It is obvious that in different cultures, World2 is conceived in different ways. An “enchanted world” means that whatever powers are taken to occupy World2 can influence World1 (the physical world) and the lifeworld of individuals. As part of this shift to disenchantment, there is a transformation to see the self, the lifeworld, as “buffered” rather than “porous.” In describing the lifeworld as “porous,” Taylor means there is an open connection, penetration, and interchange between World2 and the lifeworld.<sup>51</sup> By “buffered,” he means that an open porous interchange is closed off.<sup>52</sup> There is outright denial that World2 exists in disenchantment or that the lifeworld is isolated or buffered from World2.

Secularization also involves a transformation in one's sense of time and history. Without a transcendent God, the broader temporal horizon is still considered linear, but the sense of time becomes flattened, a strictly horizontal flow of time. The lifeworld is only situated within real World1 time.<sup>53</sup> But this horizontal flow of time is still defined by a linear notion of historical progress on all fronts. These combined changes contribute to what Taylor further describes as a developing crystallization of an “immanent frame” of experience and thinking.<sup>54</sup> By this, he means that the totality of human life and thought become enframed within this-worldly immanence instead of an other-worldly transcendence. Central to the immanent frame is “exclusive humanism.”<sup>55</sup> Humanism of this sort is a radical shift, an intra-human, “inward turn in

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 147. This is a socio-cultural concept and not a metaphysical possible worlds concept.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 35–43.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 135–142. As Taylor describes this, “[the] buffered self is the agent that no longer fears demons, spirits, magic forces.” Ibid., 135. See also his discussion on pp. 300–301

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 54–59.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 542–557.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 242–269.

the form of disengaged reason.”<sup>56</sup> Exclusive humanism becomes a fully rational and moral vision in which human nature is valorized.<sup>57</sup> It is thought possible to utilize exclusive humanly sourced powers of reason, morality, values, and the sciences to achieve exclusively human ends of progress and human flourishing. Associated with this is a transition from a universal ethic grounded in Christian *agape* to a universal and idealized commitment focused exclusively on human beneficence in this world. The key is that all of this is God-excluding, either actively or passively. It is a distinctively anthropocentric moral ideal and commitment.<sup>58</sup> Humanity alone becomes the locus of a positive and exclusive humanist belief in, and total commitment to, unconstrained human powers of self-determination, human autonomy, rationality, political freedom, universal justice, generalized human flourishing as an ultimate good, and an exclusively human-sourced morality and scheme of values. Taylor convincingly argues that none of this would have been possible without the prior groundwork laid by Christian theism. He states,

... all present issues around secularism and belief are affected by a double historicity, a two-tiered perfecttensedness. On one hand, unbelief and exclusive humanism defined itself in relation to earlier modes of belief, both orthodox theism and enchanted understandings of the world; and this definition remains inseparable from unbelief today. On the other hand, later-arising forms of unbelief, as well as all attempts to redefine and recover belief, define themselves in relation to this first path-breaking humanism of freedom, discipline, and order.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 257. Taylor refers to this as “one of the great achievements of our civilization, and the charter of modern unbelief.”

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 256. Here Taylor speaks of the “ontic placement” of this moral vision in human nature itself. Also, for his notion of “fullness: see pp.600-601.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 269.

As regards religion, after the reformation, an unending and continuous pluralism of both belief and unbelief unfolds.<sup>60</sup> In many respects, this development is positive. Over time both belief and unbelief are subjected to tremendous cross-pressures and what Taylor calls fragilization.<sup>61</sup> He has dubbed this contentious explosion and proliferation of religious and spiritual options beyond orthodoxy a “nova effect.” The pluralized world of today lives in the aftermath of this nova effect.

### **Mill, Sidgwick and Moore**

This section will explore more specific historical developments while taking the preceding as a general context for understanding the secular moral project. Before the focus is turned to secular moral nonnaturalism, it is essential to consider the development of the secular moral project itself in more detail. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where our analysis will now pick up, the full opening of secularization is firmly in play and continuing to unfold. Into this broader opening, the secular moral project develops. Three specific thinkers, John Stuart Mill, Henry Sidgwick, and G.E Moore, are relevant. The logic of selecting these three thinkers in succession is as follows. Moore is the transitional thinker to the modern period, Sidgwick is the critical thinker that sets the table for Moore and the modern period, and Sidgwick, along with Mill, labors to work out the basis and details for a new and fully adequate secular ethics.

Theism has always provided a natural and unproblematic placement within which the moral order of things is fittingly nested.<sup>62</sup> If God exists, then the moral order is grounded. To be

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 437. Taylor summarizes this on p. 305. MacIntyre similarly emphasizes this in his last chapter entitled “Contested Justices, Contested Rationalities” in Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 303–304.

<sup>62</sup> Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 452–454. Here Parfit points out that the secular moral project is in its infancy and that Theism has been the natural home of ethics. As Parfit puts things, “Belief in God, or in many gods, prevented the free development of moral reasoning. Disbelief in God, openly

sure, the details of this are worked out in different ways in Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and other versions of Theism. But all Theists agree that God, who is personal, who is fundamentally a moral, spiritual being, by virtue of being God, must somehow be the ultimate source of the normative order. In a Theistic world, all credible, ethical sources involve God and are intimately linked to God. They must depend upon God in some fundamental way. This dependence on God has profound practical implications as well. In this sense, historically, a God-given moral order not only structured and guided the whole of life in thinking and practice but also indirectly showed God's undeniability.<sup>63</sup> This order of human life needed God. However, once the deniability of God becomes broadly plausible, the very foundations of the moral order are also questioned. Secularization then forces a rethinking of the moral order down to the foundations. Once there is a total commitment to an exclusive humanism that is optimistic about rationally elaborating a fully humanly sourced moral vision, the gauntlet is laid down for fully engaging and developing the secular moral project. This need must be filled and hammered out by serious secular moral thinkers.

Otherwise, the secular project will morally flounder. Secular thinkers are forced to squarely face a whole host of thorny questions and problems concerning the moral order, given the premise of secularization. Mere reactionary critiques of Theism will no longer suffice in this regard. Secular worldview logic has a straightforward premise; since God does not exist, this fact must be squarely faced on all fronts. The big questions still loom very large indeed. How, then, are we to think and live? Why should we believe and live this way or that way, and how can this thinking and living be systematically formulated in a strictly secular view of Reality? The secular moral project becomes central to this broader set of pressing questions.

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admitted by a majority, is a recent event, not yet completed. Because this event is so recent, Non-Religious Ethics is at a very early stage." Ibid., 456.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 310–311.

## John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) not only feels the need for such an account but also takes up the challenge of trying to develop one adequately. Mill's writings are prolific, and his impact was significant.<sup>64</sup> Several aspects of his thinking will be briefly discussed before moving on to the work of Sidgwick and Moore.<sup>65</sup> Mill was raised by his father in the tradition of *philosophical radicalism* to become the ultimate Victorian intellectual and utilitarian reformer.<sup>66</sup> It is significant that as a young man, between the years 1826-1830, Mill suffered from a severe period of depression. He experienced a deep intellectual and emotional crisis.<sup>67</sup> In the period that Mill writes, he pens not only his classic work on the ethics of utilitarianism (1861)<sup>68</sup> but also philosophical works arguing against various elements of Theism and natural theology by critiquing the standard pieces of evidence put forward in favor of Theism (1874).<sup>69</sup> Mill was an exclusive humanist who advocated what Auguste Comte called the religion of humanity.<sup>70</sup> In this religion surrogate, humanity becomes a kind of object of devotion, as both the source and object of moral good and endeavor. Two additional things should be noted about the context in which

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<sup>64</sup> All of Mill's writing can be accessed in 33 volumes, see [Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, in 33 vols. | Online Library of Liberty \(libertyfund.org\)](http://www.libertyfund.org)

<sup>65</sup> I have relied heavily in this section on David O. Brink's thorough work on Mill as well as the excellent work by J.B. Schneewind on Mill and Sidgwick. See David O. Brink, "Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA, Fall 2022) John Stuart Mill, *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill: On Liberty, The Subjection of Women, and Utilitarianism* (NY: Random House, Modern Library, 2002); J.B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). For excellent overviews and analysis see the two chapters in Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study. Vol. 3: From Kant to Rawls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Brink, "Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy," 3. Of the three most famous proponents of philosophical radicalism there is Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), John Austin (1790-1859) and Mill's father, James Mill (1773-1836).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Mill, *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill: On Liberty, The Subjection of Women, and Utilitarianism*.

<sup>69</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, [Reprint] London, 1874. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> Linda C. Raeder, *John Stuart Mill and the Religion of Humanity* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002); see also her summary Linda C. Raeder, "Mill's Religion of Humanity: Consequences and Implications," *Humanitas* 14, no. 2 (2001): 4–34. Mill describes this religion of humanity as "the sense of unity with mankind, and a deep feeling for the general good, may be cultivated into a sentiment and a principle capable of fulfilling every important function of religion and itself justly entitled to the name." Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, 109.

Mill writes. First, Paley's work on natural theology<sup>71</sup> (1802) was still highly influential at the time, so much so that Mill felt compelled to respond to the prevailing arguments of Paley.<sup>72</sup> One author takes Paley's natural theology as the spiritual core of the metaphysics of the British Enlightenment.<sup>73</sup> But Paley's work in moral and political philosophy (1785) was also highly influential.<sup>74</sup> Paley was a proponent of a version of Theistic utilitarianism.<sup>75</sup> Both of Paley's works were commonly used as textbooks for years in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>76</sup> Second, Mill fully recognized that an adequate and complete secular ethics had yet to be worked out. In 1847 Mill urged John Austin to write a systematic treatise on morals, without which the kind of moral reform Mill, Austin, and others were hoping for, could not be achieved.<sup>77</sup> Mill also shared his views in 1854 that "ethics as a branch of philosophy is still to be created."<sup>78</sup> 1854 was the same year that *Utilitarianism* was drafted, and after some 30 years of thought, his final revisions came in 1859, and it was finally published in 1861.<sup>79</sup> Initially, it was only marginally impactful.

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<sup>71</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology* (Miami FL: HardPress, 2017 [1802]). It should be noted that Paley was not a deist, he was clearly a Theist.

<sup>72</sup> Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, 167, 174. Here Mill critiques and accepts Paley's argument from design. He argues that knowledge of design is only derived from things we already know as designed. Since we already possess experience of specific designed things by induction they do serve as evidence for God as a designing intelligence. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*, 151 points out that beyond 1830 or so Paley's influence begins to wane.

<sup>73</sup> Frederick Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill*. (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 113.

<sup>74</sup> Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*, 177. Schneewind's summary of Paley is quite useful, *Ibid.*, 122-129. As Schneewind points out Paley's work was published in 1785 and was used as a textbook and reprinted many times. Bentham's work on utilitarianism was published in 1789 and William Godwin also published a work in 1793. Neither of these works was as popular as Paley's works, *Ibid.*, 127. See a more detailed discussion of this in Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill.*, 131-143. Rosen shows that in England there were many religious or theological utilitarian's prior to Paley.

<sup>75</sup> William Paley, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Miami FL: HardPress, 2017 [1785]). See a discussion of this in the section entitled, "William Paley as a Utilitarian," in Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill.*, 131-143. Paley was a hedonist of sorts, but as a theist he placed emphasis on God rather than a strictly natural knowledge of right, wrong, good and evil and consequential good.

<sup>76</sup> Aileen Fyfe, "The Reception of William Paley's "Natural Theology" in the University of Cambridge," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 30, no. 3 (September 1997): 321-335. Even Darwin was influenced by Paley, see Steinar Thorvaldsen and Peter Øhrstrøm, "Darwin's Perplexing Paradox: Intelligent Design in Nature," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 56, no. 1 (2013): 78-98.

<sup>77</sup> Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*, 178.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study. Vol. 3: From Kant to Rawls*, 364.

Only gradually was it noticed and given critical attention.<sup>80</sup> It is now the best-known account of classical utilitarianism to date. But Mill was no staunch atheist. He was a Theist of sorts, a believer in a finite Theistic God. What some have referred to as a “probable Theist.” This can be seen both from the practical side of his life and his posthumously published essay entitled “Theism.”<sup>81</sup> Although Mill worked to contribute to the secular moral project, he also recognized that it was far from complete. He saw it as just beginning. But clearly, Mill believed that there was a comprehensive moral answer though he could not provide it fully. This point is significant. Mill is not committed to anything like moral nihilism.

Moreover, he developed his utilitarian account after a long line of previous thinkers, both secular and religious, had espoused some form of utilitarianism.<sup>82</sup> He attempted to remedy previous problems and misconceptions throughout his argument, which sought to develop a convincing account of utilitarianism and provide a kind of “proof” of utilitarianism.<sup>83</sup> Most agree that his proof is less than successful. Nevertheless, Mill was a highly influential political and moral reformer, philosopher, and statesman; his moral philosophy was worked out toward these larger ends. He believed philosophy could change how people thought and lived regarding moral good and that this could have a positive social, political, and economic impact. This project is in

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<sup>80</sup> Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*, 178–188.

<sup>81</sup> The religious side of Mill is thoroughly documented in Timothy Larsen, *John Stuart Mill: A Secular Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); see also Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*. Mill rejected a providential, benevolent deism, p.242. The only argument that Mill found inductively convincing for God was the argument from design, p.174. But God according to Mill was finite as shown by the existence of evil in the world and the constraints of design, pp. 38-39, 177-183. Mill also rejected the notion of miracles accepting Hume's argument of unalterable natural law as conclusive but did hold open the possibility that God could creatively intervene in the world, p.233, 244. Hence Mill was a Theist of sorts. See also Harry Settaggi, *The Probabilist Theism of John Stuart Mill*, (New York: P. Lang, 1991). See also Robert Devigne, “Reforming Reformed Religion: J. S. Mill's Critique of the Enlightenment's Natural Religion,” *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 1 (February 2006): 15–27.

<sup>82</sup> Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill*, 131. Rosen lists six thinkers cited by J. Crimmins, *Utilitarians and Religion* (Bristol, TN: Thoemmes Press, 1998).

<sup>83</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher, 2nd ed. (IN: Hackett, 2001), 35. For a careful reconstruction of Mill's argument and solid criticism of it see Brink, “Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy,” 34–39. MacIntyre simply calls Mill's proof “unimpressive.” He thinks that it flounders on a haziness of the central concept. Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 238–240.

complete agreement with Mill in this regard. How important, then, is Mill? Given his work, David O. Brink takes Mill as the most influential philosopher of the 19th century in British moral philosophy.<sup>84</sup>

### Henry Sidgwick

While Mill's work leaves the secular moral project unfinished, still to be created, it also overlaps and leads into the work of Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900), author of *The Methods of Ethics*.<sup>85</sup> Schneewind comments on this monumental work of Sidgwick.

It was not until Sidgwick's *Methods*, which tried to reconcile these two schools [intuitionism and utilitarianism], that all the characteristics of a modern treatment of ethics were fully and deliberately brought together in a single work. Sidgwick is often described as the last of the classical utilitarians. He may with as much accuracy be viewed as the first of the modern moralists.<sup>86</sup>

In what ways might Sidgwick be considered the first of the modern moralists? It has mostly to do with the way that Sidgwick went about doing the task of ethical philosophy and the reasons why he did it.<sup>87</sup> A lot of this can be gleaned from his introduction to the *Methods*. Sidgwick completed the first edition of the *Methods* when he was thirty-six years old in 1874. The final 7<sup>th</sup> edition was completed and published after his death in 1907. He spent his entire academic life revising the *Methods*. His influence is clearly seen in that the dominant forms of the problems of later British and American moral philosophy were, in many important ways,

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<sup>84</sup> Brink, *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>85</sup> This work will quote only from the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Methods*, unless otherwise noted, as is common among interpreters of Sidgwick's work. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. [1907] (London: Macmillan & Co, 1962). The work went through five printings and revisions in Sidgwick's lifetime. The last two versions were posthumous. This 7<sup>th</sup> edition also includes all of the prefaces from editions 1-7. This is very helpful for tracing the changes in Sidgwick's work and thinking.

<sup>86</sup> Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*, 122.

<sup>87</sup> Ross Harrison, "Cambridge Philosophers VI: Henry Sidgwick," *Philosophy* 71, no. 277 (July 1996): 423-438. This is an excellent review of Sidgwick's reformist efforts in helping to found a first women's college near Cambridge, and other practical institutional reform efforts he was involved with. For these things, Harrison says of Sidgwick, "But if conventional answers were insufficient, he needed some kind of different and more theoretical guidance. He needed a theory of the 'ought'. He needed a Method of ethics." p.427. Harris further describes Sidgwick not only as a reformer but also as a highly scrupulous "resigner," p.437.

shaped by his work.<sup>88</sup> In the very first sentence of the *Methods*, Sidgwick points out that the boundaries of ethics have been variously and vaguely conceived. Deliberately and clearly establishing the boundaries of ethics was thus a major part of what Sidgwick set out to do in the *Methods*.<sup>89</sup> Throughout the *Methods*, he works to clearly differentiate ethics from other disciplines such as politics, economics, philosophical metaphysics, or theology.<sup>90</sup> Sidgwick also shows how ethics must be distinct from psychology and sociology.<sup>91</sup> When Sidgwick writes, moral philosophy includes these various disciplines within its scope. According to Sidgwick, ethics is an autonomous discipline standing on its own.<sup>92</sup> Its aims, sources, and boundaries should have clear limits while not borrowing fundamental premises from other sources.<sup>93</sup>

Sidgwick thus establishes the autonomy of ethics, a significant achievement. Establishing the autonomy of ethics also helps to further distinguish between 1<sup>st</sup> order ethics and 2nd-order metaethics. This distinction is central to 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century ethical theory and had much to do with Sidgwick's work. For example, 1<sup>st</sup> order ethics might discuss what our various duties are. 2nd-order metaethics seeks to understand the nature of duty itself; what duty itself fundamentally consists of. Much of Sidgwick's discussion in the *Methods* is worked out at the level of the metaethical, as one can see in his analysis of what is "good," "right," the notions of "ought," "virtue," "duty," and so on. In the wake of the *Methods*, ethical analysis at the abstract level of metaethics has become commonplace, an independent specialty in ethics. According to Sidgwick, a related claim follows from his analysis that there is a fundamental distinction between "is" and "ought." This means that a truly categorical "ought" cannot be derived from an

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 422.

<sup>89</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 11–12.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 78–80.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 2. Note that at this time psychology and sociology are newly formed disciplines as well.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 507.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

existing particular thing or an infinite collection of particular things.<sup>94</sup> Next, Sidgwick fully recognizes that the situation within which the ethical theorist works is pluralistic. Sidgwick seeks to understand and explain why and how this is so. The major ethical viewpoints in British moral philosophy at the time that Sidgwick wrote were egoism, intuitionism, and utilitarianism. This pluralism is the starting point for the *Methods*, analyzing its character and working out ethical theory to cut through various confusions induced by conflicting viewpoints.<sup>95</sup> The *Methods* seeks to work out a unique synthesis in this regard. By and large, Sidgwick accomplishes this. He ends up synthesizing an intuitionally grounded utilitarianism.<sup>96</sup>

Notwithstanding Sidgwick's efforts, however, ethical pluralism since the *Methods* has only increased. Next, theoretical ethics for Sidgwick is a fully human undertaking. Fundamentally, ethics is a task undertaken by human beings for human beings, and it is basically about human beings. The task of ethical thinking excludes anything above and beyond the human, even if such might exist.<sup>97</sup> Sidgwick's exclusive humanism is evident here. Ethics is a fallible human project but also mostly a secular moral project. But this does not mean, as will be further seen, that Sidgwick subscribes to atheism. He does not. Nevertheless, after Sidgwick, the secular moral project is in full swing. So then, for Sidgwick, the project of ethics is progressive given that 1<sup>st</sup> order ethical views will change over time. The ethical views of the future will probably differ from those of the present in the same way that the views of the ancients differ from those of the moderns. What "ought" consists of will not change (the metaethical), whereas what we take to be our specific "oughts" may very well change over time.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 25, 396. See also David Phillips, *Sidgwickian Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55–57.

<sup>95</sup> Hence the plural *Methods of Ethics* and not the singular Method of Ethics.

<sup>96</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*. As Sidgwick puts it describing his intellectual journey away from Mill's utilitarianism toward his own formulation of utilitarianism, "I was then a Utilitarian again, but on an Intuitional basis." Preface to the 6<sup>th</sup> edition, xx.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 114–115.

<sup>98</sup> E.M Sidgwick and A. Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick: A Memoir* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1906), 607–608.

By a *method* of ethics, Sidgwick means “any rational procedure by which we determine what individual human beings ‘ought’ – or what is ‘right’ for them – to do, or to seek to realize by voluntary action.”<sup>99</sup> He recognizes a diversity of methods in ordinary practical ethical thinking.<sup>100</sup> In this, Sidgwick identifies three primary methods: egoism, utilitarianism, and intuitionism. According to Sidgwick, the study of the methods of ethics should involve “systematic and precise general knowledge of what ought to be.”<sup>101</sup> Ethics is thus clearly focused on the categorical, on oughtness. Sidgwick is an “all-purpose” rationalist in that ethics must be worked out and made precise through human reason. He is not an extreme rationalist believing that reason is all there is.

Sidgwick believes this kind of rational study of ethics can be carried out in a somewhat “neutral” fashion, in the sense that one need not be rationally pre-committed to a particular outcome in the analysis. But there is a conflict here. Any supposed neutrality can never be complete because it will conflict with the practical requirement that compels us to ethical thinking and action.<sup>103</sup> After all, a method, according to Sidgwick, is how to think about what is right (and wrong) to do. While Sidgwick believes that common sense morality has practical value and provides a bedrock for moral truth and practice, it is nevertheless imprecise and unclear in many respects. Rational analysis of ethics, therefore, must give precision and clarity to common sense morality so that ethics attains to a rational science. It must transcend common-sense moral thinking.<sup>104</sup> Here, the notion of science, as Sidgwick is using the term, is the looser 19<sup>th</sup>-century sense that was common at the time. But he did see the natural sciences as a

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<sup>99</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 6. See also David Brink O., “Common Sense and First Principles in Sidgwick’s Methods,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11, no. 1 (1994): 179–201.

<sup>101</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 1.

<sup>103</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*. See chapter XI entitled “Review of Common Sense.” See especially the conclusion pp.360-361.

paradigm case of how progress is achieved. Since Sidgwick works to delineate “fundamental principles” of ethics along intuitionist and utilitarian lines, and rejects both logical and systemic contradictions as negative tests for truth, his epistemology is appropriately classed as moderately foundationalist and coherentist.<sup>105</sup> Sidgwick sometimes compares ethics to how geometry gets worked out with axioms and derivations.<sup>106</sup> Sidgwick is moderate, given that the Methods focus on practical reason, what one “ought” to do, and how to determine right conduct. Finally, Sidgwick aims overall toward a “harmonious system” in his exposition of the methods of ethics, but he explicitly warns that he is not striving to forge a single, unified, harmonious systematic method.<sup>107</sup>

It is generally agreed that Sidgwick is accurately described as an ethical nonnaturalist.<sup>108</sup> But Sidgwick is no moral Platonist. He does not use the language of moral properties or ontology and does not refer to any Third Realm or the like to elaborate his version of ethics. He is what today is termed a moral realist of the cognitivist sort.<sup>109</sup> He rejects the notion that the “natural” can furnish an ethical first principle to work out a consistent metaethical system.<sup>110</sup> He also rejects the notion that the ideal of Ultimate Good or Universal Happiness can be established naturalistically.<sup>111</sup> Sidgwick takes naturalistic ethics to be inadequate in at least two respects. First, all versions run afoul of what he takes to be the fundamental is/ought distinction. The

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 509.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 13–14, 496.

<sup>108</sup> For a fuller discussion of this see Roger Crisp, *The Cosmos of Duty: Henry Sidgwick’s Methods of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015); Phillips, *Sidgwickian Ethics*. Crisp rightly places Sidgwick among “quietist” nonnaturalists. I will refer to “quietists” as ontologically light secular nonnaturalists. More will be said on this distinction below. It is notable that Phillips argues that Sidgwick’s formulation of nonnaturalism is better than G.E. Moore’s.

<sup>109</sup> Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, “Introduction: The Many Moral Realisms,” in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1–23.

<sup>110</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 83. See also Henry Sidgwick et al., “Symposium: Is the Distinction between ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’ Ultimate and Irreducible?,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 2, no. 1 (1892 1891): 88–107; Henry Sidgwick, “The Establishment of Ethical First Principles,” *Mind* 13, no. 4 (1879): 106–111.

<sup>111</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 396.

categorical “ought” cannot be derived from any collection of natural particulars, nor can ideals be similarly established. Second, the various naturalistic proposals each have their particular problems that lead Sidgwick to reject them.<sup>112</sup>

But Sidgwick also rejects Theistically grounded ethics although for different reasons.<sup>113</sup> Sidgwick’s relation to Theism is intriguing and ambivalent and merits a closer look. As is well known of Sidgwick, he resigned his fellowship at Cambridge in 1869 because of reservations concerning the requirement to assent to the 39 Articles of the Anglican Church to teach.<sup>114</sup> The 39 Articles were expressly orthodox in content and practice. Sidgwick’s resignation is often referred to as his turbulent “crises of faith.”<sup>115</sup> But Sidgwick does not become an atheist, although he fits the profile of a secularist rather well. He might best be described as an agnostic with leanings toward Theism or a weak Theist with agnostic leanings.

On the one hand, Sidgwick concludes in the *Methods* that Theism cannot be established “on ethical grounds alone.”<sup>117</sup> Most theists would agree. On the other hand, Sidgwick writes in personal correspondence in 1898 that “the need of Theism – or at least some doctrine establishing the moral order of the world – seems clear to me.”<sup>118</sup> Again, most Theists would agree. Sidgwick seems to be gesturing toward a version of Providential Theism.

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<sup>112</sup> Phillips, *Sidgwickian Ethics*, 14–15; Crisp, *The Cosmos of Duty: Henry Sidgwick’s Methods of Ethics*, 11, note 18.

<sup>113</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 504–507.

<sup>114</sup> For background to this period and the development of Sidgwick’s view on religion see Schneewind, *Sidgwick’s Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*, 17–40. See also Keith Tribe, “Henry Sidgwick, Moral Order, and Utilitarianism,” *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 24, no. 4 (July 2017): 907–930. Tribe provides additional useful context and background. The 39 Articles requirement was dropped as an academic requirement in 1871. See also Steven G. Medema, “‘Losing My Religion’: Sidgwick, Theism, and the Struggle for Utilitarian Ethics in Economic Analysis,” *History of Political Economy* 40, no. 5, Annual Supplement (2008): 189–211.

<sup>115</sup> Tribe, “Henry Sidgwick, Moral Order, and Utilitarianism,” 916. Tribe comments, “The Problem then is that Sidgwick’s ‘crises of faith’ has been assimilated to a narrative of secularization created by intellectuals themselves skeptical of religious faith of any kind; which was certainly not Sidgwick’s own position.”

<sup>117</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 506–507.

<sup>118</sup> Sidgwick and Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick: A Memoir*, 560. See also Sidgwick discussion of freedom and what he terms “the moral government of the world.” Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 69.

Along with rejecting orthodoxy, he also saw that Paley's natural theology and moral philosophy had pretty much exhausted itself by the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was no longer interesting and compelling for many thinkers. Again, most theists would agree. So Sidgwick is fully committed to and engaged in the secular moral project. We previously noted that Sidgwick sought to establish ethics as an autonomous discipline with distinctive non-theological first principles rationally derived. This goal partly forms the basis for his acceptance of intuitionism.<sup>120</sup> Sidgwick concluded that intuitionism and utilitarianism, thought by most to be in conflict, could be reconciled. But he also sought to reconcile individual personal happiness (egoistic hedonism/self-interest) with ultimate collective happiness (utilitarianism/duty to others) as an ideal of ethics.<sup>121</sup> However, he finally concluded that these two methods of ethics could not be rationally reconciled. If a person acts in self-interest, this might be rational. If a person acts for the greater happiness of others, this, too, might be rational. Sidgwick concluded that no unified universal, categorical “ought” could be synthesized between these two principles. Though not always, but sometimes, these two methods will necessarily conflict. For Sidgwick, this is more than a moral conflict, intellectual tension, moral difficulty, or philosophical paradox. He describes it as an “ultimate and fundamental contradiction” of intuition and judgment that informs practical reason and, along with such a contradiction, the attendant failure of a non-contradictory, rational ethical theory.<sup>122</sup> This was a final and severe blow to Sidgwick’s systematic aspirations. Sidgwick’s conception of practical rationality is that it provides complete and conflict-free guidance.<sup>123</sup> So then, as is Sidgwick’s notoriety, he ends up with the

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<sup>120</sup> Anthony Skelton, “Henry Sidgwick’s Moral Epistemology,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48, no. 4 (2010): 491–519. Skelton argues convincingly that Sidgwick’s moral epistemology is intuitionist foundationalism.

<sup>121</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 498. Sidgwick defines happiness as “desirable consciousness” and universal happiness as “...desirable consciousness or feeling for the innumerable multitude of sentient beings, present and to come.” *Ibid.*, 404.

<sup>122</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 508. Sidgwick repeats this notion of “fundamental contradiction”

<sup>123</sup> David M Holley, “Sidgwick’s Problem,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 5 (2002): 51.

contradictory and intractable “dualism of practical reason.” This dualism he takes to be a rational contradiction at the heart of his ethical system that he cannot resolve within his exclusive humanist and rationalist commitments. Sidgwick judges the implications of this to be severe. He even admits that this contradiction threatens to open “the door to universal skepticism.”<sup>124</sup> He never gave in to such skepticism. He concludes the final edition of the *Methods* this way,

I do not mean that if we gave up the hope of attaining a practical solution of this fundamental contradiction, through any legitimately obtained conclusion or postulate as to the moral order of the world, it would become reasonable for us to abandon morality altogether: but it would seem necessary to abandon the idea of rationalizing it completely.... If then the reconciliation of duty and self-interest is to be regarded as a hypothesis logically necessary to avoid a fundamental contradiction in one chief department of our thought, it remains to ask how far this necessity constitutes a sufficient reason for accepting this hypothesis. This, however, is a profoundly difficult and controverted question, the discussion of which belongs rather to a treatise on General Philosophy than to a work on the Methods of Ethics: as it could not be satisfactorily answered, without a general examination of the criteria of true and false beliefs.<sup>125</sup>

We must bear in mind that this is the mature Sidgwick writing here and not the Sidgwick of the oft-quoted concluding passage of the first edition of the *Methods* of 1864 that was effectively revised out of subsequent editions and never to reappear.<sup>126</sup> We can see in these final words that all of the things that have done good work for Sidgwick throughout the *Methods* now seem to work against him: his exclusive humanism, his rationalism, his utilitarianism, the autonomy of ethics, his quest for a unified and perfect ethical ideal, his inveterate precisionism, his thin providential Theism, and finally his sidelining of full-orbed Theism as integral to completed metaethics. But in these final thoughts, he clearly states that for ethics to be rational, there must

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<sup>124</sup> Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 509.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 508–509.

<sup>126</sup> In this first edition of the *Methods* Sidgwick concludes, “But the Cosmos of Duty is thus really reduced to a Chaos: and the prolonged effort of the human intellect to frame a perfect ideal of rational conduct is seen to have been foredoomed to inevitable failure.” M1, p.473. See also J.L. Mackie, “Sidgwick’s Pessimism,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 26, no. 105 (1976): 317–327. This passage is quoted in full by Mackie and thoroughly discussed. In some respects Mackie finds in Sidgwick an ally to his own error theory. For a full account see J. L Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1990).

be a reconciliation of the “fundamental contradiction” as a “logically necessary” hypothesis. In other words, reconciliation is achievable, but he does not know how to do it. His gesture toward a solution from “General Philosophy” is hardly optimistic. The language of logical necessity here is strong indeed. Most contemporary Sidgwick interpreters think it is too strong and demurred on Sidgwick’s precisionist and perfectionist tendencies and how he frames the problem.<sup>127</sup> But there is another way to see things.

Ironically, what Sidgwick actually discovered in his trek through the moral trees as he exits out of the moral forest was a version of the moral argument for the existence of God. So argue Baggett and Walls.<sup>128</sup> Notice how Sidgwick looks to the world’s moral order for a possible resolution. Theism could provide the basis for this order. Sidgwick saw this, as he stated in personal correspondence. Not, of course, the thin and exhausted Theism of Paley’s natural theology or the Victorian moralism of the day. “Full moral rationality requires an ontological ground of morality that, among other things, ‘guarantees’ an unbreakable connection between morality and the ultimate self-interest of all rational beings.”<sup>129</sup> This rationality must involve *both* God and reconciliation of the moral order in life after death, that is, in a world to come.<sup>130</sup> Can a full account of Theistic metaethics provide for such rationality? Ironically, Sidgwick’s Methods create an opening for just such a moral argument for God, but Sidgwick himself did not see a way to solidify the connections and ideas. While a Theistic relation to the moral order

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<sup>127</sup> Crisp, *The Cosmos of Duty: Henry Sidgwick’s Methods of Ethics*; Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1, 3 vols., The Berkeley Tanner Lectures (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Phillips, *Sidgwickian Ethics*; Holley, “Sidgwick’s Problem.”

<sup>128</sup> Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History*; 58-59; Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 243-269. In the first citation see the entire section on Sidgwick, in the second citation see chapter 8 entitled “Moral Rationality” that deals with C.S. Lewis, Sidgwick and Kant.

<sup>129</sup> Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 269. In this vein, Bart Schultz says of Sidgwick that he could not bear the idea that we lived in a universe where “...the wages of virtue might ‘be dust’” *Henry Sidgwick, Eye of the Universe: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>130</sup> Breitenbach, “Evaluating the Theistic Implications of the Kantian Moral Argument that Postulating God Is Essential to Moral Rationality,” 151.

seemed intuitively evident to him, he could never work out a rationally clear account of the nature of that order within either a dogmatic Anglican orthodoxy or an exhausted Paleyan natural theology, both of which he rejected. But he also could not work out a final reconciliation of the dualism of practical reason within an entirely secular moral logic. For if such a logic failed of logical necessity, it thus failed of moral necessity. For Sidgwick, there was nowhere else to go. He had come to an end of resources. But clearly, Sidgwick still believed there was an objectively right and true answer to his quest. Yes, Sidgwick, who some consider the most significant moral philosopher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>131</sup> was fully committed to the secular moral project. But the methods of ethics could not be fully rationalized as Sidgwick had hoped. We can see then that this left his task unfinished and unfinishable, given his array of secular commitments and his particular formulation of the ethics methods. As the generations invariably shifted toward the young and optimistic thinkers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, “old Sidg” is what Bertrand Russell and other of his young students called him, died in 1900.<sup>132</sup> Much of his labor fades into obscurity.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> C.D. Broad describes the *Methods* as “the best treatise on moral philosophy that has ever been written.” C.D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Tubner, 1930), 143; Parfit echoes this stating that the *Methods* is “the best book on ethics ever written.” Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1, pxxxiii. Both complain about its lack of conciseness.

<sup>132</sup> The words that Sidgwick wanted to have said over his grave were, “Let us commend to the love of God with silent prayer the soul of a sinful man who partly tried to do his duty. It is by his wish that I say over his grave these words and no more.” Sidgwick and Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick: A Memoir*, 598–599. He was instead given the traditional Anglican funeral with all its ritual and pronouncements. Bertrand Russell and others referred to Sidgwick as “old Sidg” and regarded him as a product of a bygone era. They regarded themselves as initiating a new era in thought and ideas.

<sup>133</sup> Of course we have the advantage of hindsight to evaluate Sidgwick’s thinking. We can see better where things go, where things end up and from where new things start. I think there are at least two important take aways from Sidgwick’s *Methods*. First, if moral/ethical debate occurs at the level of what we might call the middle range, the strictly practical range, there will be a great deal of consensus on matters; unless our practicality is informed by radically different metaphysics. Secondly, at some point, all practicality must link up with and be informed by a larger, even Ultimate metaphysics; that is, how all things Ultimately hang together in relation to fundamental ethical principles. It is here where the most substantive and difficult, but also, the most important debates will be carried out. This is also the level of metaethics. It is here where the “why” and “how” of the moral/ethical is fundamentally grounded and worked out.

## G.E. Moore

One of these students was the young G.E. Moore. Moore was a student of Sidgwick's, and Moore's impact on 20<sup>th</sup>-century ethical thought beyond Sidgwick is indisputable. Contrary to popular belief, the publication of Moore's most well-known work, the *Principia Ethica*, did not rock the world of ethical philosophy in 1903 when it was first released.<sup>134</sup> It wasn't until the 1930s that the influence and importance of Moore's primary work were widely recognized.<sup>135</sup> It is one of his earliest articles that gave him early fame – "The Refutation of Idealism," also published in 1903.<sup>136</sup> Sidgwick's influence on Moore is evident throughout Moore's work.<sup>137</sup> In the *Principia*, Moore trod well-worn paths, and many of his ideas were shared by his contemporaries.<sup>138</sup> However, this diminishes neither Moore's originality nor his impact. But it is important to put that impact in proper context regarding the history and thought that concerns us.<sup>139</sup>

Moore's work was highly impactful for several reasons. The first is Moore's rhetorical style. The *Principia* first strikes one as crisp, succinct, to the point, laser-like, and exudes rhetorical confidence. It is laid out in what appears to be a powerfully logical format, and he looks to be proceeding succinctly and rigorously. This style is very different from other writing

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<sup>134</sup> I will be quoting only from this edition of *Principia* unless otherwise noted. G. E. Moore and Thomas Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, Rev. ed., with pref. to the 2nd ed. and other papers. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1903). This is the standard work with additional notes and commentary.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas Baldwin, "A Hundred Years of Principia Ethica: Interview with Thomas Baldwin," *Florianopolis* 2, no. 1 (June 2003): 4. Much of this seems to be due to the detailed discussion of Moore in the works of W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, ed. Philip Stratton-Lake, New edition. (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 1930); see also W. D. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).

<sup>136</sup> G. E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," *Mind* 12, no. 48 (October 1903): 433–453. Baldwin also points out the importance of this early article of Moore's, see Baldwin, *ibid*.

<sup>137</sup> The *Principia* cites Sidgwick's *Methods* more than any other work.

<sup>138</sup> Even Rashdall complains in a footnote on the nature of the good. He details the fact that Moore's way of seeing things is not at all new. In particular he references Plato. See Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil a Treatise on Moral Philosophy*, Wentworth Press Reproduction. (H. Milford: Oxford University Press, 1907), vol. 1: 135-136.

<sup>139</sup> Hurka's exposition of the history and thinking shows many if not most of the ideas that Moore develops are put in place by earlier thinkers; especially Sidgwick. Thomas Hurka, "Moore in the Middle," *Ethics* 113, no. 3 (April 2003): 599–628.

in philosophy at the time. For example, it contrasts sharply with Sidgwick's expositional, wandering, wordy, heavy, and unconcise style.<sup>140</sup> In the preface of the first 1903 edition of the *Principia*, Moore asserts that the problem with virtually *all* past philosophies, and ethics in particular, is their need for more clarity in questions, answers, and analysis. Moore set out to rectify *all* these confusions of the past in the *Principia*.<sup>141</sup> Who would not be interested in a serious philosophical work that genuinely set all previous philosophers straight? The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was rife with this kind of visionary optimism.

Secondly, like Sidgwick, Moore claims to be developing a “scientific ethics” in the same sense of science common in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>142</sup> According to Moore, all previous ethical systems of thought before his work failed to achieve this status of a rigorous science of ethics.<sup>143</sup> Moore spent much effort detecting errors and fallacies, defining terms, analyzing the language of ethics, and parsing the words being used, as well as the sentences, concepts, and ideas. This way of doing philosophy was part of the beginnings of the analytic tradition with its linguistic turn that still pervades much of technical philosophy today. One can agree with Moore that the muddled use of language leads to muddled philosophy. But the analysis of language itself cannot yield a complete understanding of the moral domain, in whatever ways this domain is conceived. Ethics and values are more than language use. The central strategy was to get at the meaning of the ethical by analyzing the language of the ethical, which then, it was hoped, would enable one to get clear on the concepts and content of ethics and thereby forge a science of ethics. For

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<sup>140</sup> M.D. Eddy, “The Rhetoric and Science of William Paley’s Natural Theology,” *Literature and Theology* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 1–22. This rhetorical style harkens back to an earlier style of Newton, as opposed to Hume’s or Sidgwick’s style. This style Alasdair MacIntyre refers to as Moore’s “...method of calm assertion.” He continues, “More unwarranted and unwarrantable assertions are perhaps made in *Principia Ethica* than in any other single book of moral philosophy, but they are made with such well-mannered, although slightly browbeating certitude, that it seems almost gross to disagree. But what then is Moore’s case?” MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, 250.

<sup>141</sup> Moore and Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, 33–37.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>143</sup> Willard, *The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*, 113.

Moore, the central thing around which all ethical thinking revolves was that of intrinsic good.<sup>144</sup> His central question was, “what is good?” Moore is not asking the question, “what is *the* good?” that is, the highest good in Plato’s sense of the *summum bonum*, but rather, what is the nature of good itself as we use the term in our everyday moral language?<sup>146</sup> Put more precisely, how is good to be defined? And then how is this definition to be applied to the things we refer to as good and understand to be good?<sup>147</sup> Moore believed a science of ethics would be based on a precise and accurate conception of intrinsic good. He also carried forward the commitment to British utilitarianism as well as intuitionism, but he argued that good is the fundamental principle of ethics, and the definition of good is the central question of ethics. So then, according to Moore, the notion of right is derivative from good. Good makes an action right and not the reverse. In Moore's day, the analysis of properties had not been developed thoroughly in philosophy, so Moore's analysis of moral properties and ontology is very limited in scope. He also never technically deploys the notion of supervenience, a development that later ethical thinkers will find almost indispensable to conceptualize the metaphysics of the moral domain.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, he argues that good is not a natural property, nor is it a supernatural property. He thus rejects both ethical naturalism and ethical Theism. He claims instead that good is an indefinable, irreducible, simple, intrinsic, and nonnatural property.<sup>149</sup> This notion of a nonnatural property was both interesting and intriguing. Strangely, it looked like Platonism but was

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<sup>144</sup> Moore and Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, 55.

<sup>146</sup> It should be noted that Moore does include a discussion of ethical ideals that touches on the concept of good as an ethical ideal in the final chapter of the *Principia*. Moore and Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, 232-273.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 57. As Moore states things, he says that “[t]he most important sense of ‘definition’ is that in which a definition states what are the parts which invariably compose a certain whole; and in this sense ‘good’ has no definition because it is simple and has no parts.” Ibid., 61. Given this, it is widely recognized that Moore deploys a highly peculiar notion of the term definition throughout the *Principia* but also that this strategy of analyzing parts and wholes, today known as mereology, is really the strategy that Moore deploys throughout his work to analyze the concept of good.

<sup>148</sup> Much more will be said of supervenience later in this work.

<sup>149</sup> Moore and Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, 60–61; G. E. Moore, “Is Goodness a Quality?,” in *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 89–100.

curiously different than classical Platonism.<sup>150</sup> Yet precisely how this notion was to be taken became a thorny issue that carried into subsequent debates remains disputed in current debates.

Thirdly, Moore utilized two argumentive strategies in particular to make his point that good is a nonnatural property. He dubbed the two centerpiece arguments in the *Principia* the “open question argument” and the “naturalistic fallacy.”<sup>151</sup> These two things and the question of nonnaturalism were particularly disputed. Getting clear on these matters absorbed much of the efforts of the first half of the twentieth-century secular moral philosophy.<sup>152</sup> It is generally agreed that the naturalistic fallacy is no formal fallacy,<sup>153</sup> that the open question argument is formally invalid but interesting and sometimes useful,<sup>154</sup> and that Moore’s way of conceptualizing a nonnatural property contributed to many unfruitful controversies that plagued 20<sup>th</sup>-century secular moral philosophy.<sup>155</sup> The issues are still discussed today, and the notion of a secular

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<sup>150</sup> Moore and Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, 227–231.

<sup>151</sup> Willard, *The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*, 116–117. Willard I think correctly and succinctly identifies what Moore meant by the naturalistic fallacy, namely, the mistake of identifying one property with a property that is not identical to it. The open question argument specifies that all correct definitions of good do not create open questions, or a remaining question about goodness not specified in associated non-moral properties. For example, is pleasure good? This is an open question. If pleasure is good, then the question reduces to this, is good (pleasure) good? This open question shows that good is something other than pleasure. They are not identical. Hence, Moore argued, it is a distinguishable, intrinsic and non-natural property.

<sup>152</sup> See the well-known discussion in H. A. Prichard, “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?,” *Mind*, *New Series* 21, no. 81 (1912): 21–37; William K. Frankena, “Some Arguments for Non-Naturalism About Intrinsic Value,” *Philosophical Studies* 1, no. 4 (June 1950): 56–60; Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*. See also the intuitionist work of Ross, *The Right and the Good*; Ross, *Foundations of Ethics*. The work of Ross led to much discussion of Moore’s work. See also P.T. Geach, “Good and Evil,” *Analysis* 17, no. 2 (December 1956): 33–42; G. E. M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1958): 1–19.

<sup>153</sup> For a book length treatment on various aspects of the naturalistic fallacy see Neil Sinclair, ed., *The Naturalistic Fallacy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019). The issue is still of some philosophical interest.

<sup>154</sup> Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, eds., *Metaethics after Moore* (New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 2006), 7. Horgan notes that toward “...the end of the twentieth century, we find that the open question argument is alive and well.” For example, he points to its use in T.M. Scanlon’s “buck passing” account of value. See Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 95–100. Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay, “What’s Right About the Open Question Argument,” in *Themes from G. E. Moore: New Essays in Epistemology and Ethics*, ed. Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 261–282; see also Jeffrey Wisdom, “A Dose of Reality for Moral Twin Earth,” *Philosophical Psychology* 34, no. 6 (August 18, 2021): 784–804; Michael Smith, “Moral Realism,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, ed. Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013).

<sup>155</sup> Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, “Toward *Fin de Siecle* Ethics: Some Trends,” *The Philosophical Review* 101, no. 1 (January 1992): 115; Baldwin, “A Hundred Years of *Principia Ethica*: Interview

nonnaturalist metaethics has recently been revived in full force. There are few defenders of the naturalistic fallacy or the classical open question argument as Moore formulated these things, but there has been a revival of secular nonnaturalism.<sup>156</sup>

Fourthly, at the time that Moore wrote, it was believed that Moore had achieved a knockout argument against ethical naturalism, that he had actually refuted it. It indeed appeared so. Moore states his rejection of ethical naturalism in no uncertain terms throughout the *Principia*.<sup>157</sup> And if Moore had actually achieved a knockout argument against ethical naturalism, then that would have stood as a significant philosophical achievement.<sup>158</sup> If the naturalistic fallacy and open question argument fail to hold, and nonnatural moral properties remain mysterious, Moore's case against naturalism is greatly diminished.<sup>159</sup>

Finally, what of the legacy of Moore's work?<sup>160</sup> Mary Warnock argues convincingly that the *Principia* dealt the final death blow to grand metaphysical theories of ethics, particularly those of Idealism. Moore's rhetorical style also had a significant effect.<sup>161</sup> But he had many

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with Thomas Baldwin." For an excellent overview and analysis of Moore see the section on Moore in Dallas Willard's, *The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*. See also Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century. 1: The Dawn of Analysis*, Princeton paperbacks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study. Vol. 3: From Kant to Rawls*. See also the relevant sections in Alexander Miller, *Contemporary Metaethics: An Introduction*, Second edition. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013); Mary Warnock, *Ethics Since 1900* (Mount Jackson, VA: Axios Press : Distributed by National Book Network, 2007).

<sup>156</sup> For recent defenses of Moore's nonnaturalism see Donald H. Regan, "How to Be a Moorean," *Ethics* 113, no. 3 (April 2003): 651–677; Miles Tucker, "Simply Good: A Defense of the Principia," *Utilitas* 30, no. 3 (September 2018): 253–270. The open question argument is still appealed to as refuting naturalistic forms of reductionism, see for example Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 67–72. Shafer-Landau defends the open question argument as "relevant." See Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 57–58.

<sup>157</sup> Moore and Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, 70–71.

<sup>158</sup> Nicholas L. Sturgeon, "Moore on Ethical Naturalism," *Ethics* 113, no. 3 (April 2003): 528–556; Nicholas L. Sturgeon, "Naturalism in Ethics," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2016). For a useful exposition of how Moore uses the notion of the naturalistic fallacy see David P. Gauthier, "Moore's Naturalistic Fallacy," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (October 1967): 315–320.

<sup>159</sup> Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study. Vol. 3: From Kant to Rawls*, 633. Here Irwin makes an important point as it relates to Moore's open question argument. He observes, "...if the appeal to an open question is legitimate, it shows that Good is not only indefinable, but also inexplicable." This leaves us effectively with no moral knowledge. See Irwin's excellent entire discussion.

<sup>160</sup> The many debates spun off of Moore's work can be sampled in Horgan and Timmons, *Metaethics after Moore*.

<sup>161</sup> Warnock, *Ethics Since 1900*.

second thoughts about the ideas in the *Principia*, as the preface to the second edition (1922) shows.<sup>162</sup> Moore reflectively described the *Principia* as “full of mistakes and confusions.”<sup>163</sup> But he still held that intrinsic good was not identical to any natural or supernatural property. Nevertheless, in his well-known “A Reply to My Critics,” he acknowledges that his characterization of naturalism seemed to him now (1942) “silly and preposterous.” He also admits, “I agree, then that in *Principia* I did not give any tenable explanation of what I meant by saying that ‘good’ was not a natural property.”<sup>164</sup> He also acknowledged that his notion of an intrinsic property was vague and unclear.<sup>165</sup> So then, if the three central theses of the *Principia* do not stand and Moore’s characterization of naturalism, against which he is predominantly arguing, is admittedly fuzzy, there is little of Moore’s ethical philosophy that remains standing.<sup>166</sup>

But there is another big worry that Dallas Willard points out in Moore’s *Principia* that is typically ignored by friend and foe alike.<sup>167</sup> As it relates to right conduct, after providing a long list of impossible consequential qualifications to evaluate right conduct, Moore concludes that “[w]e *never* have any reason to suppose that an action is our duty.”<sup>168</sup> Willard rightly takes this

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<sup>162</sup> Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study. Vol. 3: From Kant to Rawls*, 639–641. See also Moore, “Is Goodness a Quality?,” 98.

<sup>163</sup> Moore and Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, 2. Moore stated in the same preface that a rewrite of the entire book was needed but that he was not able to undertake such a task.

<sup>164</sup> Paul Arthur Schlipp, *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore*, 3rd ed., vol. 2, The Library of Living Philosophers (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 582. See both volumes in this series for many well-known critical essays on Moore’s ethics.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:591.

<sup>166</sup> Soames provides the most technical and detailed criticism of Moore’s thinking. *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century. 1: The Dawn of Analysis*:3-90.

<sup>167</sup> Willard, *The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*, 159. Emphasis original.

<sup>168</sup> Moore and Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, 199. Emphasis mine. This view is also reaffirmed in Moore’s summary of his views on right conduct, *ibid.*, 229-231. Moore later states, “...an action ought to be done or is our duty, only where it produces *more* pleasure than any which we could have done instead.” G. E. Moore, *Ethics: The Nature of Moral Philosophy*, ed. William H. Shaw (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 15. Emphasis authors. The problems with this again seem obvious. See also *ibid.*, p. 120 for a version of Sidgwick’s dualism of practical reason juggernaut.

to be an eye-popping, concussive conclusion. He further points out that Moore never retracts this view; instead, he reinforces it in his summary and conclusion on right conduct that follows.

So then, Moore's vaunted boldness in 1903 to correct all the philosophical errors of the past is now laid bare in his honest and unpretentious admissions of philosophical incoherence and confusion on key details. If the past of ethical philosophy was fuzzy in 1903, it is even less clear or certain after Moore. In Moore's defense, one must acknowledge that the issues he works through are quite difficult. Nevertheless, after the *Principia*, the secular moral project is reeling, trying to find its footing and sense of direction. The impact of the *Principia* propels the secular moral project in several different directions. God is nowhere an option for Moore or any of the other secularists. Theistic thinkers did not significantly interact with Moore's work. In 1907 Hastings Rashdall, a lucid theistic ethical thinker of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, remarks in the preface to *The Theory of Good and Evil: A Treatise on Moral Philosophy* that the work of Moore (1903) came too late for him to incorporate it into his newly published volumes (1907).<sup>169</sup> William Sorley does mention Moore in a couple of places in his work but with no significant interaction since Moore's work completely ignores the question of God in relation to Good, right, and the ethical.<sup>170</sup> In the early 1940s and 50s, a little-known thinker, C.S. Lewis, no technical philosopher, gives his radio lectures that are later published on the moral argument for the existence of God. Moore is never acknowledged. To this day, Lewis's works remain readable and compelling classics of moral argument and analysis.<sup>171</sup> As a former atheist, Lewis clearly perceived his day's intellectual and ethical vacuum and responded to it accordingly.

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<sup>169</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil a Treatise on Moral Philosophy*, Wentworth Press  
Reproduction. (H. Milford: Oxford University Press, 1907) vii.

<sup>170</sup> Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*. See the appendix entries on Moore.

<sup>171</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*; David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls, eds., *C.S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness and Beauty* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

In the broader academic context of the period, two primary heirs of Moore's ethical thinking are the emotivists and the intuitionists of the 1930s and beyond.<sup>172</sup> Intuitionism breaks some new positive ground, while emotivism devolves into the position that ethical (and theological) propositions contain nothing truly factual but only reflect a person's feelings of approval or disapproval toward ethical matters.<sup>173</sup> By mid-century (1949), Stewart Hampshire laments the fact that moral philosophy has lost its way, (1952) Roderick Firth complains that just about every form of ethical analysis has been tried with no agreement, only more details and fragmentation, and Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) demands a halt to all moral theorizing until further developments in the human sciences can accommodate a theoretical moral consensus.<sup>174</sup>

At present, the *secularism* of the secular moral project is the dominant view of the academy in metaethics. Secularism has institutional clout. However, it is distributed throughout a dizzying cacophony of differing theories and proposals. The common denominator is the rejection of explicit Theism in the academy. Naturalistic ethics continue to have a powerful influence on secular ethics, but new-wave secular moral nonnaturalism is certainly an ascendant position. Theistic ethics is also a reemerging position, as we have shown, and the moral argument for the existence of God is charting new territory with or without recognition by secularists. However, the secular moral project has not abated since Mill, Sidgwick, Moore, and beyond. 21<sup>st</sup>-century secular metaethics shows no signs of diminishing.

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<sup>172</sup> Intuitionism is most strongly represented by the work of W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*; Ross, *Foundations of Ethics*. Intuitionism will be discussed in detail in a later section of this work.

<sup>173</sup> A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1936) 107. Ayer represents the movement known as logical positivism. Theological propositions are "meaningless" according to Ayer. The term emotivism is used by C.L. Stevenson. By this term Stevenson meant that ethical propositions expressed emotional attitudes that involved personal influence directed towards ethical matters. C.L. Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," *Mind* 46, no. 181 (1937): 14–31; C.L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944). Emotivism is part of a larger turn in ethics that occurred after Moore and is referred to as ethical non-cognitivism. For a good introduction to this see Mark Andrew Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>174</sup> Roderick Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12, no. 3 (March 1952): 317; Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"; Stuart Hampshire, "Fallacies in Moral Philosophy," *Mind* 58, no. 232 (October 1949): 466–482.

## Metaethics – What is it?

Metaethics stakes out a distinctive and burgeoning field in ethics and philosophy. Some thinkers lament that metaethics is far too broad, too diffuse, lacking subject matter focus, and therefore unable to achieve any real progress in moral thought. Others consider the field an essential mainstay of creative, critical, ethical, and evaluative thinking. Introductions to metaethics proliferate.<sup>175</sup> Metaethics is critical and comparative and continues to become larger, more specialized, and more complex. One might conveniently take C.D. Broad's, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* as one of the first formal side-by-side comparisons that classified and critically evaluated various systems of ethical thought.<sup>176</sup> It's important to understand that metaethics has become a strictly academic discipline, working only from within the academy. Broadly considered, the field of ethics can be mapped in this way.

- 1<sup>st</sup> Order: Normative ethics or 1<sup>st</sup> order normative moral and axiological philosophy. What are the various normative rules of right, wrong, and normative values (axiology), and how should one think about them? (1<sup>st</sup> order normativity)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Order: Metaethics, otherwise known as 2nd order ethical theory. What the moral order is, how it is to be understood, its nature, and why this is the case. (2<sup>nd</sup> order theoreticity)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Order: Practical ethics, applied ethics (this will be referred to as 3<sup>rd</sup> order practicality).
- Lifeworld: The pre-theoretical, everyday, taken-for-granted moral beliefs involved in day-to-day life experiences. The phenomenology of moral experience is often the focus of studies in the Lifeworld. Many theorists, including this author, believe it is important to be able to vindicate and live out what one

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<sup>175</sup> Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Miller, *Contemporary Metaethics: An Introduction*; Mark Steven Van Roojen, *Metaethics: A Contemporary Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015); Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018); David Copp, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>176</sup> Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*.

ultimately believes about the ethical and evaluative in the context of one's everyday life (Lifeworld pre-theoreticality).

Metaethics will focus more specifically on the metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology of ethics and value, the semantics of ethics and value, and the relation of ethical theory to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> order, and the LW. It also considers the relation of ethics to more general philosophy and other disciplines such as the physical sciences, brain sciences, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and the political domain.

Given this classification, one can break things down using the example of duty. 1) 2<sup>nd</sup> order metaethics might focus on the nature of duty and comparative conceptions of the nature of duty. The question might be, “are there prima facie duties?” If so, what is their source, and how and why is this the case in terms of metaphysics? Is there a paradigm case of such a duty? 2) 1<sup>st</sup> order normative analysis might focus on the various duties and criteria for understanding them and the implications of their normativity and performance. 3) Next, 3<sup>rd</sup> order practical ethics might analyze how one's beliefs and thinking about ethical duties and norms are applied, what one does, and how one should live given the various contexts of the performance of duty. 4) Finally, the Lifeworld is that taken-for-granted context wherein one lives amid a host of actual duties and commitments. Each of these areas of focus is important, but it is also essential to be clear on whether one is developing ideas and analysis in the “meta” (2<sup>nd</sup> order) or “normative” (1<sup>st</sup> order), or “practical” (3<sup>rd</sup> order) or “Lifeworld” (LW) domains. In critical ethical and evaluative analysis, it is essential to be clear on the focus of one's work and not to confuse these areas of analysis. Each of these areas would yield a distinctive focus of analysis.

## Secular Moral Nonnaturalism and Theistic Ethics

### Areas of Agreement

Theistic ethics and secular moral nonnaturalism (SMNN) share many important areas of agreement. Before a critical analysis is undertaken here of SMNN, it is vital to understand what areas of agreement there are. For example, the centerpiece of the positive moral argument for the existence of God in this work, as previously noted, is the following.

CONCORD: We are moral intelligible beings that live in a rational-intelligible universe. Surely this astonishing fact cries out for an explanation.

Both theists and secular moral nonnaturalists (SMNNs), for the most part, agree on this proposition. The question is how to understand and explain these things. But there are many more such things that theists and SMNNs agree on. Consider the following tally.

- Both agree on some version of moral realism, sometimes called moral cognitivism.<sup>177</sup>

Both agree that the moral domain is real and, therefore, objective and discoverable.

Moral truths are not merely humanly invented or humanly derived.<sup>178</sup>

- There are “stance independent” ethical truths.
- These truths are necessary and universally applicable.
- Both agree that there is objectively real moral and value normativity and that this is not merely a human invention or convention.
  - Both agree that there is real, objective, non-humanly derived right and wrong.
  - There is real and binding, full-blooded moral authority and categoricity.

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<sup>177</sup> Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, ed., *Essays on Moral Realism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988). Moral cognitivism as opposed to non-cognitivism. In particular see Sayre-McCord’s mapping and discussion of moral realism in the introductory chapter. For a detailed and accessible analysis of non-cognitivism see Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics*.

<sup>178</sup> Parrish, *Atheism?: A Critical Analysis*, 171–174. In the section on atheism and ethics Stephen Parrish provides a helpful way to categorize various ethical systems of thought. 1) Strong realism (ethics discovered), 2) weak realism (ethics derived) and finally 3) anti-realism (ethics invented). This is a simple but very useful way to categorize different ethical theories.

- There are real *prima facie* moral duties.
- In some sense, there are two ontological levels of Reality that are not reducible to each other. Both Theism and SMNN share a dualistic understanding of Reality.
  - By contrast, in naturalism, there is only one level of Reality. The physical universe is all that there is.
  - Both Theism and SMNN reject the metaphysical adequacy of ethical naturalism.
  - Moral beliefs, actions, and outcomes possess essentialist moral properties.
- Both Theism and SMNN understand that there is real and objective moral good (axiology).
  - Values can be, in some sense, intrinsic, inherent, or essential.
- Both understand that there is real and objective moral evil.
- Both accept that there is real and objective ascription of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness attached to moral beliefs, actions, and outcomes.
  - There is real moral virtue and guilt.
- There is real, objective (and sometimes overriding) prescriptive force to our moral obligations.
- In the field of deontological ethics, there are some absolute and necessary moral rules and duties.
- Both agree that there is real categorical “oughtness” to some of these rules. We categorically “ought” to do certain things and categorically “ought not” to do other things.

- Such categoricity is, in some sense, stance independent, objective, binding, and necessary.
- Our moral intuitions are by and large alethic and reliable.

The above shows considerable agreement and overlap between Theistic ethics and SMNN. In many ways, Theists and SMNNs are allies. Of course, the details differ, but then details differ even among Theists and the various accounts of SMNN. The key issue is how these various commonalities are to be more widely explained. And the God-related issues are a fundamental difference between them. The Theist will acknowledge that the God-related explanatory challenges are substantial. Simply invoking God does not make for an adequate explanation. Theistic metaethics must still work out the hard-earned details of an adequately filled in Theistic account of metaethics. But these broad areas of agreement also make the critical task of comparing and analyzing issues between SMNN and Theistic metaethics all the more challenging. Moorean attention to detail, to an appropriate extent, is in order.

## Chapter 2

### The Robust Realism of David Enoch

#### Introduction

David Enoch is the first thinker to be examined in the critique of secular moral nonnaturalism (SMNN). Enoch refers to his version of SMNN as robust realism, and the primary motivation for his work is for all to take morality seriously truly. He contends that of the various current meta-ethical positions on offer - various versions of naturalism, quasi-realism, expressivism, error theory, relativism, or quietism - only a strong version of robust realism enables one to take morality seriously. Notably, he never interacts with any version of Theistic metaethics nor thoroughly engages ontologically lightweight versions of SMNN.<sup>1</sup> By Enoch's lights, normative and moral truths are discovered rather than humanly created or constructed. He argues that such truths exist as part of the ontological furniture of the universe. As such, they are irreducible, perfectly objective, universal, and absolute, independent of our desires, attitudes, and will.<sup>2</sup> His metaethics is a version of robust realism that is secular, non-Theistic, ontologically heavyweight, Platonist, and nonnaturalistic. As he puts the matter, his robust realism "wears its ontological commitment on its sleeve."<sup>3</sup>

Enoch has written a well-reasoned, sophisticated, and spirited defense of non-Theistic robust realism. Some think his work is the best defense of ethical realism on offer.<sup>4</sup> His style of doing philosophy is somewhat terse, genuinely sincere, and very much engaged in the relevant

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<sup>1</sup> The one exception is the section where Enoch critiques quietism. See pp. 122-127 of *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). However, this section is a very quick overview that argues against quietism that a heavyweight ontology is required to take morality seriously.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1, 237.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>4</sup> Russ Schafer-Landau has commended Enoch's work in this way. See his comments of the back cover of *Taking Morality Seriously*.

details of contemporary meta-ethical debates. Critically unpacking his arguments requires considerable background knowledge across a wide range of current meta-ethical philosophies and a reasonably good handle on a fair number of contemporary philosophical issues and thinkers. He boldly stakes out his philosophical positions while critically engaging competing views. His contributions to the debates are often illuminating and insightful and cover new ground; all the while, he is quite open about what he takes to be the strengths and weaknesses of his own arguments. To date, no Theistic ethical philosophers have comprehensively engaged his version of robust realism.<sup>5</sup> This section of the dissertation aims to remedy that situation and take Enoch's robust realism seriously.

The plan is to lay out a broad summary and review of Enoch's thinking as it is developed in his book *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*.<sup>6</sup> The book is the most comprehensive and best exposition of Enoch's case for robust realism. A detailed and critical analysis of his two main arguments will follow after a review and summary of his views. The first argument works from impartiality to moral objectivity, while the second argument works from deliberative indispensability to the existence of normative truths. Following this, a critical analysis will assess the details of his broader epistemology and metaphysics of robust realism that Enoch develops to defend his position. This detailed critical assessment of the broader account will provide an opening for us to set up key elements of the positive case for Theistic metaethics that will be developed in the latter part of this work.

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<sup>5</sup> David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 202–209. Here this is some good discussion of Enoch's work in their section on moral knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> The 2013 edition is cited throughout this work. Page numberings are identical to the 2011 version.

## Summary of Robust Realism

### Taking Morality Seriously

Whether you agree or disagree with Enoch's robust realism, the philosophic case that he develops is one to be reckoned with. It is both original and formidable. Clearly, he is to be counted as a new-wave nonnaturalist. Enoch does not revisit some debates and issues previously discussed by nonnaturalists like Moore, such as the open question argument, the naturalistic fallacy, the abstract question of good, intuitionism, and the like. He neither works to assimilate, modify and contemporize such ancient thinkers as Plato or Aristotle nor does he reach back to the more recent past to thoroughly criticize and rethink the ethics of the likes of Kant, Hume, or Nietzsche. His robust realism is positioned squarely in what we have previously referred to as the modern chasm of secularism. Like Moore, he accepts the presumption of secularism but rejects the notion that the natural is all there is. Like Moore, he understands the notion of the "natural" in terms of the sciences. He claims to be neutral on whether the natural just is the physical.<sup>7</sup> Facts and properties, according to Enoch, are natural "if and only if they are the kind the usual sciences invoke."<sup>8</sup> Although he admits this is vague, he spends little time trying to be more precise. This is not his focus. For him, the "natural" of naturalism and the sciences is a metaphysical issue, particularly ontological.<sup>9</sup> Even though he rejects strong metaphysical naturalism in favor of metaphysical nonnaturalism, he shares a common fundamental presupposition with naturalism, which, in this work, will be referred to as *a generalized naturalism*. This is a weaker version of naturalism wherein the ultimate metaphysical horizon excludes God. The upshot is that God need not be seriously considered when taking morality seriously. In metaethics, some of the

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<sup>7</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 102, nt 8.

<sup>8</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, p.103. See G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Moore, (1903/1993): 92.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. nt. 13.

fundamental debates have been set in motion by the eclipse of Theism and the assumption of secularism. Central among them is the debate about moral realism. Given this situation, it is notable that every metaethical thinker and issue Enoch critically engages is secular. Hence, Enoch's entire metaethical project aims to develop and defend a strong version of moral realism, robust metaethical realism, and generalized naturalism. This is undertaken in light of the unstated but genuine absence of God.<sup>10</sup>

### **Objective Morality and Impartiality**

Given the importance of the question of moral realism, the first thing that Enoch sets out to establish in his case for robust realism is the objective character of the moral.<sup>11</sup> To take morality seriously, it matters whether there are objective moral facts.<sup>12</sup> This is what motivates part of his argument for robust realism. The taking-morality-seriously motif involves two important thoughts. First, we should vindicate our pre-theoretic belief about morality; morality is objective and binding, and secondly, we explain our moral beliefs and practices without undermining them. Given this, he makes his case for the objectivity of moral facts by deploying an argument that centers on the practical matter of how things work when one person has moral disagreements with another, or, more specifically, the "*moral significance* or implications of moral disagreement and conflict."<sup>13</sup> The central idea is this. If moral disagreements are more like disagreements involving mere personal preference, it seems wrong to stand one's ground in the face of disagreements with others. One should be impartial and compromise. However, if moral disagreements are more like disagreements involving matters of objective fact or principle, then

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that throughout Enoch's book robust realism is capitalized as *Robust Realism* presumably to emphasize its absoluteness. I do not follow his convention here.

<sup>11</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 16–49. This is the entire subject matter of chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. Emphasis original.

one is morally right, even obligated, to stand one's ground in the face of such disagreements. So, when one stands his or her ground in the face of moral disagreements, then one is showing that they believe these involve matters of objective moral fact. One is taking moral facts as objective and not as mere matters of subjective preference. That objective moral facts exist is therefore strongly implied in practical situations of moral disagreement. Enoch acknowledges that this does not strictly establish that there are objective moral truths, but he contends that the argument works as an argument against some versions of moral non-realism wherein moral truths are taken to be non-objective.

Furthermore, he readily acknowledges that, even if successful, this argument alone cannot fully support his version of robust realism. He is very clear that he intends the argument to apply only to the domain of the moral (as opposed to the more encompassing normative domain).<sup>15</sup> Centrally, the idea implies that in matters of moral disagreement, the persons involved are appealing to standards taken to be objective.<sup>16</sup> These are the limited gains he intends to achieve through this argument.

### **Deliberative Indispensability**

Enoch's next step to establish his version of robust realism is the argument from the deliberative indispensability of irreducibly normative truths.<sup>17</sup> This argument focuses on the existence of normative truths (as opposed to strictly moral kinds of truths in the first argument). The argument, in summary, is this: as human beings, we are essentially deliberative creatures

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<sup>15</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-84. This argument takes up the entirety of chapter 3. Note that Enoch takes morality, marked most importantly by categorical reasons, to be a particular instance of normativity, 86, 97. Enoch states that his argument can be taken as a kind of transcendental argument for such irreducibly normative truths, see p.79, nt. 71. See also David Enoch, "PEA-Soup," July 1, 2013, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://peasoup.typepad.com/peasoup/2013/07/featured-philosopher-david-enoch.html>.

engaging in various deliberative projects.<sup>18</sup> Such projects are rationally non-optional for us; we have strong reasons to participate and not disengage from them. As such, they are intrinsically indispensable. As we engage in such projects, we ask deliberative questions requiring practical deliberative answers about what one ought to do, should do, or what makes the best sense to do. So, this kind of first personal deliberation presupposes that we are guided in our decisions by normative truths about our duty or obligation, what is good, valuable, or best. Such normative truths are thus shown to be instrumentally indispensable to our deliberations. We cannot do without them. If this is true, then we show that normative truths are real facts or entities to which we are committed in the practical projects of first personal deliberation. According to Enoch, then, we are justified in believing that there are such irreducibly normative truths in an ontologically heavyweight sense.

### **Robust Meta-Ethical Realism**

In the third step of his project to establish the case for robust realism, Enoch combines the two arguments - the objectivity of the moral plus the robust real existence of irreducibly normative truths – into a fuller account of robustly real metaethics.<sup>19</sup> This combined third thesis amounts to accepting that there are both objectively real moral truths and normative truths that exist independent of our beliefs, attitudes, or desires in an ontologically heavyweight sense. The moral and the normative mutually reinforce each other. Both are irreducible in that they cannot be reduced to other different sorts of things, such as emotions, expressions, desires, reasons, cultural or sociological facts, or other such strictly natural entities. They are real entities, properties, propositions, or facts that exist in their own right, in a kind of Third Realm, which

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<sup>18</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 70.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 85–99. This is the goal of chapter 4.

Enoch half-seriously dubs “Plato’s heaven.”<sup>20</sup> He acknowledges that the first and second arguments combined do not logically entail this more substantial third thesis but argues that the third thesis comports well with the acceptance of the first two arguments and that this third thesis explains things better, on the whole, than other alternatives.<sup>21</sup> If one accepts the first two arguments, then, by Enoch’s lights, one should go all the way and accept the fuller account of metaethical robust realism.

### **Defending Robust Realism**

After this positive case for robust realism, Enoch defends his views against counter metaethical positions. This defense allows him to answer common objections to nonnaturalism and fill in essential details concerning the metaphysics and epistemology of robust realism. In their central claims, he argues that naturalism, fictionalism, error theory, and quietism cannot adequately accommodate the positive case of his combined third thesis. For example, naturalistic reductions of the moral and normative have not been successful though he acknowledges there is no solid argument in favor of irreducibility.<sup>22</sup> Or again, that moral and normative facts are just too different from natural facts, and by themselves, natural facts can have no moral or normative force. Or that fictionalism and error theory cut against the grain of our intuitions that the moral and normative are real and objective.<sup>23</sup> That quietism, the view that our moral and normative reasons can be adequately grounded and justified in an ontologically lightweight manner, should

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<sup>20</sup> This is a tongue in cheek expression that Enoch uses to refer to this distinctive heavyweight ontological domain. Enoch’s version of robust realism is a modern version of meta-ethical Platonism though strictly speaking it does not derive from Plato. This will be discussed going forward. See also pp.182, 217 and throughout his work.

<sup>21</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 99. See also p.116.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 100–109.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 109–121. Enoch takes error theory to be robust realism’s most respectable opponent, p.121.

be rejected. According to Enoch, as the quietists contend, there are no metaphysically lightweight ways of getting robust realism.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Metaphysical Challenge of Supervenience**

Enoch next shifts his attention to some of the more critical details of metaphysics and epistemology to further defend and develop his position.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, robust realism has anti-naturalist metaphysical implications. Still, Enoch rejects what has become known as the queerness objection, namely that nonnatural facts are just too metaphysically queer to be admitted into our ontological inventory.<sup>26</sup> This issue naturally leads to the question of how natural and nonnatural facts are related. This question leads him into a rather extensive discussion of the nature of supervenience and how he understands the supervenience relation.<sup>27</sup> For the nonnaturalist moral and normative supervenience has become a kind of orthodoxy, but it also faces a litany of common challenges. For the SMNN, the supervenience relation must be explained, it calls out for explanation, and Enoch fully acknowledges this.<sup>28</sup> It seems he takes supervenience to be *the* central metaphysical problem for his version of robust realism.<sup>29</sup> He opts for a strong version of supervenience that focuses on what he calls specific supervenience, wherein the moral and normative supervene on the natural in metaphysically necessary ways.<sup>30</sup> According to Enoch, the relations between the natural and the nonnatural are not arbitrary; they are only somewhat brute, fixed, and cannot be other than they are and are true in all possible worlds.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 121–133.

<sup>25</sup> This makes up the subject matter of chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>26</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 134–136. For this reason we will focus much on this issue.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 136–150.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 141–142.

<sup>29</sup> Aaron Elliott, “Can Moral Principles Explain Supervenience?,” *Res Philosophica* 91, no. 4 (2014): 631. This article is the clearest exposition of Enoch’s version of supervenience.

<sup>30</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 146.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 148.

## **The Epistemological Challenge – Explaining Correlations**

### **A (Godless) Pre-Established Harmony**

The epistemological challenges are somewhat different than the metaphysical ones. Enoch maintains that the epistemological challenge for his version of nonnaturalism is not to be understood in terms of epistemic access, namely, explaining how our beliefs have opening and connection to nonnatural normative and moral entities.<sup>32</sup> Nor is it to be understood strictly as a matter of justification or reliability, though he considers these matters important.<sup>33</sup> Enoch thinks the critical epistemological challenge for robust realism is explaining correlations between the natural and the normative. How is it that our normative beliefs correlate with normative truths? This correlation is striking and calls out for explanation. Enoch acknowledges that if this cannot be explained and justified as reliable, we are likely doomed to moral and normative skepticism.<sup>34</sup> He proposes what he refers to as a third-factor explanation. A third factor correlates our normative beliefs and normative facts. The third factor he proposes is a (Godless) pre-established harmony.

The overall logic of his account works like this. Since survival is good, in some impersonal and non-teleological sense, evolutionary pressures have aimed for this good by causally selecting our mental and motivational set-up so that our beliefs and the non-causal moral and normative truths are sufficiently correlated for survival. The aim, the correlation, and the result are simply a small sort of miracle. We are somewhat epistemically lucky that our moral and normative beliefs are correlated.<sup>36</sup> After working through some final common objections to moral realism, such as the problem of moral disagreement and the question of moral motivation,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 152–155.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 153–156.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 162–163, 171.

<sup>36</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 172–174. This explanation is also put to work for the semantic access challenge to robust realism, p.183.

Enoch summarizes and compares the case for robust realism against rival secular meta-ethical views by roughly tallying plausibility points. Against such views, he finds, as we would expect, that robust realism is the most plausible one, with some admitted reservations about specific details of the argument.<sup>38</sup> Overall, his case for robust realism is formidable, well-reasoned, often insightful, and sometimes breaks new ground. On the whole, it should be taken seriously.

## **Critical Analysis of Robust Realism**

### **Theism and Robust Realism**

But how well does Enoch's case for robust realism stand up when critically compared to Theistic metaethics? Enoch never takes Theistic metaethics seriously. The Theist would largely agree with Enoch's critique that exposes the problems of the various naturalistic meta-ethical positions. The Theist would agree that some version of moral and normative nonnaturalism is true, given that Theism is also nonnaturalistic in some sense. The Theist would agree that moral realism should be ontologically heavyweight and cannot be had with anything less. The Theist would agree that, in some sense, ethical truths are necessary truths. Also, the Theist likely agrees with Enoch on most of the content of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral truths and practices.

Some Theists develop and articulate their understanding of moral and normative truths similarly to Enoch.<sup>39</sup> But the Laplacian inspiration looms large. Is there no need for God, no place for God? Is God merely optional, somehow ancillary, completely dispensable? Or might God, in some essential respects, be fundamentally necessary to the ethical and normative? Is there any reason the Theist would not be charitable towards Enoch's argument from impartiality to moral objectivity<sup>40</sup> and from deliberative indispensability to irreducibly normative truths? The

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<sup>38</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 267–271.

<sup>39</sup> As one example take Richard Swinburne, "God and Morality," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (December 2014): 553–566.

<sup>40</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. Lewis makes a similar argument about moral standards, cf. p.3, 21.

critical and challenging question for the Theist is whether and to what extent these arguments establish the case for robust realism excluding God, God as a mere appendix. Or is God entirely dispensable?

On the one hand, the theist is sympathetic to Enoch's views. On the other hand, the theist must be critically engaging. The Theist believes and argues that if God exists necessarily, then necessary moral and normative truths must somehow be consonant with God's being necessary. Enoch does not argue against God's existence, nor does his robust realism necessarily exclude God. There is nothing in robust realism that requires the non-existence of God. For the Theist, moral facts are grounded in God facts, not arbitrarily but necessarily. God's existence would be the ultimate normative fact by which all other such normative facts are understood, assessed, and judged. Does a critical comparison with Theistic metaethics show that the SMNN of Enoch's robust realism best explains moral and normative Reality? We must critically examine the substantive metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, and meta-ethical details of robust realism to understand the critical explanatory differences to Theism. Only once this is done can the table be set for an engaging dialogue between Theistic metaethics and the robust realism of SMNN. The positive case for Theism will be developed throughout this dissertation but especially in chapters 6 and 7.

## **Critical Analysis**

### **First Plank - Moral Objectivity**

So how well do Enoch's arguments for robust realism fair as arguments? How well do they establish his fuller case for robust realism? For Theists that take his case for robust realism seriously, how do the details of his case critically compare and contrast with the case for Theistic metaethics? Let's now critically assess Enoch's first argument for moral objectivity; the

argument from impartiality.<sup>41</sup> Enoch's positive case for moral objectivity from impartiality should be taken charitably. From how moral disagreements sometimes work, it seems to be a novel and creative way to argue for objectivity. In some instances of disagreement, an impartial compromise is appropriate, showing that the disagreement involves only a matter of preferences. However, in disagreements where one is compelled to stand one's ground, one's unwillingness to compromise shows that disagreement involves an objective point of moral fact. The argument is worthy as far as it goes. But it is only partially successful<sup>42</sup>, and Enoch fully acknowledges that the positive gains in establishing the case for moral objectivity are rather limited and selective. Indeed, nothing like universal moral truths is established in this argument. But Enoch is progressively building his case towards something like this. The argument is positive as far as it goes.

Here are some of the limitations of the argument. First, Enoch points out that it is not entirely clear what moral objectivity is and what it amounts to.<sup>43</sup> That the meaning of objective is unclear would not uniquely hamstring his account. The term "objective" is used in a wide variety of ways. However, until we have more clarity on this question, the gains from the argument must also remain unclear.<sup>44</sup> As will be argued below, it does matter how objectivity is understood in

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<sup>41</sup> This argument can be gleaned from the earlier summary that was provided. The argument is relatively uncontroversial to the Theist.

<sup>42</sup> Giuliana Mancuso, "Enoch's 'Taking-Morality-Seriously Thought' Unpacked and at Work in the Argument from Impartiality," *Topoi* 37, no. 4 (December 2018): 591–602. See also Enoch's response to Mancuso. David Enoch, "Impartiality and Realism: Reply to Mancuso," *Topoi* 37, no. 4 (December 2018): 603–606.

<sup>43</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 17. He maintains however that this does not affect his argument. I will argue otherwise as it relates to the problem of moral objectivity and moral authority. Enoch is pairing objective to subjective, realist being equivalent to objective, non-realist being equivalent to subjective.

<sup>44</sup> Enoch identifies the targets of his argument, subjectivism, response dependent theories, and expressivism. While helpful, objectivity itself does not show why these other views are false in lieu of objectivity. For an example of this see, Jeremy Randel Koons, "Why Response-Dependence Theories of Morality Are False," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* Vol. 6, no. 3 (September 2003): 275-294.

this debate. Some moral naturalists claim to be moral objectivists.<sup>45</sup> There are many ways to be a moral objectivist.<sup>46</sup> Second, while Enoch claims to be working from our pre-theoretic experience of morality and extrapolating from that experience, he admits that our real-life experience involving moral conflict is quite messier than his relatively clean argument conveys.<sup>47</sup> Real-life moral messiness is an important problem for the argument. The more qualifications to clean up the messiness, the more dressed up and ad hoc the argument looks and the less strength and validity should be accorded to the argument's generalizations.<sup>48</sup> How real, then, are the gains of the argument when it comes to competing meta-ethical positions? The view is interesting but only moderately convincing.

Thirdly, any non-realist meta-ethical position that fully acknowledges the objective seemings of our moral experience, such as error theory, is mostly immune from Enoch's criticisms.<sup>49</sup> If error theory is immune, then this shows that no direct line of support works from objectivity to moral realism, particularly robust realism. Fourthly, naturalistic realists might be happy to accept the argument. The argument establishes nothing to support Enoch's distinctive nonnaturalism. Again, the scope and strength of the argument is fairly limited. Also, moral disagreement and conflict construed in a certain way have been standardly advanced as problems

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<sup>45</sup> Cornell realism is just one example. See David O. Brink 1989, Richard N. Boyd, 1988, and Nicholas L. Sturgeon, 2006. See also David Copp, "A Skeptical Challenge to Moral Non-Naturalism and a Defense of Constructivist Naturalism," *Philosophical Studies* 126, no. 2 (November 2005): 269–283.

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Tropman, "Formulating Moral Objectivity," *Philosophia* 46, no. 4 (December 2018): 1023–1040. Mancuso makes this point as well, see his, "Enoch's 'Taking-Morality-Seriously Thought' Unpacked and at Work in the Argument from Impartiality," 601.

<sup>47</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 24. This is also the problem of Enoch's "caricaturized subjectivism." The caricature is not a real meta-ethical position that any real thinker subscribes to. Thus it works only for illustration purposes.

<sup>48</sup> Mancuso, "Enoch's 'Taking-Morality-Seriously Thought' Unpacked and at Work in the Argument from Impartiality," 598. I believe that Mancuso makes this point stick solidly. For some interesting work on this issue see Thomas Pözlner and Jennifer Cole Wright, "Empirical Research on Folk Moral Objectivism," *Philosophy Compass* 14, no. 5 (May 2019); also Thomas Pözlner, "Revisiting Folk Moral Realism," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 8, no. 2 (June 2017): 455–476. Enoch intends his argument to be taken as using paradigmatic examples, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 39.

that indicate *against* objectivity and moral realism.<sup>50</sup> Finally, this argument misses some salient reasons why moral objectivity matters. One decisive reason that moral objectivity matters to the Theist is its bearing on the question of moral authority. There is a clear link between taking morality seriously and moral authority. But what makes moral standards authoritative even if they are in some sense taken to be objective? Objectivity, then, should be more carefully considered at this juncture.<sup>51</sup>

Elizabeth Tropman, in a constructive analysis of moral objectivity, clarifies the differing ways that realist moral objectivity is understood and ferrets out the crux of its features.<sup>52</sup> She rightly points out that moral objectivity is a philosophical term of art involving the basic idea that morality is not humanly invented. It is, in some crucial respects, independent of us. She calls this the independence condition. However, it hasn't proven easy to specify what this independence consists of precisely. She observes that “the idea that moral facts obtain in some brute fashion, independently of *all* our evaluative attitudes and sensibilities, is hard to take seriously.”<sup>53</sup> In this work, this will be called the radical independence or radical autonomous claim. Moral facts are, in some sense, mind-dependent in various ways; they cannot be completely mind-independent. They are obviously bound up with persons with minds in other important respects, such as moral agency, appraisal, etc. The properties taken to be objective are standards, specifically moral

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Enoch ably responds to this objection. See his chapter 8 in *Taking Morality Seriously*.

<sup>51</sup> Enoch has only somewhat addresses the question of authority but not in any adequate manner. Clearly his account is not easily reconciled with his notion of autonomous moral Platonism. See his David Enoch, “Authority and Reason-Giving,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 89, no. 2 (September 2014): 296–332. In this paper the notion of authority is defined in terms of “robust reason giving” connected to a legal notion of Hohfeldian “duties” (299-300). Real authority must in some sense be intentional, person dependent, and socio-relational in terms of power, or powers, and obligations or duties. Enoch hints at understanding this but never adequately develops this (312-313). It will be later argued that the problem of impersonalism is a fundamental problem for all versions of secular moral non-naturalism. It is a problem for Enoch’s notion of objectivity and by extension his notion of authority. The notion of authority flows naturally out of Theism in the form of divine command theory. See for example chapter 11, Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); as well see Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 12–16.

<sup>52</sup> Tropman, “Formulating Moral Objectivity,” 1023-1025.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 2015. Emphasis mine.

standards. They are metaphysical, not causal. But as Tropman points out, when it comes to moral objectivity, it is not the *content* of the standards in question but *what makes* the content of the standards authoritative.<sup>54</sup> Authority is a critical and challenging question. The discussion thus far creates two problems for Enoch. He is espousing some version of the radical independence, autonomous claim. As Tropman has pointed out, one could judge that this undermines our taking morality seriously, which is one of the primary motives for his project. Secondly, given his moral Platonism, given that content is not what matters, how can impersonal, non-causal metaphysical entities like moral propositions possess and exert full-blooded, substantive, categorically binding moral authority upon us as human beings? At the very least, this is metaphysically puzzling. For this, indeed, the Theist is owed an explanation. Precisely *what* or *who* makes, what is considered objective and authoritative, and how does such authority work in moral disagreement? If human beings do not make what is objective authoritative, then who or what does and how does this work? The question of moral authority has to be part of the discussion of objectivity itself. Simply because something is independent of us does not answer why this independence is also authoritative or binding for us. This big question appears to raise many complex problems for all versions of SMNN. In a Theistic universe, God, the God of Perfect Being Theism (PBT), makes moral standards authoritative; finite human beings do not. Such standards are grounded in God's being, attitudes, and commands, a personal moral agent. As such, they are independent of and objective to finite human beings.<sup>55</sup> If humanity never existed, given God, it would still be wrong to murder. It would still be right to refrain from any such possible acts even if there were no

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1031. The point here is not that content is completely irrelevant. As will be seen, for Enoch content is critical for how he understands things. However, once content is established, what makes it authoritative?

<sup>55</sup> Tropman rightly points out that some strong voluntarist versions of divine command theory are not objective in her sense because they depend upon and originate solely in the agency of God. Tropman, "Formulating Moral Objectivity," 1035-1036. One could still argue however that they are objective with reference to finite human beings. Huemer argues similarly.

worlds like ours. What objectivity is and how it works is taken to be very different in Theism than in secularism. Theism, given a personal God, more fittingly explains moral authority *over us*, as a property of objectivity *relative to us*, than Enoch's impersonal moral nonnaturalism. So although the Theist agrees with Enoch in the objective character of morality, the Theist also finds that Enoch's argument for moral objectivity, though helpful, is wanting, and his formulation of the nature of that objectivity is problematic in some salient ways. So the first plank in Enoch's argument for robust realism is only partially successful and somewhat weak, and his formulation of moral objectivity is problematic in at least two respects. First, the radical independence claim might, in fact, undermine our taking morality seriously. Second, there are problems with the normative nature of moral authority, rights, and duties in an Ultimately impersonal universe absent a personal God.<sup>56</sup>

### **Second Plank – Deliberative Indispensability**

Enoch's second plank for robust realism is the argument from the deliberative irreducibility of irreducibly normative truths. This argument will take considerable work to unpack and critique. Enoch's deductive form of the argument is a concise way to begin and goes as follows.

- (1) If something is instrumentally indispensable to an intrinsically indispensable project, then we are (epistemically) justified (for that very reason) in believing that thing exists.
- (2) The deliberative project is intrinsically indispensable.
- (3) Irreducibly normative truths are instrumentally indispensable to the deliberative project.
- (4) Therefore, we are epistemically justified in believing that there are irreducibly normative truths.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Derek Baker, "The Varieties of Normativity," in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. Tristram Colin McPherson and David Plunkett (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 578. As Baker skeptically puts the matter, "Non-naturalism, it seems contributes nothing to understanding the [full blooded] authoritativeness of certain forms of normativity."

<sup>57</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 83.

As the analysis begins, a few general observations should be noted. On the face of it, there isn't much to quarrel with regarding the argument. It looks to be valid. There isn't anything here that rules out Theism. The argument is just as compatible with Theism as with atheism.<sup>58</sup> Yet the argument tacitly assumes, and Enoch later argues, that God is irrelevant to their being normative truths that guide our deliberations. Again, assessing this matter will require a clear and critical examination of the details. But it's also important to understand that this argument is Enoch's strong plank, the centerpiece of his version of robust realism. If it does not succeed then his fuller case for robust realism will not go through or at least will have to be significantly revised. He aims to ride this argument all the way to his third thesis of full-blown normative and moral Platonism. For that to be true, the argument requires broad and detailed metaphysical and epistemological support; but the details can sometimes be quite nuanced. Therefore, a good bit of work will be needed to unpack and clarify things so that we can genuinely engage him in the details.

### Harman's Challenge

The argument for the second plank is taken up at the gauntlet of Harman's challenge.<sup>59</sup> Harman's challenge is an explanatory challenge to moral realists. According to Harman, when making moral judgments, only natural facts are needed to explain our moral observations and judgments; be they psychological, sociological, historical, cultural, or other such natural facts. According to Harman, independent moral facts play no such explanatory role. This is the *no*

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<sup>58</sup> Ritchie, *From Morality to Metaphysics: The Theistic Implications of Our Ethical Commitments*, 15–16. Ritchie, a theist takes Enoch's argument in this sort of way. It should be noted that Ritchie does not focus on Enoch's deliberative indispensability but instead explanatory indispensability whereas Enoch builds his argument from deliberative indispensability and not explanatory indispensability.

<sup>59</sup> Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Harman is a moral relativist advocating the idea that morality is relative to a given moral framework or context. Though Harman does not believe there are objective moral facts he is not a moral nihilist or error theorist. According to him moral facts are basically natural facts of differing sorts. See his Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Explained"(n.d.):1–14, accessed 10/22/20; see also Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

*explanatory role thesis*. Additionally, justified belief requires only facts needed for our explanations to succeed. This is *the explanatory requirement*. Since independent moral facts are not needed to explain our moral observations and judgments, they are explanatorily superfluous. For example, we have good reason to believe in electrons or perhaps numbers because they play an appropriate role in our best explanations of things. But Harman argues this is not the case regarding normative facts. Natural facts are all we need to explain moral and normative facts.

So how have metaethicists responded to Harman's challenge? Enoch surveys the field to find that various realist thinkers have responded in two different ways.<sup>60</sup> There are those that accept the explanatory requirement and try to demonstrate that normative facts do enter into our best explanation of things. Then there are those that reject the explanatory requirement arguing that we have reason to believe in normative facts even though they do not play such an explanatory role. While most realist thinkers accept the explanatory requirement, Enoch rejects it but will argue that normative truths are nonetheless ontologically respectable.<sup>61</sup> However, he adds the qualification that we should be ontologically committed only to things that are shown to be indispensable in some important sense. So he is also committed to the *minimal parsimony requirement*.<sup>62</sup> So then, thus far, there is the following.<sup>63</sup>

Enoch accepts:

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<sup>60</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 52–53. See his footnotes 8 and 9 for rather extensive citations of the two responses.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 53–54. Theism for example would violate this requirement since theism involves ontological commitments that are taken to be extravagant and well beyond what is ontologically required. Sometimes this requirement is tied to “Occam’s razor.”

<sup>63</sup> In this section I have relied heavily on the article by Brendan Cline, “Against Deliberative Indispensability as an Independent Guide to What There Is,” *Philosophical Studies* 173, no. 12 (December 2016): 3235–3254. Cline rightly comments that Enoch’s argument is the “strongest argument yet offered in favor of robust realism’s controversial metaphysical claims.” p. 3242.

*Minimal Parsimony Requirement:* Do not multiply ontological commitments without sufficient reason.

But he rejects the following:

*No Explanatory Role Thesis:* Harman's claim that normative facts do not play an appropriate role in explanations.

*Explanatory Requirement:* We are only justified in believing in the existence of a certain kind of fact if such facts play an appropriate role in our explanations.

### **Indispensabilism**

In responding to Harman's challenge, Enoch makes indispensability the centerpiece of his argument for the independent existence of normative truths. If something is indispensable, then that indispensability tells us something about the way the world is. But Enoch argues that there is more than one kind of indispensability. In the scientific domain there is explanatory indispensability. In the normative domain, there is deliberative indispensability. For him, this distinction is critical. While these are different, Enoch argues that a significant analogy between them works like this: just as electrons are indispensable to our explanations in physics, so normative truths are indispensable to our deliberative projects. He wants to argue that both involve commitments to respectable ontological entities. Indispensability of both sorts is, therefore, a guide to ontology, to what there is. Enoch is mimicking a strategy used by mathematical Platonists, who argue that ontological commitment to the existence of mathematical entities, such as numbers, sets, and the like, is justified because of their indispensable role in our best scientific explanation of things.<sup>64</sup> This strategy accepts the

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<sup>64</sup> This is often referred to the Quine-Putnam thesis. Mark Colyvan, *The Indispensability of Mathematics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); see also Mark Colyvan, "Indispensability Arguments in the Philosophy of Mathematics," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Spring 2019); Mark Colyvan, "In Defence of Indispensability," *Philosophia Mathematica* 6, no. 1 (February 1,

scientific realist's account of inference to the best explanation (IBE) that posits entities such as electrons to explain our scientific observations. But according to Enoch, IBE itself is a kind of indispensability argument.<sup>65</sup> He makes the case that IBE should be taken as a *basic belief forming method* like perception and memory and the rules of logic.<sup>66</sup> If it is basic, then it cannot be fully justified but should be taken as default, *prima facie* reliable. If it is basic, then our using it and relying on it is vindicated in forming our beliefs.<sup>67</sup> Indispensability and IBE thus work in tandem and function as a combined key conceptual tool that does noteworthy philosophical work.

Enoch moves the argument forward by differentiating between intrinsic and instrumental indispensability. This differentiation is a pivotal part of his argument for the indispensability of normative truths in deliberation. For Enoch, here's how this distinction works. Given that we are essentially deliberative creatures,<sup>68</sup> first personal deliberative projects are rationally non-optional for us, we have strong reasons to participate in them and not to disengage from them. As such, they are intrinsically indispensable for us.<sup>69</sup> As we engage in such projects, we ask deliberative questions requiring practical deliberative answers about what one ought to do, should do, or what makes the best sense to do. So, this kind of first personal deliberation about what to do shows

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1998): 39–62. See also Daniele Molinini, Fabrice Pataut, and Andrea Sereni, "Indispensability and Explanation: An Overview and Introduction," *Synthese* 193, no. 2 (February 2016): 317–332; Cristian Soto, "The Epistemic Indispensability Argument," *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 50, no. 1 (March 2019): 145–161.

<sup>65</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 55. See De Ray who makes the case that IBE is itself best explained on a theistic basis. Christophe De Ray, "A New Epistemological Case for Theism," *Religious Studies* 58, no. 2 (June 2022): 379–400.

<sup>66</sup> David Enoch and Joshua Schechter, "How Are Basic Belief-Forming Methods Justified?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, no. 3 (May 2008): 547–579.

<sup>67</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 56–67. Vindication is not as strong as strict justification.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. In other places he speaks of our "constitution" as rational human beings as critical to rational non-optional; see Enoch and Schechter, "How Are Basic Belief-Forming Methods Justified?," 553, 556, 558.

<sup>69</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 117. Enoch states that "...the deliberative project is rationally non-optional for us, [this is] a paradigmatic normative judgment."

that we are guided in our decisions by an implicit belief<sup>70</sup> in normative truths about what is our duty or obligation, what is good, valuable, or best. Such normative truths are thus shown to be instrumentally indispensable to our deliberations.<sup>71</sup> We cannot do without them without undermining our deliberative projects. Since, in the first personal project of deliberation, we are committed to the existence of normative truths, Enoch concludes that we are justified in our inference that such truths exist. Hence normative truths are just as ontologically respectable as scientifically postulated entities, like electrons, or mathematically postulated entities, such as numbers, sets, and the like.<sup>72</sup>

It's important to realize that there are two threads to this argument. The first thread is an argument for accepting indispensability arguments in general (both explanatory and deliberative) as an inferential guide to ontology, and the second thread is an argument that challenges the scientific and mathematical realist to show why explanatory indispensability should be accepted, but deliberative indispensability should be rejected as a guide to ontology.<sup>73</sup> I will focus here on the first thread of the argument. So we must first ask, do indispensability arguments work as an independent guide to ontology? If so, to what extent are they such a guide, and how strong are Enoch's arguments for accepting them as such? And just as consequential, specifically, what ontology might these arguments press upon us to accept in the various domains wherein they are deployed, such as mathematics, the sciences, or normativity? Are we truly implicitly guided in

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 78. Enoch elaborates, "...this is how indispensability arguments in general work: it's the belief...that is directly indispensable for the relevant project. But notice that the attitude that is indispensable is genuine *belief*, not some less-truth-directed surrogate for belief." (Emphasis original).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 74. Enoch explains. "Deliberation – unlike mere picking – is an attempt to eliminate arbitrariness by discovering (normative) reasons, and it is impossible in a believed absence of such reasons to be discovered....by deliberating you've already committed yourself to the existence of reasons." Again, he states that the "...content invoked in deliberation is in terms of the relevant normative truths." Ibid., 78.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 67. Enoch also states, "...given the role of mathematical statements in the natural sciences, how can we reject mathematical Platonism? And given the role of irreducibly normative truths in our deliberations, how can we reject Robust Realism?" Ibid., 83.

our first personal deliberative engagements by robust irreducibly normative truths of a Platonic sort? Are we then pressed to accept this sort of ontology given our project-oriented, first-person practical deliberations?

In responding to these questions, consider the case of naturalism and then that of Theism. Naturalists have argued for the indispensability of moral facts in responding to the Harman challenge while feeling no compunction about inferring normative truths of a Platonic sort. In this way, naturalist explanations would also be more parsimonious than nonnaturalism.<sup>74</sup> By contrast, Theists might find ways to work the argument all the way to God. A deliberative God who exercises personal agency seems to better explain the existence of deliberative creatures like us, and a deliberative friendly universe such as ours, than an impersonal atheistic universe populated by Platonic-like normative entities. So it would seem then that indispensability is not an independent guide to what there is. At best, it is only provisional. More explanation is required to convince us of any particular ontology. And while there might be an analogy between explanatory indispensability and deliberative indispensability, the crucial difference between them is how they link our inferences to the ontological posits of our commitments.<sup>75</sup> There are important disanalogies between them.<sup>76</sup> The link to the reality of electrons comes by way of experimental physics and theories about electromagnetic forces and entities. Explanations of this sort are truth apt. The link to irreducibly normative truths by way of deliberation requires more

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<sup>74</sup> David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 182–197. See also James Lenman for a spirited critique of Enoch from a Humean perspective, “Deliberation, Schmeliberation: Enoch’s Indispensability Argument,” *Philosophical Studies* 168, no. 3 (April 2014): 835–842 and Enoch’s response, “In Defense of Taking Morality Seriously: Reply to Manne, Sobel, Lenman, and Joyce,” *Philosophical Studies* 168, no. 3 (April 2014): 853–865.

<sup>75</sup> Enoch offers no criteria for determining and adjudicating our ontological commitments.

<sup>76</sup> The case for disanalogy is the thrust of the arguments given by Cline and Worsnip. See Brenden Cline, “Against Deliberative Indispensability as an Independent Guide to What There Is.”; Alex Worsnip, “Explanatory Indispensability and Deliberative Indispensability: Against Enoch’s Analogy.” *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 4 (December 2016): 226–235. Justin Clarke-Doane also finds important elements of disanalogy, see his *Morality and Mathematics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020): 38, 71, 82, 86, 94.

than indispensability itself can provide to be firmly established. Inferring to ontology by way of deliberation, at best, gives us an inference to the commitments of practical deliberation.

However, whether and how the ontology of those commitments involves true beliefs about real entities has to be argued for and established in other ways.<sup>77</sup> Belief itself cannot establish the truth of such commitments. It might even be that a person is committed to normative falsehoods that seem true to them while deliberating.<sup>78</sup> In such cases, the ground does not suffice to underwrite the ontology of deliberative commitments. To be sure, Enoch works to provide explanatory support for his inferences from deliberation, but this reveals a couple of things. First, it shows us the limits of indispensability as an independent guide to ontology. Second, it shows us how important the additional supportive explanations and justifications are for Enoch's argument to go through.

## **Indispensability Arguments in General**

### **Mathematics**

But there are additional problems with indispensability arguments in general that are worth noting at this juncture. The first thing is the lack of clarity and precision as well as a fuller account of what indispensability amounts to,<sup>80</sup> particularly in how it relates to our ontological commitments, be they explanatory or deliberative. Enoch acknowledges that he does not fully defend the indispensability premise itself that his argument relies on.<sup>81</sup> Is indispensability intuitively straightforward and, therefore, unproblematic? Being unproblematic is hardly the case when applied to these arguments. It is surprisingly difficult to specify. Take, for example, the

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<sup>77</sup> Cline makes this point but in a different way. Cline, *ibid.*, p. 3245.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* Cline uses the example of the normativity of libertarian free will to illustrate this point. An atheist might use the example of a theist's belief in God to illustrate her point.

<sup>80</sup> For example, Enoch points out that it is not merely helpful, or enabling, it is not merely ineliminable, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 68.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

case of mathematical Platonism utilizing various indispensability arguments. Even though Enoch does not rely directly on the Quinean version of the argument, it is notable that the original Quinean thesis has been subjected to withering criticism of various sorts.<sup>82</sup> Differing stipulative proposals have been offered in efforts to rigorously amend and clarify indispensability criteria and applications.<sup>83</sup> These might be helpful, but still, the notion remains stubbornly imprecise.<sup>84</sup> For a host of reasons, the argument has been modified in various ways<sup>85</sup> to shore up weaknesses to the point where it has been argued that the meta-normative indispensability argument *might even be better* than the mathematical indispensability argument.<sup>86</sup> The normative argument has clearer and wider applicability than the mathematical argument. More important, however, is the nature and range of the ontological posits of one's ontological commitments<sup>87</sup> that are supposed

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<sup>82</sup> See William Lane Craig, *God and Abstract Objects: The Coherence of Theism: Aseity* (New York: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2017); William Lane Craig, *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). This is so much the case that Craig concludes that every one of the Quinean thesis is "highly controverted, and none of them, much less all of them, is, I think probably true." *God and Abstract Objects*, p. 80. Each of the elements integral to Quine's argument is controvertible. These are his a) naturalized epistemology, b) the indispensability thesis itself, c) his criterion for ontological commitment, and d) his conformational holism. Craig works through each of these problems thoroughly, *ibid.*, 79. See also the index, taxonomy of responses to indispensability arguments, p.532 for additional references in *God and Abstract Objects*.

<sup>83</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 68, nt. 48.

<sup>84</sup> Vladimir Drekalo, "Is the Enhanced Indispensability Argument a Useful Tool in the Hands of Platonists?"; Vladimir Drekalo, "Two Weak Points of the Enhanced Indispensability Argument – Domain of the Argument and Definition of Indispensability."

<sup>85</sup> Mark Colyvan, "Indispensability Arguments in the Philosophy of Mathematics," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Spring 2019).

<sup>86</sup> This is an interesting thesis. See Justin Clarke-Doane, "Moral Epistemology: The Mathematics Analogy," *Noûs* 48, no. 2 (June 2014): 238–255. Justin Clarke-Doane, *Morality and Mathematics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). Alan Baker, "Non-Optional Projects: Mathematical and Ethical," in *Explanation in Ethics and Mathematics: Debunking and Dispensability*, ed. Uri D. Leibowitz and Neil Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>87</sup> William Lane Craig rightly points out that the whole matter of the Quinean thesis of "ontological commitment" is really a meta-ontological thesis that attempts to read the nature of reality off of our discourse. He states, "According to this criterion, singular terms and existential quantifiers are devices of ontological commitment. It is worth noting that such a criterion is not a criterion of existence, telling us what exists. Rather, the criterion is intended to disclose to us the existential commitments of our discourse. It tells us what we must believe exists if we regard certain statements as true." *God Over All*, 96. This kind of arcane philosophical procedure often reduces philosophical discourse to mere "ontologese" as Craig describes it. That is, things said that do not mean what the words state about reality but actually mean something entirely different. For example, apparent literal discourse that is entirely ontological fiction. See his very useful and critical discussion in *God Over All*. For another useful analysis see Agustín Rayo, "Ontological Commitment," *Philosophy Compass* 2, no. 3 (May 2007): 428–444. See also a classic analysis by William P. Alston, "Ontological Commitments," *Philosophical Studies* 9, no. 1–2 (1958): 8–17.

to follow from their purported indispensability. In the case of mathematics, the variety of ontologies (and anti-ontologies) proposed is bewildering, conflicting, and highly contested; Platonism is only one of many options.<sup>88</sup> There is no uniform agreement on what an abstract object or entity might be or how many there are; their number and kinds seem to be unlimited, with few constraints on multiplying them.<sup>89</sup> In the case of the ontologically heavyweight meta-normative realism of Enoch, he provides us with no specified and detailed account of irreducibly normative truths. Ontological detail on such a deep, wide, and fundamental matter is glaringly sparse; it turns out to be a very thin conception of a deep ontology, even though the ontology Enoch proposes is heavyweight. Sparse ontology is a problem for several reasons. Indispensability itself does not settle the kind or extent of ontology that characterizes the nonnatural Third Realm to which Enoch claims we are committed in our deliberations. Also, perhaps more importantly, how can he resist being pulled into the vast Platonic hoard of expansive and profligate entities that occupy this Third Realm of ontologically respectable entities?

Especially since mathematical Platonism is the assumed paradigm case for comparison throughout his various arguments.<sup>91</sup> A robust, irreducibly normative truth of the Third Realm (be it a normative principle, an ethical fact, a moral property or relation, a proposition, an essential truth, and so on) looks much like an abstract mathematical entity of the Third Realm (be it a

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<sup>88</sup> See Craig's survey and analysis of the various proposals in his *God and Abstract Objects* and *God Over All*. Enoch comments, "...a full development of an indispensability argument would have to rule out fictionalist, metaphorical and other understandings of the quantification over abstract objects that is involved in the natural sciences." *Taking Morality Seriously*, 83. Suffice it to say that he does not provide this.

<sup>89</sup> In his book, Sam Cowling observes that "most versions of platonism hold reality to be positively teeming with abstract entities like numbers, properties, and propositions. This is because, implicitly or explicitly, abstract entities figure into the explanation of almost any fact." Sam Cowling, *Abstract Entities (New Problems of Philosophy)* (New York: Routledge, 2017): 7. See also Gideon Rosen, "Abstract Objects," ed. Edward N Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: The Metaphysics Research Lab, Spring 2020). Accessed 11/7/2020. Craig refers to the "vastness of the realms of uncreated being postulated by Platonism...the profligacy of Platonism in this respect truly takes away one's breath." *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism*, 41.

<sup>91</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 79–80.

number, a function, an axiom, a relation, a set, and so on). Given the tendency to expansiveness - in what sense then is Enoch seriously committed to the minimal parsimony requirement, and what does this commitment really amount to in practice?<sup>92</sup> This reticence to adequately come to terms with the proposed broader metaphysical story, framed within a Grand Story, is philosophically myopic. The Theist, somewhat puzzled, might point out that this requirement is being selectively and arbitrarily applied and not thought through to important conclusions. It looks as though there is no way to constrain the tidal wave of abstract entities and kinds of entities. Given this expansiveness – the Theist is right to ask, why not God? How is it that God can be summarily excluded and not taken seriously? Might not an infinitely excellent God be a better cosmic fit, a better ontological fit, a better metaphysical fit, a better epistemological fit, a better personal fit, a more comprehensive, unifying and ramifying fit, than a domain of abstract normative entities that occupy an impersonalist Platonic Third Realm that somehow exists “over and above” moral deliberators? The Theist rightly asks – what in Ultimate Reality “answers to” the kind of moral beings that we are in the sort of universe in which we live? Indeed, put this way, would this not leave considerable explanatory plausibility for an infinite and personal God?<sup>93</sup> This work will argue that Theism is truly a better total explanatory fit.

### **Deliberative Indispensability**

#### **More Detailed Analysis**

But there are additional issues with Enoch’s indispensability argument that turn out to be problematic. To more fully assess these, we must further unpack his argument's details.<sup>94</sup> This

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<sup>92</sup> Enoch notes that the minimal parsimony requirement does not operate at the level of specific entities but at the level of kinds of entities. Ibid., 92. I do not see exactly how this helps with the profligacy problem. The sheer counting of entities is not the problem. It’s about unrestrained expanding of what’s in the domain.

<sup>93</sup> To be sure, the whole question of God and Platonic entities is attended by a host of complex issues. This set of issues will be addressed in our arguments later in chapter 6.

<sup>94</sup> In order to help with this I have worked out what I call Enoch’s Circle of Reinforcing Logic of Indispensability. This helps to clearly see the flow and logic of things in his indispensability argument. For this see Appendix 1.

process can be philosophically painful. As has been explained, for Enoch to show that indispensability arguments work, he needs to show that IBE works as a legitimate and basic belief-forming method we are justified in utilizing.<sup>95</sup> Recall that Enoch takes IBE to be a kind of indispensability argument itself.<sup>96</sup> By *basic*, he means default-reasonable to use and depend on, *prima facie* reliable, not needing full-blown justification or support by additional arguments. Beliefs formed utilizing IBE are then default reasonable to accept as justified beliefs. This is because IBE method itself is indispensable. But this is not a full-blown epistemic justification of IBE that is strongly supported and justified by additional arguments but rather *a pragmatic vindication*<sup>97</sup> that our default-reasonable use of it is practically justified. This practical justification is an important detail to understand in reading Enoch. His overall argument relies on this crucial pragmatic foundation of vindication in order to go through.<sup>98</sup> It forms the basis of the crucial work done by indispensability in his argument and provides the necessary step in supporting the inferential move from deliberative indispensability to ontology.

Enoch further specifies how this indispensability is to be understood. Strictly speaking, Enoch is arguing for the justification of belief-forming *methods*. This means that something follows inferentially from an indispensable method's proper and successful deployment. From method follows justified (vindicated) belief. From justified (vindicated) belief, ontology can be inferred, or more strictly, our commitments to ontology can be inferred. Again, bear in mind that

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<sup>95</sup> Enoch and Schechter, "How Are Basic Belief-Forming Methods Justified?"; Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 67.

<sup>96</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 55.

<sup>97</sup> It needs to be clearly understood that a "vindicating" account of epistemology seeks only to vindicate, rather than fully justify one's method of having knowledge of things. Given Enoch's sometimes loose uses of the terms justify, justification, justified, it is easy to get confused on this matter when you are reading his work.

<sup>98</sup> Note that this should not be construed to mean that I take Enoch to be in the "pragmatist" camp of philosophers. Clearly he is not. This is what he says. "Notice that the suggested account, although it doesn't epistemically justify the use of our basic belief forming methods, nevertheless does justify them *pragmatically*. And, given the rational weight of pragmatic justification (and given the non-optionality of the relevant project), this line of thought also justifies the rational force of our basic belief forming methods." Ibid., 61. (Emphasis original).

Enoch is trying to show us why deliberative indispensability is a justified (vindicated) method just as explanatory indispensability is a (more complete but differently) justified method in mathematics and the sciences. He states in his formal argument that “if something is instrumentally indispensable to an intrinsically indispensable project, then one is epistemically justified (for that very reason) in believing that something exists.”<sup>99</sup> Such vindicated belief follows from the epistemic justification of the method deployed.

So then, what does Enoch mean by instrumental and intrinsic indispensability? These are technical specifications as follows. For something to be *instrumentally indispensable* to a deliberative project means that it cannot be eliminated from the project without undermining the reasons one had to engage in the project in the first place.<sup>100</sup> For something to be *intrinsically indispensable* to a deliberative project, the project itself must be rationally non-optional. That is, one should have compelling, intrinsic, and rational reasons for participating in the project in the first place and not disengage from the project.<sup>101</sup> For Enoch, these two kinds of indispensability work together in a mutually reinforcing way. Both figure importantly in his argument.

*Instrumental indispensability* works as a broad multi-pronged pragmatic criterion and condition. As a normative criterion, it enables us to pick out what is indispensable. As a normative condition, it pragmatically grounds what is indispensable in our practical engagements. It involves a normative means/end utilization requirement that something not only counts as integral but is integral to the possible success of one’s engagements. It, therefore, bears a modal aspect as well. It is utilization essential (the positive criterion) and cannot be eliminated

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<sup>99</sup> *Taking Morality Seriously*, 83.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

without undermining the project's success (the negative criterion).<sup>102</sup> But Enoch thinks that a normative means/end requirement by itself is not enough to fully specify indispensability; particularly when it comes to specifying the indispensability of a basic belief forming method such as IBE when applied to our deliberative and explanatory engagements. The problem is that, by itself, its application is too broad and too general. Something more is needed. Something stronger, tighter, and more fundamental is required to be genuinely indispensable. This more substantial requirement leads Enoch to further link instrumental indispensability to intrinsic indispensability.

*Intrinsic indispensability* is designed to function as a set of stipulations and conditions that integrate with instrumental indispensability. The first stipulation is that a project must be rationally non-optional. Enoch states this precisely.

A thinker T is *prima facie* epistemically justified in employing a belief-forming method M as basic if there is for T a rationally non-optional project P such that it is (pragmatically-relevantly) possible to succeed in engaging in P using M, and it is (pragmatically-relevantly) impossible for T to succeed in engaging in P without using M.<sup>103</sup>

Rational non-optionality is required so that indispensable projects conform to certain standards of rationality. If we are rational creatures, then rationality should be taken to be an intrinsic normative condition of indispensable projects.<sup>104</sup> This is a key normative feature designed to limit the set of acceptable projects or set of admissible purposes that we should be

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 60. Referring to the success of basic belief forming methods, Enoch states, “that their possible success is our only (relevant) hope of successfully engaging in some extremely important project.” Part of what contributes to the possibility of success is our background beliefs about the universe/world in which we live. The world is deliberative friendly, it is also explanatory friendly. In this sense the universe is taken to be intelligible, or “lovely.”

<sup>103</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 63–64.

<sup>104</sup> David Enoch and Joshua Schechter, “How Are Basic Belief-Forming Methods Justified?” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, no. 3 (May 2008): 558. Here Enoch and Schechter state, “Rational requirement may be a basic normative status, unexplainable in more fundamental normative terms.” The converse is that it is not rational to disengage from intrinsically indispensable projects.

willing to engage in.<sup>105</sup> Without this gatekeeper normative condition, any old irrational project – such as pursuing an intelligible relationship with God - might be taken to be intrinsically indispensable. But intrinsic indispensability is also designed to ground our ontological commitments.<sup>106</sup> This grounding is critical because it ensures that we are not arbitrary in our ontological commitments. Our commitments must be adequately abductively grounded. We must have good reasons for being committed to them. Finally, there is the non-optionality criterion. This criterion is the strong feature of intrinsicity that Enoch appeals to. It is built out of the notion that we are essentially deliberative creatures. This is a constitutive feature of the kind of beings that we are.<sup>107</sup> So we see then, as the summary below illustrates, when all of this is pulled together and combined that it works as a rather powerful specification of what constitutes indispensability; particularly of the deliberative kind.

#### Summary of the Circle of Reinforcing Logic of Indispensability

Deliberative indispensability is always *for* or *to* a certain purpose or project.

Key aim: (indispensabilism) to show that indispensability arguments can be belief forming methods we are justified in employing as basic.<sup>108</sup>

This aims at a form of *pragmatic vindication* of IBE<sup>109</sup>



(So one requires *instrumental* indispensability)

**Instrumental indispensability involves:**

- 1) Engaging in a practical project (that requires deciding what to do)
- 2) utilizing normative/guiding reasons (involving implicit

<sup>105</sup> So this functions as a conditional rule such that acceptable projects must conform to certain rational standards. Enoch uses two examples to illustrate his point as to how this works. “Believing in evil spirits, for instance, is indispensable for the project of sorcery, but this is no reason to believe in evil spirits....And belief in God may be indispensable for the project of achieving eternal bliss, but this does not give us reason to believe in God – unless, that is, the project of achieving eternal bliss is of the kind that can justify ontological commitment; unless, in other words...it is an intrinsically indispensable project.” Ibid., 69.

<sup>106</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 67. So this functions as a stipulative rule such that ontological commitments must be adequately grounded in abductive inferences.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 70; Enoch and Schechter, “How Are Basic Belief-Forming Methods Justified?,” 558.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 67. Strictly speaking, this refers to belief forming methods. That is, that something follows inferentially from the proper deployment of an indispensable method.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 60-64.

beliefs) that 3) cannot be eliminated from that project without 4) undermining the project itself.<sup>110</sup>



(So one requires *intrinsic* indispensability)

**Intrinsic indispensability involves:** Key stipulation - a project must be rationally non-optional.



(This stipulation does three things)

- a) Limits the set of acceptable projects (or limit the set of admissible purposes)<sup>111</sup>  
(Rule = acceptable projects must conform to rational standards)  
(Condition = functions as intrinsic normative condition, we are intrinsic rational creatures).
- b) Grounds ontological commitment.<sup>112</sup>  
(Rule = ontological commitments must be adequately grounded in abductive inferences)
- c) A Non-optionality feature<sup>113</sup> (this is strongly *intrinsic* to intrinsic indispensability).  
(This functions as an intrinsic normative condition = grounded in that fundamental normative feature of the kind of beings that we are) namely:
  - We are constitutively deliberative/we are essentially deliberative creatures

Why is one doing this?



Key overall reasons:

1<sup>st</sup> personal deliberations = to deliberate and decide what to do.

Or

3<sup>rd</sup> personal account = to abductively infer from what we do (in deliberation) to what there is (by explanation); to ontology.

How is one doing this?



By utilizing a belief forming method justified as basic (pragmatically vindicated) that is shown to be indispensable for deliberation in the ways specified.

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<sup>110</sup> The key elements then are as follows:

1. Engaging in practical projects.
2. Normative/guiding reasons.
3. Normative/ guiding content.
4. Implicit background beliefs a). (Positive) essential to the project. b) (Negative) cannot be eliminated without undermining the project.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 70.

Thus, “instrumental indispensability of an intrinsically indispensable project” is a very well crafted, densely packed, multi-pronged and powerful notion designed to circumscribe and fill in the notion of indispensability as applied to deliberation. Enoch takes this account to meet the sufficiency condition but not the necessity requirement but notes that the sufficiency condition is all that is needed for his indispensability argument for robust realism to go through.<sup>114</sup>

## **Deliberative Indispensability**

### **The Problems**

It is now time to identify and elaborate on a critical weakness of this part of Enoch’s argument for robust realism. The problem centers on the pragmatic account of vindication that he deploys to ground indispensability. After carefully working through and analyzing Enoch’s argument, McPherson and Plunkett conclude their assessment as follows.

This puts us in a position to spell out our central objection to Enoch: Truth-Directedness is a constraint on vindicating accounts of the sources of basic epistemic justification, and Pragmatic violates Truth-Directedness. This is because the fact that the belief that P is indispensable to our deliberative projects bears no positive relationship to the truth of P. Enoch never claims that it does. Rather, he appeals to a different normative significance for this belief: that it is indispensable to a rationally non-optional project. But as we have emphasized...it is not enough for a vindicating account of the sources of basic epistemic justification to be normatively significant; such an account must also capture what is distinctive of epistemic justification. This we have argued, requires compatibility with Truth-Directedness.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Taking Morality Seriously*, 61. That is, whether this specification is both necessary and sufficient. The entire issue of necessity will be more fully examined in later sections of this work.

<sup>115</sup> Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett, “Deliberative Indispensability and Epistemic Justification,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. Russ Schafer-Landau, vol. 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 121. I have relied heavily on their work in this section. Their rework of Enoch’s argument in schematic form is as follows (ibid., 108-109).

1. If (implicitly or explicitly) treating a belief-forming method as a source of basic epistemic justification is instrumentally indispensable to an intrinsically indispensable project, then that method is a source of basic epistemic justification (Enoch 2013:60-64).
2. The project of practical deliberation is intrinsically indispensable (Enoch 2013:70-73).

They summarize Enoch's Pragmatic logic as follows.

Pragmatic: One complete ground for the fact that something is a source of basic epistemic justification is the fact that treating it as such a basic source is instrumentally indispensable to an intrinsically indispensable project.<sup>116</sup>

McPherson and Plunkett interpret Enoch to be advocating a version of foundationalism that works from the metaphysics of grounding wherein certain belief forming methods are epistemically basic and others derivative; wherein one thing depends upon another; one thing is grounded in another.<sup>117</sup> The problem lies in the specific grounding account that Enoch proposes; *a fully pragmatic one*. In short, the account lacks one of the most distinctive, substantive, and normative epistemic features that any vindicating account should possess; truth-directedness. That is, the "norms of epistemic justification have the content that they do *in part* because of some positive connection between those norms and the truth of the beliefs that these norms govern."<sup>118</sup> A pragmatic vindicating<sup>119</sup> account of deliberative indispensability does not entail

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3. Treating our commitments in practical deliberation as a source of basic epistemic justification is instrumentally indispensable to the deliberative project (Enoch 2013:67-69).
  4. Therefore our commitments in practical deliberation are a source of basic epistemic justification (from premises 1-3).
  5. In practical deliberation, we are committed to belief in the existence of ethical facts, as they are conceived of by robust realism (Enoch 2013: 71-79).
  6. Therefore, (because sources of basic epistemic justification provide defeasible epistemic justification) we have defeasible epistemic justification for believing in the existence of robustly real ethical facts (from premises 4-5)

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>118</sup> McPherson and Plunkett, "Deliberative Indispensability and Epistemic Justification," 104. Emphasis added. Noting this qualification is important for understanding the critique. Also, for a useful exposition of this see Davide Fassio, "The Aim of Belief," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., accessed November 23, 2020, <https://iep.utm.edu/beli-aim/11/23/20>. It should be pointed out that truth-directedness does not require any particular theory of truth. As Timothy McGrew points out in discussion of truth-directedness, "It is possible to hold a traditional concept of truth without any more detailed theory of the relation between propositions and the world than that the world be as the proposition has it." Timothy J. McGrew, *The Foundations of Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Littlefield Adams Books, 1995), 10. I am working with a correspondence theory of truth. For a good defense of this see Joshua L. Rasmussen, *Defending the Correspondence Theory of Truth* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

normative, truth-directed, epistemic justification. It does not provide basic epistemic justification for believing that P. It, therefore, conflicts with part of what is distinctive about epistemic justification. By McPherson and Plunkett's analysis, mere talk of truth, appeal to irreducibly normative truths, or the appearance of truth-directedness, is not enough, instead a "legitimate vindicating account must appeal to this positive connection to *explain why* something is a source of basic epistemic justification."<sup>120</sup> Enoch's use of the word "truths" can make it look like his account connects naturally, unproblematically and deeply to the truth; i.e. that it is truth-directed. But this is not so. Can pragmatic justification itself establish the truth of these "truths"? No, it cannot. What makes such "truths" true cannot be established pragmatically. Furthermore, irreducibly normative truths cannot underwrite their own truth conditions. This is viciously circular. For this, there must be other deep, metaphysical, epistemological, explanatory connection to truth-directedness, a key aspect of what is distinctive of epistemic justification. Enoch's pragmatic account simply does not provide this.

Yes, it is the case that Enoch's entire project of taking morality seriously involves repeated appeal and reference to irreducibly normative *truths*, which he takes to be Third Realm, non-natural normative facts. It is clear that this is what Enoch is aiming for in his wider project. But he states up front that his use of the nomenclature of "truths" is somewhat loose and flexible and might be used interchangeably with normative facts or propositions, even, in some instances, with properties.<sup>121</sup> However, McPherson and Plunkett perceptively point out that there is an important distinction between ethical facts and epistemic facts, ethical normativity and epistemic

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., "...a vindication of those basic sources is, roughly, a non-epistemic explanation of why the sources are what they are, which upholds (rather than debunks or reforms away) our intuitive conception of the nature and importance of those sources."

<sup>120</sup> McPherson and Plunkett, "Deliberative Indispensability and Epistemic Justification," 123. Emphasis original.

<sup>121</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 5.

normativity, ethically normative facts and epistemically normative facts.<sup>122</sup> What Enoch calls “normative truths” in his description of first personal deliberation is better described as “ethical facts” in a broadly normative and evaluative sense. Construed this way, McPherson and Plunkett are able to draw a clear distinction between *ethically* normative facts and *epistemically* normative facts. This distinction is crucial. Once we recognize this clear distinction, we can see that normative ethical facts are simply the wrong kind of facts to underwrite the kind of substantive epistemic normative connection required for epistemic justification. Instrumental indispensability (means/end utilization) is neither true nor false but only, strictly speaking, useful or not useful; even if crucially needed for the success of an intrinsically indispensable project. To more readily see the significance of these distinctions, I have developed a suitably revised version of Enoch’s argument that reflects these important distinctions.

- (1) If something is instrumentally indispensable to an intrinsically indispensable project, then we are (epistemically) justified (in the sense of non-truth-directed pragmatic vindication) in believing that thing exists.
- (2) The deliberative project is intrinsically indispensable.
- (3) ~~Irreducibly normative truths~~ Normative ethical facts are instrumentally indispensable to the deliberative project.
- (4) Therefore, we are epistemically justified (in the sense of non-truth-directed pragmatic vindication) in believing that there are ~~irreducibly normative truths~~ normative ethical facts.

Taken this way, the argument, at best might be taken to support some version of ethical realism that is indispensable to our projects of practical reasoning. The naturalist or the Theist is perfectly willing to grant this, but this hardly establishes what Enoch intends for the argument. If we extend the implications of these findings, we can see that pragmatic vindication does not

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<sup>122</sup> McPherson and Plunkett, “Deliberative Indispensability and Epistemic Justification,” 133, nt. 1. They state, “...we treat *facts* as the standard metaphysical relata throughout, while Enoch typically talks of *truths*....we talk of *ethical* facts where Enoch tends to talk of *normative* facts. We mean ‘ethical’ broadly, to refer to the normative and evaluative facts that govern our practical lives. We insist on this change in wording because epistemic facts are also normative, and because the contrast between ethical and epistemic normativity is central to our project here.” (Emphasis original).

support the move, the inference to ontology, by way of indispensability; particularly one that necessarily excludes God. The argument cannot support the Laplacian Inspiration of excluding God and clearly leaves the question of God – an open question. That is all we need at this point for our purposes. The argument does not in any way demonstrate that there are irreducibly normative truths of a robust realist sort that Enoch envisages. Strictly speaking, it only shows that normative ethical facts are, in some sense, indispensable to our practical projects.<sup>123</sup> The argument does not settle the nature of these facts. The argument does not determine the significance of this indispensability, and the exact nature of these ethical facts remains a difficult and unanswered question, a somewhat vexed open question at that. Third-realm ontology of irreducibly normative *truths* of a robust realist sort cannot be had by simply naming them in the argument. The argument surreptitiously assumes these facts by merely naming them as “truths”, even though it’s supposed to demonstrate them by way of indispensability. Given these enumerated weaknesses, I take it that the argument fails for its intended purpose.

### **Third Plank**

#### **The Full Move to Metaethical Realism**

Enoch urges us to accept not only the first plank of his argument, which is the realist objectivity of the moral, but also the second plank, which is meta-normative realism that is ontologically heavyweight, but also a combined third plank, namely, a meta-ethical realism that is fully realist and ontologically heavyweight. That is *Robust Realism*. His argument to this effect is somewhat circuitous and requires a bit of tidying up. We only need to summarize it here. He recognizes that the previous two planks do not logically entail the third.<sup>124</sup> Instead, he tries to convince us that it simply makes more sense to be entirely consistent across the board in our

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<sup>123</sup> McPherson and Plunkett reject that even this indispensabilist conclusion is established by the argument. *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>124</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 99.

ontological commitments. So says Enoch, if the argument for the second plank is successful, then we should have come to accept ontologically heavyweight irreducibly normative truths. And if the argument for the first plank is successful, then we should have come to accept morally objective categorical reasons. The costs are negligible if we accept that objective moral truths are of the same heavy ontological sort as meta-normative truths. So, the reasoning goes, we should accept both moral truths and normative truths that exist in a Third Realm ontology, in which case we have accepted the combined third plank; meta-ethical realism of the robust realist sort.<sup>125</sup>

However, we have found the first plank argument only moderately successful, and we have pointed out fairly solid reasons to reject the second plank argument, the centerpiece of his overall argument. We therefore, have good reasons to reject the move to the third plank of full-orbed meta-ethical Platonism. Enoch grants that if the second plank argument fails then robust realism is in serious trouble.<sup>126</sup> This writer concurs. So this leads us to ask whether there are any other additional reasons that might compel us to accept meta-ethical Platonism. Are there any other positive arguments supporting the irreducibility claim? To this Enoch admits, “I do not have such an argument up my sleeve.”<sup>127</sup> The Theist might be inclined to agree that moral, ethical, and normative properties are in some sense *sui generis*; but that seems to bring with it more questions than answers. The first and most obvious question is - *sui generis* in what sense? Does *sui generis* of the sort envisioned necessarily exclude God? Simply *sui generis* is a rather thin characteristic of such an expansive and bold ontology. In the end, Enoch concedes that he is left with a “just too different intuition” to support the claim of irreducibility,<sup>129</sup> especially one with

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 86–93. Enoch also argues against what he calls “disjunctive” combinations.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 107. Enoch concedes, “We may not be able to do here much more than just stare at the just-too-different-intuition and try to see how plausible it seems to us, at least as a starting point. And to me, it seems very plausible indeed.” Ibid., 108. The whole matter of intuitions and intuitionism will be taken up later in the section on nonnaturalist ethical intuitionism. I should state that I am sympathetic with the “just too different” intuition but

Laplacian like, God excluding aspirations. The Theist might agree with the “just too different” intuition but deeply questions the account. Again, this seems a relatively meager reason to accept such a bold and expansive ontology. Enoch moves forward by defending the metaphysics and epistemology of robust realism in the subsequent two phases of his project. The focus now turns to analyzing these matters.

## **Examining the Defense of Robust Realism**

### **The Metaphysics of Supervenience**

The thesis of supervenience is central to the metaphysics of robust realism.<sup>130</sup> In particular, for Enoch, it is a main metaphysical issue. However, it will be argued that it does little actual work for him as he has progressively developed his thinking on robust realism.<sup>131</sup> Generally speaking, does SMNN have a supervenience problem? Many think so.<sup>132</sup> Supervenience might more accurately be described as a family of challenges rather than a single problem. However, in what ways this might be the case largely depends on how any individual thinker develops the notion of supervenience within their particular system of metaethics. Hence,

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should point out that this might be better explained theistically than secular nonnaturalistically. My point here however is that this involves a rather thin ontological feature to argue for irreducibility.

<sup>130</sup> For good overviews of this subject see Brian McLaughlin and Karen Bennett, “Supervenience,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: The Metaphysics Research Lab, Summer 2021); Tristram McPherson, “Supervenience in Ethics,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: The Metaphysics Research Lab, Summer 2022). Dean Rickles, “Supervenience and Determination,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., accessed November 23, 2020, <https://iep.utm.edu/superven/11/23/20>.

<sup>131</sup> Elliott, “Can Moral Principles Explain Supervenience?,” 631. Elliot takes the problems associated with supervenience to be *the* metaphysical problem that Enoch addresses in his discussions of metaphysics. Elliot’s work is intended to be a positive contribution to extending Enoch’s account. Note that Enoch has even suggested that supervenience might be deliberately indispensable. See *Taking Morality Seriously*, 142.

<sup>132</sup> Carla Bagnoli, “The Supervenience Dilemma Explained Away,” in *Supervenience and Normativity*, ed. Bartosz Brożek, Antonino Rotolo, and Jerzy Stelmach (Cham, 2017), 105–122; Jamie Dreier, “Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Moral Realism?,” *Philosophical Studies* 176, no. 6 (June 2019): 1391–1408; Billy Dunaway, “Supervenience Arguments and Normative Non-Naturalism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91, no. 3 (November 2015): 627–655; Tristram McPherson, “Ethical Non-Naturalism and Supervenience,” in *Oxford Studies in Meta-Ethics*, ed. Russ Schafer-Landau, vol. 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Pekka Väyrynen, “The Supervenience Challenge to Non-Naturalism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett (New York: Routledge, 2018); Victor Moberger, “The Mackiean Supervenience Challenge,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 22, no. 1 (February 2019): 219–236.

there is need to work through each of our four thinkers separately.<sup>133</sup> And more importantly, how are these problems relevant, and do they make a difference in the Theistic critique of SMNN? It will be argued in this work that it does. Venturing into the debates involving supervenience lands one quickly in a deep thicket of sprawling, complex, and dizzying metaphysics that range from philosophy of mind to metaethics. The metaphysics of nonnaturalism is only one of these many diverse thicket patches.<sup>134</sup> The basic idea of supervenience seems relatively straightforward enough. A thesis of co-variance can be stated thus: a set of properties A supervenes upon another set of properties B such that no two things can differ with respect to A-properties without also differing in their B-properties. In slogan form, “there cannot be an A-difference without a B-difference.”<sup>135</sup> In this order, the B-properties are typically described as a subvenient *base* set of natural properties, and the A-properties generally are described as a *supervenient overlay* of moral, ethical, evaluative or normative properties upon the base set of natural properties. In the case of moral supervenience, this means that there can be no moral difference between the A and B sets of properties without a corresponding natural difference between them.<sup>136</sup> The covariance between the two sets of properties is typically taken to involve some kind of necessity (weak or

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<sup>133</sup> That is, Eric Wielenberg, David Enoch, Russ Schafer-Landau and Michael Huemer all make significant use of the metaphysics of supervenience. Huemer makes the least explicit use of supervenience in his intuitionism and epistemology of phenomenal conservatism.

<sup>134</sup> The supervenience thesis has been put to work both in the field of meta-ethics and philosophy of mind. The two are actually historically intertwined. In the area of meta-ethics it was R.M. Hare who reintroduced the notion of supervenience into ethical debate and Jaegwon Kim who crafted the notion in the philosophy of mind. See John E. Hare, “The Supervenience of Goodness on Being,” in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, ed. Kevin Timpe (New York: Routledge, 2009), 143–156. See Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World: An Essay on the Mind-Body Problem and Mental Causation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). In the philosophy of mind Kim famously states, “...mind-body supervenience, far from being part of the solution, may turn out to be part of the problem.” KL 730; elsewhere Kim states that “We must conclude, then, that mind-body supervenience itself is not an explanatory theory; it merely states a pattern of property covariation...mind-body supervenience states the mind-body problem – it is not a solution to it.” Most importantly for Kim supervenience defines, “minimal physicalism.” Jaegwon Kim, “The Mind-Body Problem: Taking Stock After Forty Years,” *Noûs* 31 (June 28, 2008): 190. This is an excellent article for a review of the many issues involved in the debates swirling about the matter of supervenience.

<sup>135</sup> McLaughlin and Bennett, “Supervenience,” 1.

<sup>136</sup> This is often referred to as a “descriptive” set of properties, as opposed to a strictly “physicalistic” set of properties.

strong supervenience). Also, the direction of covariance generally is taken from subvenient (natural) base B to supervenient overlay A and not in the other direction. The supervenience claim can also be construed globally (sometimes called general supervenience) or locally (sometimes called specific supervenience). It's also important to distinguish between the conceptual claim of covariance and the ontological claim of covariance. The conceptual claim is intended to work as a strictly logical statement of necessary covariance, sometimes put to work in the format of possible worlds, while the ontological claim is intended to work as a metaphysical statement as to how the natural and the metaphysical necessarily relate and covary with respect to each other. The dizzying part is that all of this can be variously mixed and matched, sometimes developed in a very technical manner, across a wide array of differing philosophical positions, to get a wide variety of combinations, that are then deployed in a host of differing ways, with lots of disagreements to boot.<sup>138</sup> But famously, in the case of supervenience, what is supposed to help explain things, may merely state things, requiring explanation and clarification itself, and the difficulty thereof producing no end to vexing and thorny issues both in ethical philosophy and in the philosophy of mind. This dissertation in metaethics is more interested in the metaphysical, ontological focus, the strong form of the claim, and the specific application of the claim. This can be described as strong, specific, metaphysical/ontological supervenience. This form of supervenience is most relevant in the supervenience debates between naturalists, nonnaturalists, and Theists. This is because of the focus on properties, relations, structures, speech acts, beings, and the metaphysics of these items in metaethics.

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<sup>138</sup> This has caused Sturgeon to be quite critical, though accepting, of the whole notion of supervenience in the field of meta-ethics. Nicholas Sturgeon, L, "Doubts About the Supervenience of the Evaluative," in *Oxford Studies in Meta-Ethics*, ed. Russ Schafer-Landau, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 53–92.

## Naturalism, Secular Nonnaturalism, Theism, and Supervenience

### Plantinga's Supervenience Argument Against Naturalism

There is a rather interesting divide relevant to the supervenience discussion. Naturalism and SMNN share the premise that no God exists and that our systems of moral, ethical and normative thinking can be developed without God; indeed should be, and must be done without God. They are thus allies in their common stand against Theistic metaethics and its God centered focus. But both SMNN and Theistic metaethics share the common conviction that there are fundamental inadequacies with various versions of naturalistic metaethics. It will be argued here that Plantinga's supervenience argument against naturalism nicely parleys these two divides in an interesting way. First, it shows the failure of naturalistic realist ethics, not directly, but by showing that the common ways of arguing for it fail. The supervenience of the ethical shows how this failure works. Secondly, the question of God and how God relates to the nature of ethical properties is directly germane to this failure. Finally, this failure is instructive and has important implications in the meta-ethical debates between Theists and secular nonnaturalists.

Plantinga begins by stating what he takes to be a rough summary of how naturalists often go about making the case that naturalism can accommodate moral realism.<sup>139</sup> He defines an equivalence thesis designed to approximately capture this as follows:

EQUIVALENCE: For any property *M*, there is a naturalistically acceptable property *P* such that N (for any *x*, *x* has *M* if and only if *x* has *P*), where 'N' expresses metaphysical or broadly logical necessity.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> He uses moral obligation throughout to focus his point so that is also what we will use throughout this section. I think that the deontological form of the argument here can be worked out to the axiological (value) and Plantinga applies the argument to critique Ralph Wedgwood's project developed in his *The Nature of Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). So we have then the moral, the ethical and the normative covered in the argument.

<sup>140</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Naturalism, Theism, Obligation and Supervenience," *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 3 (2010): 247. He briefly elaborates on this "...where a given act A is morally obligatory, there will be various sets of naturalistic properties such that necessarily, if A has one of these sets of naturalistic properties then A has the property of being morally obligatory, and the property of being morally obligatory is then constituted by that set of properties. And of course when a set of properties entails obligation, the conjunction of those properties is a conjunctive property that entails it." Ibid., 248.

According to Plantinga, naturalists will generally argue for some form of EQUIVALENCE. It should first be noted that EQUIVALENCE is not to be construed as requiring a reductive thesis. However, it would cover reductive forms of naturalistic ethics, and the specific form that any naturalistic account might take will more or less fit EQUIVALENCE as a strategy for capturing the morally real. EQUIVALENCE is only intended to describe broadly and charitably how naturalism typically works to accommodate moral realism in the various accounts on offer. Plantinga then goes on to fill in the commonly accepted details of how to understand both the notions of moral realism and metaphysical naturalism.<sup>141</sup> Although there are many ways to take the notion of naturalism, the key for Plantinga is that naturalism is most tellingly marked by what it is against; it denies that there is God. According to Plantinga, naturalism entails atheism; it is stronger than atheism.<sup>142</sup> So then the key question is, can one show that (prima facie) moral obligation is naturalistic by finding some naturalistic property to which it is equivalent? That is, is the argument in terms of EQUIVALENCE successful for the naturalist in excluding God? Plantinga answers definitely not.<sup>143</sup> Why is this so? This is so because moral properties supervene on nonmoral properties. He elaborates, "...the fact that moral properties supervene on naturalistic properties means that finding a naturalistic property logically equivalent to a moral property *M* (obligation, for example) is nowhere nearly sufficient to show that *M* is natural."<sup>144</sup> Plantinga agrees that obligation strongly supervenes on naturalistic properties and also affirms from this that there are naturalistic properties that are logically equivalent in a broadly metaphysical sense to obligation. This follows from his proper

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 249. Of course there are many varieties of moral realism. The more problematic of these two is recognized to be the precise "nature" of the "natural" in naturalistic moral realism.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

functionalist account of warrant. But suppose that moral obligation is as naturalistically unacceptable as possible. That is, suppose not only that God exists but further suppose the following about God:

What makes an action A obligatory is that it is an essential property of God to command all persons to perform A.<sup>145</sup>

Given the above, says Plantinga, it would still be the case that there is a descriptive, even naturalistic, property equivalent to obligation. For example, God enjoins us to tell the truth, refrain from murder, adultery, theft, or covetousness, to treat others with love and respect. All of these obligations are natural acts, continues Plantinga; they all involve properties and their compliments that are naturalistic, “despite the fact that what makes an action morally obligatory obviously entails that there is such a person as God.”<sup>146</sup> The reason for this is straightforward - given supervenience, for any moral property there will be a naturalistic property equivalent to it.<sup>147</sup> So then this shows that it is not sufficient to find a naturalistic property P equivalent to moral obligation to demonstrate that obligation is itself naturalistic. Something much more tightly connected to obligation is required to achieve this; mere equivalence is not sufficient.<sup>148</sup> In a different context, Plantinga concludes that it “could be both that obligation is realized in natural properties, and that any act is obligatory only because it is commanded by God.”<sup>149</sup> To be sure, this doesn’t show that Theism is true or that metaphysical naturalism is false but it does show that typical Laplacian-like strategies that naturalists use to argue that the morally obligatory is naturalistic (thus God excluding) are not sufficient; they utterly fail to exclude God. This is a significant failure. But more importantly, given the metaphysics of supervenience, not

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 259. Plantinga goes on to reject the Jacksonian notion that there cannot be equivalent but distinct kinds of properties, or as others sometimes refer to these as “discontinuous” properties, see *ibid.* 259-263.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 268. Here the context is Wedgwood’s account of the nature of normativity.

only do they utterly fail to establish naturalism, but they also fail to exclude God. In fact, given the metaphysics of supervenience, they must include God as a live possibility that underwrites the morally obligatory; and by extension (if the argument goes through), naturalistic moral realism, ethical realism, or normative realism all face a similar sort of objection. This, in a nutshell is Plantinga's supervenience objection to moral naturalism.

We should note that this particular supervenience objection to naturalistic moral realism works given the combined effect of the metaphysics of supervenience itself, the possibility of equivalent but distinct properties, and the possibility of God's existence and commands. But are there any lessons here for the meta-ethical debates between Theists and SMNN? I believe that the argument can be amended to apply to robust realist metaethics, given it has a strong commitment to the metaphysics of supervenience and the shared assumption of atheism. This is an interesting combination of things to parley. Let's make things clear and tally up the other features of Plantinga's argument to help fill in our ideas before proceeding.

Now Plantinga, by all counts, is a capable philosopher. He has answered certain things in the argument, anticipated other things, and set up matters in the argument to succeed in a much wider way, as any capable philosopher would do. In some instances the details might not be fully developed in his short article, but all the ingredients are there. Here is a tally of some of the more important details.

1. Affirms that supervenient relations between properties can involve asymmetric dependence relations.<sup>150</sup> However, he also allows for non-asymmetric supervenience relations.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 271-272. Plantinga explains, "...the theist needs an asymmetrical dependence relation between equivalent properties and propositions, and even between necessary propositions and necessarily exemplified properties, both in ethics and more generally as well; but is there any such relation?...Yes indeed: the much vaunted relation between truth and being furnishes relations of just this kind...Theistic ethics requires an asymmetrical dependence relation or explanatory relation between propositions and properties that are equivalent in the broadly logical sense. This is not as puzzling at it may initially seem; a similar relation is to be found in many other areas."

2. Affirms that there are necessary connections between equivalent but metaphysically distinct properties. Put another way, affirms there are necessary connections between distinct or discontinuous properties.<sup>151</sup>
3. Related to the previous tally, he denies Hume's Dictum that there can be no necessary connection between distinct (or discontinuous) properties.
4. Denies that one level (e.g. the subvenient) is somehow more fundamental, basic, explanatory, or more or less important than another level (e.g. the supervenient) by virtue of supervenience itself.
5. Affirms that supervenience primarily *states* the relation between covariance rather than explains the relation.<sup>152</sup>
6. Tied to the previous tally, denies that supervenience is itself explanatory.
7. Tied to the previous two tallies, affirms that, in the metaphysics of supervenience, an asymmetric, dependence relation to God *is* a metaphysically explanatory relation.
8. Indicates reservations about Third Realm Fregean ontology of abstract objects; particularly the mind independence thesis.<sup>153</sup>
9. Affirms that God can act upon the non-moral, or the descriptive, or the natural (all referring to the same sets of properties) as a causative difference maker. Thus God, by way of supervenience, is a causative difference maker in the covariant necessary connections between things. In some fundamental sense, God transcends supervenience but also relates to and works within it.
10. Anticipates and very briefly answers the standard Euthyphro-related objections to Theism that might arise from the metaphysics of supervenience.

So then, is robust realism subject to a similar sort of supervenience objection as naturalistic ethics? To answer this question we must first be clear on how Enoch deploys supervenience in his robust realism. We can summarize Enoch's characterization of strong, specific supervenience as follows:

Nonnatural normative property P normatively grounds a natural property(ies) iff  
 (1) P specifically and strongly supervenes on natural properties,<sup>154</sup> (2) it is the essential nature of P thus to supervene,<sup>155</sup> (3) P supervenes necessarily but

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 259. A natural property is continuous with other natural properties. To count as a distinct or discontinuous property 1) neither property is reducible to the other, 2) they are *not* identical or 3) they are not metaphysically continuous with each other. (See McPherson, "Ethical Non-Naturalism and Supervenience," 218). A nonnatural or supernatural property would therefore be distinct or discontinuous with a natural property.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 269-270.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 249, nt. 2.

<sup>154</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 145.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 147-148. Enoch says, "...perhaps we should say something about the nature of normative properties – that it is in their nature to be determined in the right kind of way by natural ones – as an explanation of the necessary relation between distinct existences here."

brutely,<sup>156</sup> and (4) P supervenes “in virtue of” (metaphysically) distinct, ultimate, normative, content of principles (C of U).<sup>157</sup>

We can see that this is basically a form of grounding account of normativity. It works by a somewhat opaque form of the “in virtue of” grounding relation.<sup>158</sup> This kind of grounding relation is typical for ontologically heavyweight versions of nonnaturalism. From this, we can also formulate a generalized rough approximation for nonnaturalism similar to Plantinga’s EQUIVALENCE. Call this GROUNDED, and it runs as follows:

GROUNDED: For any natural property  $Np$ , there is (metaphysical) nonnatural ultimate normative content  $C$  of  $U$  such that  $N$  (for any  $x$ ,  $x$  is normative if and only if  $x$  is grounded “in virtue of”  $C$  of  $U$ ),<sup>159</sup> where “ $N$ ” expresses metaphysical or broadly logical necessity.

So, instead of an EQUIVALENCE strategy to show that moral properties are naturalistic, the robust realist uses something more akin to GROUNDED to show that normative properties are both necessary and nonnatural. In this way, God is *eo ipso*, unnecessary. But let’s ask the question whether this is sufficient to show that normative properties are nonnatural? In other words, is robust realism subject to the same kind of failure that naturalism is subject to by way of supervenience? It appears to be the case. Recall that both naturalism and nonnaturalism affirm in unison that there is no God. Recall that nonnaturalism is specifically tailored as a rejection of both naturalism and supernaturalism. Nonnaturalistic entities are said to occupy a mind-

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 148. Enoch states, “I accept *some* brute (or pretty brute...) relation here between distinct existences, and so that Robust Realism stand in violation of Hume’s Dictum.” He goes on to affirm the need to reject this piece of “metaphysical dogma.” Emphasis original. I stand with Enoch and Plantinga in rejecting Hume’s Dictum as metaphysical dogma.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 145-146. This is to be read, “content of ultimate” principles. In the case of Enoch “C of U” is equivalent to the “content C of Ultimate” principles. Enoch states, “So all the robust realist has to do in order to explain the (strong) specific supervenience of the normative is to point to *the content of the basic or ultimate norms*.” Emphasis added.

<sup>158</sup> This is dubbed “opaque” because grounding used in this way does not conform to some of the standard features that have come to be expected of metaphysical grounding accounts, that grounding is asymmetric, transitive and irreflexive.

<sup>159</sup> “C of U” is to be read, “C (the content) of Ultimate” X, where X is a variable and might be principles, or reasons, or substantive conceptual moral truths, or laws, or whatever the Ultimate Principles might happen to be for any given nonnaturalist thinker. See **Abbreviations and Acronyms Used** for similar detail.

independent Third Realm “over and above” the natural thus making the supernatural superfluous and curing the deficiencies of naturalism. The reasoning goes something like this, if there are necessary moral, ethical, or normative principles (truths, facts, propositions, essences, entities, or the like), then the fact that these are necessary indicates both against naturalism and Theism. Exactly how might this work? It works, says the nonnaturalist (among other things), by way of supervenience. Supervenience, by way of GROUNDED, shows us an important way that this works.<sup>160</sup> We can now make the Plantingian move. Once again, however, suppose not only that God exists but further suppose the following about God:

COMMEND: What makes action A normatively right (or B normatively wrong) is that it is an essential property of God to commend to all persons the C of *U* (i.e. content of ultimate) principles: thus, it is right to perform A (or wrong to perform B).

Given the above in COMMEND, given supervenience, a little reflection will show that robust realism suffers from a similar sort of failure as naturalism. Given supervenience, we should ask whether “C of *U*” principles by way of GROUNDED excludes COMMEND? No, it does not. Might we affirm both “C of *U*” principles and COMMEND? Indeed we may. Might “C of *U*” principles be true even though - what makes action A normatively right (or B normatively wrong) is that it is an essential property of God to commend to all persons C of *U* principles? Or, put another way, might “C of *U*” principles be true, even though COMMEND entails the existence of God, who thus normatively commends? It looks that way. Does “C of *U*” principles in any way necessarily exclude God or COMMEND. No, it does not. But we may now go on to further ask, what exactly is this “C of *U*” principles; this Ultimate Content? Obviously, replacing the noun “ultimate” with another like “basic” or “fundamental” or “essential” or “foundational” or some such other does not help. Do any of these or all of these refer to an

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<sup>160</sup> The important point here is that this involves a strong commitment to supervenience on the part of most nonnaturalists including Enoch.

abstract object, a universal, a principle, an essence, a type, or a disposition? Whatever it refers to, how does it come to possess the Ultimate Content C that it does? How does it come to be what it is and stand in the relations and instantiations that it does? Is the content C “of *U*” principles somehow self-grounding, self-evident, or self-explanatory? Is the necessity of content C both independent of all minds and yet at the same time mind-dependent-meaningful-content for us knowers who know what is normatively right or wrong? By robust realism, it seems it would have to be so. But how can this be? This appears to be inexplicable and contradictory; or at the very least paradoxical and quite puzzling. Supervenience itself is of no help in answering these kinds of questions. It seems the fact that “C of *U*” principles has content in the first place and then possesses the kind of content that it does, *viz.* normative content, is utterly mysterious. And then how might it be that all this works necessarily in relation to things it’s connected to? By virtue of what are these connections to content C necessary and the relations with which it stands necessary? What explains this additional necessity - some other necessity in vicious regress? An account of “C of *U*” principles must capture the *normativity* of the normative and not merely state what makes something have some normative property.<sup>161</sup> “C of *U*” principles does the latter but fails to capture the former. Failing to capture the normativity of the normative should be judged a critical failure. This line of questioning could easily be continued. This looks to amount to an acute failure for nonnaturalism. It can thus be concluded that GROUNDED, given supervenience, utterly fails to support the Laplacian aspirations of SMNN. It thus succumbs to Plantinga’s supervenience objection in a similar way that naturalism succumbs to it.

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<sup>161</sup> Victor Moberger, “Hume’s Dictum and Metaethics,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 70, no. 279 (April 1, 2020): 345. This notion of the normativity of the normative is also referred to as robust or authoritative normativity as opposed to merely formal authority. See Baker, “The Varieties of Normativity”; Preston J. Werner, “Why Conceptual Competence Won’t Help the Non-Naturalist Epistemologist,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 3–4 (2018): 616–637.

But there is an additional point to be made here. A Theist could argue that there is a significant cost to affirming robust realist metaphysics while at the same time denying that somehow this is necessarily tied to the existence of an infinite personal God. This cost concerns the first six items listed in our previous tally of things Plantinga takes to be true. In short, Enoch's account of supervenience *merely states things* but does not *actually explain things*. It is commonly acknowledged that supervenience is not explanatory, yet itself requires explanation.<sup>162</sup> Supervenience is not a fundamental metaphysical explanation of things. If this is the case then this makes number 7 in the abovementioned tally important. For this reason, it bears repeating:

...in the metaphysics of supervenience, an asymmetric, dependence relation to God *is* a metaphysically explanatory relation.

God is no mere cipher! God is explanatorily deep, full, and rich. How can an infinite, personal God of loving excellence be otherwise? If this is true then this is an important piece, albeit only a piece, of the positive argument for theism.<sup>163</sup> God cannot be reduced to a thin abstract entity, normative entity, Platonic entity, or any collection of some such entities. Can we show that this is true? Part of the truth of Theism is the truth of this fundamental insight. But this would be getting ahead of the argument here. Ultimately, the project aims to accomplish this, but the arguments supporting this claim remain to be made.

So then, let's step back at this point and re-queue our focus by more modestly considering this possible way of thinking about God and supervenience as it relates to robust realism. On the one hand, it might be asked, Is God as God, given the being of God, fundamentally explanatory? Or put another way, is God, by virtue of being God, a deep explainer

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<sup>162</sup> McLaughlin and Bennett, "Supervenience," 20. See section 3.7. Enoch understands this but tries to answer it, see *Taking Morality Seriously*, 142. I do not think that his explanation succeeds.

<sup>163</sup> For a good quick summary of this see Anne Jeffrey, *God and Morality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); for a more thorough account see Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*.

of things? Theists answer yes to this. Theists understand that Theism incurs an explanatory burden given supervenience. But it is a very different explanatory requirement in light of who and what God is. On the other hand, does robust realism, and more broadly, various versions of ethical nonnaturalism, owe us an explanation of the kind of necessity that they affirm in their account of supervenience? It seems evident that they do. But more precisely, we want to know what kind of explanatory burden this is. The explanatory burden for SMNN, given supervenience, takes us significantly beyond the likes of Harman's challenge. It takes us to the various versions of the supervenience challenge. I will highlight two challenges that I think are most relevant, McPherson's challenge and Blackburn's extension of Kripke's metaphor.

### **McPherson's Challenge**

The first explanatory burden is brought in McPherson's challenge. This challenge involves explaining the relationship between natural and nonnatural properties that are necessarily connected and co-instantiated. Given the metaphysics of supervenience and its other consequential commitments, let's consider McPherson's modest but very well-reasoned case that ethical nonnaturalism bears a significant burden of explanation.<sup>165</sup> The supervenience challenge that McPherson puts to nonnaturalism is set up using three propositions.

**SUPERVENIENCE:** No metaphysically possible world that is identical to a second world in all base respects can be different from the second world in its ethical respects.

**BRUTE CONNECTION:** The non-naturalist must take the supervenience of the ethical properties on the base properties to involve a brute necessary connection between discontinuous properties.

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<sup>165</sup> Tristram McPherson, "Ethical Non-Naturalism and Supervenience." See also Stephanie Leary, "Non-Naturalism and Normative Necessities," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, vol. 12 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 76–105. Leary provides a clear analysis of the problems with Enoch's account of supervenience. She offers a hybrid essentialist account. Teemu Toppinen, "Essentially Grounded Non-Naturalism and Normative Supervenience," *Topoi* 37, no. 4 (December 2018): 645–653) critiques this view as problematic.

MODEST HUMEAN: Commitment to brute necessary connections between discontinuous properties counts significantly against a view.<sup>166</sup>

Given supervenience, the problem for nonnaturalism comes from a commitment to unexplained or brute necessary connections between discontinuous properties, that is, necessary connections between natural and nonnatural ethical properties. The Theist does not face this same sort of challenge. McPherson has formulated MODEST HUMEAN in such a way that weakens the hard and cutting force of what is called Hume's Dictum<sup>167</sup> but also crafted it so that it plainly places upon nonnaturalists a requirement to explain BRUTE CONNECTION.<sup>168</sup> Theists side with Enoch in rightly rejecting the strong Hume's Dictum as "metaphysical dogma," but both Theism and SMNN are obliged to respond to MODEST HUMEAN. It should first be pointed out that the presumption of naturalism, in the sense of an ontological monism, stands at the core of both Hume's Dictum and MODEST HUMEAN.<sup>169</sup> Similarly, both SMNNs and Theists reject this presumption but part company at the fork of God. Given PBT, given God as creator of all things, given all necessary things are asymmetrically consonant with God's necessarily existing,<sup>170</sup> then what could be more natural than necessary but discontinuous properties in relations of supervenience given a Theistic universe? In fact Theism requires this, it predicts this; it doesn't just accommodate this, however, robust realism has difficulty even

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>167</sup> Hume's Dictum is this, "There is no object, which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves..." (Book I, part III, section 6), David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Ernest C. Mossner (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 135. Hume's Dictum amounts to a denial of necessary connections between entities of distinct ontological kinds. Hume believed that we imposed associated necessary causality upon events rather than causality being an objective, inherent, and necessary feature of the events themselves. Its application has been extended in many different ways in a host of different areas. For a recent explication and defense of Hume's Dictum see Camoren Gibbs, "A Defense of Hume's Dictum" (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2019), accessed November 24, 2020, [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations\\_2/1733](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2/1733).

<sup>168</sup> McPherson does not have in mind here conceptual or logical bruteness paired to conceptual necessity, in other words, brute—that which exists for no reason, and necessary—that which exists, the existence of which is characterized by the strongest possible reason; necessity. He is not saying that nonnaturalists are incoherent because they are committing a logical contradiction. See McPherson, "Ethical Non-Naturalism and Supervenience," 228.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Plantinga, "Naturalism, Theism, Obligation and Supervenience," 270–272. Plantinga briefly discusses this particular issue.

accommodating this. MODEST HUMEAN, as formulated, then counts nothing against Theism but counts “significantly” against all versions of SMNN, robust realism included.<sup>171</sup> From within a strictly naturalistic worldview, in strong or weak versions, a Theistic universe will look like a rather queer place; involving queer moral, ethical, and normative things. But irreducibly normative entities of atheistic robust realism look queer as well, but for different reasons and in different ways. The Theist sees queerness as positive evidence for God, not negative evidence against God.<sup>172</sup> Contrast the Ultimate ontologies of PBT and SMNN and observe how this queerness flows out of their respective metaphysics. The Theist views the nonnaturalistic rejection of naturalistic monism as a positive stance.

Along with the Theist, the nonnaturalist believes that something more than naturalism is required to explain things - something different, something more sufficient, something possessing the right sort of necessity and plentitude. If God being is necessarily true, then it follows that two presumptions are necessarily false; both the presumption of naturalism and the presumption of atheism. As Plantinga’s supervenience objection shows, supervenience makes room for God and one might take the “something more” that nonnaturalism affirms as a clue, an indication, a natural sign, a further pointer – to God.<sup>173</sup> The significance of the differences between Theism and nonnaturalism is beginning to emerge more clearly. The personal God of PBT situates us in a very different Ultimate metaphysical and explanatory context than that of

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<sup>171</sup> Of course I acknowledge that it is not McPherson’s aim to argue against theism and this is not to say that MODEST HUMEAN cannot be formulated so that it significantly counts against theism as well. But this has not been done and my point is that theism predicts the features of MODEST HUMEAN as well as contravenes Hume’s Dictum.

<sup>172</sup> George Mavrodes I., “Religion and the Queerness of Morality,” in *Rationality, Religious Belief, & Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 213–226. Mavrodes is referring to queerness in a Russellian universe; that is different than a Platonic universe.

<sup>173</sup> Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments*. Evans takes such natural signs as weak but important arguments for the God. As he puts the matter, such signs are “widely accessible” but “easily resistible.”

impersonal SMNN. God provides deep and wide metaphysical explanatory power that encompasses, grounds, and unifies the richness and totality of our moral, ethical, and normative worlds. It is this unifying and integrating explanatory power, in its many particular and fitting details, that the Theist takes as centrally important. But again, this will be developed more fully in the following chapters.

### **Blackburn Extends Kripke's Metaphor**

The second explanatory burden for robust realism that will be highlighted is set out in Blackburn's extension of Kripke's metaphor. Blackburn uses it to focus on the question of necessity in the metaphysics of supervenience. It will be used here to highlight the need to explain, given supervenience, an account of the whole of the moral, the ethical, and the normative, in very broad strokes, and how it is that the whole hangs together in a necessary way. Saul Kripke famously used the God creation metaphor to more simply and clearly illustrate some of his ideas in *Naming and Necessity*.<sup>174</sup> Simon Blackburn, in another place has effectively extended Kripke's metaphor to illustrate how problems regarding supervenience present problems for moral realism.<sup>175</sup> Blackburn is a quasi-realist, a projectivist, and a non-cognitivist.<sup>176</sup> So he is a metaphysical naturalist of sorts; the physical world is all there is. He thereby believes it reasonable to think that the ethical arises from the physical, but he is critical about whether supervenience captures how this might be the case. His criticisms of supervenience are one notable way that he motivates the move to quasi-realism. So here is the

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<sup>174</sup> Saul Kripke A., *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 153–155. Kripke rejects reductive materialism, as he calls it, to explain the mind.

<sup>175</sup> Simon Blackburn and Robin Le Poidevin, "Metaphysics," in *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, eds. Nicholas Bunnin and E.P. Tsui-James, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 80–81. Section 4 contains the special section that discusses supervenience. I will simply summarize parts of his presentation and embellish them for my own purposes from this cited portion of his essay on metaphysics.

<sup>176</sup> See Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

extended metaphor.<sup>177</sup> If one thinks of God creating the world, a physicalist understands that all God has to create is the physical world, and God is done. All the mental and moral facts are fixed since, according to the physicalist, mental and moral facts just are physical facts.<sup>178</sup> No mental or ethical overlay needs to be added. There is nothing over and above, no metaphysical distance between the physical and the mental or ethical. If this is the case, then God has no second creative task to complete. But given the mental and moral as we know it, given supervenience to explain this mental and moral overlay, any explanation of this identity of the physical and the mental and moral must somewhere involve a necessity. That is, the mental and moral must be what it is since the physical is how it is. But no physicalist has ever shown how this necessity is so. All efforts to date are merely promissory. It seems then that even on reductive physicalism,<sup>179</sup> given supervenience, there would be a second creative task for God to complete. In addition to fixing the physical facts, God had to fix the mental and ethical overlay as part of the physical. And suppose with these facts, that is, involving the fixed connecting links; there is a degree of freedom as to what is linked to what, then these might have been given different relations involving different covariant links in other possible worlds. There is nothing that logically or metaphysically precludes there being a degree of freedom in how these are fixed. So then, even on reductive physicalism, the fact-mental links, the fact-value links, would have to be created in a second creative task to be a certain way in the world according to God.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). This work is an interesting philosophical account of how metaphors shape our thinking. The metaphors may be truer than we know.

<sup>178</sup> See J. P. Moreland, "Should a Naturalist Be a Supervenient Physicalist?," *Metaphilosophy* 29, no. 1-2 (January 1998): 35–57, for an excellent critique of physicalism and supervenience in philosophy of mind.

<sup>179</sup> Blackburn does not single out reductive physicalism, however, if his metaphor applies to reductive physicalism it applies equally strongly to all non-reductive forms as well.

<sup>180</sup> For purposes here, call anything of this sort a "fixessity" to be contrasted with a necessity (of various types). There are necessities, there are fixessities. Some things are necessary, some things are fixessary. The key to fixessities is that they are always in some basic sense contingent, i.e. they could have been otherwise, that they hold in virtue of their dependence on something else, that they do not hold in all possible worlds.

However, God is still not done - for there are, as of yet, no people in this world. A third more complex creative task is also required to people this world with knowers and known. To create moral, rational creatures instead of zombies, that is, creatures which have knowing capacities and understand the value-laden world in which they live, God must create them in such a way that their cognitive, perceptual, and behavioral apparatuses are shaped so that they fit, know and grasp, respond to, and act upon, the good and the ethical as intended by God. How might all this involve a necessity? It is assuredly unsatisfactory to appeal to supervenience of values on natural facts and then hope that this somehow makes the necessary bridge. And yet again, if these creaturely knowers are to know that they know these things, then this is a unique kind of understanding, an intentional knowing, a knowing that one knows. With the second act of creation and certainly with this third act of creation, we have gone far beyond anything supervenience might be capable of explaining. Supervenience has once again left us with more questions than answers.

But let us imaginatively extend the metaphor further still. At this point, God enters the world of SMNN; God enters Plato's heaven. Upon entering, instantaneously, God is no more. Since God is not necessary, there can be no God in Plato's heaven. Instead, in Plato's heaven, we find an infinite array, a vast hoard of true and false abstract; necessary beings; some absolutely necessary, some more or less necessary; but all true and false abstract beings nonetheless. Since God is not counted as necessary, God is therefore not counted among the members of Plato's heaven. There are entities, beings - like the necessary laws of logic, the necessary truths of mathematics, the necessary moral and ethical principles and truths, normative necessities, and then there are beings such as metaphysically necessary universals, properties, types, relations, laws, sets, functions, and on and on it goes; the vast hoard of inert, causally effete, timeless,

spaceless, uninstantiated abstract necessities from infinity to infinity. But again, we should note - in Plato's heaven, there are no minds, persons, wills, living beings, or causes. There is no God to enact a third act of creation, nor a second before it, or even a first. Plato's heaven has absolutely no causal engine for concretization, not one scintilla. This is one of the odd *necessities* of abstract necessity, part of the nature of abstractness itself, one of its essential properties. Abstracta are powerless.

But without minds, can there be necessary truths?<sup>181</sup> Can a human mind contain Plato's heaven? Is the necessity of all these necessary beings separate from any essential connections to minds? How might such connections to particular minds occur in the first place? All of this seems a grand metaphysical oddity that assuredly calls out for explanation. Plato's heaven cannot explain this. Plato's heaven adds yet another layer to Reality. It therefore requires another, more complex layer of explanation. This is a big problem. Human beings with human minds are contingent physical beings; their existence begins and ends in time and depends on many other things. Plato's heaven, rather than narrowing the chasm between human minds and necessary truths, has significantly widened the chasm by adding another layer of reality which then requires yet another elaborate layer of explanation. Furthermore, the Grand Story when viewed from the top down or when viewed from the bottom up, is supposed to necessarily match up. What explains these modal possibilities? This is more than queer. This mysterious match looks to be altogether improbable. Nevertheless, there must be some Grand Story by which contingent beings come to know and live by the richness of the content of necessary truths, contingent truths, in a contingent knowledge-laden, value-laden world wherein there is no God. But if this cannot come from the top down; from Plato's heaven, how then does it occur from the bottom up

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<sup>181</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "How to Be an Anti-Realist," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 56, no. 1 (September 1982): 47-70. Plantinga here asks similar questions, see esp. pp. 67-68.

in real-time in the diachronic causal story of the actual world? Here again, there are more questions than answers. These considerations pose a different sort of challenge to the robust realist than the explanatory challenge and the supervenience challenge. These are challenges of alethic modality. From one way of looking at things, the challenge is narrower; it is epistemological. From another perspective, the challenge is much broader and complex because it must situate and explain the epistemological in the context of some ontological Grand Story; some ultimate naturalistic modal causal story. Plato's heaven is no help in explaining all this. How do things ultimately hang together, and how is it possible that they have come to be as they are given this kind of generalized, naturalistic, causal Grand Story? The metaphors push us into deep modal questions. It is from the metaphors to these questions that we now turn.

### **Robust Realism and the Epistemological Challenge**

#### **Correlations or Skepticism?**

The metaphysical challenges eventually push one over into facing the epistemological challenges. Enoch recognizes this, so he squarely turns to face the epistemological challenge.<sup>182</sup> If the metaphysical challenge is about explaining the necessary connections between natural and nonnatural normative entities then the epistemological challenge is about explaining the correlations between our normative beliefs and the posited irreducibly normative truths. Here is how Enoch takes the epistemological challenge. Initially, he wants to be clear about what he thinks the epistemological challenge is not. Clearing the table is an excellent strategy to help focus things. According to Enoch, the epistemological challenge for robust realism is not, in the

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<sup>182</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 150. It should be noted that Enoch does not think that this pushes him *directly* over into deeper ontological questions. As will be argued later in this work, this move is typical for SMNNs. However, the indirect handling of the deeper ontological account does not make the matters of fundamental ontology go away. They are simply inadequately dealt with.

first place, about epistemic access to irreducibly normative truths.<sup>183</sup> This is not the central challenge to robust realism. Here is how he reasons. He points out that what epistemic access amounts to is unclear; he then readily admits that there is no such access to normative entities, that this in itself is not a problem, and that however epistemic access is understood, it is not something required for either epistemic justification or moral knowledge.<sup>184</sup> It thus poses no unique challenge to robust realism. The epistemological challenge to robust realism is secondly not about justification.<sup>185</sup> Whatever problems that might be posed for robust realism about justification are similar problems for other areas of knowing as well. Justification is therefore not to be taken as the central epistemological challenge for robust realism. Enoch argues similarly about the separate problem of reliability.<sup>186</sup> He argues that if our beliefs in ethics and normativity are true, they should also be taken as reliable. However, he takes the reliability challenge as something that must be more specifically addressed in the epistemic challenge for robust realism. Fourthly, there is the question of epistemology itself, that is, the general state of our account of knowledge, particularly our account of moral and normative knowledge.<sup>187</sup> Enoch acknowledges the shortfalls of current accounts of epistemology but then argues that, as with the other challenges, such challenges are not unique to robust realism. And then lastly, there are the various skeptical worries.<sup>188</sup> But answering the different skeptical challenges, according to Enoch, does not get to the heart of the epistemological challenge for robust realism. According to Enoch, what is the heart of the epistemic challenge for robust realism? The heart of the epistemological challenge is to explain the “striking” correlations between the ontological facts

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 152–153.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 153–155.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 155–156.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 156–157.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 157–158.

about normative truths and our beliefs about these remote and abstract entities. If such entities exist, how do we explain our having the beliefs that we have of them? How do we acquire such beliefs, and how is it that our beliefs just happen to line up with these irreducibly normative truths in the ways that they do? So then, the correlation problem, according to Enoch, is *the* central epistemological explanatory challenge for robust realism. He thus sets himself to answering the correlational challenge of robust realism.

In responding to the epistemological challenge, one of the first things that Enoch does is to deflate just how striking the correlation between our beliefs and normative truths might be.<sup>189</sup> He then proceeds to argue that if we already possess generally reliable reasoning capabilities, any moral reasoning involving normative truths is not too far off from this starting point. He also contends that he is not required to explain the full scope of the correlations between our beliefs and normative truths. He aims to develop nothing more than a “plausible account.”<sup>190</sup> He finally opts for a “third-factor” explanation that he believes plausibly accounts for this correlation. He says this third factor is a (Godless) pre-established harmony.<sup>191</sup> His logic works like this. Assuming that survival is in some sense good, selective forces have shaped our normative judgments with the “aim” of survival or reproductive success. We have thus been pushed in the direction of having beneficial evolutionary beliefs but not necessarily true beliefs while also being endowed with a kind of “normative governance” mechanism in our mental and motivational setup.<sup>192</sup> Since survival is good, behaving in ways that promote survival is good, we

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 165–166. He maintains that the correlation is weak, only strong enough to block the inference to skepticism.

<sup>190</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20–21. Plantinga rightly asks of Dawkins, what is the force of the notion of “plausible” in such notions as plausibility? This must take the form of an actual *probable* biological causal account. See the relevant sections in Plantinga’s critique of this possibility.

<sup>191</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 168.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 168–169. This seems to echo his earlier pragmatic approach to IBE and reliable belief forming processes. But as we earlier showed. The pragmatic approach has problems with truth, truth directedness, and truth conditions.

are pushed to believe and act in ways that promote this good; this good then pushes us toward beliefs that tend to be true.<sup>193</sup> In this way, our beliefs and normative truths are correlated given the (Godless) pre-established harmony and the good of survival. Enoch admits that there is still a small remaining epistemological miracle given this account.<sup>194</sup> Nevertheless, in the end, we are still epistemologically lucky. The problems with this explanatory account are numerous. Let's start with the more obvious issues. First, Enoch relies on the standard, generalized, naturalistic neo-Darwinian evolutionary account of human origins and formation in which all causal forces are natural and mechanistic forces. His Third Realm is causally effete; objective moral facts are causally impotent.<sup>195</sup> His third-factor account plainly appeals to a 1<sup>st</sup> order axiological good, a normative notion of good. This appeal is problematic in at least two respects. In the neo-Darwinian account, there is no such thing as an evolutionary aim, much less an aim that involves anything like a teleological and axiological good. Enoch's account smuggles in teleology as well as axiology while at the same time denying any such teleology.<sup>196</sup> Next, this normative axiological assumption looks to be question-begging.<sup>197</sup> In his account, Enoch relies on the very belief in normative good that his account is supposed to explain and vouchsafe. At the very least, it seems clear that he is illegitimately reading this notion of good back into the evolutionary account that is supposed to explain our knowledge of this same good in the first place. Secondly, what explains the (Godless) pre-established harmony itself? This is the ontological biggie. God

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The epistemological challenge will center on how there are correlations that are true by which we possess moral knowledge.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 169. This notion of "push" is Enoch's language.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 172–173.

<sup>195</sup> For a useful article that makes good use of this problem see Jared Warren, "Epistemology Versus Non-Causal Realism," *Synthese* 194, no. 5 (May 2017): 1643–1662.

<sup>196</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 168. See note 38.

<sup>197</sup> Justin Morton, "When Do Replies to the Evolutionary Debunking Argument Against Moral Realism Beg the Question?," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 265–280; see also Michelle M. Dyke, "Bad Bootstrapping: The Problem with Third-Factor Replies to the Darwinian Dilemma for Moral Realism," *Philosophical Studies* 177, no. 8 (August 2020): 2115–2128.

might explain it. But without God, how is such harmony in any way “pre-established”? The pre-established harmony itself requires explanation. In Enoch’s account, it looks to be brute and inexplicable. Hence Enoch’s account is a version of brute fact theory. Even if there is some such harmony between survival and good, there doesn't seem to be a necessary, non-accidental connection to normative truths through such harmony, especially a connection to some Third Realm ontology of irreducible normative truths of which we have knowledge that forms the content of our current beliefs. The very loose and wide notion of survival does not neatly integrate with the tight and precise notion of truth or truths and our knowledge of such truths. The looseness of survival and the tightness of truth is a grand integration problem. Thirdly, all versions of SMNN as well as naturalism that espouse a generalized, naturalistic evolutionary account of human origins and formation, have what is referred to here as a *plausible mechanism problem* in explaining how it has causally come about that normative truths and our beliefs about such truths are conjoined to constitute genuine normative knowledge of such truths.

### **The Plausible Mechanism Problem**

Here is how this goes. There is a Plausible Mechanism Problem (PMP) for the Evolutionary Naturalistic Account (ENA) of the formation of our rational and moral faculties, given that these faculties are formed in an Impersonal Universe (IU) that is a Totally Indifferent Universe (TotIU) of Wide-Indifferent-Bottom-Up physical (WIBU) processes, events, and functions:

Given the PMP, the Secular Moral Non-naturalist (SMNN) faces a dilemma:

Horn1: If the ENA in an IU, a ToIU is true then Ethical Realism/Truth Realism (ER/TR) is false.

Horn2: If ER and TR are true then the ENA in an IU, a ToIU is false.

P1: ER and TR are true...

C1: Therefore, the ENA in an IU, a TotIU is false and (by implication) any account of ER or TR domain knowledge, based upon this version of an ENA inherits all of its problems tending toward ethical and rational skepticism.

### **Sketch of the Argument**

P1: Given atheism, when the actual contingent universe begins it is an Impersonal Universe (IU) of physical processes.<sup>198</sup>

P2: In the beginning an IU does not know that it knows. There are no knowers or known.

P3: As well, in the beginning, in an IU of physical processes, there are only TrIPs (Truth Indifferent Processes), ErIPs (Ethical Real Indifferent Processes). An IU is thus a TrIU, an ErIU. In this sense, it is a Totally Indifferent Universe (TotIU) of physical processes, events, and functions. True or ethical real content is nowhere located “in,” “at,” “above,” or “related to” these processes.

P4: From the beginning in time the coming to be of humanity occurs from within this contingent IU; this ToIU of physical processes (From P1-P3).

Q1: How do beings like us come into being *in the first place*, and *how do we come to be* the knowers of known true propositions, including ethical truths, in an IU, a TotIU, as described? Surely this calls for explanation.

P5: ENA: (Evolutionary Naturalistic Account) the current explanatory account of humanity’s coming to be is an ENA in the actual universe as described.

P6: NS: The ENA centrally, but not exclusively, involves natural selection (NS) processes and functions.

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<sup>198</sup> It is presumed here that all will acknowledge that there is *some causal story* to be told here.

P7: Given this account - NS *must necessarily* operate a) as a process/function that is totally blind, unintelligent, non-teleological, impersonal, contingent, yet b) selectively specific and c) fitness enhancing.

P8: In the ENA there is nothing above; no top down foresight, only wide bottom up physical processes, functions and conditions without foresight. Call this the Wide-Indifferent-Bottom-Up (WIBU)<sup>199</sup> condition of NS.

C1: Therefore, our cognitive faculties were exclusively formed<sup>200</sup> in an IU, a TotIU involving only TrI and ErI functions and processes within WIBU conditions and processes. True or ethical real content is nowhere located within, or above, or related to these processes (from P1-4, then from P5-8).

THE PMP (the plausible mechanism problem):<sup>201</sup>

P9 – The ENA lacks a demonstrably successful and adequate mechanism(s) for:

P9a – Bringing into being, constituting, correlating, linking and alethically lighting, E(ethical)-knowing, R(rational)-knowing, T(truth)-knowing, cognitive faculties *in the first place*, as well as...

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<sup>199</sup> Wide; this is to be understood as “across the board,” that is, without exceptions.

<sup>200</sup> Or “constituted”; in which case they would be Truth-Indifferent-Constituted-Faculties, Ethical-Real-Indifferent-Constituted-Faculties, that is TiCon constituted faculties. You get the idea in the phraseology. This is aimed at Shafer-Landau’s constitutive account of supervenience and the evolutionary development of our rational and moral capacities. See the relevant sections in Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*.

<sup>201</sup> For a very useful analysis of the notion of mechanism see Bryon Cunningham, “A Prototypical Conceptualization of Mechanisms,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2020.09.008> (October 2020): 1–13. For analysis of the philosophical problems with the whole notion of causal mechanisms, see Ruth Groff, “Causal Mechanisms and the Philosophy of Causation,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 47, no. 3 (September 2017): 286–305. These issues do not affect the account on offer in this argument. Groff analyses mechanism in a wider account of powers. Phyllis McKay Illari and Jon Williamson, “What Is a Mechanism? Thinking about Mechanisms *across* the Sciences,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Science* 2, no. 1 (January 2012): 119–135; Peter Machamer, Lindley Darden, and Carl F. Craver, “Thinking about Mechanisms,” *Philosophy of Science* 67, no. 1 (March 2000): 1–25. For a Theistic account of laws and powers relevant to our argument here see James Orr, *The Mind of God and the Works of Nature: Laws and Powers in Naturalism, Platonism, and Classical Theism* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2019).

P9b - Necessarily, non-accidentally, connecting, correlating, and integrating beliefs and intuitive seemings in the *ongoing belief formations of* ER (Ethical Real) and TR (Truth Real) domain content *within* knowing minds, *between* distinct knowing minds and between knowing minds and the intelligible world.

S1: (Summary) call this the PMP of the ENA (given an IU that is a TotIU of Wide Indifferent Bottom Up physical processes and events). No plausible mechanism amounts to the absence of a formative diachronic explanation. The PMP of ENA is a Grand specified complexity problem involving independent Bottom Up recipe, match, fit, integration, function, and selection-for, types of problems in the *initial creation of*, and *ongoing belief formations of*, persons with minds.

Two qualifications are in order:

- 1) This is not to claim that all beliefs are false or deny that there are any such things as true beliefs only that such cannot be vouchsafed on the basis of an ENA as described.
- 2) This is also not a claim that all such beliefs are evolutionarily determined.

C2: Therefore an ENA seems incapable of explaining how or why we have ended up with a) our E, R and T-knowing cognitive faculties or b) our E, R and T-knowing cognitions or finally, by extension c) our E, R, and T-domain specific knowledge content. The ENA, therefore, fails as a formative diachronic explanation of these things.

The current reliability of our cognitive faculties cannot be appealed to so as to vouchsafe their truth-apt or ethical-real-apt formation in the past on the basis of the ENA in the IU as described. Such an appeal would be viciously circular since it is this very formation in the past being called into question; the very thing such an account is required to explain and vouchsafe. To do so is either a) to reject the call for formative explanation, b) commit an isogetic fallacy c)

commit an anachronistic fallacy, d) beg the question or the explanation, or e) simply to fudge the problems or the solution in the required account. It is contended that the PMP is near fatal to the epistemology of all versions of SMNN that rely on the ENA.

These combined problems render Enoch's account highly problematic and implausible as an adequate explanation. On the one hand, his account presumes too much that remains unexplained to be plausible. On the other hand, it lacks a plausible mechanism that accounts for the kind of beings we are in the kind of universe in which we live. The PMP applies to all versions of SMNN that rely on a generalized, naturalistic, evolutionary account of the origin of our moral and cognitive faculties. Some commentary and additional explanation is in order.

Since it is believed that the PMP is near fatal for SMNN some additional commentary is in order. To begin, the PMP is *not* a kind of evolutionary debunking argument. Evolutionary debunking arguments (EDAs) are designed to show that the causal origins of a function provide an undercutting defeater in the reliability of that function. All such debunking arguments presume the truth of the ENA and attempt to argue that the formative processes of naturalistic evolution render our knowledge in various domains unreliable.<sup>202</sup> The PMP calls into question the adequacy of the ENA

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<sup>202</sup> The literature on EDA's is vast. See Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 1 (January 2006): 109–166; Daniel Z. Korman, "Debunking Arguments," *Philosophy Compass* 14, no. 12 (December 2019); Guy Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," *Noûs* 45, no. 1 (March 2011): 103–125; for a book length treatment see Hanno Sauer, *Debunking Arguments in Ethics*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Benjamin James Fraser, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments and the Reliability of Moral Cognition," *Philosophical Studies* 168, no. 2 (March 2014): 457–473; Tomas Bogardus, "Only All Naturalists Should Worry About Only One Evolutionary Debunking Argument," *Ethics* 126, no. 3 (April 2016): 636–661; Morton, "When Do Replies to the Evolutionary Debunking Argument Against Moral Realism Beg the Question?"; Michael Klenk, "Old Wine in New Bottles: Evolutionary Debunking Arguments and the Benacerraf-Field Challenge," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 20, no. 4 (August 2017): 781–795. For a theistic version of the argument see Linville, "The Moral Argument." SNN's have responded against EDA's in attempts to diffuse them. See Russ Shafer-Landau, "Evolutionary Debunking, Moral Realism and Moral Knowledge," *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 1–37; William FitzPatrick J., "Why There Is No Darwinian Dilemma for Ethical Realism," in *Challenges to Moral and Religious Belief: Disagreement and Evolution*, ed. Michael Bergmann and Patrick Kain (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Erik J. Wielenberg, "On the Evolutionary Debunking of Morality," *Ethics* 120, no. 3 (April 2010): 441–464; Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (New

account itself and further argues that it lacks a positive mechanism to account for the moral, rational beings that we are. Yet the PMP can avail itself of any dialectically useful outcomes that might solidly result from EDAs. Also, the PMP might be taken to be an extension and variant of the evolutionary argument against naturalism (EAAN) but it obviously has a different focus than the EAAN. It affirms Plantinga's argument against atheism as a core feature of the argument.<sup>203</sup> But the focus of the PMP is that the ENA lacks a positive causal mechanism to bring into existence the moral rational beings that we are in the impersonal universe which *the ENA must posit*. Natural selection simply will not suffice as an adequate causal mechanism.<sup>204</sup> Next, the PMP can also be taken as a variant of C.S. Lewis' argument against naturalism given the nature of human rationality as well as a variant of the argument from mind or consciousness developed by J.P. Moreland.<sup>205</sup> The ENA cannot account for mind itself. Next, the PMP can be mutually

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York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 214–219. Adam Lloyd Johnson, “Debunking Nontheistic Moral Realism: A Critique of Erik Wielenberg’s Attempt to Deflect the Lucky Coincidence Objection,” *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2 (2015): 353–368.

<sup>203</sup> Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*; especially p.380, nt. 4 for a history of that argument. See also Alvin Plantinga, “Content and Natural Selection,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 83, no. 2 (September 2011): 435–458; James K. Beilby, ed., *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga’s Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Andrew Moon, “Debunking Morality: Lessons from the EAAN Literature: Debunking Morality,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 98 (December 2017): 208–226; Daniel Crow, “A Plantingian Pickle for a Darwinian Dilemma: Evolutionary Arguments against Atheism and Normative Realism,” *Ratio* 29, no. 2 (June 2016): 130–148; Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>204</sup> Jerry A. Fodor and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini, *What Darwin Got Wrong* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010). See also Paul A. Nelson, “Unfit for Selection: The Fatal Flaws of Natural Selection,” in *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski and James M. Kushiner (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001).

<sup>205</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001); Victor Reppert, *C.S. Lewis’s Dangerous Idea: A Philosophical Defense of Lewis’s Argument from Reason* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Victor Reppert, “The Argument From Reason,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Oxford, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 344–390; Victor Reppert, “Defending The Dangerous Idea: An Update on Lewis’s Argument From Reason,” in *C.S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness and Beauty*, ed. David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 53–67; J. P. Moreland, “The Argument From Consciousness,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Oxford, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 282–343; J.P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009); James Porter Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987).

paired with any number of versions of the fine-tuning argument as a sub argument for Theism. Any plausible mechanism must be capable of bringing about the fine-tuning that we observe in our universe upon which *all* our knowing and very being depends. Not simply fine-tuning for life but fine-tuning for the moral-rational lives we actually live given the kind of beings we are in our intelligible universe. Finally, it should be pointed out that the PMP is not committed to a causal theory of knowledge or epistemology. While the PMP focuses on the origination of our moral and rational faculties, the kinds of beings we are must be nested within and depend on other pivotal, creative, originative moments. These amount to six really hard problems and runs as follows:

1. There is the problem of how our actual universe begins in the first place.
  - a. How to explain the ordered and lawful features of our universe.
  - b. How to explain that our universe is fine-tuned for life.
  - c. How to explain that our universe is intelligible.
2. The problem of how information and specified complexity originate in the first place.
3. The problem of how biological information and complex biological life originate in the first place.
4. The problem of how sentient life originates in the first place.
5. The problem of necessary truths and propositions and how they fit into the rest of Reality; particularly their ontology and our knowing them.
6. The problem of how complex persons, such as ourselves, originate in the first place; persons that are moral, rational agents.<sup>206</sup>

The diachronic dependencies and chaining of concatenations are clearly seen if one works backward from our current standpoint in time as moral, rational persons to the beginning. The chain of dependencies works back diachronically to the beginning of our actual contingent universe through each pivotal originative creative moment. Several things should be taken into account given these key pivotal originative moments. Each phase faces an “initial conditions”

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<sup>206</sup> These six really hard problems can be unified for a cumulative evidential case that supports Theism. See pp. 147-151.

causal challenge as well as an initial “plausible scenario challenge.” How does all this (e.g. the universe) occur in the first place? Each phase faces a plausible mechanism problem unique to the kind of phase it is (e.g. algorithmic information). Each originaive creative moment faces a complex, specified integration challenge: a complex, diachronic part-whole challenge, and finally, each phase faces the Grand teleological problem. Is the universe just one grand, great big, pointless Rube Goldberg machine? It is argued here that each originaive creative moment is more likely expected given Theism and less likely expected given a generalized naturalism. When taken all together, Theism is a more likely explanation; more on this below. Also, each of these, in its own way constitutes a *really hard problem* for a generalized naturalism both for origination and continuance. In this work, the problem of continuance will be dubbed the *problem of perdurance*. The transformation and persistence of things is just as much a problem as the origination of things.<sup>207</sup> Why should things persist in just the ways that they do?

With P1, the PMP argument begins at the point where our actual contingent universe begins since any explanation of moral, rational beings must reach back to the beginning of all things *for us*. It must reach back to the Grand Story with a view *to us*. The key here is that an atheistic universe is ultimately an impersonal universe, a totally indifferent universe of physical processes; only chance, physics, and chemistry. P2 elaborates on this with the PMP in view that, given atheism, there are no knowers or known in the beginning. There is no *known* logic given there are no knowers or known; likewise, there are no *known* mathematical truths and no *known* moral, ethical, or normative truths. What, then, is the ontological status of these things from the beginning, before the beginning? Whether we call these mind-oriented, mind-related, mind-

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<sup>207</sup> Sally Anne Haslanger and Roxanne Marie Kurtz, eds., *Persistence: Contemporary Readings* (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books/MIT Press, 2006). Markus Schrenk, “The Powerlessness of Necessity,” *Noûs* 44, no. 4 (December 2010): 725–739. For a Theistic argument for perdurance see Jonathan L. Kvanvig and Hugh J. McCann, “Divine Conservation and the Persistence of the World,” in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1988), 13–49.

dependent, or mind-originating, they are nowhere to be found *in* the causal physical processes of an IU from the beginning. P3 fills in relevant details of the argument. There are only truth-indifferent processes, ethical-real-indifferent processes, mind-indifferent processes such that the Impersonal Universe (IU) is a totally indifferent universe of physical processes, events, and functions. This is what we mean when we use the idea of an Impersonal Universe (IU), a *totally* indifferent universe (TotIU). A TotIU is blissfully unaware and must remain forever so.

The fact that the universe is contingent and everything hangs in a delicate balance of ongoing, extremely finely-tuned contingencies and dependencies is astonishing. This astonishing fact implies that our coming into being was neither necessary nor inevitable given atheism, an IU, a TotIU. Radical contingency brings us to Q1 - our coming into being raises a fundamental question that calls out for explanation. It also presents a counterfactual possibility that must be considered in relation to normative truths. Had the circumstances of human origination and subsequent evolution been different, then this might have led to different content of our moral judgments and moral sense.<sup>208</sup> P5-P8 details some of NS's most salient features, and C1 is a preliminary conclusion that results from P1-4 combined with P5-8. If there are only WIBU causal conditions, how do these impersonal and mindless conditions work as the actual conditions for the possibility of the creation of real persons with rational minds such as ours in the first place?

All of this sets the argument up for P9. We can see from P9 the need for a positive causal story that involves a rather complex mechanism (or mechanisms) that pulls into its purview all of the preceding key, pivotal, creative, originative moments that then work as the contingent basis for our coming into being. The ENA lacks a demonstrably successful causal mechanism for *all* of the preceding pivotal, creative, originative moments, which must already be in place to

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<sup>208</sup> Linville, "The Moral Argument," 409–414.

support the life of the kind of beings that we are. However, the PMP is most acute for explaining the kind of beings we are given our minds, our moral, rational capacities, and our agential capacities for moral and rational deliberation and decision. All of this must involve E(ethical)-knowing, R(rational)-knowing, and T(truth)-knowing faculties, cognitions, and knowledge domains. In the genealogical account, how do minds of this kind come into being in the first place? By what causal processes do persons with minds that have E, R, and T-knowing capacities originate, transform, and persist? The PMP requires much more than just “correlations” and “harmonizations” in the rough and unspecified sense that Enoch proposes. Most crucially, correlations are not causal. A specified explanatory account must move from - that which is correlated - to the causal conditions and mechanisms that bring about such correlations. A pre-established harmony does not cause itself. It must be caused by something else. Correlations say nothing about how persons with minds come into being in the first place in an IU, a TotIU of wide, indifferent, bottom-up (WIBU) impersonal processes, functions, and events with no knower or known. Indeed this must be explained on any account of the causal Grand Story.

Then there are the constitutive challenges. The PMP also highlights all such problems. Again, in an IU, a TotIU of WIBU processes, these can only be truth indifferent (TrI) and ethical (ErI) real indifferent constitutive processes. On the generalized naturalistic account what else is there? Truth correlated behavior is not at all truth content in the mind let alone truth vouched safe content. Cognitive faculties formed out of truth-indifferent constitutive processes would thereby possess a content indifference to truth. But there must also be a causal connection within a mind to itself, between distinct minds, and between minds and worlds. Again, mere correlations cannot account for these kinds of multiple complex entities, processes, and

integrations. Also, there must be linkages involving various proposed scenarios with any proposed objective truths that flow out of the proposed Grand Story account. How do these constitutive connections, linkages and scenarios originate in the first place, how do they come about, how are they constituted, and how do they actively persist over time? How does all this “stand up” in the first place and continue to hold as it does going forward in real time?

And then there is what is called the alethic “lighting” problem.<sup>209</sup> This is a really hard problem. Without “lighting” or “illumination” in the mind, there is no self-knowing mind, no self-awareness, no qualia, no knowers that know that they know, or inter-subjectivity, or knowledge of the world and objective things; only zombies. Lighting involves intentionality (aboutness) as well as intensionality (meaningfulness) in addition to the capacities for reflective subjectivity, language, and communication and then, by extension, the full, rich range of deep and complex cultural capacities that mark our humanity; truth, ethical real, rational capacities. It involves what has been termed the really hard problem of consciousness; the experience of what it is like to know that one knows. But this is more than simply knowing; it is knowing truth. Hence, this is *alethic lighting*; that is, knowing-that-one-knows-the-truth. So we are not merely interested in consciousness per se, but truth knowing moral consciousness, moral knowing, ethical and normative knowing in real truth knowing moral agents. All of these possess mind based content that requires mind based features of the moral rational beings that live in the intelligible world that we live in. How did this lighting come about in an IU, a TotIU, of WIBU processes in the first place? All of this then leads to summary S1 and finally to the conclusion of the argument C2. Given the PMP, the conclusion C2 I argue poses a dilemma for the SMNN:

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<sup>209</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 233. Here Enoch illustrates partly what I have in mind by lighting. He states, “...the way in which normative facts – such as that R is a reason for A to  $\Phi$  (in the circumstance) – explain action is not by *causing* action, but rather by being that in the light of which an agent acts...by being the content of a belief that plays an appropriate causal role in bringing about an action.” (Emphasis original).

Horn1: If the ENA in an IU, a ToIU is true then Ethical Realism/Truth Realism (ER/TR) is false.

Horn2: If ER and TR are true then the ENA in an IU, a ToIU is false.

P1: ER and TR are true...

C1: Therefore, the ENA in an IU, a TotIU is false ---- and (by implication) any account of ER or TR domain knowledge based upon this version of ENA inherits all of its problems tending toward ethical and rational skepticism. Therefore, Enoch's Robust Realism and its account of epistemology should be rejected as explanatorily problematic and highly implausible. But let's briefly consider some likely objections.

### **Objections and Replies**

*Objection 1:* The PMP argument proves too much.

*Reply:* This objection would hold true if we retained a strong naturalism or even a weaker generalized naturalistic metaphysics and ontology. It does not create a problem for the Theist.

*Objection 2:* The argument overgeneralizes.

*Reply:* This is not a problem for the Theist for the same reasons.

*Objection 3:* Surely, the argument demands too much.

*Reply:* This objection is not quite right for this reason. The kind of explanations we require and the extent or demands of those explanations should account for the sorts of actual things and the real complexities that we observe - given the things we are trying to explain. The PMP does not demand more than this regarding the kinds of beings we are. Yes, it is demanding, but then so is the Reality of what we are, who we are as persons, and the kind of universe in which we live. Furthermore, the issue is not so much that the PMP demands a complete explanation but rather that the *kind of explanation on offer* by SMNN does not seem to have the right resources

required in the first place in the Grand Story, the right kind of ontology (personal/impersonal), the right kind of metaphysics (personal creative agency/impersonal, non-purposive processes), to account for the kinds of beings that we are in the kind of universe in which we exist. The PMP also raises the problem of broad metaphysical explanatory fit. This will be more fully discussed below.

*Objection 4:* If the alternative being proposed to a generalized naturalism is Theism then the problem is that Theism doesn't really explain anything at all. God is merely a placeholder for things that we do not yet understand; as such, God is simply not explanatory.

*Reply:* This objection is a variant of the explanatory requirement that we dealt with earlier. The God explanation is not incompatible with a scientific explanation of how things are caused to come into being in the first place, how they transform and persist. God is a causative personal agent of infinite creative power. Therefore the God explanation might well be an explanation of the PMP. The issue is that the Grand Story of a generalized impersonal naturalism seems *in principle*, incapable of explaining the PMP given the commitments and explanatory resources of such a generalized, naturalistic understanding of Ultimate origins, of human origins and formation.

*Objection 5:* The argument commits a version of the genetic fallacy.

*Reply:* This objection is not on target. The argument presumes ethical realism but questions not where our beliefs come from. Instead, it questions the explanatory account of their origination, formation, and integration with the totally indifferent universe (TotIU) in which we live and from which we have purportedly emerged. Indeed, the causal and constitutive questions that arise when considering human origins and formation bear directly on questions of how we are Ultimately understood and the related metaethical questions considered in this work.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

This section of the project has laid out a fairly thorough summary of Enoch's robust realism and followed this with a critique of some of his central ideas. His case for robust realism is both sophisticated and formidable. The following things have been argued, 1) the centerpiece of his argument for robust realism, the argument from deliberative indispensability, is not successful; 2) that his defense of the metaphysics of supervenience, on which all accounts of SMNN rely, succumbs to a reformulation of Plantinga's supervenience objection, and 3) has difficulty with the challenge of brute, necessary connections between discontinuous properties, and 4) cannot, in the end, explain the relations of supervenience – supervenience states the relations but does not explain these relations. Therefore supervenience itself requires explanation. 5) Lastly, his "third-factor" explanation of a godless pre-established harmony to account for epistemological correlations with the Third Realm of abstract normative entities is quasi-question-begging. It was also pointed out that the godless pre-established harmony that he puts forward to explain these correlations itself requires explanation and that his account succumbs to what has been dubbed the plausible mechanism problem (PMP). This problem reaches all the way back to the beginning of the actual universe, to the Grand Story, which, given a generalized naturalistic account of origins, can only be a mindless, chance-driven, impersonal universe of totally indifferent processes, events, and functions. An account based on such a view of Ultimate Reality cannot explain the origin of the kinds of beings we are in the universe in which we live. The combined outcome of these arguments warrants rejecting Enoch's version of robust realism. But the critique then begins to position toward building a positive case for Theism given that we are moral rational beings in a morally and rationally intelligible universe. This astonishing fact is no small miracle and calls out for an explanation.

At this point, only a few things have been said to support the positive case for Theism, but a number of summary themes can be marked out that have only been briefly touched on in our arguments critiquing robust realism.<sup>210</sup> The first theme concerns normative objectivity. If the God of PBT exists, then this God must be the Ultimate normative ontological and metaphysical fact of Reality. Given the God of PBT the ethical is objective – though not fully autonomous - to us, since it is grounded in the being, will and commands of God. Consequently, the Theist sees no need for arguments like the various indispensability arguments affirming instead that God more than adequately “answers to” the something more that the robust realist is looking for in the dissatisfaction with naturalistic metaethics and the various versions of non-realist metaethics. However, Enoch maintains that his indispensability argument could be viewed as a kind of transcendental argument for normative truths.<sup>211</sup> If this is the case, then the Theist can also avail herself of this argument and extend the trajectory of the argument to God. God, being God, is a profound explanation of Reality, an in-depth explainer of things. But also, God being God grounds objective – though not fully autonomous - normative authority. It has been noted that the Platonic horde figures into the wider understanding of things espoused by Enoch, but he nowhere comes to terms with the broader implications of the horde of necessary entities believed to occupy Plato’s heaven. The personal/impersonal divide that differentiates PBT and various versions of SMNN is thus a fundamental category divide that our critique will continue to build on and develop. Any adequate explanatory account of things must account for the personal,

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<sup>210</sup> For a useful overview of Theistic themes in metaethics see Jordan, “Some Metaethical Desiderata and the Conceptual Resources of Theism.”

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 79, nt. 71. Sem de Maagt summarizes well how this type of argument works. “A transcendental argument is an argument that starts from an inescapable or unquestionable feature of our self-understanding and consequently explores the necessary conditions of possibility of this specific feature of our self-understanding. More specifically, a transcendental argument is an argument that tries to show that a commitment to X is a necessary condition for the possibility of Y – where, given that Y is inescapable, it logically follows that one is necessarily committed to X.” Sem de Maagt, “Reflective Equilibrium and Moral Objectivity,” *Inquiry* 60, no. 5 (July 4, 2017): 460–461. In the final argument of chapter 7 the positive moral argument for the existence of God will involve an important transcendental component.

moral, rational beings that we are in the rationally intelligible universe in which we live. The impersonalism of SMNN is a serious metaphysical and ontological challenge. It is an impenetrable and all-encompassing ontological enclosure.

Conversely, God as Person and the Creator has always been central to a Theistic understanding of God. Finally, God and the Third Realm is a complex and deep question, but it is in no way a completely new challenge to Theism. It is of the same family of challenges that classical Platonism posed to early Christian theology that remains to this day. SMNN is simply another in this same family of Platonist challenges. Much work has been done in the area in recent years, and this discussion will be taken up in detail later on when we lay out the positive case for Theism. And so we now move to our next thinker in the new wave of SMNN.

## Chapter 3

### The Godless Normative Realism of Eric Wielenberg

#### A Summary Review

The second thinker that will be considered in this Theistic critique of SMNN is Erik Wielenberg. Again, the plan is first to provide a general overview of his thinking and then to critically examine some of the relevant themes and unique ideas comprising his version of SMNN, which he calls godless normative realism (GNR).<sup>1</sup> Wielenberg affirms that he is carrying forward a significantly revised form of nonnaturalism associated with G.E. Moore in which the ethical is construed as neither wholly naturalistic nor in any way supernaturalistic.<sup>2</sup> Yet Wielenberg is proposing no mere revision of Moore. His version of new-wave moral nonnaturalism is unique in several respects. He points out that one of the motivating reasons for developing his ideas was to respond to the familiar Mackie-Harman challenge. For Mackie, the challenge is that moral realists must posit a strange sort of cognitive faculty or intuitions involving “queer” kinds of cognitions, properties, entities, and metaphysics. For Harman, the challenge is the requirement for moral realists to provide an explanatory account of how objective moral properties that are casually inert are supposed to figure into our explanations of moral perception and judgment.<sup>3</sup> So, Wielenberg aims to take up and answer both challenges positively.<sup>4</sup> He does so by developing an account of moral knowing that proposes to synthesize two things into a working model; the metaphysics of normative nonnaturalism and the empirically based findings of recent work in moral psychology. Among SMNNs, this makes his

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<sup>1</sup> The main source, the most thorough source, for Wielenberg’s thinking will be the single volume entitled *Robust Ethics*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., preface ix. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, ed. Thomas Baldwin, Rev. ed., with pref. to the 2nd ed. and Other Papers. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1903/1993).

<sup>3</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*., preface, iv. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*; Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*.

<sup>4</sup> This is unlike Enoch who, as we have seen rejects Harman’s explanatory requirement and chooses to go the route of deliberative indispensability. See Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 51–53.

account unique. He calls this the *morphological reliabilism model*, using the acronym MoRM for short. In the model, he qualifies his stated objectives by noting that he is not offering a conclusive argument that such an account is true.<sup>5</sup> He proposes the MoRM to provide only a plausible account of how we could acquire and possess moral knowledge of ethical truths “if there are ethical facts ‘out there’ to be known.”

Another feature that makes Wielenberg’s thinking unique from other SMNN accounts is that, although his godless normative realism is atheistic and thus secular, he often interacts with Theists and Theistic ethics throughout his work.<sup>6</sup> He maintains that his view does not entail atheism and that his account is compatible with Theism or atheism. However, he argues that there are objective ethical facts even if atheism is true and that his account is a better account of our “commonsense moral beliefs” than Theism.<sup>7</sup> To develop his account, he has even appropriated some Theistic-like metaphysics at various points in his thinking.<sup>8</sup> In his work, it is clear that he is theologically attentive as he actively critiques several Theistic arguments that

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<sup>5</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 101.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 40-85. His entire second chapter is taken up with answering various theistic challenges. Even Wielenberg notes how little SMNN have given serious attention to theistic ethics, pg. 41. See also his Erik J. Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason: C.S. Lewis, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Erik J. Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Erik J. Wielenberg, “Sceptical Theism and Divine Lies,” *Religious Studies* 46 (2010): 509–523; Erik J. Wielenberg, “Euthyphro and Moral Realism: A Reply to Harrison,” *Sophia* 55, no. 3 (September 2016): 437–449; Erik J. Wielenberg, “The Absurdity of Life in a Christian Universe as a Reason to Prefer That God Not Exist,” in *Does God Matter?: Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*, ed. Klaas J. Kraay (New York: Routledge, 2017); Erik J. Wielenberg, “Plantingian Theism and the Free-Will Defense,” *Religious Studies* 52, no. 4 (December 2016): 451–460; Erik J. Wielenberg, “Intrinsic Value and Love: Three Challenges for *God’s Own Ethics*,” *Religious Studies* 53, no. 4 (December 2017): 551–557; Erik J. Wielenberg, “Divine Command Theory and Psychopathy,” *Religious Studies* 56, no. 4 (December 2020): 542–557; Matthew Flannagan, “Robust Ethics and the Autonomy Thesis: A Reply to Erik Wielenberg,” *Philosophia Christi* 19, no. 2 (2017): 345–362. Erik Wielenberg, “Craig’s Contradictory Kalam: Trouble at the Moment of Creation,” *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 4, no. 3 (October 9, 2020); and Craig’s response to this, William Lane Craig, “No Trouble,” *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 36, 83. I think that it should be pointed out that the early chapter in *Robust Ethics*, entitled “Cudworth’s Revenge” involves Wielenberg in a misreading of Cudworth’s Platonist theology. For a full exposition of Cudworth’s theology see Douglas Hedley, “Gods and Giants: Cudworth’s Platonic Metaphysics and His Ancient Theology,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25, no. 5 (September 3, 2017): 932–953.

<sup>8</sup> His “making as causation” is just one example of this, *ibid.*, 18-19.

Theists have offered to justify Theistic ethics. He has also worked to refute some common ways that Theists have argued for rejecting atheistic ethical accounts. For this reason, various Theists have engaged Wielenberg on a number of occasions.<sup>9</sup>

In his metaphysics, Wielenberg is committed to what has been previously termed a generalized naturalism; that is, natural facts are causal facts that are the typical subject matter of the physical sciences. He also claims to fully endorse the causal closure of the physical.<sup>10</sup> But his view, as a generalized naturalism, is a weak form of naturalism, and some might view his commitment to the causal closure of the physical as compromising.<sup>11</sup> This is because, as a nonnaturalist, he rejects strict physicalism and endorses the view that ethical facts are ontologically distinct from natural facts.<sup>12</sup> These are variously taken to be abstract entities, abstract objects, types, or universals. Such nonnatural, ethical facts are said to be fundamentally basic.<sup>13</sup> That is, they are fundamental non-physical features of the universe that ground other such truths. They are a) causally inert and b) epiphenomenal; they are taken to be c) metaphysically necessary and d) rest on no other ontological foundation beyond themselves; as

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<sup>9</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, "In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism," *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2009): 23–41. See also William Lane Craig, Erik J. Wielenberg, and Adam Lloyd Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality: What Is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?* (New York: Routledge, 2020). This is a book form of a debate between Craig and Wielenberg with some additional contributions from Wesley Morriston, Michael Huemer, Dave Baggett and J.P. Moreland. See also Angus Menuge, "Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism, by Erik J. Wielenberg;," *Faith and Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (2016): 249–253.

<sup>10</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> For a full account of this commitment from a strong naturalist perspective see David Papineau, "The Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Brian P. McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); For alternative views see Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality*; Keith Buhler, "No Good Arguments for Causal Closure," *Metaphysica* 21, no. 2 (October 25, 2020): 223–236; Barbara Gail Montero, "Varieties of Causal Closure," in *Physicalism and Mental Causation: The Metaphysics of Mind and Action*, eds. Sven Walter and Heinz-Dieter Heckman (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2003), 173–190.

<sup>12</sup> Wielenberg favorably compares his view with the "naturalistic property dualism" defended by David Chalmers, *ibid.*, 15. For this see David John Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Wielenberg, like Enoch uses the terms normative, ethical and moral somewhat loosely and interchangeably although in his thinking at times they are different and distinguishable.

such, they are e) brute and serve as the f) foundation of all other moral facts.<sup>14</sup> How can such facts be known, how are such facts exemplified, and how do these two sets of physical and nonnatural facts interrelate and work together? To answer this set of complex and difficult questions, Wielenberg works through the usual sorts of metaphysical problems that SMNNs are typically pressed to work through - such challenges as various objections to supervenience, how to understand grounding, the challenges of ontological parsimony, challenges from reductive naturalism, and various evolutionary debunking arguments that are particularly acute for SMNN.<sup>15</sup> One of Wielenberg's unique contributions is his formulation of how supervenience works in what he terms the "making as causation" relation (MaCR). This relation is taken to be distinct from supervenience but is structurally conjoined with supervenience to explain the necessitation relation that is said to hold between the natural and the nonnatural; between ethical and natural properties.<sup>16</sup> This notion works as one of the core ideas both in Wielenberg's metaphysics and his model. Since this is central to his account, it deserves a close and critical examination.

Joined to his metaphysics is the model, the *morphological reliabilism model*, or MoRM as he refers to it. It is here that Wielenberg endeavors to directly meet the Mackie-Harman challenge.<sup>17</sup> Wielenberg makes use of what has become known as dual process theory, in which the brain is believed to have at least two distinct processing systems, labeled "System 1" (S1) and "System 2 (S2)."<sup>18</sup> S1 cognitive processes are said to be fast, automatic, below the surface of consciousness, and so intuitive, while S2 processes are described as involving slow, conscious,

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<sup>14</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 13-14, 37-38.

<sup>15</sup> Supervenience and grounding are the subject matter of chapter 2 while evolutionary debunking is the entire subject matter of chapter 4.

<sup>16</sup> No other SMNN thinker couples this notion to his or her account of supervenience in the way that Wielenberg does.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89, 107.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-96.

deliberative type thinking that requires working memory. In moral cognition, the two systems work together, but Wielenberg focuses almost exclusively on S1 processes of automaticity in developing and deploying his model.<sup>19</sup> By extending this empirical psychological model, Wielenberg develops a reliabilist, epistemological theory that amounts to a working model of reliable moral knowledge.<sup>20</sup> To S1 and S2 cognitive processing, he couples what he dubs the “(expanded) hidden principles claim.” By this, he means that there are nativist forms of moral principles that we possess as intuitive content by which we form and deliver various moral judgments and beliefs.<sup>21</sup> He makes the most use of the notions that people have an inborn belief about rights and intrinsic value that applies both to themselves and other people.<sup>22</sup> This also forms the basis of his “third-factor” account to respond to evolutionary debunking arguments.<sup>23</sup> He tests his working model against the notion of disgust to see how it fares in terms of reliability since disgust is typically taken to be one of the most unreliable moral responses,<sup>24</sup> and he also uses his model to critically engage the arguments of Joshua Green, who has used the empirical evidence of S1 type moral cognition to debunk realist moral claims.<sup>25</sup> In this way, Wielenberg believes he has answered Mackie’s worry about queer cognitive faculties by drawing on the findings of empirical psychology that describe the inner workings of such faculties, and similarly, he believes that he has answered Harman’s challenge by explaining how moral judgments are formed in situations where we make such judgments - through a rapid-fire

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<sup>19</sup> He states, “I focus on System 1 moral cognition because it is typically taken to be the more problematic sort of moral cognition, least likely to generate epistemically justified moral belief, probably because it happens quickly, automatically, and non-consciously, it often involves emotion, it is associated with moral dumbfounding, and perhaps for other reasons as well.” Ibid., 101. For some of the ongoing debates concerning S1 and S2 processing see Ron Mallon and John Doris M., “The Science of Ethics,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, ed. Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson, 2. ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 92-94, 104.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 99, 107. In this he is relying on the “social intuitionist model” (SIM) developed by Jonathan Haidt and others.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 144-146.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 110-123.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 123-132.

combination of S1 cognitive processing that involves nativist principles and intuitions.<sup>26</sup> He also believes that he has developed a better account of ethical Reality than various Theistic accounts on offer, particularly divine command theory. He also takes it that he has successfully answered the evolutionary debunker's claims that seek to undermine all versions of moral realism with his third-factor account. These are ample reasons for thoroughly engaging Wielenberg's godless normative realism in our critique of SMNN.

### **Godless Normative Realism:**

#### **The Synthesis Project**

#### **The Metaphysics**

Wielenberg assures us that although his meta-ethical account is non-theistic, it does not entail atheism. He maintains that his view is compatible with Theism as well as atheism.<sup>27</sup> Be that as it may, he is an atheist. He argues that God does not exist, that there are good reasons for believing that God does not exist, and therefore ethics must be undertaken in what he takes to be a godless universe. He takes it that "objective morality is somehow built into reality [but] the bottom floor of objective morality rests ultimately on nothing."<sup>28</sup> Wielenberg has taken the Mackie-Harman challenge to heart. In this vein, he writes,

I accept moral realism yet I believe that God does not exist. I also find it unsatisfying, perhaps even "lame" as Mackie would have it, to posit mysterious, quasi-mystical cognitive faculties that are somehow able to make contact with causally inert moral features of the world and provide us with knowledge of them. The central goal of this book is to defend the plausibility of a robust brand of moral realism without appealing to God or any weird cognitive faculties.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 103, 109-110, 146-147.

<sup>27</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>29</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, ix.

If God does not exist, what is the ultimate explanatory range of Wielenberg's account? What are his ontological and epistemological commitments? He clarifies this in a reasonably straightforward manner when he states,

My brand of robust normative realism is naturalistic at least to the extent that [David] Chalmers's naturalist dualism is. Like Chalmers, I endorse the existence of non-physical properties but do not reject the causal closure of the physical or deny that the physical sciences are entirely successful in their own domains. If naturalistic dualists can get by without invoking the forces of darkness, then so can robust normative realists.<sup>30</sup>

Wielenberg appears then to endorse what can be appropriately described as a version of *metaphysical pluralism*.<sup>31</sup> Within this fundamental ontology, he allows for at least three basic kinds of properties and entities. There are a) physical properties, b) phenomenal<sup>32</sup> properties possessed by conscious entities such as ourselves, and c) realist nonnaturalistic moral properties, which he takes to be epiphenomenal, real, but causally inert. He endorses the causal closure of the microphysical, with physics as the deepest microphysical level and the universe itself as the widest physical level. But he also allows for nonnaturalistic moral properties as causally inert abstract objects combined with phenomenal mind properties of human consciousness.<sup>33</sup> We have then a) properties that are ontologically real in a physicalistic sense that enjoy global causal priority at the micro and macro levels, b) real properties in a mind-based epiphenomenal sense that are causally dependent on the physical, and c) real properties in a moral-based epiphenomenal sense with an even stronger kind of causal dependence on the physical. The phenomenal and the epiphenomenal are both such because they are being described "relative to" the physical. The phenomenal and epiphenomenal involves a delicate and subtle ontological

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 15–16.

<sup>31</sup> Wielenberg has not described his position this way but I think it is an accurate depiction of his multi-propertyed metaphysics.

<sup>32</sup> It should be said that Wielenberg has not explicitly endorsed "phenomenal" properties of consciousness but it seems that he endorses these by way of his approving discussion of and use of Chalmers ideas.

<sup>33</sup> Wielenberg has been strongly influenced by the views of David Chalmers. See Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*.

balancing act that borders on incoherence. By endorsing the causal closure of the physical, Wielenberg supports a generalized naturalism; that is, everything originates from the physical and depends upon the physical as causally prior. Phenomenal properties of the mind and realist nonnatural moral properties depend on the physical in the sense that the physical has origination and causal priority. How this is concretely achieved is no doubt different for each different kind of entity. Both phenomenal properties of the mind in conscious experience and epiphenomenal nonnaturalist moral properties in moral experience are said to exist “over and above” the physical base. In turn, they supervene upon the physical in different ways, and both work dynamically “with” and “through” the physical. They do not float freely, unanchored to the physical domain. They depend upon the physical to be causally actualized. No causation moves from mental to physical or from the moral nonnatural to the physical. This causal direction would involve a breach of the causal closure of the physical. So the notion of realist nonnatural moral properties is designed to demarcate this domain of entities and properties as originating from the physical, relative to the physical, with the causal priority of the physical. Moral properties are taken to be, in some sense, *sui generis*. But the properties are also to be demarcated from anything supernatural because they are not believed to have originated with God or are related to or depend upon God in any way. Supernatural properties and entities are not allowed in this version of ontology. God is deemed explanatorily dispensable.

## **Supervenience**

### **The Making as Causation Relation and Brute Facts**

Wielenberg differentiates three ways that moral properties might be taken to supervene upon the base properties: a) *R-supervenience*, which means **R**eductive supervenience, *A-supervenience*, which means Robert *A*dam’s type supervenience, where the moral property

supervenies upon and is entailed by the base property, and lastly c) D-supervenience, which means Michael Depaul type supervenience; where the moral property *depends on* some base property but is not reducible to or entirely constituted by the instantiation of the base property.<sup>34</sup> Instead, the base *explains* the instantiation of the moral property because it causally *makes* the moral property be instantiated.<sup>35</sup> As Wielenberg takes it,

Supervenience is a purely logical relation; it is *modal co-variation* .... Just as two things can be correlated without one causing the other, two properties can co-vary without one making the other be instantiated.<sup>36</sup>

But Wielenberg recognizes that this modal co-variation is somewhat weak; it lacks explanatory bite. It does not explain *why* specific moral properties supervise in the way they do.<sup>37</sup> To help remedy this weakness, he proposes to strengthen the relation by clearly differentiating between two things. a) The making as causation relation (MaCR) that causes the moral property to be instantiated as the moral property it is, and b) the supervenient relation of the causally inert moral properties caused to be instantiated by the making as causation relation. The instantiated event is a hybrid state of affairs wherein nonnatural epiphenomenal moral properties are superveniently interwoven with nonmoral causal properties. The physical entities and forces of the base cause these emergent entities and properties to be instantiated.<sup>38</sup> One might say that the robust making relation works within and through the D-Supervenience relation that is causally dependent upon the natural subvenient base. By Wielenberg, these exist in a relationship of asymmetric dependence but require each other for instantiation. The “making relation is the

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<sup>34</sup> D-supervenience after the account of supervenience offered by Michael R. DePaul, see his “Supervenience and Moral Dependence,” *Philosophical Studies* 51, no. 3 (May 1987): 425–439. This specification of necessity and dependence is given in Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 10–11.

<sup>35</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 10–11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

cement that binds instances of these [moral and non-moral] properties to each other.”<sup>39</sup> Again, it is the “cement of the foundation of normative reality.”<sup>40</sup>

In metaphysics, this “making relation” has been understood in a number of different ways. Wielenberg divides these into two different types. The first is the Schaffer-Rosen version of “making as grounding.” In this account of the making relation, an entity possesses one property *in virtue of* another, or, saying the same thing in a propositional form - one proposition makes another true.<sup>41</sup> Grounding of this sort is taken to be metaphysically primitive and, in many respects, unanalyzable. But, says Wielenberg, exactly how this grounding relation is conceptualized along with other metaphysical relations such as identity, constitution, part-whole, type-token, and the like is ambiguous and poorly understood in metaphysics. So Wielenberg, while sympathetic to this account, instead turns to another that he describes as “making as causation.” The sort of causation he has in mind is not straightforward causation but rather what he describes as a form of “robust causation” similar to how some theologians have understood the God causal relation - as when God *wills* certain states of affairs to obtain.<sup>42</sup> Specifically, he proposes that cause and effect are “simultaneous.”<sup>43</sup> Wielenberg acknowledges that he has not developed a full metaphysical analysis of this making-as-causation relation.<sup>44</sup> He further fleshes out this version of robust causation as a “third factor” function of our cognitive faculties wherein

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 104–105.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>41</sup> For an account of the making relation as grounding construed in this way Wielenberg relies on the work of Jonathan Schaffer, “On What Grounds What,” in *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, ed. David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 347–383; Gideon Rosen, “Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction,” in *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*, ed. Bob Hale and Aviv Hoffmann (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 109–135.

<sup>42</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 18–19. The whole notion of causation and causality is not as straightforward as common sense understandings might suppose. For a useful introductory overview see Alex Broadbent, “Causality,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., accessed January 15, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/causatio/>. For a dispositional view see also Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). This author leans toward a dispositional view. For a defense of this see Orr, *The Mind of God and the Works of Nature: Laws and Powers in Naturalism, Platonism, and Classical Theism*.

<sup>43</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 16.

one factor, A, reliably correlates with another factor, B, by way of a third factor, C.<sup>45</sup> In his account, Wielenberg considers this third factor relation to be our cognitive faculties, and he believes these to be subvenient “causal” in the processes of moral knowing. All this is supposed to explain *how* the supervenience relation works in the moral domain.

As Wielenberg further maps his metaphysics, he stipulates that “a fundamental category of existing thing is the category of *states of affairs*. *Facts* are obtaining or actual states of affairs....” These states of affairs are “necessarily existing abstract entities that obtain or fail to obtain.”<sup>46</sup> Of these, contingent facts and necessary facts are defined in terms of possible worlds.<sup>47</sup> Contingent facts obtain in *some* metaphysically possible worlds, and necessary facts obtain in *all* possible worlds. Some facts rely on other facts (causal dependence), while other facts are ontologically brute; that is, they do not depend on other states of affairs for their existence. Wielenberg asserts that “a given fact is brute does not imply that it cannot be proven or inferred from other things one knows.”<sup>48</sup> He points out that Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne affirm that God’s existence is a brute fact such that both Theism and his version of moral realism are deemed equally and ultimately brute. Therefore, he argues that bruteness is not a philosophical liability that counts against SMNN.<sup>49</sup> In some sense, all are guilty of such bruteness. He goes on to affirm that his version of nonnaturalism is committed to the existence of such *basic ethical facts* as we earlier quoted above. These serve as the brute foundation for all realist objective morality.<sup>50</sup> The above is a rough thumbnail sketch of Wielenberg’s metaphysics.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 145. In this proposal Wielenberg is using what he calls a third factor account. This is similar to the third factor account that David Enoch develops in his *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 167–177. For Wielenberg the third factor is “cognitive faculties.” In Enoch the third factor is a pre-established harmony. Each thinker’s third factor proposal is different.

<sup>46</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> That is, not defined in terms of causal dependence.

<sup>48</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 37.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 38.

## The Synthesis Project

### The Morphological Reliablism Model (MoRM)

As we earlier pointed out, Wielenberg has endeavored to craft a working model of how moral knowledge functions by combining the work of empirical moral psychology with philosophical moral nonnaturalism.<sup>51</sup> It is both an interesting and informative account. He dubs this model the *Morphological Reliablism Model* or MoRM.<sup>52</sup> That Wielenberg is proposing a model-based approach is noteworthy. It implies that this model is supposed to work as a fully integrated high-level system. It is a proposal to capture the dynamics of how the moral domain works. Models propose to specify top-down global systemic architecture and can be worked downward to complex, specified, integrated, functional detail that accurately captures causal dynamics at various levels.

For a working model to be successful, this is how it should perform. This is the benchmark. Wielenberg is proposing *a model* to plausibly account for how the many diverse and disparate things actually function as an integrated system in the human world of moral experience. He also proposes an atheistic metaphysics that compliments his meta-ethical theory supporting the model. The model and the metaphysics should therefore be well integrated. The model should ramify to the metaethical system, and metaphysics should adequately support and help explain the model. His model aims to be causally descriptive, modestly empirical, and strongly metaphysical. The project aims to account for how the specific workings of the human brain “correspond with” causally “inert” moral facts in the workings of actual moral belief to provide a plausible account of how moral knowing reliably obtains.<sup>53</sup> The project is admirable but daunting because of the staggering complexity of the subject matter. His empirical model

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 88.

synthesis will be the first line of critical examination. Finally, Wielenberg believes that his account is a better account of our “commonsense moral beliefs” than the various Theistic accounts on offer.<sup>54</sup> On the whole, Wielenberg qualifies the aim of his ethical project by affirming that he is not out to *prove* that we have moral knowledge but only to provide a plausible account as to how such knowledge can be acquired and known “*if there are ethical facts ‘out there.’*”<sup>55</sup> Wielenberg has aimed to argue that his account is a better explanation than Theism and can withstand the various standard objections that come from the direction of either Theists or ethical nonrealists, both of whom have critically rejected nonnatural moral realism.

Given his model, Wielenberg takes moral realism to be true.<sup>56</sup> His account involves a careful look into the peculiar inner workings of the human brain to understand “how our moral beliefs could correspond with the causally inert moral facts.”<sup>57</sup> This correspondence occurs, he conjectures, largely by way of the “adaptive unconscious.” As the current research goes, there are two systems of processing in the human brain, “system1” type processing and “system2” type processing.<sup>58</sup> System1 (S1) type cognition is mainly unconscious and involves such things as reflexes, motor skills, and category tracking in a largely unconscious way. In contrast, system2 (S2) type cognition involves voluntary, deliberate, and conscious type cognition. S1 operates autonomically and quickly with little effort or sense of voluntary control. Given S1 cognition, people can follow certain forms of complex rules without knowing what those rules

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>58</sup> For a useful overview of the research that is not too dated, see Jonathan St B. T. Evans and Keith Frankish, eds., *In Two Minds: Dual Processes and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). For recent critiques of the dual process approach see Samuel C. Bellini-Leite, “Dual Process Theory: Systems, Types, Minds, Modes, Kinds or Metaphors? A Critical Review,” *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 9, no. 2 (June 2018): 213–225; Jonathan St. B. T. Evans and Keith E. Stanovich, “Dual-Process Theories of Higher Cognition: Advancing the Debate,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 8, no. 3 (May 2013): 223–241; Cordula Brand, ed., *Dual-Process Theories in Moral Psychology: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Theoretical, Empirical and Practical Considerations* (Presented at the Symposium “Can Psychology Replace Ethics?”, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016).

exactly are or how they are doing it; a kind of “knowing without knowing how” activity.<sup>59</sup>

Unconscious knowing how is normal, ordinary S1-type human cognition. Wielenberg then takes this research into his account to illuminate the meta-ethical debate between access internalists and access externalists. He claims it is plausible to understand that S1-type cognition refers primarily to access-externalist accounts of moral knowing. In contrast, S2-type cognition refers primarily to rational, deliberate type moral cognition as reasoning.<sup>60</sup> S1-type cognition has been shown to execute reliable classification of entities as a non-conscious cognitive function.

Wielenberg builds on this cognition functional reliability and formulates a reliability thesis in this way.

System 1 Reliabilism (S1-R): S’s belief that x is M is epistemically justified if:  
(i) System 1 produces in the ordinary way one or more correct non-conscious classifications of x as N1, N2, etc.; (ii) those non-conscious classifications cause S’s belief that x is M; (iii) the process type being caused to believe that x is M by such non-conscious classifications is reliable when x is N1, N2, etc.; and (iv) S has no undefeated defeaters for the belief that x is M.<sup>61</sup>

Of the takeaways Wielenberg wants us to carry forward, it seems the most important is this: that there is ordinary, reliable classification, as a function of S1-type moral cognitions, that operates as a “causal connection from the non-conscious classification to a resulting belief.”<sup>62</sup> But this conclusion looks to be based on a confusion. It is contended here that the research he cites does not fully support his claim. Simply put, S1 cognition is *not about belief*. It is about non-conscious classification functions. Furthermore, a reflex is not a belief. Moral believing is surely more than ordinary S1 category distinguishing functions of cognition. Moral belief *must involve* some element of S2-type cognition. A fully non-conscious moral “belief” does not seem possible. In fact, it looks rather queer. Consequently, his distinction between S1 and S2 cognition

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<sup>59</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 90–99.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

is overdrawn. His move from category distinguishing to moral belief is not justified by the research. The research does not strongly warrant his formulations.<sup>63</sup> To be sure, he qualifies his gains by acknowledging that S1-R is merely a plausible *component* of his model of moral knowledge and cannot serve to establish his entire case. So to be clear - the research cited for S1 type cognition does not explicitly involve reliable S1 type classification of *moral cognition*. This overgeneralization is critical since Wielenberg continues his discussion as though this is established when it has not been established in the research that he cites.<sup>64</sup> Can these narrow research findings be widely generalized to moral cognition involving moral categories, rules, and underlying moral cognition? Perhaps they can be, but he has not established this in his argument up to this point. His real gains regarding moral reliabilism are pretty narrow and modest.

The next component of Wielenberg's model does address a specific moral dimension as he incorporates the research of the "social intuitionist model" (SIM) to build his own model. SIM research has empirically documented under controlled conditions that we engage in non-conscious moral judgment. In the flow of everyday life, people execute dozens or hundreds of rapid-fire, effortless moral judgments and decisions. In the ongoing flow of daily life, we are told that most of this is a function of S1 cognition but must also involve some element of S2 cognition. Wielenberg then conjectures that "moral knowledge" and "grammatical knowledge" might parallel each other through an innate functional capacity. He endorses some form of moral nativism.<sup>65</sup> Just as human beings appear to have an innate capacity for language, including pre-apprehension of rules of syntax structure, word morphology, concept association, and the like, he

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<sup>63</sup> Wielenberg clearly makes this move in his discussion on p. 95.

<sup>64</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 95. To be clear here, S1 classification claims have been extended to experimentation in moral cognition but their reliability has not been established in studies of moral cognition.

<sup>65</sup> This builds from the work of Noam Chomsky and his generative grammar. In line with Chomsky's work moral nativism might be dubbed generative morality. Noam Chomsky, *Topics in the Theory of Generative Grammar* (The Hague Paris: Mouton, 1978); John M. Mikhail, *Elements of Moral Cognition: Rawls's Linguistic Analogy and the Cognitive Science of Moral and Legal Judgment* (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

conjectures that human beings might also have an innate parallel capacity for moral judgments.<sup>66</sup>

And just as a child can master complex linguistic functions, a child begins to innately master complex moral functions. But Wielenberg emphasizes that most of this functional work is S1-type cognition work. It is hidden from the person. It is somehow within, at work, but unknown and hidden. He thus further stipulates what he dubs the *expanded hidden principles claim*. This claim is as follows.

The Expanded Hidden Principles Claim: Our conscious moral judgments typically conform to general moral principles; such principles are often but not always hidden from us in that we cannot become consciously aware of the conformance of our conscious moral judgments to such principles in any direct way. This phenomenon is a consequence of the heavy involvement of System 1 cognition in the production of our conscious moral judgments. *In generating our conscious moral judgments, System 1 typically employs non-conscious classifications of entities; these non-conscious classifications in turn generate conscious moral judgments, with emotions perhaps serving as intermediate links in the causal chain.*<sup>67</sup>

Again, the research does not strongly establish a link between S1 classification functions and the inner structuring of complex moral judgments. As well, there is no overall explanation of the moral nativism he endorses. Nevertheless, by incorporating these insights into his thinking, Wielenberg continues to build and synthesize his account by further filling out his model.<sup>68</sup> Again he cautions that he is proffering only an empirically based and plausible model that does not amount to establishing the truth of the MoRM. He also acknowledges that the SIM data is variously interpreted as to how to take the relative contributions and interdependent workings of S1 and S2 moral cognitions of judgment.<sup>69</sup> But together, the expanded hidden principles claim, and S1-R (system1 reliabilism) form the heart of Wielenberg's MoRM model.

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<sup>66</sup> For this he relies on the work of Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, "Morphological Rationalism and the Psychology of Moral Judgment," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 10, no. 3 (July 3, 2007): 279–295.

<sup>67</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 107. Emphasis original.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 100. There is another issue here as well. Wielenberg has appropriated from the research of both Jonathan Haidt and that of Horgan and Timmons, "Morphological Rationalism and the Psychology of Moral Judgment." But Horgan and Timmons largely disagree with the interpretation of the findings of Haidt as he has formulated them in his SIM model. Horgan and Timmons are clear that their model is rational based whereas they criticize Haidt's SIM model as post hoc "confabulationist."

<sup>69</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 101. Emphasis mine.

### **The Model: Test Case #1 (Harman's Hoodlums)**

Wielenberg applies his findings to Gilbert Harman's famous hoodlums torturing the cat scenario.<sup>70</sup> He philosophically justifies moral knowledge regarding how the making relation and supervenience might work together to counter Harman's skepticism regarding moral observation.<sup>71</sup> As he fleshes out his discussion of Harman's example, he insists that the moral component is not a mere appendage that can be stripped from the observations of the situation of moral judging, as Harman maintains. He then makes this summary observation as he generalizes the metaphysics and the modeling of the moralizing functions.

Fortunately, when it comes to the precise nature of the non-conscious classifications involved in moral cognition, the details don't matter *as long as such classifications latch on to non-moral properties of actions that are reliably correlated with the moral properties ascribed to those actions by the moral beliefs that such cognition generates.*<sup>72</sup>

This is a good summary of his synthesis. Consider this generalized summary description of how the process works more carefully. It's instructive to paraphrase Wielenberg's summary findings in his own fashion to test how far he has taken us. Importantly, what he means in this description is: that latching is a kind of immediate and automatic moral cognition function reliably executed by the MaCR. This being a central function in his model, when Wielenberg sees hoodlums torturing a cat, he claims the following:

*The Wielenberg Interpretation:* ...the latching function connects non-moral properties of the interpreted situation to the inert nonnaturalistic moral properties that exist independently. S1 then automatically and reliably classifies, qualifies, and correlates (as a function of a causal making relation and D-Supervenience) these real nonnatural moral properties together with the non-moral physical situational properties. In just this way, mostly S1 (non-conscious and hidden)

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<sup>70</sup> This classic discussion can be found in Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, 4–9.

<sup>71</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 103–106.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 106. Emphasis mine.

moral cognitions (along with some S2 cognitions) generate specific reliable, justified, and innately intuitive (S1-R type) moral ascriptions by way of certain verdictive moral beliefs.

By contrast, when Harman sees hoodlums torturing a cat, in light of the Wielenberg interpretation, he might say:

*The Mackie-Harman Interpretation:* ...the so-called latching function is no more than pre-structured culturally laden evaluations that are socially generated by way of behavioral associations; thus, *reliabilist* is no more than *regularist* correlation whose causes are found in socialization and the brain. These may be mostly S1 cognition-generated moral ascriptions, and these may be socially generated moral (SIM) intuitive judgments; granted, they are fast, almost automatic, but they are no more made up of nonnatural moral properties than the moon is made up of green cheese. Everything here is natural; everything here is brain structured and socially and psychologically generated. As Harman argues of the hoodlums and cat scenario,

...you do not need to *conclude* that what they are doing is wrong; you do not need to figure anything out; you can *see* that it is wrong. But is your reaction due to the actual wrongness of what you see or is it simply a reflection of your moral 'sense,' a 'sense' that you have acquired perhaps as a result of your moral upbringing.

The issue is complicated. There are no pure observations. Observations are always 'theory laden.' What you perceive depends to some extent on the theory you hold, *consciously or unconsciously*.<sup>73</sup>

And while, in the light of Wielenberg's synthesis, Mackie may have to revise some of his thinking on the queer nature of moral intuitions, he would likely still argue that,

[the] assertion that there are objective values or intrinsically prescriptive entities or features of some kind, which ordinary moral judgements presuppose, is, I hold, not meaningless but false.<sup>74</sup>

Given the conjectured Mackie-Harman interpretation of the research - as applied to the hoodlums and cat scenario - as contrasted with the Wielenberg interpretation, there doesn't seem

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<sup>73</sup> Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 40.

to be any compelling reasons to accept Wielenberg's account of the matter. Mainly where is the need for "inert moral properties"? Simply because "moral judgments can conform to broad moral principles"<sup>75</sup> doesn't require us to conjecture nonnatural moral realism. Harman agrees with Wielenberg when he states that moral "...judgments are analogous to direct perceptual judgments about facts."<sup>76</sup> They are fast, automatic, and maybe of the S1 type. The key here is that it does not successfully overcome the Mackie-Harmon challenge. All in all, the Harman interpretation has not been put down, and Mackie can still rightly assert that Wielenberg has a lot of spooky stuff going on, semi-queer functions of the brain, queer moral properties, queer latches, cements and linkages of various sorts.

Regarding Wielenberg's model, it is concluded that Wielenberg overreaches in interpreting the empirical data. Secondly, he illegitimately extends the implications of the empirical findings in his synthesis, in spite of his frequent qualification for restrained plausibility as opposed to firm truth in his presentation of the synthesis model. Thirdly, there is still a lot of spooky stuff going on in the cognitive faculties of Wielenberg's model. He has not put down the Mackie-Harman challenge. However, he should be applauded for attempting to synthesize metaethics and experimental moral psychology.

Regarding Wielenberg's metaphysics, a few points also need to be made. First, his metaphysics succumbs to the supervenience problems detailed in Enoch's third-factor metaphysics critique. Each has a problem with supervenience. Each has, for this very reason, proffered a third-factor approach. As we previously argued, beyond supervenience, Enoch's problem is his unwarranted appeal to a third factor (Godless) pre-established harmony. How is this third-factor pre-established harmony to be explained? Wielenberg's problem is his appeal to

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<sup>75</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 103.

<sup>76</sup> Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, 6.

a third-factor making-as-causation relation (MaCR) in the cognitive faculties. How is this MaCR to be explained? Each thinker has tacitly acknowledged the insufficiency of supervenience by itself as an explanation of how moral dynamics work. There is consensus that supervenience does not explain but itself requires explanation and that supervenience cannot secure the necessity required in accounts of the moral domain. Both have therefore attempted to supplement supervenience in various ways. The analysis that follows will focus on Wielenberg's MaCR proposal from a critical perspective. It will be argued that his primary problem is adequately explaining the exemplification of moral properties, given his commitment to Third-Realm moral Platonism.

### **Problem #1**

#### **The Exemplification of Moral Properties**

##### **The Exemplification Challenge**

Proposed here is a relatively precise and metaphysical interpretation of the exemplification challenge, posing a substantial but not necessarily decisive problem for SMNN. Specifically, the three following theses will be deployed to examine the issues related to Wielenberg's account of GNR and its problems with exemplification.

**EXEMPLIFICATION:** If there are abstract objects (that is, Third-Realm, *sui generis*, universal moral properties, and propositions) that are neither causally efficacious nor located in space/time, then there must be some causal story that explains how and why such abstract objects are exemplified. Neither supervenience nor emergence adequately explains such exemplification, *viz.* why it is what it is or how it works in the ways it does. The why and how questions are critical in the causal story.

**CAUSAL NEXUS:** Abstract objects require some causal entity(ies) to bring about their exemplification. Such exemplification requires a nexus of exemplification that works between a) causal entities in space/time and b) non-space/time-abstract-objects in instances of exemplification. This nexus of exemplification must appropriately *fit* into some overall Grand Causal Story. An explanation of this unified Grand Story should *fit* with a) how it is that this nexus

of exemplification is possible and comes into being in the first place (the problem of origins) and b) how and why this nexus of exemplification continues to work as it does (the problem of perdurance) and finally, c) why the nexus of exemplification is as it is (the problem of its essential nature).

MODEST ELEATIC: Every existing thing that makes a difference does so by virtue of the causal powers of something. Commitment to inexplicable, *ad hoc*, brute causal features counts significantly against a view.<sup>77</sup>

In the summary review of Wielenberg's GNR it is clear that he is committed to the existence of abstract objects, specifically Third Realm abstract objects of the moral type. These nonnatural abstract objects he affirms to be necessary *sui generis* moral entities. As we have seen, Wielenberg has put forward an account of how these things are to be explained that involves what he terms D-supervenience, which he also couples with a MaCR. Without these two things, both his metaphysics and model fall apart. To help draw out the contours of what I consider key problems with Wielenberg's account, I have proposed three theses:

EXEMPLIFICATION, CAUSAL NEXUS, and MODEST ELEATIC.

Some preliminary clarifications are in order. First, the term nexus is meant to focus on the point of convergence where several posited items combine together to manifest the instantiation in the exemplification process.<sup>78</sup> By CAUSAL NEXUS, the focus is on the grand story of causality into which any account of exemplification must be integrated and from which it ultimately proceeds. The broader causal story must involve a nexus of exemplification of some form. By MODEST ELEATIC, the focus is on the ontological and metaphysical commitments of the various causal proposals on offer; specifically, positing brute, inexplicable, *ad hoc* causal features counts significantly against a view. MODEST ELEATIC is not intended to be

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<sup>77</sup> Eleatics argue that only objects with causal properties exist. For a useful discussion of this debate see Russell Marcus, "The Eleatic and the Indispensabilist," *Theoria: An International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science* 30, no. 3 (November 12, 2015): 415–429.

<sup>78</sup> In GNR this nexus is physically located "in the head" in the "cognitive faculties." It involves moral and non-moral properties, abstract states of affairs; D-supervenience and the robust MaCR combined and brought together in particular moral experiences.

committed to a universal or strong Eleatic thesis or a causal theory of knowledge but rather that difference-making powers must involve causal powers in some sense and that an adequate account of how this works is an appropriate expectation for any theoretical model like GNR.<sup>79</sup> Exemplification is apt for explanation.

J.P. Moreland has provided a rather focused critique of Wielenberg's account of exemplification that is quite detailed.<sup>80</sup> Moreland focuses on the *what* and the *how* of exemplification. However, each of Moreland's criticisms is tied in some respect to what Moreland takes to be Wielenberg's commitment to naturalism.<sup>81</sup> But Wielenberg conveniently deflects the entire thrust of Moreland's critique by denying he is committed to a strong version of naturalism.<sup>82</sup> While Wielenberg has acknowledged that he is committed to the thesis that "every physical event that has a cause at all has a complete physical cause."<sup>83</sup> As we have noted, this is a weak version of the causal closure of the physical. For this reason, Wielenberg's commitment to naturalism is described here as a generalized naturalism. Such a commitment is typical for SMNNs. However, Wielenberg's attempted deflections do not suffice to fend off the force of Moreland's major criticisms.

Let's begin with CAUSAL NEXUS to see why Wielenberg's move does not quite work. When explaining *how* EXEMPLIFICATION fits into the Grand Story, there is little to no practical difference between a strong naturalist and a weak naturalist account. Whatever causal factors are invoked for either will be pretty much the same. Theists take that God stands as the

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<sup>79</sup> For example, Paul Benacerraf, who criticized mathematical Platonism, was committed to a causal theory of knowledge. Justin Clarke-Doane, "What Is the Benacerraf Problem?," in *New Perspectives on the Philosophy of Paul Benacerraf*, ed. Fabrice Pataut (New York: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2016), 17–43.

<sup>80</sup> Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality*. See his entire criticism in chapter 11 entitled "Capital on the Cheap."

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. Kindle loc. 2899-2905.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. Kindle loc. 6007. As Wielenberg puts it, "...Morelandian naturalism is not part of my view." It should be pointed out that Moreland refers to the core of Wielenberg's position as "strong emergence" whereas this is the same thing that Wielenberg refers to as "non-reductive supervenience." Kindle loc. 6007.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Kindle loc. 5933.

beginning of the creation event, typically called the Big Bang. God is an infinitely creative causal agent. But atheists that are strong naturalists, and weak naturalists, both reject Theism. Therefore they will fall back to the same causal forces in whatever ways these happen to be understood for the beginning of all things. Assuredly, abstract objects are no help here. They are acausal and located outside space/time. They are, therefore, powerless to cause anything. Given this, the first observation brought to light by CAUSAL NEXUS is the problem of the Grand Cosmic Story, Ultimate origins, and integrative cosmic fit. How and why is it that the moral nexus of exemplification is possible and comes into being in the first place?<sup>84</sup> Here we can ponder an Ultimate origins query. In an atheistic, naturalistic universe, can moral values and obligations exist the moment before the Planck Time (that is, the split moment before  $10^{-43}$  seconds after the Big Bang)? If so, then why and how is this the case? This query brings to light a number of issues.

- It raises the question of Ultimate origins. The original cause of the coming into being of all things in the first place, including abstract objects and the architecture of reality, for the kind of exemplification in view here.
  - By atheism, in the beginning, there are no minds or cognitive faculties.
    - It indicates that there is a location problem for GNR.
    - It also raises the problem of uninstantiated universals.
    - GNR is also subject to the previously detailed Plausible Mechanism Problem.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Kindle loc. 3154.

<sup>85</sup> As Wielenberg puts the matter, “Evolution has given us these moral properties by giving us the non-moral properties that make such moral properties be instantiated....But that they are accidental in origin does not make these moral properties unreal or unimportant.” *Robust Ethics*, 56. Also Adam Lloyd Johnson makes a detailed case that Wielenberg has not successfully skirted Plantinga’s Argument Against Evolutionary Naturalism. See chapter 4 Adam Lloyd Johnson, *Proposing A Trinitarian Metaethical Theory as a Better Explanation for Objective Morality*

- Then there is also the problem of contingency over the course of our evolution, what Mark Linville has referred to as a Darwinian counterfactual. That is, if the evolutionary landscape had been different, then the course of human evolution would have been different, and our morals and values today would likewise be different.<sup>86</sup>
- By contrast, that our universe is cosmically fined tuned for self-knowing moral beings like us is problematic on atheism and requires explanation. It is a strong point in favor of Theism. Theism anticipates moral beings like us.
- Personalist involving, mind involving moral values, obligations, propositions, and properties are problematic in an ultimately impersonal, mindless Platonic universe of the kind espoused in GNR.
  - In an impersonal universe, these sorts of moral values, obligations, and properties are ultimately queer. An impersonal universe is a completely morally indifferent universe. In such a universe, we must ask, for example, not only *how* but also *why* deliberate cruelty makes something morally wrong. An abstract object cannot make this so. An impersonal universe not only does not care, it is utterly incapable of caring about such things.<sup>87</sup>
  - Such provides the grist for a revised queerness objection. Minds themselves are queer entities in a naturalistic universe – of either strong or weak naturalism.

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*Than Erik Wielenberg's Godless Normative Realism*, ProQuest 27959592 (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary: PhD diss, 2020).

<sup>86</sup> Linville, "The Moral Argument," 409–414.

<sup>87</sup> This same point is made by Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 143.

- Moral minds, in particular, are therefore queer entities in the universe of GNR.
- Again, this query gestures toward a transcendental argument for Theism. The personal God of PBT can indeed provide the specific conditions for the possibility of the exemplification of moral values, obligations, and properties and rational beings like us in an intelligible universe such as ours.

So, in light of the aforementioned, it makes little practical difference whether one holds to a strong or weak naturalist position; CAUSAL NEXUS raises a similar set of problems for both positions, whereas Theism has no issue accommodating these concerns. And while abstract objects might appear to help buttress the moral realism claims of SMNNs, it is evident that it also brings into play another deeply problematic layer of required explanation relating to the abstract domain, particularly in light of CAUSAL NEXUS and EXEMPLIFICATION.

But MODEST ELEATIC brings out another concern with GNR, namely the making-as-causation relation (MaCR) itself. The MaCR is put forward by Wielenberg as a making relation that holds between moral and non-moral properties.<sup>88</sup> Wielenberg describes its function variously as a “latch,” a “cement,” a “structure,” or a “holding” relation that works to instantiate abstract moral properties. He refers to the MaCR as a form of “robust” causation that works in conjunction with D-supervenience. In illustrating what he means by *robust*, Wielenberg compares the MaCR to a Theistic understanding of how the will of God works. When God wills something, the effect is simultaneous with the cause. But also, if God wills something to be, that something cannot fail to be unless logically or morally impossible. Wielenberg also understands that this robust MaCR functions in a conserving manner. By this, he means that moral properties

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<sup>88</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 18.

are sustained or conserved via non-moral properties through the MaCR. Again, this function is analogous to the Theist's understanding of how God's power sustains the universe.<sup>89</sup>

There are two problems with this proposal. The first seems obvious to a Theist. The MaCR is ascribed Godlike powers in a Godless universe. This ascription of powers not only looks to be unwarranted, but it does not fit Wielenberg's atheism. It amounts to surreptitious cooptation. The MaCR as "causal" (in any sense of the term) must come from *within* the metaphysics and ontology of a generalized naturalism and atheism in order to be genuinely explanatory. Therefore, a God "act" as a paradigm case is, in principle, out of bounds and cannot be rightly imported into a generalized naturalistic and atheistic explanatory account.<sup>90</sup> The foreign import can do no *real* explanatory work for Wielenberg. At best, it's an incongruent metaphor. At worst, it indicates a fundamental, systemic incoherence. In either case, it can do no *real* work to explain EXEMPLIFICATION. The second problem is this; the MaCR is brute.<sup>91</sup> It is not in any sense necessary. From whence does it come? How is it possible? From whence does its necessity come? How is it that it "holds" in just the way that it does? As MODEST ELEATIC specifies, this counts significantly against GNR or any other view that posits similarly brute causal powers. Brute causal powers, particularly when connected to a domain of abstract objects, are fundamentally mysterious and inexplicable causal powers.

Another important consideration has to do with the causative nature of the MaCR. Precisely what sort of causation is in view here? If the MaCR is a kind of latching that binds moral (nonnatural abstract objects) and nonmoral (natural) properties, then what causes the latching of the latching event? If every cause is a physical cause, the cause of the latching event cannot be nonphysical. The causal closure of the physical is the rule here. Then what causes the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 24.

latching event? Either the MaCR is part of the physical chain of events or not. If it is, then it would itself have to be physically caused. If it is not, then its causal powers must be nonphysical. The MaCR *must* reach into the nonphysical to do what it does on Wielenberg's account. Casual traffic can only move in one direction in Wielenberg's universe. But there is no physical explanation for what causes the MaCR or how the MaCR itself works in relation to physical events. Then the causality in view here is utterly mysterious and ad hoc, one that violates causal closure of the physical and a generalized naturalism, two fundamental commitments of GNR.

Additionally, the MaCR is not a law of nature. It is not nomologically necessary. The MaCR is not a function within a developed functional account. It is not a constitutive relation with a broader constitutive or dispositional account. It is not a top-down causal power within a developed emergentist account. It is not a mechanism integrated into a broader, complex, specified EXEMPLIFICATION architecture. It looks to be a merely speculative, ad hoc auxiliary posit to shore up the insufficiency of the supervenience account. Furthermore, Wielenberg acknowledges that he makes no claim as to how the causal side of the MaCR actually works.<sup>92</sup> This is a monumental admission. Thus the MaCR is left unexplained and utterly mysterious. The MaCR does considerably too much work for Wielenberg's account to be left unexplained. Without the MaCR, there seems to be no way to causally bridge the moral and the non-moral domains to exemplify and thus actualize the moral in human experience. If this is so, then his account flounders and cannot succeed. This outcome is a straightforward application of

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<sup>92</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, "Reply to Craig, Murphy, McNabb, and Johnson," *Philosophia Christi* 20, no. 2 (2018): 366, n. 3. He states, "I offer no account of how such causation works nor do I offer an explanation of why certain nonmoral property tokens cause one moral property token rather than another." These of course are the critical *how* and *why* questions. Again, it should be pointed out that Theism has no problem with this concern.

MODEST ELEATIC to the MaCR. The MaCR does not even meet a *minimal* explanatory burden. It amounts to voodoo metaphysics.<sup>93</sup>

So then, an explanation of EXEMPLIFICATION requires that CAUSAL NEXUS be explained in terms of MODEST ELEATIC. Without this, EXEMPLIFICATION has not been explained. EXEMPLIFICATION is apt for explanation. There is an explanatory burden to discharge. It is evident then that this inexplicability counts significantly against GNR.<sup>94</sup>

## **Problem #2**

### **Brute Necessities – A Logical Incoherence**

Another issue of much contention in debates about GNR is the matter of brute necessities. Wielenberg cites Theists Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga and William Lane Craig as examples of Theists that maintain the existence of God is a substantive, metaphysically necessary, brute fact.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Wielenberg maintains that there are ethical truths that are both brute and obtain in all metaphysically possible worlds. These ethical facts are brute in that they rest on no foundation at all, come from nowhere, and are grounded in nothing external to themselves. They are fundamental features of the universe that ground other such truths.<sup>96</sup> As Wielenberg concludes, on both Theism and GNR, “the bottom floor of objective morality rests ultimately on nothing.”<sup>97</sup> Wielenberg also points to the metaethics of Robert Adams as another

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<sup>93</sup> Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality*, 35. This is Craig’s charge against Wielenberg. I think that it is spot on. This exemplification challenge also amounts to Cosmic Coincidence Problem #2 for SMNNs. This is the problem of causal coincidence between nonnatural moral properties and natural properties.

<sup>94</sup> Shafer-Landau, “Evolutionary Debunking, Moral Realism and Moral Knowledge,” 27–29. Here Shafer-Landau suggests that moral facts may be causal facts, of a certain sort, given their truth and our sensibilities to understand them. Yet he does not explain how this might be the case. He has then also an explanatory burden to discharge which he has not undertaken. For an apt criticism of the causal component in the arguments of SMNN see Daniel Crow, “Causal Impotence and Evolutionary Influence: Epistemological Challenges for Non-Naturalism,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 19, no. 2 (April 2016): 379–395.

<sup>95</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 37, 55.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–38.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

example of foundationless theistic ethics.<sup>98</sup> In this respect, then, according to Wielenberg, there is parity between Theism and GNR. Each is an instance of equivalent bruteness. Thus, according to Wielenberg, Theism possesses no explanatory advantage whatsoever to atheism in regard to the moral order of things.<sup>99</sup>

Stephen Parrish has directed his criticisms of Wielenberg on just this point of bruteness and necessity.<sup>100</sup> Parrish argues that Wielenberg's notion of a brute necessity is logically self-contradictory and, therefore should be rejected. It should be rejected as an accurate characterization of Theism and also rejected as an adequate basis for atheistic metaethics. Parrish concludes that Wielenberg's Platonist metaethics cannot be sustained given its basis in self-contradictory brute necessities and it's being undercut by its Platonic impersonalism. Some clarifications are needed in order to see these points. Wielenberg rightly points out that the issue of bruteness is more an ontological rather than an epistemological issue.<sup>101</sup> But what is bruteness? What is necessity, and how should we understand the notion of brute necessity concerning the moral domain?

A brute fact is a fact for which there is no reason, cause, or explanation. It just is.<sup>102</sup> Parrish claims that most atheist and agnostic philosophers believe in some form of a brute fact theory of the universe.<sup>103</sup> The universe just is; it exists for no reason; it could be other than it is, has no Ultimate cause, and has no Ultimate explanation. From this, it's easy to affirm brute fact

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 43–44, 54; see Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>99</sup> Wielenberg asserts that substantive, metaphysically necessary brute ethical facts is “the only sensible approach to ethics.” Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 43.

<sup>100</sup> This argument will be drawing from the work of Stephen E. Parrish, “The Incoherence of Brute Necessities: Answer to Wielenberg” (Presented at the Evangelical Philosophical Society, San Diego CA: Unpublished paper, 2019); Stephen E. Parrish, *The Nature of Moral Necessity: A Theistic Proposal* (forthcoming, n.d.).

<sup>101</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 37.

<sup>102</sup> For an analysis of brute facts in relation to other general theories of facts see Kevin Mulligan and Fabrice Correia, “Facts,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Winter 2021); for an analysis of the field of brute facts see the recent volume by Elly Vintiadis and Constantinos Mekios, eds., *Brute Facts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>103</sup> Stephen E. Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 2001, 185.

metaethical theory of the sort that Wielenberg espouses and affirm this within a generalized naturalistic worldview that is also ultimately brute. But like all SMNNs, Wielenberg is not fully content with a strong naturalistic account of metaethics. As we have seen, he argues for a realist, metaphysically necessary, nonnaturalist, abstract moral domain that he believes remedies the problems of necessary ethics that come with a strictly naturalistic way of seeing things. The universe is brute yet contingent. Ethics is brute but somehow necessary. The two positions seem strongly inconsistent. This brings us to questions about the nature of necessity. Philosophers have extensively debated questions about the nature of necessity.<sup>104</sup> The issues are difficult and sometimes rather philosophically technical. It is often analyzed in modal terms and possible worlds. The question of God and necessity is also a central issue for Theists, as God is deemed a necessary being. The analysis of Parrish is quite helpful with these issues. In sorting these things out, Parrish distinguishes at least five importantly different ways to understand necessity.<sup>105</sup> He emphasizes that there are clear differences in the different kinds of necessities which in turn indicate differences in Reality. These are distinctions with a difference. He also emphasizes that the concepts and not merely terminology is what is important here.

1. Tautological necessity.

- a. When two terms mean the same thing, this is an instance of tautological necessity.<sup>106</sup>
- b. Tautologies do not give one new information.

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<sup>104</sup> Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*; Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, Reprinted. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Robert Merrihew Adams, "Divine Necessity," in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 209–220; Bob Hale, *Necessary Beings: An Essay on Ontology, Modality, and the Relations Between Them* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Alvin Plantinga, *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, ed. Matthew Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Joshua Rasmussen, "From a Necessary Being to God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 66, no. 1 (August 2009): 1–13; Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*; Parrish, "The Incoherence of Brute Necessities: Answer to Wielenberg"; Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, Second edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>105</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 1–21. See also a similar discussion in Parrish, *Metaethics and Categoricity: A Theistic Proposal*, 66–72; Stephen E. Parrish, *The Knower and the Known: Physicalism, Dualism, and the Nature of Intelligibility* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2013), 30–37.

<sup>106</sup> For example, a bachelor is an unmarried man, or  $2+2=4$ .

2. Analytic necessity.<sup>107</sup>
  - a. This is necessity that is so by essential positive properties entailed by the nature of the item in view without considering concepts extrinsic to the item in view. The necessary property(ies) are *contained* in the term in view. The necessity flows necessarily from the nature of the concepts involved.
  - b. First-order analytic necessities are those that are contained in some legitimate definition of a thing.
  - c. Second-order analytic necessities are entailments of the definition of a thing, strictly regarding the defined object itself.
  - d. *De dicto* analytic necessity is so by stipulated definitions or classifications.
  - e. *De re* analytic necessity has its necessity in the nature of the object itself apart from *de dicto* stipulation.
  - f. Analytic necessities do give one new information; they require additional information to understand their essential properties. That is, combined truths yield new truths.
3. Metaphysical necessity (sometimes also called *a posteriori* necessity).<sup>108</sup>
  - a. Necessity having to do with the identity and essential properties of kinds and individuals. This is necessity of identity and composition.
  - b. *A posteriori* necessity does give one new information about an item in view and requires additional information to understand.
4. Synthetic necessity (sometimes also called synthetic *a priori* necessity).
  - a. Necessity wherein the concept is considered with other concepts extrinsic to the thing at hand.<sup>109</sup> Necessity that is due to factors external to the item in view; this as opposed to analytic necessity.
  - b. Necessity of this sort involves the intersection of more than one concept and depends upon this kind of intersecting and relation of externality.<sup>110</sup> This necessity is not contained in the concept of one object, concrete or abstract, but rather from the relationship of two or more objects or concepts.<sup>111</sup> It might also be called relational necessity.
  - c. Synthetic necessity does give one new information about the items in view. It requires additional information to understand.

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<sup>107</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 18–19. For a thorough overview of this concept and some of the controversies involved see Cory Juhl and Eric Loomis, *Analyticity* (New York: Routledge, 2010). For example, it is necessarily true that a cube will have eight corners on it. This follows with analytic necessity from the nature or essence of a cube. Eight corners is analytically *contained* in the concept of a cube. Juhl and Loomis refer to this as the “containment criterion,” *ibid.* 6–8. See also discussion in Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 29–33.

<sup>108</sup> For example, water is necessarily H<sup>2</sup>O.

<sup>109</sup> For example, that 7 plus 5 equals 12 is not strictly part of the meaning of the numbers involved.

<sup>110</sup> Parrish, *The Nature of Moral Necessity*, 71. For example, that 2+2=4 is synthetically necessary. The number 2, the number 4, the + and = signs by themselves do not contain the necessary outcome. They do so only when combined; hence synthetic necessity.

<sup>111</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 31.

- d. Synthetic necessity is key for understanding the moral categorical; moral oughtness.
- 5. Nomological necessity.
  - a. This is necessity by the order and laws of nature.
  - b. This is also sometimes referred to as causal or factual necessity. Necessary by the laws of nature.
  - c. Nomological necessity does give one new information about the items in view.

Of course, there will be some overlap in these distinctions; but on the whole, they are quite useful for sorting things out. Absolute necessity rests on the truths of 1<sup>st</sup> order logic, the laws of non-contradiction, and the laws of identity. For something to be necessary in this sense means its denial entails a contradiction. That which is logically necessary is true in all possible worlds; it could not possibly be false, and it could not fail to be true. Absolute necessity is necessity of the strongest sort. At first blush, however, moral truths, in and of themselves, do not look necessary in this strongest sense apart from God.

The above puts us in an excellent position to evaluate the notion of brute moral necessities in GNR. Wielenberg fully understands that GNR requires strong necessity, that is, truths that are necessarily true in all possible worlds. Wielenberg refers to these ethical truths as true in all *metaphysically* possible worlds.<sup>112</sup> If bruteness means existing for no reason or cause, then that which is brute need not exist or not exist in the way it does and could have existed differently. All this seems to flow conceptually from what it means to be brute.<sup>113</sup> That which is brute then would not necessarily exist in all possible worlds, would not be absolutely necessary, and could fail to exist in some possible worlds. If this is the case, then Wielenberg's moral brute necessities are not true in all possible worlds. Wielenberg's brute moral abstracta cannot possibly then be absolute, for they would fail to obtain in some possible worlds. They also then fail to be

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<sup>112</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 37–38. In this quote Wielenberg references Parfit, *On What Matters*, 1:129.

<sup>113</sup> Parrish, *The Nature of Moral Necessity*, (forthcoming) 122.

universal. On his account, there would then be worlds wherein proposition *T*, for example, torturing innocent people for fun, is permissible; for example, in worlds without pain.<sup>114</sup> There would also be nonmoral worlds, worlds that are certainly possible on Wielenberg's account, wherein proposition *T* would be neither permissible nor non-permissible, in which case proposition *T* would not be metaphysically necessary. Furthermore, as reprehensible as torture might be, the denial of proposition *T* does not entail a logical contradiction. It would not then be absolutely necessary. But the matter is still a bit deeper than this. To be brute and necessary, that is, necessary in all possible worlds, involves a rather oxymoronic or outright logical incoherence. If something is brute then it exists for no reason. If something is necessary in all possible worlds, then it exists for the strongest possible reason, and its denial involves a logical contradiction. A brute necessity is then a logical incoherence. Even foundationless and bottomless ethics cannot finally rest on a broad logical incoherence.<sup>115</sup> It would seem then that brutality itself undercuts the metaphysical necessity that GNR requires to sustain the moral realism, moral necessity, and universalism to which it aspires.

But Wielenberg's characterization of Theism is also problematic in several respects. While Wielenberg rightly recognizes that Theists maintain that God exists necessarily. Theists do not understand that God exists brutally in the same sense that Wielenberg intends brutality.<sup>116</sup> Wielenberg is mistaken when he states that on both Theism and GNR "the bottom floor of

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<sup>114</sup> Wielenberg takes pain to be intrinsically evil, Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 37. If the evil of torture is the pain inflicted by torture then worlds without pain would not contain this evil. Therefore, the evil of proposition *T* would not obtain in this possible world. I do not think that all pain, universally, can be dubbed intrinsically evil. See for example C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962); Philip Yancey and Paul W. Brand, *The Gift of Pain: Why We Hurt & What We Can Do About It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997).

<sup>115</sup> Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 142 make a similar observation concerning Wielenberg's explanatory stopping point.

<sup>116</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 276. Here Parrish compares PBT to brute fact theory of the universe. He states, "In theism...one would know the laws that do exist allow for the existence of personal beings and that God wished to create such a universe."

objective morality rests ultimately on nothing.”<sup>117</sup> He is mistaken in at least two respects. First, God is not equal to nothing; the equation is fallacious. Nor is God reducible to an abstract proposition of any sort. Secondly, the moral domain is necessarily contained in the very being that God is and flows naturally from his character and infinite worth. This domain depends upon God to be what it is. The God of perfect being Theism exists in all possible worlds, affirms all possible moral truths in all possible worlds, and does so in a way that is utterly consistent with his character. A Theist argues that necessary moral truths cannot stand alone and are not necessary in themselves. If that is true, then where does their necessity come from? Parrish argues that they are synthetic necessary truths as described above. They are truths of synthetic necessity because they depend upon the being of God, who affirms them in all possible worlds. They are thus universally true. By contrast, moral abstracta are not necessarily true in all possible worlds, are thus not universally true, are impersonal, and exist in an atheistic universe that is ultimately brute as well. All of this undercuts Wielenberg’s GNR. In the same way that we saw Wielenberg speculatively positing an inexplicable and ad hoc MaCR to secure the instantiation of moral properties along with non-moral properties, we also now see that he speculatively posits moral brute necessities as the arbitrary final stopping point of his moral metaphysics. The inexplicable MaCR and moral brute necessities, respectively, involve mysterious ad hoc causality and broad logical incoherence. These look to be fundamental problems for GNR.

### **Problem #3**

#### **Godless Normative Realism and the Problem of Moral Agency**

#### **Test Case #2**

But given Wielenberg’s focus on necessitation, it is easy to see that Wielenberg faces another further problem that is quite important, a dilemma. On the one hand, his push toward

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<sup>117</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 55.

strong necessitation and causal closure of the physical sacrifices libertarian moral agency. On the other hand, if he accommodates libertarian moral agency, his account becomes unstable and cannot be sustained. The problem only becomes apparent once we place moral agency front and center in the discussion of Wielenberg's account. I have illustrated this in the following flow chart below, which represents a changing situation of moral judgment. I will use my own example below to illustrate the points to be made.

Wielenberg describes various situations involving reliable and necessary moral judgments this way: when S1-R (system1-reliabilist) moral judgments occur, they occur fast and automatically because these involve a non-conscious moralizing process in the cognitive faculties; as such it is primarily non-deliberative and automatic. This he describes as a "...being caused to believe that..." process.<sup>118</sup>

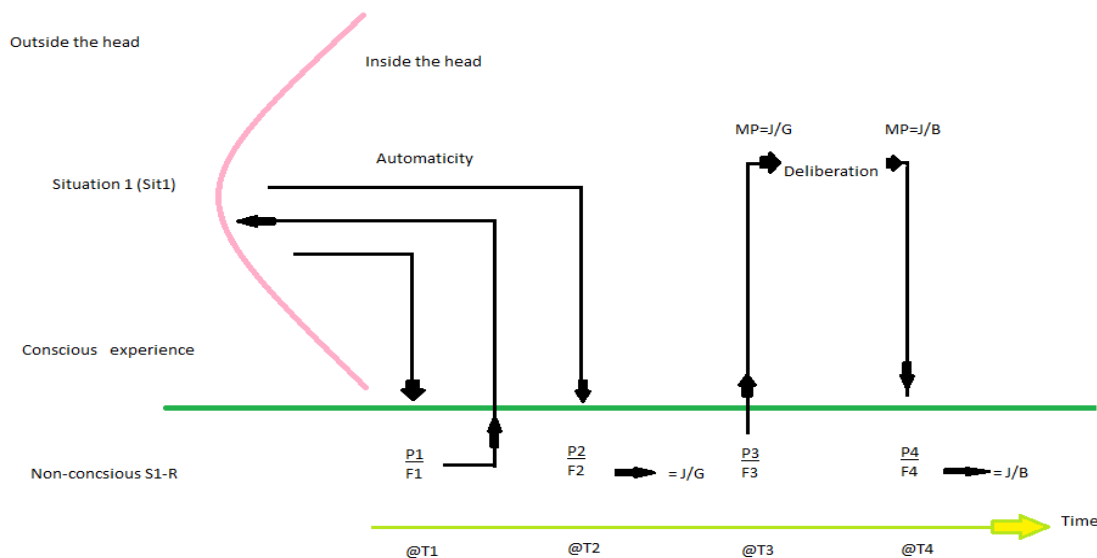


Figure 1

Consider the following scenario: Bill sees John helping Jane, and he judges the act as good, as the right thing to do. As he makes a non-conscious, automatic moral judgment, Bill is

<sup>118</sup> This is the precise phrase that he wants us to use, Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 135, 146.

“...being caused to believe that...” John’s helping Jane is right; it is good. The S1-R process of moral judgment is said, in this case, to be reliable. It has no defeaters. In our illustration above, @T1 the situation (Sit1) occurs. It is processed at the S1-R non-conscious level of the cognitive faculties of Bill, impacts P1/F1<sup>119</sup> of these faculties, and as the direction of flow arrows indicate, it then is processed to become P2/F2. We then have the resulting moral judgment of Bill that the act was good (J/G).<sup>120</sup> This can be read as resulting in J (judgment) = the moral state of affairs is G (Good). In this case, the broad moral principle non-consciously invoked might be something like, “It is true that it is morally good to help someone who needs help.” In all this D-Supervenience is doing its work of necessitation paired with the making as causation relation that latches/cements and instantiates moral abstract objects – all by which the moral judgment is non-consciously formed, believed and held.

In the flow chart, this initial process all occurs between @T1 and @T2 on the timeline. Let’s ask first where all this “...being caused to believe that...” processing is going on? Note in our flow chart it is all going on “in the head.” This is Wielenberg’s “third factor” in his account; certain cognitive faculties are where all this is going on. Note also that it is all going on below the level of consciousness; as the situation is taken in, the situational judgment rips through the conscious level and back to be registered almost immediately as a “...being caused to believe that...” judgment that is taken as good (= J/G). Horgan and Timmons, whom Wielenberg relies on heavily in his account, describe the “in the head” functions in this way.

...the information contained in moral principles is embodied in the standing structure of a typical individual’s cognitive system, and this morphologically embodied information plays a causal role in the generation of particular moral judgments. The manner in which the principles play this role is via ‘proceduralization’ – such principles operate automatically.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup> P stands for *p*hysical state, F stands for morphological *f*orm of this state throughout the illustration.

<sup>120</sup> This is labeled as the judgment that the act is good =J/G.

<sup>121</sup> Horgan and Timmons, “Morphological Rationalism and the Psychology of Moral Judgment,” 279.

“Proceduralization” is simply behavioral internalization whereby skills practiced develop into skill-based competencies, as in competent (or even incompetent) moral judgment. This is simply “regularist” internalization. But Wielenberg’s metaphysical account seeks to be much stronger than this. He is looking to secure moral reliability while maintaining causal closure of the physical in a non-reductive account of moral judgment that can bring into play abstract nonnatural moral properties. For this, he needs “realist” and necessary moral entities and functions, and not mere “regularist” functions. Recall that he has rejected the reductive or R-supervenience account.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, Wielenberg attempts to achieve necessity by joining D-Supervenience and the robust making as causation relation and locating these two things in the very structure of the emergent state of affairs, of moral cognition itself; in the moral faculties; in the informational processing structures of the brain. In every way, he has endeavored to maintain the causal priority of the physical without succumbing to physicalism. However, this question then looms large, has he secured necessitarian reliability by sacrificing moral agency? The position taken here is that he has.<sup>123</sup>

This problem is easily seen once moral deliberation is included in the scenario of Bill, John, and Jane. The original scenario of our example needs to be extended to illustrate this. To repeat our original scenario, @ T1 and T2 Bill has witnessed John helping Jane; he judged that it was good, as the right thing to do. As he has made the non-conscious, automatic judgment, Bill

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<sup>122</sup> In fact Wielenberg takes this to be a feature of his account that makes it a better account than either a theistic or naturalistic account. It should also be pointed out that one way Wielenberg has resisted the criticisms of Frank Jackson and Campbell Brown that all ethical predicates are really descriptive predicates is by strongly distinguishing between the structure helping function of D-Supervenience and the “making as causation” relation and assigning to each a different but collaborative function in the determination of moral judgments. Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 24–32.

<sup>123</sup> Maintaining this balancing act is going to be a bit more difficult. As I see it the driving logic for a non-reductive physicalism has been to somehow retain things like good, mind, beauty, freedom, love, moral realism, and so on. The real existence of all of these things becomes problematic on the thesis of a fully reductive physicalism. It allows an opening for all these sorts of things so as to avoid the full and complete stranglehold of a strong, fully reductive physicalism.

has “...been caused to believe that...” John’s helping Jane was right; that it was good. But now, we continue to @T3 and @T4. Note that in the flow diagram below Base P1- P4, there is also an F below each P. This stands for the Morphological *Form* of the P-state, or Physical state. The actual physical state of the brain (P state) has changed at each time T or temporal point. Consequently, the morphological form (F state) of the Physical state has changed as well. Each P/F state at time T is in some specific ways ontologically different. Each state is an ontologically distinct state of affairs with its own cognition states, operations, and moral, abstract objects. There appears to be no moral deliberation between the states P1 and P2, but the morphological structure of the brain has still changed. This change is a well-established scientific fact.<sup>124</sup> The consciously had personal identity of the individual involved in the moral experience has not changed, but the underlying character of that identity has changed. The notion that there is a “standing structure” of the human brain is only partly true. There is a lot of active and continuously changing neural-function going on below the standing structure. Each function of the brain changes the structure of the brain, and each structural change of the brain means that a different F state is the starting point of every new experience (new F state) in the ongoing flow of human experience, so that the various P states across time are continuously changing within continuant personal identity.

Now let’s further suppose that Bill has somehow deliberately come to believe, without learning any new facts, that John’s helping Jane was really a bad act; he has come to conclude, after deliberation, what he previously took to be a good act was, in fact, a bad act. John’s helping Jane was somehow maliciously self-serving; he helped her not only for strictly selfish reasons but for reasons that actually resulted in Jane being wronged by John. So Bill said to himself (as

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<sup>124</sup> See for instance Ira B. Black, *Information in the Brain: A Molecular Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

he reasoned about his broad moral principles), “What John did was bad. It is bad to wrong somebody in the way that John wronged Jane by helping - all the while being maliciously self-serving.” In our flow chart, this is the series of events from @T3 to @T4. I take this change to be more than a mere defeater of Bill's prior belief. *It is a moral property changer*, a change of states, in the context of this particular state of affairs involving Bill's moral judgment of the prior moral situation. The moral properties (MPs) of the judgment have now changed from MP=J/G to MP=J/B. Along with this change, the P3/F3 state has also changed to now become the P4/F4 state – moral morphological form F3 has now changed to morphological form F4. This is now part of the transformed P4 state of Bill's cognitive faculties. So then, where does the instance of MP=J/B come from? How does it get instantiated on this occasion? Was it *caused* by the physical base? No, not entirely.<sup>125</sup> Was it *caused* by the Sit1 situational base? No. Was it *caused* by the morally inert moral properties? Not possible on Wielenberg's account. Was it *caused* by an automatic, non-conscious S1-R process? No. The P3 base, in part the result of P1 and P2, did not fully *casually determine* this change. The P1/P2/P3 base cannot be the entire causal explanation. And yet, the moral state of affairs at @T4 is different; in fact, it is a reversal of the P3/F3 state @T3. What caused this change? Moral deliberation caused the changed state of the moral propertied (MP) character of Bill's judgment, which then actively caused the P4 state of the cognitive faculties of Bill to change. This all occurs *causally* from the top-down, all by moral agency, so that now Bill's cognitive faculties are in the P4/F4 state. This can be taken as J = state of affairs that B @ T4. That is, Bill's moral judgment of John's helping Jane is equal to being bad. To be clear, this is a new P4/F4 state, a new and different state of affairs that resulted from

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<sup>125</sup> That is, unless we happen to be very strong reductive determinists.

deliberation, *which caused a newly propertied moral judgment* to be had by Bill. The result then is this:

@ T3 ----- P3/F3=J/G >>>>> to >>>>> @T4 ----- P4/F4=J/B.

Such that,

J = state of affairs that B @ T4

As caused by,

- Intentional moral Agency; an act of moral deliberation by a moral agent.

This looks to be a clear case of top-down mental/reasoning/deliberative transformation of the P4/F4 state cognitive base without it being fully causally determined by anything strictly physical or the making-as-causation relation. It is caused by the moral deliberation of a moral agent. Unless Wielenberg is prepared to admit that deliberation is reducible to the causal chain of the physical, he has a problem i.e., that deliberation is simply one physical event causing another ad infinitum.<sup>126</sup> Unless also he is willing to reduce the unique and unified acting moral agent to a mere state of affairs, he has a problem. Such would dissolve the moral agent to nonexistence; individual experiences do not sum. By themselves, they do not constitute a unified moral agent.<sup>127</sup> I take this to mean that the metaphysical balancing act that he has constructed cannot be maintained. The upshot is this. That causal closure of the physical cannot be maintained; that top-down mental causation is possible in moral deliberation; that the entire function of the edifice of D-Supervenience is further called into question and the robust making as causation relation is now without the needed structural “necessitation” support to metaphysically secure the reliability of moral knowledge. Once we place libertarian moral agency into the account, we can see that the account is not stable and coherent. The balancing act of the metaphysics and the model cannot be maintained. Either Wielenberg should affirm robust intentional moral agency or reject the formulation of necessitarian reliabilism of his MoRM account.

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<sup>126</sup> Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*. See the excellent analysis of chapter 3 entitled, “Naturalism, Free Will and Human Persons.” It is strongly applicable to Wielenberg’s position that has been detailed here.

<sup>127</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 362.

So then, here is the outcome:

MoRM combines...

S1-R + HP m-possessed (hidden principles morphologically possessed).

S1-R + HP m-possessed automaticity requires strong reliabilist necessity.

MoRM functional, strong reliabilist necessity is achieved by combining ...

- 1) Innate, practice-shaped morphological, standing structures in the brain, the cognitive faculties.
- 2) Supervenience-D = metaphysical connections to mediate necessary reliable morphological structure.
  - a. Sup-D strongly requires bottom-up causal priority of physical Base P.
- 3) A strong making as causation relation that necessarily cements Base P and inert moral properties in moral judgments and moral states of affairs.
- 4) Inert (non-causal, epiphenomenal) nonnatural moral properties that are over and above the physical.

MoRM must be taken as a whole. It is compromised if *any one* of the 1-4 above is missing, problematic, or unconnected to the others.

From this, it is argued that:

- MoRM (S1-R + HP) reliabilist necessity entails emergent physicalism (or something close enough to strong emergent physicalism).
- Emergent physicalism of GNR is committed to firm causal closure of the physical.
- Moral agency involves (among other things) intentional, top-down, moral deliberation of a moral agent.
- Casual closure of the physical Base P eliminates moral agency of this kind.
- Therefore – MoRM eliminates deliberative moral agency.<sup>128</sup>

If the above is correct, then MoRM should be rejected, given that the model is incoherent and cannot accommodate a common and vital feature of our moral experience; top-down deliberative moral agency of a moral agent. This is one of the most important features of our moral being.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> See Angus J. L. Menuge, *Agents Under Fire: Materialism and the Rationality of Science* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). This is an excellent critique of the problems of agency and various forms of physicalism. Wielenberg denies he is a physicalist, following David Chalmers, he says he is a property dualist, yet he still has problems adequately accommodating moral agency. See also the thorough analysis throughout Parrish, *The Knower and the Known* on the matter of mind and agency.

One can see that these results are a problem for Wielenberg's MoRM. What do the wider implications of these findings show? GNR throws moral agency into doubt. The moral agent disappears amidst the complex flurry and flux of non-conscious S1-R cognitive processes. Again, experiences do not sum to a unified moral agent. Our findings imply that the causal closure of the physical is problematic. Top-down moral deliberative causality by a moral agent violates the causal closure of the physical. Wielenberg's account of the causal and dependency dynamics cannot accommodate top-down moral deliberative causation of a moral agent. It implies that causation's bottom-up physical to mental to moral dependence relation has been misconstrued. Moral deliberation, as elaborated, requires that the "making as causation relation" be reformulated if not outright rejected. This reformulation throws into doubt the entire D-Supervenience and making-as-causation relation edifice. Without this edifice, the strong necessitation required for the account cannot hold. At the same time, the SR-1 processes and necessities dissolve libertine moral agency. These problems combine to show that the broad metaphysics of the account and the model not only do not hang together, they come apart because they are conflictive and incoherent. The incoherence and misconstruals involve a fundamental misunderstanding of how moral Reality works, how it is put together, and why moral Reality is what it is.

In this last section, our focus here has been to show that GNR cannot adequately accommodate moral agency and the moral agent. But then these findings also create an opening for Theism. More generally, one might argue from the very nature of moral agency itself that

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<sup>129</sup> Adam Lloyd Johnson has also captured this same sort of problem with Wielenberg's account. He points out that Wielenberg's "proposed making relationship between cognitive faculties and moral properties is necessary, his proposed relationship between cognitive faculties and moral beliefs is contingent." Adam Lloyd Johnson, *Divine Love Theory: How the Trinity Is the Source and Foundation of Morality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2023), 184. In this case the contingency of a deliberative moral agent becomes a metaphysical problem.

Theism can propose a significantly stronger cosmic explanation for moral agents like us than the generalized naturalism that undergirds all versions of SMNN, including Wielenberg's GNR.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

A summary of the possible Theistic argument runs as follows. God is the supreme moral agent.<sup>130</sup> Any adequate metaethics should be able to accommodate a robust account of moral agency. Human beings are made in the image of God. Thus, humans are moral agents that reflect God's image and moral agency. Theism anticipates moral agents like us and our moral agency, which in turn points to God. SMNN, given its commitment to a generalized naturalism with its commitment to causal closure of the physical, has difficulty accommodating the moral agency of moral agents like us.

But the argument that centers on moral agency also dovetails nicely with problem #1, which was brought out: the causal exemplification of moral properties. God is a creative causal agent that brings the universe into existence *ex nihilo*. The creative omniscience of God, combined with the causally creative will of God, not only brings the universe into existence but also dynamically structures the world so that moral properties are exemplified in just the ways that they are. As for problem #2, that a brute necessity is logically incoherent, as will be argued in the final chapter, God is not a mere brute fact. God is an infinitely creative necessary being that brings all things into existence and whose very being ontologically grounds the moral domain. Therefore, Theism does not face the problem of the logical incoherence of brute necessities.

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<sup>130</sup> The perfection and goodness of God entail the moral agency of God.

## Chapter 4

### Ethics as Philosophy

#### The Realist *A Priori* Nonnaturalism of Russ Shafer-Landau

##### A Summary Review

Russ Shafer-Landau is the fourth thinker that will be examined in the critique of secular moral nonnaturalism. Shafer-Landau's version of nonnaturalism is unique in several respects. First, he emphasizes that ethics is, strictly speaking, philosophy.<sup>1</sup> If ethics is philosophy, then it is to be strongly distinguished from the various natural sciences.<sup>2</sup> He works out this distinction in the following ways. Scientific facts are natural, whereas ethical facts are distinguished as *sui generis* and nonnatural. By extension, ethics is not naturalistic but rather nonnaturalistic. Moral facts, as the subject matter of philosophy, are therefore different in kind from any other sort of fact.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the sciences are empirical, whereas ethics is about *a priori* and non-empirical principles and truths. The sciences are also causative in their subject matter, whereas ethics is not. The causative sciences are subject to an explanatory requirement, the sort that Harman enjoined upon all ethical thinking.<sup>4</sup> But Shafer-Landau rejects Harman's demand of the

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<sup>1</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, "Ethics as Philosophy: A Defense of Ethical Nonnaturalism," in *Metaethics after Moore*, ed. Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons (New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 2006), 209–231. See also Russ Shafer-Landau, "Ethics as Philosophy," in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 59. Here Shafer-Landau characterizes naturalism in terms of natural properties, namely, those that figure ineliminably "in perfected versions of the natural and social sciences." This of course is an idealization that has its associated problems. On the the problems associated with such idealizations see for example Dallas Willard, "Knowledge and Naturalism," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. William Lane Craig and James Porter Moreland (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 55.

<sup>4</sup> Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*.

explanatory requirement.<sup>5</sup> Second, in broad terms, Shafer-Landau defends a version of nonnaturalism that is intuitionist, externalist, and reliabilist.<sup>6</sup> It is intuitionist in so far as ethical truths (propositions) are deemed non-inferential and conceptually self-evident.<sup>7</sup> It is externalist in that the moral domain is taken to be objective and stance independent of any and all preferred moral attitudes or perspectives.<sup>8</sup> It is reliabilist in that the knowledge processes by which our moral beliefs are formed are taken to be reliable and result in true moral beliefs. These intuitionist, externalist, and reliabilist beliefs are deemed true yet defeasible and serve as the basis for categorical moral reasons, judgments, and principles. Thirdly, while Shafer-Landau has written extensively at a technical level in the area of metaethics, he has also written at the introductory and non-technical levels of ethics.<sup>9</sup> This introductory work is a unique contribution that makes Shafer-Landau's scholarship distinctive and valuable among metaethical nonnaturalists.

Since many of the themes of Shafer-Landau's thinking are similar to other proponents of SMNN, the focus will only be on two areas of his thinking relevant to the concerns here.<sup>10</sup> The first focus will be to evaluate his critique of Theistic metaethics, particularly his criticisms of

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<sup>5</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, "Moral and Theological Realism: The Explanatory Argument," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 4, no. 3 (2007): 311–329.

<sup>6</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 296–302.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>8</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, "A Defense of Motivational Externalism," *Philosophical Studies* 97, no. 3 (2000): 267–291. Externalism is of course contrasted with the various versions of motivational internalism; e.g. often referred to as desire based Humeanism. But externalism is primarily an objectivist, moral realist position. See Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Three points should be noted. 1) Shafer-Landau's thinking is subject to similar objections regarding supervenience that were detailed in the criticisms of both Enoch and Wielenberg. 2) He is subject to the issues associated with the plausible mechanism problem (PMP) that were detailed in our criticisms of Enoch. The plausible mechanism problem presents a direct challenge to his reliabilist account of moral knowledge. 3) As well, given his commitment to property dualism he also has problems accommodating moral agency as does Wielenberg. Although there is no space to work out these various issues here as they relate specifically to his particular version of secular moral nonnaturalism, it is not hard to see that each of these critiques might be effectively developed. Given space constraints the details must remain promissory at this juncture.

divine command theory. His criticisms of divine command theory are typical yet somewhat lopsided. He considers only an extreme theological voluntarist version of divine command theory. Consequently, his critique of Theistic metaethics misses the mark. The second focus will be to critique the proposal of what he and Terrence Cuneo have termed the moral fixed points.<sup>11</sup> It will be argued that the moral fixed points account is implausible in some substantive respects.<sup>12</sup>

### **Shafer-Landau and Theistic Metaethics**

The point has been emphasized throughout that one of the distinguishing features of SMNN is its rejection of both a naturalistic and a supernaturalistic account of humanity's ethical domain and ethical nature. Given the pursuit of a secular basis for metaethics, the nonnaturalist is allied with the naturalist and avidly subscribes to what has been termed here - a generalized naturalism. Along with this commitment, there is also typically a commitment to a weak version of the causal closure of the physical. These metaphysical commitments are taken to be fully consistent with ethical nonnaturalism. Vital to the Theist, however, is that God is deemed dispensable in all respects - across the board.<sup>13</sup>

### **Theistic Metaethics as Constructivist**

#### **Laws and Lawmakers**

How then does Shafer-Landau handle Theism? Shafer-Landau takes Theistic ethics to be a species of constructivism.<sup>14</sup> He rejects the argument that moral laws require lawmakers (e.g., God) by pointing out that the laws of logic, mathematics, physics, and chemistry, do not require

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<sup>11</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, "The Moral Fixed Points."

<sup>12</sup> This portion of the assessment relies heavily on David Copp's critique of the moral fixed points. See David Copp, "Are There Substantive Moral Conceptual Truths?," in *Moral Skepticism: New Essays*, ed. Diego E. Machuca, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 91–114.

<sup>13</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

lawmakers. All of these laws, according to Shafer-Landau, are brutally true. Why, he asks, should moral laws require a lawmaker such as God? Nothing, he maintains, makes moral truths true. They simply are true. But this conclusion is too fast. First, classifying all things called laws as laws in the same sense would be an obvious fudging. Laws of logic, laws of mathematics, laws of nature, and moral laws all look to be laws of different sorts. Laws of logic are those upon which all rational thinking depends. Though somehow related to logic and obviously necessary, laws of mathematics are not themselves ultimately derived from the laws of logic, and their axioms cannot be proven by axioms of mathematics itself, as shown by Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem.<sup>15</sup> Although the focus here is on moral law, a comparison between moral and natural laws is instructive.

### **Moral Laws and Laws of Nature: A Comparison**

Natural laws are clearly to be differentiated from moral laws.<sup>16</sup> Natural laws are, in some sense, descriptive, while moral laws are clearly prescriptive.<sup>17</sup> Natural laws are in some sense contingent,<sup>18</sup> while moral laws are in some sense necessary. But when it comes to thinking about the laws of nature, things get more interesting. Consider that the universe as a whole is subject to a grand cosmic "things could have been otherwise" (TCBO). Then add to this the following:

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<sup>15</sup> This incompleteness may simply be epistemic rather than ontological. However, delving into this matter would take us too far afield. For some discussion of this see Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 300–301, nt 74. See also Gregory J. Chaitin, "Gödel's Theorem and Information," *International Journal of Theoretical Physics* 21 (1982): 941–954; G. J. Chaitin, "Randomness in Arithmetic and the Decline and Fall of Reductionism in Pure Mathematics\*," *Chaos, Solutions & Fractals* 5, no. 2 (1995): 143–159; Gregory J. Chaitin, *The Limits of Mathematics: A Course on Information Theory and the Limits of Formal Reasoning* (London: Springer, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> For an interesting argument from laws of nature as distinctive and independent evidence for Theism see Tyler Hildebrand and Thomas Metcalf, "The Nomological Argument for the Existence of God," *Noûs* 56, no. 2 (June 2022): 443–472.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen C. Meyer, *The Return of the God Hypothesis: Compelling Scientific Evidence for the Existence of God* (New York: HarperOne, 2020), 370–372. As Meyer rightly points out, natural laws as human descriptions of how nature works do not "cause" the universe to work the way that it does. Such "laws" and actual "events" are to be logically distinguished. To refer to these humanly created descriptive laws as causative is a category mistake.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Sidelle, "On The Metaphysical Contingency of the Laws of Nature," in *Conceivability and Possibility*, ed. Tamar Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 309–336.

No Reason<sub>1</sub> = the reason for the existence of something contingent is not contained within itself.

No Reason<sub>2</sub> = the entity in question cannot be the cause of its own existence.

No Reason<sub>3</sub> = the fact of something's current existence does not explain it's coming into being in the first place.

(No) Perdurant Reason, No P/Reason = the reason (or not) for something's *continued* existence as it is.<sup>19</sup>

First, the universe itself as TCBO - the universe, on the whole, might conceivably never have come into being. Hence, Leibniz's question, why is there something rather than nothing? Nothing about the universe makes it's coming into being inevitable or logically necessary. Second, the suite of natural laws, the various constants, CSI<sub>nf</sub>, CSI<sub>int</sub>,<sup>20</sup> the existence of life, sentient life, and minded/moral beings such as we are; these are all TCBO as well. None of these things are logically necessary. These things might not have come into being or might have been different than they are. Thirdly, the created order on the Theistic account is not order and complexity arising Ultimately out of inexplicable chance, but an order *ex nihilo*. It, therefore, exists out of God's free, creative mind, power, and will. It exists for reason(s) outside itself.

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<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that the notion of Perdurant reason is being used here as a catch-all term for the persistence of things through time. The two philosophical schools of thought that deal with this are typically referred to as endurantism and perdurantism. For a useful discussion see Ryan Wasserman, "Theories of Persistence," *Philosophical Studies* 173, no. 1 (January 2016): 243–250. It is simply being argued here that God must be figured into any theory of persistence through time, see Kvanvig and McCann, "Divine Conservation and the Persistence of the World."

<sup>20</sup> CSI<sub>nf</sub> is complex specified information. CSI<sub>int</sub> is complex specified integration of information rich biological entities, similar to what is referred to as irreducible complexity. See Stephen Meyer, "The Argument from Biological Information," in *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief*, ed. C. P. Ruloff and Peter Horban (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Michael Behe J., "The Argument From Biological Complexity," in *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief*, ed. C. P. Ruloff and Peter Horban (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Michael J Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Touchstone, 2006), accessed May 7, 2022. As William Dembski rightly shows, without contingency there can be no information, that is CSI<sub>nf</sub>. William A. Dembski, *No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot Be Purchased Without Intelligence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 155.

Theism thus entails that God is the answer to No Reason<sub>1, 2, and 3</sub> regarding the universe, as well as No Perdurant Reason for the universe's continued existence.<sup>21</sup>

On the SMNN or generalized naturalist Grand Story, the universe and all its order and complexity must come into being out of inexplicable chance or pure possibility.<sup>22</sup> On the Theistic account, the universe comes into being for a reason(s), but not a reason(s) that is logically necessary or that can be derived from the contingent universe itself. Because it is wholly contingent, the reason(s) for its existence must lie outside of itself. The Theistic position is that God, the creator of all things, is the reason that answers the No Reason<sub>1, 2, and 3</sub> and the No Perdurant Reason regarding the wholly contingent universe.

Furthermore, on the SMNN, or generalized naturalist account, the coming into being of the universe is neither logically necessary nor is it explicable solely in terms of the contingent universe itself. The big fact of the universe itself is contingently brute; all of its creative order and entities are contingently brute. It is thus subject to an implausibility of an across-the-board contingent bruteness. This is a deep problem and will be referred to as the problem of ramified

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<sup>21</sup> That Shafer-Landau has a problem with Perdurant Reason can be seen from the following quote in his discussion on supervenience. "...it is a conceptual truth that if a set of physical properties once underlies a mental one, it must (in that world) always do so. The same goes for the chemical and colour facts. So the relevant supervenience claim in each of these domains is a conceptual truth – if a natural/physical/atomic/primary quality grouping once fixed (because it constitutes) a moral/mental/chemical/colour fact, then it must (in that world) always do so." Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 88. Emphasis original. What "fixes" such things in the first place is never explained and why they should be "fixed" as such ever on in a continuous manner is likewise never explained, it certainly isn't a conceptual truth or something *a priori*. For Shafer-Landau it is no more than a brute fact. I conclude therefore that for Shafer-Landau's metaphysics there is a No/P Reason problem.

<sup>22</sup> Invoking the multiverse here does not help; the multiverse is subject to the same constraints for its coming into being in the first place as the universe. The multiverse theory cannot explain the fine tuning required to bring the various other universes into existence without invoking extreme prior fine-tuning. See Stephen C. Meyer, "What Is the Evidence for Intelligent Design and What Are Its Theological Implications?," in *The Comprehensive Guide to Science and Faith*, ed. William A. Dembski, Casey Luskin, and Joseph M. Holden (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2021), 148. See also discussion in Meyer, *The Return of the God Hypothesis*, 339–345. By one estimate this prior *extreme* fine-tuning is approximately 1 in 10<sup>66,000,000</sup> for life friendly universes in addition to other problems that Meyer documents. What fine tunes the extremely finely tuned universe generating machines? Furthermore, multiverse theory is a highly profligate theory of the universe that is fundamentally brute.

cumulative bruteness.<sup>23</sup> As cumulatively brute, literally, *all* of what has come into being in the first place exists for no reason(s) internal to itself. It is entirely subject to No Reason<sub>1, 2, and 3</sub> and No Perdurant Reason. In this way, TCBO strongly works against SMNN and a generalized naturalistic grand story.

By contrast, on the Theistic account, the TCBO works strongly *for* the Theist. The Theist can combine the following three things for a combined Theistic trifecta.

1. *The created order and complexity of the intelligible universe* – the universe arises as a singularity,<sup>23</sup> it is a universe that is governed by the universal laws of logic but also has the applied mathematical built into its essential nature.<sup>25</sup> The mathematical is applied in the created order in the form of contingent constants, laws, and information. This combination of the free application of the mathematical and the TCBO of contingent constants, laws, and information is woven into the deeply complex and creative fabric that characterizes our universe.<sup>26</sup> This complexity is more than mere order.
  - a. These all exhibit the right kind and degree of combined contingency and applied abstract necessity that is more than simply physical order and natural laws. Yet none of this is logically necessary. Instead, this is a highly complex,

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<sup>23</sup> Brute fact theory is critiqued in detail in Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*. In particular see chapter six “The Ultimate Possibilities” and also chapter seven entitled “Brute Fact.”

<sup>23</sup> The probabilities of the singularity according to Roger Penrose are less than 1 in  $10^{10^{124}}$ . See Roger Penrose, *Cycles of Time: An Extraordinary New View of the Universe* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2011), 127. This is an impossibly, infinitesimal probability for the fine tuning required for the beginning of our actual universe. As Penrose says, “This is the kind of figure that needs some completely different kind of theoretical explanation.”

<sup>25</sup> Meyer, *The Return of the God Hypothesis*. See also William Lane Craig, “The Argument from the Applicability of Mathematics,” in *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief*, ed. C. P. Ruloff and Peter Horban (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Mark Steiner, *The Applicability of Mathematics as a Philosophical Problem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). For some discussion of this see also Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 26. For a full rendition of this thesis see Max Tegmark, “The Mathematical Universe,” *Foundations of Physics* 38, no. 2 (February 2008): 101–150; Max Tegmark, *Our Mathematical Universe: My Quest for the Ultimate Nature of Reality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> For an excellent analysis of the metaphysics of laws and Naturalism, Platonism and Theism, see Orr, *The Mind of God and the Works of Nature: Laws and Powers in Naturalism, Platonism, and Classical Theism*.

finely tuned, multidimensional contingency.<sup>27</sup> It is built out of the informational.<sup>28</sup> This will be called - complex contingencyFT (finely tuned, complex, multidimensional contingency).<sup>29</sup>

- b. But our universe is also inherently intelligible. Complex contingencyFT is discoverable and knowable by beings with minds like ours.
- c. A related corollary is the causal incompleteness of the physical universe at the microphysical level, given quantum mechanics. For quantum reality to be it must be observed.<sup>30</sup>

2. *The moral order and moral nature of humanity* - combining both the grounded necessity in God's mind and the essential nature of Goodness and Love.

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<sup>27</sup> This entire thesis is argued in considerable detail in Alexander Pruss R., "The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 24–100. Here also Pruss deals with the regress problems, the gap objection and the taxicab objection. See also Lydia Jaeger, "The Contingency of Laws of Nature in Science and Theology," *Found Phys* 40 (2010): 15; Lydia Jaeger, "The Idea of Law in Science and Religion," *Science and Christian Belief* 20 (2008): 133–146.

<sup>28</sup> Dembski, *No Free Lunch*, 155. Dembski puts it this way, "What mathematicians call function and what scientists call deterministic natural laws cannot explain the origin of CSI [complex specified information]. Because the processes that such functions or laws describe are deterministic, these processes cannot yield contingency, and without contingency there can be no information."

<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the definitive work on cosmological fine-tuning arguments is Jason Waller, *Cosmological Fine-Tuning Arguments: What (If Anything) Should We Infer from the Fine-Tuning of Our Universe for Life?* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). As Waller points out, "The key premise of any cosmic fine-tuning argument is a *counterfactual* claim about the way the physics of our universe *could have been* but happens not to be." Ibid., 19, emphasis original. Waller argues successfully for what he calls a "minimal theism," that concludes that such a being [as God] plausibly (i) exists necessarily, (ii) is a powerful and intelligent person, (iii) has free will, (iv) created the universe, and (v) made the universe, at last partly so that organic intelligent life would evolve within it. Ibid., 235.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce Gordon L., "How Does The Intelligibility of Nature Point To Design?," in *The Comprehensive Guide to Science and Faith: Exploring the Ultimate Questions About Life and the Cosmos*, ed. William A. Dembski, Casey Luskin, and Joseph M. Holden (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2021), 258–261. See also Bruce Gordon L., "A Quantum-Theoretic Argument Against Naturalism," in *The Nature of Nature: Examining the Role of Naturalism in Science*, ed. Bruce Gordon and William A. Dembski (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2011), 179–214; Robin Collins, "The Teleological Argument: An Exploration of the Fine-Tuning of the Universe," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 256–277. Here Collins also discusses and critiques the multiverse hypothesis. See also the useful discussions in Henry P. Stapp, *Mind, Matter, and Quantum Mechanics*, 3rd edition. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2009); Henry P. Stapp, *Mindful Universe: Quantum Mechanics and the Participating Observer* (New York: Springer, 2007).

- a. Again, all of this shows the right kind of combined necessity (in the moral order) and freedom, entailing the possibility though not the necessity, of evil (given that we are free beings that might choose evil). Our moral faculties are in fact, “truth aimed.” This suggests a moral fine-tuning argument for God.<sup>31</sup>
3. *The “match” between rational mind and world, moral order and human nature* given that humanity is created in the image of God. This multifaceted “match” indicates a common source of origin for all these, namely the living God.<sup>32</sup>

This trilemma calls out for explanation, suitably “fits,” and is entirely at home in a Theistic universe.<sup>33</sup> From the front end of time looking forward, Theism fittingly anticipates all of these things, although it does not predict them. They are more suitably expected on Theism than on atheism. An inexplicable chance universe, subject to ramified cumulative bruteness, cannot anticipate or predict any of the above. It is subject to a series of mysterious cosmic coincidences. It looks evident that our universe and world is a TCBO, complex, contingent universe. Cumulative bruteness is incapable of explaining any of this. It stops at the whole range of critical facts and dubs them chance-generated and brute. Theism explains all of this as the work of a free, creative, infinite mind and will of a necessary God that stands outside the contingent universe. This trilemma shows that our wholly contingent universe is better explained on a Theistic account. Ultimate inexplicable chance, coupled with ramified, cumulative bruteness, is implausible. It explains nothing. Laws, natural and moral, are not logically necessary. Hence,

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<sup>31</sup> Linville, “The Moral Argument,” 414.

<sup>32</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*; Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*; Lydia Jaeger, “The Idea of Law in Science and Religion,” *Science and Christian Belief* 20 (2008): 133–146; Lydia Jaeger, “The Contingency of Laws of Nature in Science and Theology,” *Found Phys* 40 (2010): 15. See also Plantinga’s insightful analysis of this entire issue in Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 274–283.

<sup>33</sup> I am deploying here what I will call the PFSR, that is, the Principle of Fittingly Suitable Reason. I take it that the PFSR entails the PSR, the Principle of Sufficient Reason, as well as the R-PSR, the Restricted Principle of Sufficient Reason. At this point I think the PFSR can be defended as a priori true. This will be more fully discussed in the final chapter. For a full defense of the PSR that this author endorses see Alexander R. Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

given complex contingencyFT together with No Reason<sup>1, 2, and 3</sup> as well as the need to explain Perdurant Reason(s), it can be concluded that laws, natural and moral, are not brute but are better explained by a lawmaker and therefore are rightly thought to require a lawmaker. God is the necessary lawmaker. The God of PBT, a necessary being, the being from whom all things originate and upon whom all things depend, is the best explainer of moral and natural laws. God is the reason for the laws being the laws that they are. In a fundamental sense, all laws depend upon God.

### **Moral Objectivity Generates a Euthyphro Problem for Theism**

Now Shafer Landau also rejects the argument that ethical objectivity requires God. As he puts the matter,

...suppose you're right: God exists. Then it's easy isn't it? If God exists, then God is the author of morality, and morality is objective. That is the most natural, straightforward way of getting God into the picture. But it is also deeply problematic. In fact, it turns out that even if you believe in God, you should have serious reservations about tying the objectivity of morality to God's existence [even...theists]...should insist on the existence of a realm of moral truths that have not been created by God.<sup>34</sup>

Shafer-Landau works out a version of the Euthyphro dilemma that he believes creates problems for all constructivists, especially for Theists.<sup>35</sup> The contra-Theistic argument proceeds in a typical fashion like this. Does God commanding an action make it right, or does God command an action because it is right? If the latter is the case, rightness is prior to God and His commands; in this case, rightness is independent of God and, therefore, not dependent upon God.<sup>36</sup> If the former is the case, rightness is subject to arbitrariness and other similar worries. God could command rape, murder, torture, and the like, and these evils would be right simply by

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<sup>34</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*, 78–79.

<sup>35</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 51.

<sup>36</sup> This is the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma.

virtue of God commanding them.<sup>37</sup> Either horn of the dilemma creates problems for the Theist.<sup>38</sup> As a nonnaturalist Shafer-Landau believes that moral truths, in the form of reasons, exist independent of God. God's existence is irrelevant to such truths. Call this the *God is Dispensable Thesis* of SMNN. This thesis is typically worked out together with some version of the Euthyphro dilemma. It should be noted that appeal to the Euthyphro dilemma is a standard move to discredit Theism in the secular metaethics literature - by naturalists, nonnaturalists, realists, and non-realists alike. Some secularists apparently think it is a knockout argument against Theistic ethics. However, this is not the case.<sup>39</sup>

A few additional points should be noted about Shafer-Landau's use of the Euthyphro dilemma as an objection to Theism. The first is Shafer-Landau's complete severing of God's being and moral being. He asserts that divine command theory entails that "...prior to God's commands, nothing was right or wrong. Morality simply did not exist."<sup>40</sup> But this then makes God ontologically amoral prior to his commands. This would seem to lead to a peculiar bootstrapping problem in which the property of God's own goodness would be constituted out of God's own command. This is a strange result of God's moral being (*de re*) determined by God's post-facto commands (*de dicto*). Surely this cannot be right. Even Theists, who are the most extreme theological voluntarists, rarely, if ever, take God to be altogether amoral.<sup>41</sup> In this

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<sup>37</sup> This is the voluntarist horn of the dilemma.

<sup>38</sup> This is a summary of Shafer-Landau's account. See Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*, 80–84. The dilemma is put in terms of normative reasons in Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 67. In this latter text the dilemma is laid out in a 6 step deductive argument. Shafer-Landau observes, "A God who issues commands for good reasons will rely on the best reasons – and those can explain, all by themselves, what is right and wrong." Ibid., 72.

<sup>39</sup> See Baggett and Walls, *Good God*. This work by Baggett and Walls is the most extensive discussion of this issue and shows why the objection though important is by no means fatal to Theism.

<sup>40</sup> Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> The one exception might be certain Islamic Theists. See Robert R. Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2011). For a useful introductory discussion of this see chapter 3 entitled "God's Goodness" in Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*, and also the relevant sections in Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*.

regard, the entire point of Theism is that there is a fundamental and deep identity between God's being and moral being. Next, when Shafer-Landau argues that God's being good simply means that "God is favored by God," or that God being self-loving bears no necessary connection to God commanding love rather than rape or torture, he once again misses the basic point of Theistic meta-ethics; that there is a deep and fundamental connection between God's being and moral being. Additionally, according to Shafer-Landau, in divine command theory, God "commands," "authors," "makes up," or "creates" morality. In his view, these are all basically the same thing. Again, even the most extreme theological voluntarist does not believe that God creates morality *ex nihilo* in the same sense that God creates the universe *ex nihilo*.<sup>42</sup> So the Theist can resist this horn of the dilemma. The key to resisting it is forging a deep and fundamental fusion between God's being and moral being, a truth that Theists have always affirmed. God's commands (*de dicto*) do not sever morality from God. Instead, they are an expression of God's moral being (*de re*). They are grounded in the axiological fullness of God's being, his being the Good.<sup>43</sup>

Shafer-Landau continues by counseling Theists to embrace the other horn of the dilemma; the non-voluntarist side. He states that God must be constrained by the moral laws in the same way that God is constrained by the laws of logic, neither of which are divinely created. God can do anything at all within the limits of the laws of logic.<sup>44</sup> So then God commands actions because they are right; there is an objective moral code recognized by God prior to any of God's endorsements. But then, this objective moral code that God might endorse is entirely

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<sup>42</sup> Again, certain Islamic thinkers might be the exception here. See Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*. See especially chapter 3, "God's Goodness" and chapter 6 "The Being of God."

<sup>44</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*, 83. With the exception of Descartes, who was a universal possibilist, Theist's generally agree with this assessment. For more discussion of this see Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 275–279.

consistent with the nonexistence of God.<sup>45</sup> But the Theist will point out that the matter does not end there. This way of taking things raises a whole host of additional thorny questions for the secularist, and Shafer-Landau realizes this. He, therefore, devotes the chapter that follows his discussion of divine command theory to the basic question of where moral standards come from. Again, he has in view whether God is the source of these standards, a position that he denies.<sup>46</sup>

### **Eternal and Necessary Moral Principles:**

#### **Do They Lead to a Morally Necessary God?**

Shafer-Landau proceeds to argue the bold, secular, nonnaturalist proposal that moral truths are eternal, that they are true before humanity existed and remain true after humanity is no more; they do not come from anywhere or anyone.<sup>47</sup> But this creates a striking metaphysical oddity. Moral truths obviously intended for contingent moral beings, fitted to contingent moral beings, and applying to contingent moral beings, but with no contingent moral beings existing, no persons who are contingent moral beings are required.<sup>48</sup> This is quite odd, akin to having eternal gasoline but no engines. So Shafer-Landau works to alleviate this striking oddity by invoking a distinction between moral principles and moral facts. On the one hand, he maintains that moral principles are eternal if-then conditional claims.<sup>49</sup> They can be true even if never instantiated. For example, a moral rule prohibiting killing states that *if* one kills, *then* one does

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<sup>45</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*, 83. Call this *The God is Dispensable to Morality Thesis* – typically worked out from some version of the Euthyphro dilemma. It is a standard and predictable move for SMNNs.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>47</sup> Third realm moral Platonism is lurking in the background of this proposal.

<sup>48</sup> This evokes cosmic coincidence #3 that we have detailed. See Nadeem J.Z. Hussain, “The Ontic Cosmic Coincidence Problem for Non-Naturalism about Morality,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, vol. 16 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1–26. See also Matthew Bedke S., “Intuitive Non-Naturalism Meets Cosmic Coincidence,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 90 (2009): 188–209; Matthew Bedke S., “No Coincidence?,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, vol.9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020): 103–125; Rafael Vogelmann, “Robust Ethical Realism and The Moral Coincidence Problem,” *Dissertatio* 55 (2022): 91–110.

<sup>49</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 268. See note 2.

wrong. On the other hand, moral facts are instantiations of moral principles. A moral fact is an instance or occurrence of good, right, or virtue and the like. Shafer-Landau continues,

The distinction between fact and principle is all we need to turn the criticism that an eternal morality has absurd implications....But is it really so absurd to suppose that at least some of the moral principles themselves are eternal? ...My hunch is that all of the deepest moral principles are like this.<sup>50</sup>

Shafer-Landau then compares moral principles to mathematical principles. For example,  $2+2=4$  is eternally true. He draws from this comparison that both mathematical and moral principles are eternally true. They are true, independent of any and all human minds, and true even if never instantiated.<sup>51</sup> But this hardly alleviates the striking oddity of his account. It only further cements it in place. It can be seen that this striking oddity in Shafer-Landau's proposal provides an opening for the following Theistic argument. Consider the following.

P1 - Eternal Moral Principles require informational content.

P2- Thus, if there are such moral principles that contain informational content then there must be that by which such content is eternally specified.<sup>52</sup>

P3 - Such informational content must have definite informational properties. It must be quantified, complex, specified, conceptual, and semantically encoded content.

- Without this, the “moral” and “meaningful” side of such “moral principles” is not possible.

P4- The informational content of Eternal Moral Principles can only come from a Mind of a certain sort. As regards the moral, mind is ineliminable.

P5 - This mind must be (while possessing other qualities) Eternal, Rational, Communicative, Morally Good, Personal, and Necessary.

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<sup>50</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*, 87.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 88. See our comparison of the moral and mathematical, appendix 4.

<sup>52</sup> Throughout his writings Shafer-Landau prefers the terms “fixed” rather than “specified” as I have employed here.

C1 - God's mind is the only candidate for such a mind.

C2 - Therefore, if there are Eternal Moral Principles, God is the being in whose mind such content is eternally given.

There are Eternal Moral Principles.

God is the being of these Principles.

C3 - If these Eternal Moral Principles subsist in God's Eternal Mind, then it is not possible for God not to exist.

C4 - God is, therefore a necessary being, viz., a morally necessary being.

Furthermore, Theists who argue from Perfect Being Theism, as we are arguing here, argue that this God, the greatest possible being (GPB), can be the *only* Morally Necessary Being since this God is sovereign and the only necessary mind and will upon whom all such necessary principles depend in all possible worlds.<sup>53</sup> This is part of what it means to be the necessary being that God is. Furthermore, God's perfection entails God's goodness. So then, the above argument, if successful, accomplishes a number of things. First, it alleviates the striking oddity of Shafer-Landau's impersonalist nonnaturalistic account of eternal moral principles. The mind, the will, the essentially perfect character of the personal God, who is a necessary being, is a complete and total explanatory fit to the moral domain as we know it. The moral domain is real, objective, and in some sense, moral truths are necessarily true given that they flow out of the mind and will of God, who is essentially and infinitely good. Not only is God the natural home for such truths, but God also unifies the principled moral domain of eternal moral truths. Theism resolves the

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<sup>53</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 177. As Leibniz puts the matter, "If there were no eternal substance [the Personal Being of God who is necessary] there would be no eternal truths; and from this too GOD can be proved, who is the root of possibility, for His mind is the very region of ideas and truths." See also the relevant quotes from the *Monadology* and the detailed discussion in Adams most thorough work on Leibniz. The 7<sup>th</sup> chapter is entitled, "The Roots of Possibility" and subtitled "The Proof of the Existence of God from the Reality of Eternal Truths." Stephen Parrish emphasizes the unique singleness of God. See Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 69.

striking oddity of Shafer-Landau's secular account. God, a morally necessary being, is the logical outcome of such a resolution, and God provides deep and wide-ranging explanatory power for understanding the moral domain. Something Shafer-Landau's account admittedly lacks.<sup>54</sup> Second, the argument further resolves the tension that the Euthyphro dilemma places on Theism. Eternal moral truths are in perfect consonance with the nature and being of God, who alone is eternal. That which is necessary is in consonance with the God who alone exists necessarily.<sup>55</sup> There is no conflict here. There is no threat to God's aseity or conflict with God's omnipotence. God need not resist logical contradiction, irrationality, or temptation to evil, and thus the sense in which God is "constrained" by these is qualified by God's infinite knowledge and moral perfection.<sup>56</sup> Limits to God come only from God's own nature. There never was a time when eternal moral principles, or necessary logical principles, were not a part of the necessary mind and morally perfect being of God. To sever these is a colossal error. God is a unified being. The Theist affirms that all things that exist necessarily exist in an asymmetric relation of logical and ontological dependence upon God, the only necessary being.

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<sup>54</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 51. Here he acknowledges, "I concede that moral realists don't have much of a story about why true moral standards are true." This is a significant admission.

<sup>55</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 101-102. Here Parrish rightly points out, "Existing as an omnipotent and sovereign perfect being does not entail being able to do anything. It entails the ability to do those things that are consistent with existing as a necessary, spiritual and sovereign being....It is not that God *could* not perform an immoral act it is that he *would* not perform an immoral act." See Parrish's extensive discussion in chapter 10 on these issues; especially pp.273-275, and also chapter 4 "The Power of God" in Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*. This very question can be turned into a positive argument for God, see James N. Anderson and Greg Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic," *Philosophia Christi* 13, no. 2 (2011): 321-338; also Brian Leftow, *Anselm's Argument: Divine Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 125 for a discussion on time, eternity and necessary truths in relation to God. This will be developed in more detail above.

<sup>56</sup> It might be put this way with regard to God being constrained by logic, or doing the logically impossible. There is no such thing as doing the logically impossible, therefore with regards to God, there is no such sort of thing for God to be unable to do. Hence, impossibilities do not in any sense constrain God. This way of putting the matter is stated by Keith Yandell, see Paul M. Gould, ed., *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 155. In terms of that which is external to God's nature, God is neither prevented from being logical nor compelled to be illogical, nor is He compelled to be moral or compelled to be immoral. It is God's essential nature of Perfection to be both rational and good.

Theists also affirm that God, the creator, and framer of all Reality, has made beings like us in his image. We are personal beings. Our minds know, understand and affirm moral, rational truth. Eternal moral principles are candidates for such truths. This is because our minds are analogs of God's mind. Suppose we are fitted to be moral, rational beings. In that case, we ask of those who hold an impersonal secular account of these things – on the wholly secular account, what is it in Reality that ultimately answers to the kind of beings we are? God is a wholly fitting and adequate answer to this question. For SMNN, Shafer-Landau's suggestion of eternal moral principles leads to an ontic cosmic coincidence problem about morality.<sup>57</sup> This peculiar ontic cosmic coincidence problem<sup>58</sup> involves the simple oddity that eternal moral principles are necessary principles - about persons, addressed to persons, applied to persons, concerned with relations between persons, all of whom are contingent, yet highly complex, utterly unique moral beings. The ontic cosmic coincidence is "that precisely the extremely complex creatures of the kind needed for the principles of morality to apply just happen to exist."<sup>59</sup> This is no small coincidence. Indeed it is a massive, ontic, cosmic coincidence. But there is no such coincidence on a Theistic account of the moral domain and the moral nature of humanity. Thirdly, it is one thing to conjecture that there are eternal moral principles in a secular nonnaturalist account, but it is a more difficult matter to specify precisely what these principles are and how we can know them. On ethical pluralism, Shafer-Landau comments, "I think that the question of how we can

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<sup>57</sup> Hussain, "The Ontic Cosmic Coincidence Problem for Non-Naturalism about Morality." Hussain formulates this massive cosmic coincidence problem well, but unfortunately never considers Theism as a candidate in his review of various options to resolve this peculiar problem for nonnaturalism. This is #3 of the cosmic coincidence problems for SMNN.

<sup>58</sup> Hussain takes this cosmic coincidence problem to be a third unique cosmic coincidence problem for SMNN. The first is the epistemological cosmic coincidence problem (which was highlighted in the critique of David Enoch). The second is a causal cosmic coincidence problem (which was discussed in the critique of Wielenberg) and the third is this unique problem of the contingent nature of complex moral persons to which eternal moral principles are believed to apply. These are eternal and necessary moral principles about highly complex moral persons that might not have existed. Surely this would be a massive cosmic coincidence.

<sup>59</sup> Hussain, "The Ontic Cosmic Coincidence Problem for Non-Naturalism about Morality," 12.

know the fundamental rules of morality is very, very hard.”<sup>60</sup> We might call this *the really hard problem* of secular metaethics. By contrast, this is not a hard problem for Theistic metaethics. Specified, normative axiological and ethical content in the form of normative truths is an essential feature of the very mind, will, and being of God, and he has created us to know and understand these very sorts of things. Finally, Shafer-Landau readily acknowledges, as is the case with all secular nonnaturalist accounts of metaethics – in the final analysis, moral principles and facts are simply brute.<sup>61</sup> In the secular account, there are moral reasons for which there are no reasons; in this case, moral reasons that are characterized by eternal moral bruteness – yet another metaphysical oddity of the secular account. Eternal moral principles require an eternal moral being; this being we call God, and they are addressed to the contingent, yet wonderfully complex, moral persons we are.

### **The Moral Fixed Points Thesis: An Assessment**

One of the more recent and unique attempts at formulating a somewhat differing version of secular moral nonnaturalism is the collaborative work of Terrence Cuneo and Russ Shafer-Landau. They have developed an account of moral nonnaturalism that they refer to as the moral fixed points.<sup>62</sup> Their core claim is the following.

There are nonnatural moral truths. These truths include the moral fixed points, which are a species of conceptual truth, as they are propositions that are true in virtue of the essences of their constituent concepts.<sup>63</sup>

Cuneo and Shafer-Landau provide several examples of what they take to be moral fixed points.

The following is a representative sample.

- It is pro tanto wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow human being.

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<sup>60</sup> Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 250. Emphasis mine.

<sup>61</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 48. That moral facts are brute is repeated throughout Shafer-Landau’s work.

<sup>62</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, “The Moral Fixed Points.”

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 411–412. They call this the “embellished core claim.”

- It is pro tanto wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure.
- It is pro tanto wrong to torture others just because they have inconvenienced you.
- There is some moral reason to offer aid to others in distress, if such aid is very easily given and comes at very little expense.<sup>64</sup>

The moral fixed points, understood as nonnaturalistic conceptual truths, are first-order moral truths intended to be ecumenical, appealing to naturalists, nonnaturalists, and supernaturalists alike.<sup>65</sup> They are not intended to serve as a set of supreme fundamental or foundational moral truths from which all others may be derived, but instead, they are a set of 1<sup>st</sup> order moral truths intended to fix or set the boundaries of the moral domain by explicating a reasonably comprehensive yet still incomplete system of moral propositions. As such, they are said to have “framework status” and even moral “fact-making” status in that they are conceptual moral truths by which moral facts are referenced and fixed.<sup>66</sup> They are considered highly evident, in some sense necessarily true, a priori knowable, and enjoy superior explanatory power. If they are denied, the one who denies them is considered conceptually or morally deficient.

Furthermore, the moral fixed points are qualified in their scope of application. They are considered conceptually true for beings like us in worlds like ours.<sup>68</sup> The metaphysics of standard nonnaturalism is worked out in terms of a robust account of nonnaturalistic moral *properties* or *moral facts*, whereas the nonnaturalism of the moral fixed points is worked out in terms of essentialist nonnaturalistic moral *concepts*.<sup>69</sup> Understanding this is critical for understanding the difference between standard nonnaturalism and the version developed in the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 405. They list ten moral fixed points in all but our selection is representative of the ten and will serve our purposes here.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 402, nt. 8.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 406, 411.

<sup>68</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, “The Moral Fixed Points,” 404. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau state that their motivation for this qualification is to avoid bizarre, modal, possible world’s counterexamples to their thesis, see pg. 405, nt.15.

<sup>69</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*. In this earlier work for example the account of moral nonnaturalism is worked out almost solely in terms of moral properties. The term “properties” related to moral debate occurs over 400 times in this book. By contrast there is almost no use of essentialism as such, let alone, conceptual essentialism in this work.

moral fixed points. The key difference is that moral fixed points are not made true by correlative worldly facts (or properties) but rather strictly by the constituent concepts' essence.<sup>70</sup> For example, according to the moral fixed points, the concept of the recreational slaughter of other human beings possesses as one of its constituent elements the concept of being wrong; each is built into the concept of the other. Anyone that understands the proposition understands that the two (recreational slaughter and wrong) are linked conceptually and essentially.<sup>71</sup> The motivation for the moral fixed point project seems to be twofold. The first motivation is an attempt to avoid the typical criticisms of nonnaturalism directed at the entire notion of Third-Realm nonnatural moral properties understood as abstract objects. Some difficulties come with justifying this sort of account. The second motivation seems to be to develop a systematic account of conceptually necessary moral propositions that diverse ethical theorists can assent to across the board. It will be argued here that the moral fixed point thesis has not been successful in either respect.

A Theist should find the moral fixed points an interesting thesis. Virtually nothing in the account excludes God, nor does anything specifically connect to God. Nevertheless, God is not taken as relevant to the thesis. It is not, therefore God neutral. But is the moral fixed point thesis something that Theists should endorse? Perhaps! Theism aside, there are problems with the details of the metaphysics of the moral fixed points, and these details are important. What follows will now focus on these details and their attendant problems. Given that one of the primary motivations of all forms of nonnaturalism is the purported inadequacy of the metaphysics of moral naturalism, it is the moral naturalist and not the Theist that has the most at stake in the debates about the moral fixed points. If *any* robust version of nonnaturalism,

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<sup>70</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, "The Moral Fixed Points," 411.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 410. "...a proposition (that x is F) is a conceptual truth if it belongs to the essence of 'F' that, necessarily, anything that satisfies 'x' also satisfies 'F.'"

including Theism, is true, then moral naturalism is false. So David Copp,<sup>72</sup> an able proponent of moral naturalism, has undertaken a reasonably comprehensive and incisive critique of the metaphysics of the moral fixed points. His analysis is worth considering in detail.

### **Leveraging David Copp's Critique of the MFPs**

In their proposal, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau make a pivotal distinction between two versions of moral nonnaturalism. They distinguish between,

*Minimal nonnaturalism*: there are nonnatural moral truths, but there are no nonnatural moral properties or facts. All moral properties and facts are natural.

*Robust nonnaturalism*: there are both nonnatural moral truths and nonnatural moral properties and facts.<sup>73</sup>

In light of “minimal nonnaturalism” Copp rightly asks why the moral fixed points should be classed as nonnatural moral truths at all. He acknowledges that while robust nonnaturalism and naturalism are clearly incompatible, minimal nonnaturalism might well be compatible with some versions of naturalism, depending on how the details are parsed. He also points out that moral naturalists can acknowledge that some moral propositions are conceptual truths.<sup>74</sup> But he denies that there are *a priori*, substantive moral conceptual truths of the sort put forward in the metaphysics of the moral fixed points. By *substantive* Copp means truths that a proponent of

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<sup>72</sup> David Copp advocates a version of realist naturalism that he calls realist expressivism. It is a society centered constructivist account of moral normativity wherein moral standards are societally constructed and justified with a view toward societal flourishing. Copp takes naturalism to be an empirical thesis about the moral domain and our moral natures. He has engaged moral nonnaturalism in a number of publications both defending naturalism and critiquing nonnaturalism. See David Copp, *Morality in a Natural World: Selected Essays in Metaethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); David Copp, *Morality, Normativity, and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); David Copp, “Just Too Different: Normative Properties and Natural Properties,” *Philosophical Studies* 177, no. 1 (January 2020): 263–286; Copp, “A Skeptical Challenge to Moral Non-Naturalism and a Defense of Constructivist Naturalism”; David Copp, “Realist-Expressivism and the Fundamental Role of Normative Belief,” *Philosophical Studies* 175, no. 6 (June 2018): 1333–1356; David Copp, “Social Glue and Norms of Sociality,” *Philosophical Studies* 172, no. 12 (December 2015): 3387–3397; David Copp, “Four Epistemological Challenges to Ethical Naturalism: Naturalized Epistemology and the First-Person Perspective,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary Volume* 26 (January 1, 2000): 31–74.

<sup>73</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, “The Moral Fixed Points,” 403.

<sup>74</sup> Copp, “Are There Substantive Moral Conceptual Truths?,” 96. These are mostly truths that are trivially true.

error theory would deny. In another place, he calls this an informal “Mackie test.”<sup>75</sup> This is how the Mackie test works. In the case of the moral fixed points, conceptual truths are true in virtue of Third-Realm Platonic abstract objects. Moral Platonism is a metaphysical account that any error theory or strictly naturalistic theory would clearly reject.<sup>76</sup> So then, Copp’s first line of critique is to take issue with the theory of concepts and conceptual truths that is part of the metaphysics of the moral fixed point thesis.

Copp gives several reasons throughout for rejecting the Platonic theory of concepts and conceptual truths.<sup>77</sup> I only summarize these reasons here. Firstly, the theory is metaphysically akin to a Platonic theory of nonnatural moral properties and therefore does not really avoid the host of problems associated with a Platonic account of such properties.<sup>78</sup> At a minimum, it leaves the relation of nonnatural conceptual essences to moral properties unclear, thereby creating additional explanatory difficulties. Secondly, it is also unclear why Platonic abstract objects, which function as 2nd-order intermediaries, are needed to refer to and have beliefs about 1<sup>st</sup> order moral properties involving rightness or wrongness. By Copp’s lights, regular old social learning seems adequate to account for our grasp of the concepts of rightness or wrongness.<sup>79</sup> Also, on their account, there is the problem of the proliferation of abstract objects in Plato’s heaven; the horde. Each property instantiation might be paired to a single conceptual essence, or differing conceptual essences might constitute a single object. For example, take water to

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<sup>75</sup> Copp, *Morality in a Natural World: Selected Essays in Metaethics*, 118.

<sup>76</sup> Copp, “Are There Substantive Moral Conceptual Truths?,” 93. As Copp states, “...a property is substantive if and only if a skeptic who denied the existence of the property would be committed to denying the truth of the proposition.” See also p. 104 comments on this matter.

<sup>77</sup> The following is a fairly condensed summary of Copp’s fuller and well-reasoned analysis.

<sup>78</sup> Copp, “Are There Substantive Moral Conceptual Truths?,” 98–99. As Copp states, “Concepts are another layer of abstract entity alongside properties.”

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 100. Copp briefly suggests a functionalist account for our knowledge of wrongness; see previous citations throughout. He has developed this elsewhere although he acknowledges that such an account may have trouble with accounting for the truth of such functional states of mind. The question would then be what makes a “functional state of mind” true, what is its truthmaker? Strict functionality simple will not suffice as a truthmaker. Such functional states of mind might be strictly false.

illustrate this point. We might have the common everyday concept of water as contrasted with the biochemical concept of  $H_2O$ .<sup>80</sup> These would be two conceptual essences of the same entity. There might also be moral concepts that are unknown and unthought, unknowable or unthinkable, occupying Plato's heaven. This being said, there could be differing concepts of wrongness, each of which is different and distinct in essence from others; wrongness1 would be a different conceptual essence from wrongness2, or 3, and so on.<sup>81</sup> The conceptual truths about wrongness might vary from concept to concept. There may also be indeterminate concepts of wrongness that result in indeterminate wrongness beliefs. Do these have conceptual essences as well? Furthermore, differing conceptual essences of wrongness would be paired with differing concepts and systems of morality; morality system1, 2, or 3, and so on, each having differing moral fixed points that make up the respective conceptual essences from which they are constituted, framed, and deemed fact makers. As Copp notes, since on Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's Platonic view, concepts are mind-independent, "the question whether there is more than one wrongness concept does not depend on whether we have detected them, nor does it depend on facts about our beliefs."<sup>82</sup> Given the above, Copp initially concludes, "[s]omething clearly has gone wrong with Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's theory of concepts and conceptual truths."<sup>83</sup> This author agrees. Once the theory's details are worked out, complications and worries become readily apparent and multiply.

But Copp finds another set of worries. Copp has put his finger on a rather curious incoherence in the moral fixed point account and its elaboration of conceptual truths in terms of conceptual essences. To illustrate this, take, for example, moral fixed point 1 - that it is wrong to

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 101. Note that there is no discussion of universals in the account of the moral fixed points.

<sup>81</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, "The Moral Fixed Points," 410. "It belongs to the essence of the concept 'being wrong' that it applies to exactly those things that are wrong."

<sup>82</sup> Copp, "Are There Substantive Moral Conceptual Truths?," 103.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow human being. Does this moral fixed point entail that the property of wrongness itself exists? Does it entail that it is a conceptual truth that the property of wrongness itself exists? Copp argues yes.<sup>84</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau claim no.<sup>85</sup>

This difference marks an important disagreement. Here is why. On the one hand, if Cuneo and Shafer-Landau deny that the property of wrongness exists, then they have various problems linking the moral fixed point thesis of moral conceptual truths to the real world of moral properties, people, and things. How, then, is the property wrongness instantiated on their account? On the other hand, if, given the moral fixed points, conceptual truths link up essentially only to other conceptual truths, then they have the resulting problem of delimiting what counts as a conceptual truth and how the various conceptual truths are related and constituted. Hence, the question, is it a conceptual truth that the property wrongness itself exists?

Are Cuneo and Shafer-Landau saying that moral fixed point 1 is merely wrong by way of conceptual essences (i.e. relations among concepts) but not actually wrong in the real world of moral properties, people and things? As strange as this might be, it seems to be the logical outcome of their conceptualist account and their denial. But why would they deny that wrongness as such exists? Abstract wrongness unconnected to anything would indeed be a rather striking metaphysical oddity. Wrongness, of itself, by itself, is not a conceptual truth that has a conceptual essence. Something must be conceived as wrong for wrong to be constituted as a conceptual essence. Otherwise, wrongness is not so constituted. Furthermore, if wrongness itself exists as an essentialist abstract object, then the striking oddities are multiplied even more. Hence

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 106–107. Copp reinforces this position by stating, “...if <p> entails or presupposes <q> as a matter of conceptual truth then <q> is a conceptual truth if <p> is a conceptual truth.” This supposition is hard to deny. Copp finds problems with wrongness simply existing.

<sup>85</sup> Cuneo and Russ Shafer-Landau, “The Moral Fixed Points.” 414, nt.33.

Cuneo and Shafer-Landau deny that the property wrongness exists and, by extension, that it exists as a matter of conceptual necessity.

In other places, Shafer-Landau and Cuneo have elaborated the thesis of the supervenience of nonnatural moral properties on descriptive properties in some detail.<sup>86</sup> But these accounts are worked out solely in terms of *moral properties* - natural, nonnatural, and the causative - and not in terms of *conceptual essences* and properties. So the conceptual oddity that Copp has put his finger on seems to remain in place on their account. By contrast, Theism has no problem here. Concepts are things thought; things conceived in thought. There are no mind-independent thoughts. On an account of Theistic conceptualism, God is omniscient and knows all truths and all possibilities, including the truths and possibilities of wrongness. These truths exist necessarily in the mind of God, who affirms that which is necessarily wrong as such. Wrongness need not be instantiated for wrongness to be wrong, and what God deems wrong is wrong essentially and necessarily across all possible worlds. Once again, a striking metaphysical oddity disappears on a Theistic account of things, given that ultimate Reality is personal and mind related. This ontology is only possible on a Theistic account of Reality. It is not possible on either a naturalistic or nonnaturalistic ontology. God is the infinite and necessary mind after whom all finite minds are crafted and upon whom all finite minds depend. There is no need for an autonomous Platonic Third Realm of mindless, autonomous, yet somehow necessary conceptual essences that exist as abstract objects. Rather, what are taken to be abstract objects by secular moral and mathematical Platonists are taken instead by the Theists to be ideal objects that subsist in the infinite mind of God.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*. See chapters 3 and 4. See also Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>87</sup> This is a thesis that runs from Augustine, through Leibniz, Alvin Plantinga, Stephen Parrish and others. Much more will be said on this below in chapter 6 and the final chapter as the positive case for Theism is developed.

Still, there are other worries with the moral fixed points that Copp accurately puts his finger on. These have to do with the application of the moral fixed points, particularly with the qualification that the moral fixed points apply to *beings like us in worlds like ours*. As noted earlier, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau make this qualification to forestall having to deal with bizarre counterexamples to their thesis but also so that they do not have to defend a stronger and unqualified version of the moral propositions that they enumerated. Each and every one of the moral fixed points is intended to be qualified by this proviso. Copp proposes that this qualification can be taken in two different ways. It can be taken indexically or descriptively. On the indexical reading, the moral fixed points should be read and applied in terms of *beings like us as we actually are* and a *world like ours as it actually is*. On the descriptions reading, the moral fixed points are to be read and applied in terms of *kinds of worlds* and *kinds of agents*.<sup>88</sup> That is, kinds of worlds with properties A, B, and C and agents with properties X, Y, and Z, whatever these properties happen to be in a particular world. The key is that the properties combine to form morally distinctive kinds of beings and worlds. Copp finds similar problems with both readings.<sup>89</sup>

The problem with a descriptions reading and application is this. While it may be granted that it is a conceptual truth that it is wrong to humiliate others for pleasure (moral fixed point 3) in certain kinds of worlds (e.g., ABC worlds) for certain kinds of agents (e.g., XYZ agents) it is not a conceptual truth that we actually live in that kind of ABC world and are those kinds of XYZ agents. Thus it is not a conceptual truth that we are wrong to humiliate others since we may actually live in a humiliation-friendly world where humiliation of others has positive import and

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<sup>88</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau rightly refer to moral agents as “intentional agents.” Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, “The Moral Fixed Points,” 434.

<sup>89</sup> Copp, “Are There Substantive Moral Conceptual Truths?,” 108.

effects.<sup>90</sup> The match between the conceptual truth of the moral fixed points to the kinds of worlds and kinds of beings we are is not itself a conceptual truth that holds by conceptual necessity. The purchase point in necessity is lost in the extension.

The problems with the indexical readings are similar, but Copp rightly points out that the indexical reading and application create additional issues with what can be known *a priori*. The *actual beings we are* and *the actual world we live in* cannot be settled in a strictly *a priori* way as a mere matter of relations among concepts. The various moral fixed points do not encode and guarantee the kind of world we live in or the kind of beings we are. Thus they cannot ensure that we live in a world that necessarily references and applies to the wrongness or rightness of their moral content in an *a priori* way. All combined, Copp takes these problems to be (nearly) fatal to the moral fixed points account and takes it that these worries render the whole thesis implausible.<sup>91</sup> Again, this author agrees.

In thinking about their use of worlds and beings, it is notable that Cuneo and Shafer-Landau say almost nothing to fill in the details in their account about the kind of world we live in and the kind of beings we are. They simply assume that these big-ticket items are somehow self-evident and unproblematic, and they also assume that this part of their thesis links up unproblematically with the various moral fixed points proposed. Both of these assumptions are incorrect. Instead, it creates a thicket of additional problems. By contrast, a Theist has great leverage as regards worlds and beings. The kind of beings we are (made in God's image) and the kind of world we live in (created by God) is directly relevant to our understanding of the moral domain and the moral nature of humanity. If God is as Theism takes God to be, then these things

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. While one would be hard pressed to argue that we live in a recreational slaughter friendly world, or a torture friendly world, the point still stands that as far as the moral fixed points account is constructed, the foothold of necessity is lost in the extension.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 109.

cannot be truly understood apart from God. Further, the Theist argues that both of these things point to God and are best explained as originating with God. The naturalist and secular nonnaturalist alike subscribe to the same impersonal cosmic Grand Story – over against the personalist Grand Story of Theism. They both, therefore, have problems accommodating the kinds of beings that we are (moral and rational persons) and the kind of universe in which we live (rational and intelligible yet person friendly). Theism is suitably fitted to and anticipates all of these things very well.

One final detail of the moral fixed points that needs to be examined is the question of their necessity. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau affirm that the moral fixed points are necessary in two respects. First, they are highly self-evident, and second, they are conceptually necessary given their constituent essence as conceptual truths.<sup>92</sup> They clarify, however, that as conceptual truths, they do not express concept identities or property identities. For example, “recreational slaughter” is not identical to “being wrong” by way of essence or properties.<sup>93</sup> They further elaborate by making an important distinction between what they designate as *immediate conceptual truths* and *mediate conceptual truths*. Immediate conceptual truths are essentially complete in themselves without requiring additional information.<sup>94</sup> Mediate conceptual truths, however, are not essentially complete in themselves. Their truth depends on chains of dependence between different things or concepts by which their necessity obtains.<sup>95</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau maintain that the necessity of the moral fixed points is mediate. For example, the moral fixed point that “recreational slaughter of a fellow human being is wrong” has multiple elements; each depends on the other to complete the whole essentialist complex concept. The

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<sup>92</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, “The Moral Fixed Points,” 430, 435.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 432-433.

<sup>94</sup> For example, a triangle necessarily has three equidistant connecting sides.

<sup>95</sup> Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, “The Moral Fixed Points,” 433–434.

immediate essence of the concept “being wrong” does not essentially contain any information about “recreational” or “slaughter” or “fellow human beings” and vice versa, but they combine to form a mediate, chained, complex, essential, moral fixed point deemed necessary – in a mediate sense. Each of the elements requires more information to be true or false and depends on this additional information to form the larger whole, which is deemed mediately necessary given its complex essence. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau comment,

...we acknowledge that proceeding down the essentialist chain in the way we have does not itself establish that a moral fixed point such as (that it is wrong to engage in recreational slaughter of a fellow person) is a mediate conceptual truth. But it would establish how it could be that it belongs to the mediate essence of ‘being wrong’ that, necessarily, this concept pertains to beings like us in worlds such as ours....<sup>96</sup>

Suffice it to say that this looks to be an important admission that brings to light a relatively thin and tenuous notion of necessity for the moral fixed points. This point is not too hard to see. If proceeding down the essentialist chain of dependencies does not itself establish a mediate moral conceptual truth, and if there is no such thing as an *immediate* essence of “being wrong” - how does attaching “wrongness” and calling it a *mediate* essence ensure the result that wrongness necessarily obtains for the moral fixed points? Put another way, how is it that wrongness is calibrated in just the right way so as to refer extensionally and exclusively only to those things that are, in fact, wrong but not to those things that aren’t? Call this *The Ontic Calibration Problem* of the moral fixed points.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, why should we stop where Cuneo and Shafer-Landau stop in the essentialist chain of dependence? We are still left with what looks to be a weak kind of necessity in worlds like ours and for beings like us. I submit that for wrongness to *necessarily* obtain in a strong categorical sense, a full-blooded categorical sense; it would seem that we have to go still further

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 435.

<sup>97</sup> This is also an ontic calibration problem.

down the ontological chain of dependencies. But for Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, there is no further ontological ground available. They have run out of available metaphysical territory. Invoking Third Realm Platonic abstract objects will not help here. It is by no means a necessary conceptual truth that our world and moral being is ensconced in Plato's impersonal heaven of abstractions.<sup>98</sup> By contrast, the Theist will take all of the self-evidence that Cuneo and Shafer-Landau are willing to grant and take all of what is true by conceptual essence that they can possibly muster; thin and tenuous though it be, and move further down the ontological chain of dependence to God. The Theist has available the ontological plentitude of the being, mind, and will of the living, personal God whose own necessary being grounds all else that is necessary; this would include all necessary truths in all possible worlds. The truth of the moral fixed points is only a tiny sliver of this totality contained in the infinite mind of an omniscient and perfect being; God.

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<sup>98</sup> After some good discussion, Daniel Crow makes the same point. See his analysis in Crow, "Causal Impotence and Evolutionary Influence," 386.

## Chapter 5

### Theism, Secular Moral Nonnaturalism and the Ethical Intuitionism of Michael Huemer

#### Introduction and Plan of the Chapter

Ethical intuitionism fell into disrepute in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but has undergone something of a transformation and revival in the last 30 years or so. This revival has been dubbed the new intuitionism.<sup>1</sup> The movement and its proponents are relevant, given that all secular moral nonnaturalists, in various respects, either ally themselves with moral intuitionism or identify their ethical system as intuitionist. For the moral argument for God's existence, the history of Theism and intuitionism is both relevant and fascinating. This section will proceed as follows.

Initially, it will be helpful to examine the history of moral intuitionism and its relationship to Theism. Then, once reviewing the various types of intuitionism, the focus will turn to a critique of the nonnaturalist ethical intuitionism of Michael Huemer.<sup>2</sup> Huemer's ethical intuitionism is worked out from his epistemological account of phenomenal conservatism.<sup>3</sup> The critique of Huemer's phenomenal conservatism, which he dubs "direct realism," will involve a side-by-side comparison with the Theistic epistemological "direct realism" of Stephen Parrish as developed in his book *The Knower and The Known*.<sup>4</sup> This comparison will afford an opportunity to evaluate and selectively respond to Huemer's critique of Theism, focusing on the ontological argument. This comparison will also allow the introduction of a transcendental argument for Theism similar to that offered by Stephen Parrish.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jill Graper Hernandez, ed., *The New Intuitionism* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Huemer, "Phenomenal Conservatism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., accessed November 11, 2020, <https://iep.utm.edu/phen-con/>.

<sup>4</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*. The particular focus is the account developed in chapter 9.

<sup>5</sup> This is the argument worked out in the entirety of Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*.

Given the previous chapters of exposition and critique of SMNN, the storylines should be readily familiar by now. The epistemological issues will inevitably push us into deeper ontological waters. In the past, intuitionists' failure to wade into these deeper waters has been a legitimate criticism of ethical intuitionism. Do the metaphysics of the new intuitionism fare any better than the old intuitionism? In focusing the discussion, two things will be most relevant.

First, Huemer raises the penetrating question about the nature and structure of obligable<sup>6</sup> relations in our relationship to God. Secondly, given Huemer's intuitionism (and the wider secular moral nonnaturalist commitment to intuitionism), it will be argued that the comparable "design intuition" is an example of the "match" between mind and world that Theism posits. Huemer's first question, asking why we should obey God, must be adequately answered for Theistic metaethics to be credible. As for the second issue, it will be argued that the design intuition should be realistically and alethically construed, similar to ethical intuitions that Huemer affirms and defends. This puts secular moral intuitionists in obvious difficulty. If they affirm ethical intuitions, then they cannot arbitrarily dismiss the design intuition. If they dismiss the design intuition, ethical intuitions are also in doubt.

Next, the argument from design, founded in the nature of information, will be combined with cosmic "fine-tuning" of the Universe and suggests that the design intuition, based on the design inference, leads to the conclusion that the universe is designed by God. Furthermore, affirming ethical intuitions will open a path to argue that a Theistic rendering of ethical intuitions provides a better explanatory account than the secular accounts.

Thirdly, it will be argued that Huemer's broader metaphysics does not adequately account for either ethical intuitions or the design intuition. Huemer's account suffers from what

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<sup>6</sup> Pronounce this "obligable" with a long "i" as in "ice" and the "g" pronounced like the English "j" as in "Jesus".

has already been dubbed the problem of “ramified, cumulative brutality.”<sup>7</sup> Spotty or patchy brutality might be tolerated as a minor metaphysical problem. Ramified cumulative brutality is different. Ramified cumulative brutality is found just about everywhere one turns for an explanation of things. In Huemer’s account, ramified cumulative brutality amounts to a cumulative negative evidential case of *ubiquitous cosmic brutality* that counts significantly against his view. This kind of brutality is problematic for all versions of metaphysical naturalism and secular moral nonnaturalism that rely on a generalized naturalistic account of origins.

### **Theism and the Early History of Moral Intuitionism**

Moral intuitionism was born and developed in the context of Theistic ethics. This noteworthy fact is too often overlooked in contemporary discussions of intuitionism. Theism and intuitionism are natural partners for several reasons. Moral intuitionism tends to be joined to moral realism, and Theism is typically a strong version of moral realism. Also, in order to trust intuitions, they must have not only adequate epistemological support but, just as importantly, adequate ontological support. Theism is able to provide this kind of deep and fuller metaphysical support. If the argument presented here is successful, it will become evident that a thin intuitional epistemology and ontology are inadequate to support categorical ethical intuitions.

The founding intuitionists are part of the revolution in early British and Scottish moral philosophy from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward.<sup>8</sup> The thinkers identified with the intuitionist tradition

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen E. Parrish, “Brute Facts All the Way Down,” Article, July 11, 2022, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://worldviewbulletin.substack.com/p/brute-fact-all-the-way-down>.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Stratton-Lake, “Ethical Intuitionism,” in *The Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Sacha Golob and Jens Timmermann. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 549–561; Philip Stratton-Lake, “Intuitionism in Ethics,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Winter 2016); D. D. Raphael. *British Moralists, 1650-1800* (Indianapolis IN: Hackett Publishing, 1991).

are Ralph Cudworth (1618-1688),<sup>9</sup> Samuel Clarke (1675-1729),<sup>10</sup> John Balguy (1686-1748),<sup>11</sup> Richard Price (1723-1791),<sup>12</sup> as well as Thomas Reid (1710-1796)<sup>13</sup> and others of the Scottish enlightenment. Cudworth and Clarke are commonly part of the group referred to as the Cambridge Platonists, while Reid and those of the Scottish Enlightenment are typically understood to be advocates, in response to David Hume's empiricism, of a version of common sense philosophy. The early moral intuitionists were strong Theists. One notable characteristic they had in common was their belief that ethical principles and truths are self-evident and knowable, given humanity's intellectual and moral makeup. Although all of these thinkers differ in various respects, they all ground the moral domain in the being of God. For these early

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<sup>9</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: Franklin Classics, 1678); Sarah Hutton, "From Cudworth to Hume: Cambridge Platonism and the Scottish Enlightenment," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 42, no. S1 (February 2012): 8–26. Hutton shows that there is a strong link between the British and Scottish enlightenments; Hedley, "Gods and Giants: Cudworth's Platonic Metaphysics and His Ancient Theology"; Sarah Hutton, "Ralph Cudworth," ed. Edward N Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer (2021): 1–14. See also the recent discussion by Zachary Adam Akin, "Ralph Cudworth's Divine Conceptualism and the Bootstrapping Objection," *Philosophia Christi* 23, no. 2 (2021): 367–376. Bogdan-Antoniou Deznán and Zeta Books, "The Eternal Truths in Henry More and Ralph Cudworth," *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 11, no. 1 (2022): 93–114.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Clarke, "Samuel Clarke, *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, 1704.," ed. Jonathan Bennett (Some Texts from Early Modern Philosophy, 2017), accessed April 23, 2022, <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/clarke>; Timothy Yenter and Ezio Vailati, "Samuel Clarke," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Winter 2021); Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation...of Reason,,Being Sixteen Sermons*, 1823 ed. (England: Wentworth Press, 2016); Dafydd Mills Daniel, *Ethical Rationalism and Secularisation in the British Enlightenment: Conscience and the Age of Reason* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). One can find a digital version of Clarke's major works at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=genpub;idno=ClarkDisco>. Bennett's work cited above is a very useful collection of texts and analysis, including breakdown of the arguments and Clarke's distinctive use of theological and philosophical vocabulary. See <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/clarke>.

<sup>11</sup> One can find a fairly complete collection of Balguy's various works on virtue and moral philosophy in the Post Reformation Digital Library [http://www.prld.org/author\\_view.php?a\\_id=2119](http://www.prld.org/author_view.php?a_id=2119)

<sup>12</sup> David McNaughton, "Richard Price," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA, 2019), accessed September 19, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill-moral-political/>; Winston H. F. Barnes, "Richard Price: A Neglected Eighteenth Century Moralism," *Philosophy* 17, no. 66 (April 1942): 159–173.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Reid, *Essays On the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Philadelphia, PA: J.H. Butler & Co., 1878); Terence Cuneo, "Reid's Ethics," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab, Winter 2016); Terence Cuneo and Randall Harp, "Reid on the Autonomy of Ethics: From Active Power to Moral Nonnaturalism," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 2, no. 4 (2016): 523–541; Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ryan Nichols, "Thomas Reid," ed. Edward N Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA, 2021). Reid spoke of a "moral sense" that was loosely analogous to sense perception. For a useful discussion of this see Robert Stecker, "Thomas Reid on the Moral Sense;," *Monist* 70, no. 4 (1987): 453–464.

intuitionists, the core of moral intuition is the moral conscience.<sup>14</sup> During the early period, the epistemology of intuitionism was clearly nested within Theism's wider metaphysics. It did not stand by itself. Dafydd Mills Daniel's thorough analysis of Clarke's moral philosophy shows that the early intuitional Theists resisted three significant assumptions of secular enlightenment rationalism.

- a. The naturalization of reason.
- b. The absolute authority of the individual as a primary constructor of value.
- c. The privatization of value.<sup>15</sup>

We earlier saw that Sidgwick became the watershed for rejecting common sense intuitionism. In the *Methods*, intuitionism was taken to be little more than the everyday morality of common sense practice and belief. As we saw, Sidgwick rejects this as much too rough and ready to be precisely formulated into rational ethical principles. After Sidgwick, intuitionism follows the path through H.A. Prichard,<sup>16</sup> G.E. Moore, and finally, to W. D. Ross.<sup>17</sup> Prichard publishes his seminal essay in which he rightly calls into question the entire enterprise of modern secular ethical theory. Secular nonnaturalism as a whole and secular nonnaturalist intuitionism falls into disrepute and is largely rejected after Moore and Ross.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel explains the role of conscience in Clarke. "In Clarkean ethical rationalism..., conscience has peculiar referents, because it is an intuitive and reflective faculty through which human beings experience reason *qua recto ratio*: our law, God's law, and the law of the created universe itself....it is that through which we experience the moral as a 'complex whole.'" See Daniel, *Ethical Rationalism and Secularisation in the British Enlightenment: Conscience and the Age of Reason*, 281, 283. For Clarke then, moral reason is a gift of God wherein we are active and self-responsible participants, but not self-creators of value or passive subjects, *ibid.* 290. By contrast the new intuitionists do not typically emphasize the role of conscience as a strong intuitional feature. See some discussion of this in the concluding remarks of Daniel, *ibid.*, 296-301. For a recent exposition of the role of conscience in moral theory see Angus John Louis Menuge, "Grounding the Conscience," *Religions* 13, no. 10 (October 12, 2022): 966.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel, *Ethical Rationalism and Secularisation in the British Enlightenment: Conscience and the Age of Reason*, 277. See the concluding chapter of this recent thorough study of the early intuitionists. It should be noted that Clarke is arguing against both Hobbes and Spinoza.

<sup>16</sup> Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?"

<sup>17</sup> Ross, *The Right and the Good*; Ross, *Foundations of Ethics*; David Phillips, *Rossian Ethics: W.D. Ross and Contemporary Moral Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). As Phillips shows, the distinctive contribution of W.D. Ross to ethical theory is his notion of prima facie duties.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Stratton-Lake rightly concludes, "Ross is, arguably, the last of the great classical intuitionists. After Ross intuitionism fell into disrepute. Many philosophers found its nonnaturalist realism and rationalist epistemology hard

The shift from Theistic intuitionism to secular intuitionism that resulted in the initial undoing of intuitionism is no surprise to the Theist. As John Cottingham puts the question,

What exactly replaces the authority attaching on the traditional view to the deliverances of the divinely imparted natural light? Although the issue is seldom raised in this form, we can discern, I think, a certain residual disquiet among today's intuitionists about the status of our moral intuitions within an atheistic world view.<sup>19</sup>

Cottingham rightly observes that the generalized naturalistic account of evolutionary origins presents a significant challenge to moral intuitionism, given the contingency of that history. As was previously argued, had the evolutionary landscape been different, our moral intuitions would likely also have been different, yielding only a conditional moral normativity.<sup>20</sup> Conditional moral normativity throws into doubt the categorical normative status of our moral intuitions, hence contemporary intuitionists' clear move to a version of secular robust realism that attempts to secure a strong nontheistic basis for moral normativity. Moral intuitionism must involve some wider metaphysics and ontology that combines, in an interlocking account, a match between our intuitions and the moral domain that adequately supports the deliverances of these intuitions. Theism has historically been the natural home, the natural partner of moral intuitionism. To be sure, Cottingham rightly makes the point that this provides Theistic metaethics with no easy reflective or explanatory shortcuts. Simply invoking God will not suffice. The explanatory task for Theistic metaethics remains a wide-open and challenging task.

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to accept, while others found the sort of normative theory offered by Ross empty and unsystematic.” Stratton-Lake, “Ethical Intuitionism,” 560.

<sup>19</sup> John Cottingham, “Intuition and Genealogy,” in *Intuition, Theory, and Anti-Theory in Ethics*, ed. Sophie Grace Chappell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12. Koons makes the same point with Theism, secularism and intuitionism in general, see his Robert C. Koons, “The General Argument from Intuition,” in *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, ed. Trent Dougherty, Jerry L. Walls, and Alvin Plantinga (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Cottingham, “Intuition and Genealogy,” 14–17. This would also bring into play the previous argument that we dubbed the plausible mechanism problem.

## The New Intuitionism

Intuitionism has undergone a revival and transformation since the days of W.D. Ross. In the new intuitionism, Robert Audi is by far the most prolific thinker.<sup>21</sup> Audi is a Theist, and his intuitionism is built on the notion that moral intuitions are to be taken as a kind of moral perception. He further builds his perceptual intuitionism within a broadly revised Rossian intuitionism as well as a Kantian deontological framework.<sup>22</sup> Audi, therefore, has worked out a revised classical intuitional ethics, Theistically backed, with significant and novel innovations. However, it should be noted that there are various and contrasting interpretations of moral intuitions. Consider the following: David Enoch, in his *Taking Morality Seriously*, deploys a suite of intuitions - from impartiality<sup>23</sup> to pragmatic vindication,<sup>24</sup> indispensability,<sup>25</sup> the “just-

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Audi, *The Good in the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Robert Audi, *Moral Perception* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Robert Audi, “Self-Evidence,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (1999): 205–209; Robert Audi, “Kantian Intuitionism as a Framework for the Justification of Moral Judgments,” in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, ed. Mark Timmons, vol. 2 (Presented at the Arizona Workshop on Normative Ethics, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 128–151; Robert Audi, *Action, Intention, and Reason* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993); R. Audi, “A Kantian Intuitionism,” *Mind* 110, no. 439 (July 1, 2001): 601–635; Robert Audi, “Reason and Experience, Obligation and Value: An Introduction to the New Intuitionism,” in *The New Intuitionism*, ed. Jill Graper Hernandez (New York: Continuum, 2011), 1–7; Robert Audi, “Intuitions, Intuitionism, and Moral Judgment,” in *The New Intuitionism*, ed. Jill Graper Hernandez (New York: Continuum, 2011), 171–198; Robert Audi, “Moral Perception and Moral Knowledge,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 84 (2010): 79–97; Robert Audi, “Intuition, Inference, and Rational Disagreement in Ethics,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 11, no. 5 (November 2008): 475–492; Robert Audi, “The Axiology of Moral Experience” *The Journal of Ethics*, 2, (1998) 355–375; Robert Audi, “Intuitionism, Pluralism, and the Foundations of Ethics,” in *Moral Knowledge? New Readings in Moral Epistemology*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Mark Timmons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Robert Audi, *Means, Ends, and Persons: The Meaning and Psychological Dimensions of Kant’s Humanity Formula* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> As noted Audi is a classical Theist, and not a secularist, though his Theism does not figure strongly into the specific details of the metaphysics of his moral intuitionism, or his rational, foundationalist epistemology. But he has clearly developed a thorough and insightful account of these intuitional truths. Audi takes moral truths to be necessary, non-natural, *a priori* truths, ontically grounded in the God of classical Theism that supervene (are “embedded” in) on natural properties. He gestures towards, but does not fully endorse such truths as divinely “commandable” as opposed to divinely commanded. In this case, divine commandability is thus *a priori* reasons based; reasons consonant with God’s nature. These reasons are *within* God, not *above* God. Audi is a clear and interesting example of the natural partnership of intuitionism and Theism but also Audi has worked hard to bridge the divide between Theists and non-Theists. Robert Audi, *Rationality and Religious Commitment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013). See especially chapters 6–10 in this book. Additionally, Audi espouses a fallibilistic foundationalist epistemology, a moderate foundationalism, see his Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Robert Audi, *The Architecture of Reason: The Structure and Substance of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 29–35.

too-different” intuition,<sup>26</sup> and the rationalist intuition which he takes to support robust realism.<sup>27</sup> Wielenberg, in his *Robust Ethics*, makes heavy use of Jonathan Haidt’s “social intuitionist model” even though he crafts this to his own model.<sup>28</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, in his *Moral Realism*, takes moral intuitions to be self-evident, *a priori* necessary truths.<sup>29</sup> Christopher Kulp understands moral intuitions to be (for the most part) doxastic beliefs that are *a priori*, analytically true.<sup>30</sup> David Kaspar takes moral intuitions to be intuitional apprehensions of self-evident categorical universals, or “moral kinds,” as he refers to them.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Michael Huemer construes moral intuitions to be a form of defeasible intellectual “appearance” or immediate, non-inferential moral “seeming.”<sup>32</sup> It is clear then that there is no agreed-upon way to construe moral intuitions in the new intuitionism precisely. This, of course, is not unusual in philosophy. But what’s to be made of this? Care must be taken when digging into the details of the new intuitionism to be clear on whose account of intuitionism is being examined and what the details of that account happen to be. Audi’s intuitionism, Kulp’s, Kaspar’s, Wielenberg’s, and Ross’s are all different in some important respects. Clearly, given the history of intuitionism, one can advocate a Theistic or non-Theistic version of intuitionism. As has been argued throughout, the non-Theistic version would be part and parcel of the secular moral project. The question - which version might work better, or better yet, which version might be true - will be more fully considered in this section. But the mistaken notion that in this debate, Theism is on the outside looking in, so to speak, shows clear ignorance and willful neglect of the history of the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 68–69.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 108–109.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 151–184.

<sup>28</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 101–110.

<sup>29</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 247–253.

<sup>30</sup> Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth*, 115–118; Christopher B. Kulp, “The Pre-Theoreticality of Moral Intuitions,” *Synthese* 191, no. 15 (2014).

<sup>31</sup> David Kaspar, *Intuitionism* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 99.

<sup>32</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 101–105.

controversies surrounding intuitionism. As will become apparent, intuitions *alone cannot settle the wider* questions regarding God or not God. These wider issues must be settled on other grounds. As well, intuitions *of themselves* do not seem to be necessarily categorical. Their categoricity must be grounded in other features of the moral domain. Hence, in any version of intuitionism, there are problems with the categorical's categoricity, the normativity of the normative, and the necessity of the ethically necessary. So, in this debate, it is important to keep two issues clearly distinguished. First, the particular account of intuitionism under consideration, what intuitions are, and how they work within that account; and secondly, attention must be paid to the broader account of metaphysics and Reality within which any particular version of intuitionism is nested. What do most intuitionists share in common? Christopher Kulp, following Audi, summarizes the central features of moral intuitions that are mostly agreed upon. Intuitions are understood to be non-inferential, firmly believed, comprehended, and pre-theoretical.<sup>33</sup> What exactly moral intuitions are intuitions *of* - will be more thoroughly discussed in the next chapter. In that chapter, we will further delve into the issues involving the metaphysics of intuitions and the ontology of abstract objects.

### **The Intuitionism of Michael Huemer – Phenomenal Conservatism**

The ethical intuitionism of Michael Huemer is worthy of consideration. As is true of the previous thinkers that have been examined, there is much to be learned from his thinking and much to be liked in his work. He has a notable knack for thinking clearly, nailing root issues, and venturing into many interesting and provocative subjects.<sup>34</sup> Ethical intuitionism is only of these.

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<sup>33</sup> Christopher B. Kulp, "Moral Facts and the Centrality of Intuitions," in *The New Intuitionism*, ed. Jill Graper Hernandez (New York: Continuum, 2011), 60–64.

<sup>34</sup> A sample of these include Michael Huemer, "A Proof of Free Will (Unpublished Paper)" (n.d.), <https://www.owl232.net/papers/fwill.html>; Michael Huemer, *Approaching Infinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Michael Huemer and Ben Kovitz, "Causation as Simultaneous and Continuous," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 53, no. 213 (October 2003): 556–565; Michael Huemer, "Existence Is Evidence of Immortality," *Noûs* 55, no. 1 (March 2021): 128–151; Michael Huemer, *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to*

Huemer's account of ethical intuitionism flows out of his account of the epistemology of phenomenal conservatism (PC).<sup>35</sup> He describes the epistemology of phenomenal conservatism (PC) as a mostly common sense philosophy of perception. The principle of PC is understood this way: "when it seems as if *P* and there is no evidence to the contrary, it is *reasonable to believe P*."<sup>36</sup> Now this straightforward claim should not be underestimated. It is simple, but it is not simplistic. Huemer has threaded a rather fine needle in formulating this reasonable principle. First, PC is pitted against any would-be radical skeptic who might claim that all perceptual knowledge is epistemologically suspect.<sup>37</sup> The arguments for such skeptical claims are familiar enough. There is the familiar problem of an infinite regress of justification,<sup>38</sup> or again, the well-known challenge of criteria for justifying reliable belief-forming methods,<sup>39</sup> or the oft-appealed-to distortions of perception,<sup>40</sup> or finally, the more philosophically sophisticated scenario that we might just be brains in a vat experiencing perceptual illusions.<sup>41</sup> Second, PC is a version of

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*Philosophy* (n.p.: Michael Huemer, 2021); Michael Huemer, *The Problem of Political Authority: An Examination of the Right to Coerce and the Duty to Obey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 99–101. Two points should be noted. 1) Huemer's thinking is subject to similar objections regarding supervenience that were detailed in the criticisms of both Enoch and Wielenberg, *ibid.*, 202–210. 2) He is subject to the issues associated with the plausible mechanism problem that were detailed in our criticisms of Enoch. The plausible mechanism problem presents a direct challenge to his intuitionist account of moral knowledge, *ibid.*, pp. 214–219. Although there is no space to work out these various issues here as they relate specifically to his particular version of secular moral nonnaturalism, it is not hard to see how each of these critiques might be effectively developed. Given space constraints the details must remain promissory at this juncture.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 103. Emphasis original. This is the stronger version of PC. Huemer qualifies and weakens this as we will see below.

<sup>37</sup> Huemer defines skepticism as "any philosophical theory that challenges a significant class of common sense beliefs." Common sense beliefs are generally accepted by everyone, taken for granted, and challenging such beliefs is thoroughly irrational. *Ibid.*, 18. For additional details on PC see Huemer's, "Phenomenal Conservatism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy"; Michael Huemer, "Phenomenal Conservatism Über Alles," in *Seemings and Justification*, ed. Chris Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 328–350.

<sup>38</sup> Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 8–11.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–13.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–16.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–18. Huemer has nicely stated and answered each of these arguments in chapter 8 of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*.

“direct realism” taken from an internalist, first-person standpoint.<sup>42</sup> Direct realism deems perceptual experience to be “self-evident.” It enjoys the highest initial level of plausibility and thus need not be supported by other beliefs (although it might be thus supported). It is considered presumptively true, affirmed as a “necessary truth” and not a “contingent” one, and thus should be regarded as epistemically normative. By necessary truth, Huemer means that “there is no possible world in which phenomenal conservatism is false, although there are possible worlds in which most of the things that appear to be so are not so.”<sup>43</sup> The principle of PC is “presupposed in all normal judgment and reasoning since the judgments that one makes are determined by what *seems* to oneself to be the case.”<sup>44</sup> Huemer rejects the account of the radical skeptic who asserts that there is some questionable, indirect, mediating perceptual process (i.e., a “veil”) between the objects of perception and the perceptions themselves that we experience.<sup>45</sup> Not only are perceptions both real and direct, but they are also taken to have content, and such content is considered propositional.<sup>46</sup> Thirdly, PC is a version of epistemic foundationalism. Foundational beliefs are beliefs that do not depend upon other beliefs for their justification.<sup>47</sup> The key operative concept in PC is the term “seemings.” A “seeming” is distinct from an inferential *belief* or *reason*.<sup>48</sup> A seeming is an immediate, intuitive, defeasible, *prima facie* justified appearance.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 20–22. For example, first person as opposed to an “omniscient observer” standpoint. On internalism see Michael Huemer, “Phenomenal Conservatism and the Internalist Intuition,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (April 2006): 147–158.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 102–103.

<sup>44</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 232. Emphasis added. See this claim more strongly stated in Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 107. PC underlies *all judgment* in general but is not itself a “judgment”.

<sup>45</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 121. The “veil” is a metaphor for what Huemer refers to as the “subjective inversion” of the skeptic. Such an inversion turns the cognitive states that are posited to explain our awareness of the world into a veil that ends up blocking our view of the world. This is a rather pithy and perceptive way to articulate the problem.

<sup>46</sup> Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 74.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Huemer, “Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74, no. 1 (January 2007): 41. Here, Huemer says “justification for believing that *p* is not to be confused with justified belief that *p*.”

<sup>48</sup> On this point Huemer is clear, “his version of foundationalism does not hold that ‘I have an intuition that *p*’ one may infer *p*’; or ‘It seems to me that *p*’ is a reason for *p*’.” These are versions of inferential justification, which

It is non-inferential. Appearances themselves, in the absence of defeaters, provide their own justification for their contents, which is propositional.<sup>50</sup> All justifying evidence consists of appearances.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, we experience these appearances with a kind of assertiveness or forcefulness. It should be pointed out, since its initial formulation, that Huemer has weakened the strength of the principle of PC cited above to the following:

PC If it seems to S that p, then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least *some degree* of justification for believing p.<sup>52</sup>

Huemer is clear that PC is a narrower epistemological claim about intuitive seemings or appearances and not a wider and deeper metaphysical account of such seemings. But he is also quite confident that it is possible “that PC enables us to surmount *all* epistemological problems.”<sup>53</sup> In fact, Huemer ventures only very little into the wider metaphysics of PC. He appears to think that the wider metaphysics are brute, inexplicable, trivially true, and thus, for the most part, unproblematic.<sup>54</sup> This is a significant lacuna in his account, as will be shown below.

### **Huemer’s Ethical Intuitionism**

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Huemer rejects. He states, we are justified in some beliefs without the need for supporting evidence. Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 120.

<sup>49</sup> Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 99–100.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Huemer, “Inferential Appearances,” in *Intellectual Assurance: Essays on Traditional Epistemic Internalism*, ed. Brett Coppenger and Michael Bergmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 153.

<sup>51</sup> Huemer, “Phenomenal Conservatism Über Alles,” 346.

<sup>52</sup> Huemer, “Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism,” 30. Emphasis added. Michael Tooley points out that this is an important slimming down of the force of the principle of PC. Also, see Tooley for a good critique of Huemer’s PC. Michael Tooley, “Michael Huemer and the Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism,” in *Seemings and Justification*, ed. Chris Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 306–327. The final summary is especially helpful, see pp.326–327. See also Peter Markie’s penetrating analysis of Huemer’s PC in, “The Mystery of Direct Perceptual Justification,” *Philosophical Studies* 126, no. 3 (December 2005): 347–373.

<sup>53</sup> Huemer, “Phenomenal Conservatism Über Alles,” 346. Emphasis added. He states, “PC holds out the promise of a simple and unified account of the justification of our beliefs about the external world, about the past, about the future, about values, and so on. It is otherwise very difficult, perhaps impossible, to account for all these justified beliefs, let alone to do so in such a simple manner. It therefore seems to me that this is a powerful argument in favor of some form of phenomenal conservatism.” As Michael Tooley puts it, “...direct realism conquers all in epistemology.” Tooley, “Michael Huemer and the Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism,” 318. Huemer repeats this optimism of PC in Huemer, *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*, 112–113.

<sup>54</sup> Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality*, 155. Huemer has an important contribution in this volume which will be referenced throughout our examination of his ethical intuitionism.

Huemer's volume entitled *Ethical Intuitionism* is a highly readable and well-argued defense of his version of moral intuitionism.<sup>55</sup> Like the other thinkers we have reviewed in the previous chapters, he feels compelled to comprehensively defend SMNN and is confident that he can successfully take on all comers in the metaethical debates. Any comprehensive defense first faces the challenge of carving out one's position among the wider contentious field of metaethical thinkers. Given that Huemer is defending both a version of ethical nonnaturalism and ethical intuitionism, this definition of the field is doubly essential for him.<sup>56</sup> As we have seen, both nonnaturalism and intuitionism have recently gained traction as viable metaethical positions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Huemer describes his version of moral intuitionism as a form of "rationalistic intuitionism" wherein there are "objective values" and that we are "justified in believing at least some evaluative statements on the basis of rational intuitions."<sup>57</sup> He is therefore arguing for a version of moral realism, typically classed as a form of cognitivism. But how does he justify such a commitment? His commitment to PC is the key to understanding his strategy of justification. He emphasizes that the order of priority in justification moves from *prior seemings* that already are taken to be justified and not justification that is logically *derived from* such prior seemings.<sup>58</sup> Thus intuitional seemings stand at the epistemological center. As for moral facts, in particular, intuitions "(partly) *constitute* our awareness of moral facts."<sup>59</sup> Again,

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<sup>55</sup> Huemer provides a very brief but useful summary and outline of the book. See "Précis of *Ethical Intuitionism*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78, no. 1 (January 2009): 192–196.

<sup>56</sup> Huemer divides the field in this way. 1). *Nihilism*, holds that nothing is good, bad, right or wrong (also called, Error Theory). 2) *Non-cognitivism*, holds that we do not make genuine claims about how the world is, most importantly, this applies to moral claims. 3) *Subjectivism*, holds that moral claims are made true by a subject's attitudes. Huemer takes divine command metaethics to be a species of subjectivism. 4) *Naturalism*, holds that moral claims are made true or false by natural properties of a given thing, and finally, 5) *Intuitionism*, holds that moral truths are irreducible, objective, evaluative, and that we sometimes know these claims to be true intuitively. Huemer takes nihilism and non-cognitivism to be *eliminativist* theories about ethical properties, subjectivism and naturalism to be *reductionist*, and intuitionism to be a *dualist* theory. See Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 4–7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 122. Emphasis original. In a qualifying endnote, Huemer explains, "[r]oughly, intuitions (sometimes) count as awareness of moral facts because (sometimes) moral facts correspond to the propositional contents of the

he clarifies that intuition is “our *means of cognizing* moral truths. It does not create moral truths any more than perception creates truths about the physical world.”<sup>60</sup> Intuition thus works as a function of constitutive reason. Such reasoning depends on logic, identity, and intuition that presupposes these objective principles. As a point of comparison, while moral intuition and mathematical intuitions might differ, they differ not in their intuitional “seemings” *per se* but rather in the objects of those seemings.<sup>61</sup> In this sense, intuitions are a necessary, constitutive component of knowledge of objective entities.

But how are these intuitively apprehended objective entities to be taken? More specifically, what kind of objects are they that are rationally intuited in the appearances of intuition? By Huemer’s lights, they are abstract universals that exist objectively and necessarily. He takes such universals to be “abstract things (features, relationships, types) that two or more particular things or groups can have in common.”<sup>62</sup> Huemer generally thinks that “all *a priori* knowledge is, or derives from, knowledge of the properties and relations of universals.”<sup>63</sup> He briefly outlines his take on our knowledge of abstract universals in the following way. In having concepts, we introspectively grasp (understand) universals. Any adequate grasp of a universal is a consistent, clear, and determinate grasp of abstract objects. This understanding is intrinsic and comes in degrees.<sup>64</sup> But in some strong cases, this intuitive grasping of universals involves an intuitive process that itself “guarantees” the truth of beliefs thus formed.<sup>65</sup> Next, conceptually, such an intuitive grasp is filled in in the understanding. This filling-in occurs “because

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intuitions, that intuitions represent their contents as actual, and it is non-accidental that these intuitions are true.” Ibid., p.270, nt.47. It should be noted that Huemer’s intuitionism is “non-doxastic” in nature. See Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth*, 115–116 for a useful classification of “doxastic” and “non-doxastic” epistemologies and relevant citations of various intuitionists including Huemer.

<sup>60</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 211. Emphasis original

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 215–216.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 126.

understanding the nature of a universal *inherently tends to cause* one to apprehend certain basic facts about it.”<sup>66</sup> Appearances that are seemings, then involve a “kind of propositional attitude, a sort of mental state, representing the world as being a certain sort of way.”<sup>67</sup> Propositional content is understood in an epistemic sense. To be sure, Huemer acknowledges that such *a priori* knowledge of necessary universals poses significant explanatory challenges regarding how it can be both necessary and non-accidental.<sup>68</sup> But he largely sidesteps this challenge by pointing out that this is a more general epistemological problem and not just a challenge to moral epistemology.<sup>69</sup> Given this, he argues that it is not the burden of moral epistemology to solve this problem entirely. But his attempt to meet the challenge is far too brief and misses the mark. It is just not enough.<sup>70</sup> So then, both the general and more specific moral epistemological challenges remain.<sup>71</sup> As for moral facts specifically, in Huemer’s account, they are abstract objects, a species of nonnatural, necessary, and objective facts that exist independent of us (moral platonism), that are intuitively apprehendable by us (direct realism), and can be truthfully known in the apprehension that we have of them (appearance intuitionism).<sup>72</sup> This makes Huemer’s intuitionism a version of metaethical direct realism and metaphysical and ontological dualism.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 125. Emphasis added.

<sup>67</sup> Huemer, “Phenomenal Conservatism Über Alles,” 330.

<sup>68</sup> Huemer cites a classic formulation of this put forward by Paul Benaceraf, Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 123–125. This has become known as the Benaceraf challenge. It was originally put forward as a problem for mathematical knowledge. If mathematical propositions or entities, for example, the number 5, are abstract, inert, casually effete, and isolated from us, then how can we have knowledge of them? The challenge has also worked its way over into all *a priori* knowledge generally. There is an explanatory burden that must be discharged for such knowledge. For additional exposition of this and its relevance see Clarke-Doane, “What Is the Benaceraf Problem?”; Klenk, “Old Wine in New Bottles”; Paul Benaceraf, “What Numbers Could Not Be,” *Philosophical Review* 74, no. 1 (January 1965): 47–73; Paul Benaceraf, “Mathematical Truth,” *Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 19 (November 1973): 661–679.

<sup>69</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 123.

<sup>70</sup> Tropman makes this point well. See Elizabeth Tropman, “Varieties of Moral Intuitionism,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 48, no. 2 (June 2014): 177–194. See also her other criticisms and expositions of intuitionism that are helpful. Tropman, “Intuitionism in Moral Epistemology”; Elizabeth Tropman, “Non-Inferential Moral Knowledge,” *Acta Analytica* 26, no. 4 (December 2011): 355–366; Elizabeth Tropman, “Renewing Moral Intuitionism,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 6, no. 4 (2009): 440–463.

<sup>71</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 124.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 183.

Make no mistake. Huemer's moral intuitionism is a genuine contender in the secular moral project of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Huemer's Ethical Intuitionism and Theism**

A Theist is in a good position generally when it comes to thinking through the comparative ramifications of intuitionism and Theism. A Theist can pick and choose here and need not be committed to endorsing any one version of intuitionism. After all, Theism gave birth to intuitionism. Theism is a natural home for intuitionism. It is Theistic friendly. Nothing in PC or Huemer's ethical intuitionism necessarily excludes God. As regards Theism, Huemer is, at best, agnostic, if not downright doubtful, about the existence of God. He has attempted to engage and criticize various arguments that aim to provide positive evidence that God exists. For example, he takes the ontological argument for God's existence to be "certainly fallacious," as the "epitome of sophistry."<sup>73</sup> He rejects the Kalam cosmological argument and assesses that it is simply "mistaken."<sup>74</sup> He also finds that the various cosmological arguments built on the principle of sufficient reason, the PSR, also fail, given that the PSR itself is problematic and cannot be justified.<sup>75</sup> As for the various arguments from design and the related cosmic fine-tuning of the universe for life, he finds these arguments have a bit more evidential credibility. However, the theory of evolution has supplanted all such arguments. But even if successful, he points out that the arguments are limited and cannot establish the triple-omni God thesis; that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. So then, traditional orthodox Theism is by no means established by such arguments.<sup>76</sup> Although Huemer never specifically evaluates the moral

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<sup>73</sup> Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality*, 163; Huemer, *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*, 135.

<sup>74</sup> Huemer, *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*, 142.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–146. For example, these would be arguments put forward by Samuel Clark, Leibniz, or more recently Alexander Pruss.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

argument for God's existence, he finds various knotty problems with any version of metaethics tied to God. Notably, he classes Theistic ethics as a version of ethical subjectivism. He finally demurs with the question, "Even if there is a God, why should we do what he says?"<sup>77</sup> He concludes that no argument "proves that there's a god."<sup>78</sup> When pitted against the various arguments for atheism, particularly the evidential problem of evil, things look much worse for the Theist.<sup>79</sup> He concludes,

My own attitude is agnostic: There is some reason to think the universe has a creator..., but also some reason to doubt this....None of the arguments on either side [Theism or atheism] is decisive. If there is a creator, though, it's probably not a triple-omni being.<sup>80</sup>

Given the preceding, a more careful and critical look at Huemer's handling of Theism is in order. It's worth pointing out that Theistic philosophers are the first to acknowledge the limits and challenges of all such arguments that aim to provide positive evidence for the existence of God.<sup>81</sup> Evans, for example, refers to such evidence as "signs" or "pointers" that are "widely accessible" but "easily resistible."<sup>82</sup> Still, it is interesting to consider both the quantity and creative nature of some of the newer evidential arguments for Theism.<sup>83</sup> Although each provides more or less compelling positive evidence, none *proves* God's existence conclusively. So then,

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<sup>77</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 57.

<sup>78</sup> Huemer, *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*, 159.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 178. The entire chapter 10 evaluates the positive arguments for atheism.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> See for example Plantinga. He deems that the cosmological and teleological arguments of Aquinas are less than successful, Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 77–84. He defends the ontological argument but clearly states that the argument does not "prove" the existence of God, or the truth of Theism, but rather its "rational acceptability," *ibid.*, p. 112. The same point is made in Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 221. Plantinga defends a version of the design argument, of the cosmic fine tuning of the universe for life but does not overreach in the argument in chapters 7 and 8, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*. Stephen Parrish similarly is well aware of the limits of the various arguments of natural theology, see his very thorough discussion of the various arguments that aim to provide positive evidence for the existence of God, Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*.

<sup>82</sup> Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments*, 2–17.

<sup>83</sup> See one case in point, Dougherty, Walls, and Plantinga, *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*. Sennett and Groothuis, *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment*; Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments*; Ruloff and Horban, *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology*; Taliaferro, "The Project of Natural Theology." See also Chad A. McIntosh, "Nontraditional Arguments for Theism," *Philosophy Compass* 14, no. 5 (May 2019): 1–14.

Theistic philosophers agree with Huemer in this regard. But, in turn, Theistic thinkers have not seriously engaged the work of Huemer. Part of the purpose here is to do just that.

Huemer's treatment of the ontological argument for God is a good example to begin with. He offers what he calls an interpretive paraphrase of Anselm's ontological argument as follows.

1. God is defined as a being so great that nothing greater than it can be conceived. (Premise/definition)
2. So nothing greater than God can be conceived. (From 1)
3. One can conceive of a god that exists. (Premise)
4. A god that exists is greater than one that does not exist. (Premise)
5. Therefore, if God doesn't exist, then something greater than God can be conceived. (From 3,4)
6. Therefore, God exists. (From 2,5)<sup>84</sup>

Huemer rejects the argument for reasons we will examine below. In response to Descartes's version of the ontological argument, referred to as the argument from perfection, Huemer puts forth the following parody that he intends to work as a *reductio* against the argument. If the *reductio* goes through, then the argument is refuted.

God Argument	Pizza Argument
1'. God is defined as a supremely perfect being.	1''. Spizza is defined as the supremely perfect pizza.
2'. So God is supremely perfect.	2''. So Spizza is supremely perfect.
3'. Any supremely perfect thing possesses all perfections.	3''. Any supremely perfect thing possesses all perfections.
4'. Existence is a perfection.	4''. Existence is a perfection.
5'. So God possesses existence.	5''. So Spizza possesses existence.

It should first be pointed out that there is no single ontological argument. The argument is rather a family of varying but related arguments.<sup>85</sup> There are many versions of the ontological argument, some formulated better than others, some more successful than others, but all are

<sup>84</sup> Huemer, *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*, 135.

<sup>85</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 98.

controversial.<sup>86</sup> Huemer's interpretive paraphrase is only one such formulation. Even so, it is relevant to ask whether a formal argument is required to believe that there is a being, who is God, who is a necessarily existing being that has all perfections? The answer would be no. Take Peter van Inwagen, a noted Christian philosopher, who believes that this is true of God but concludes that the ontological argument is not successful. He takes it that the argument simply begs the question and does not, therefore, go through, but he accepts its premise for other reasons.<sup>87</sup>

Huemer's handling of the argument is less than admirable for several reasons. First, he does not engage the argument's more recent and stronger modal versions. Second, the first premise of his interpretive paraphrase of Anselm's argument states that "God is defined as...." This interpretive rendering of the argument already builds a tacit rejection of the argument into its first premise. One cannot simply define God (or anything else for that matter) into existence.<sup>88</sup> Even Theists who accept the ontological argument agree that you cannot simply define things into existence. Thirdly, premises 2 and 3, as stated, utilize the philosophically weaker and vaguer notion of *conceivability* to motivate the argument. Although Anselm did use

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<sup>86</sup> For good a survey and introduction to this argument see Graham Oppy, "Introduction: Ontological Arguments in Focus," in *Ontological Arguments*, ed. Graham Oppy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1–18; Robert Maydole E., "The Ontological Argument," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, eds. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 553–592; for a recent comprehensive overview see Jason Megill, "The Ontological Argument," in *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief*, ed. C. P. Ruloff and Peter Horban (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 75–97. S5 modal logic is simply explained on pp.84–85 in Megill's review as well. For an historical investigation into the issues, particularly on Kant's objections to the argument see Morgan Keith Jackson, "'Something than Which Nothing Greater Can Be Thought' and Kant's *Ens Realissimum*," *New Blackfriars* 103, no. 1103 (January 2022): 77–96.

<sup>87</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "Begging the Question," in *Ontological Arguments*, ed. Graham Oppy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 242. His earlier critique can be found in Peter Van Inwagen, "Ontological Arguments," *Nous* 11, no. 4 (November 1977): 375–395. For a detailed response to van Inwagen see Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 106–108, see also Brian Leftow's historical exposition of a similar point, "Why Perfect Being Theology?," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69, no. 2 (April 2011): 103–118.

<sup>88</sup> Huemer, *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*, 138. "I think the Ontological Argument's basic error is a confusion about how definitions work." Huemer set's up his argument in this way, given he thinks this is the basic strategy of the argument as well as the basic error of the argument.

this term, it makes the argument more readily vulnerable.<sup>89</sup> The test for the argument should not be psychological conceivability but rather logical contradiction and coherence. Fourthly, Huemer's charge that the argument is "the epitome of sophistry" might be true if the argument only amounted to his paraphrase. But there are stronger versions that he ignores. Take, for example, Stephen Parrish's slight reworking of Plantinga's modal ontological argument. It runs as follows.

1. The proposition *there is a maximally great being* is possible in the broadly logical sense...
2. There is a possible world in which there is a maximally great being...
3. Necessarily, a being with maximal greatness would be necessarily existent and would have (at least) omnipotence, omniscience and moral perfection essentially...
4. What is necessary does not vary from possible world to possible world (so that if it is possible that *p* is necessary, then *p* is necessary).
5. [T]herefore, a being that is necessarily existent and essentially omniscient, omnipotent and wholly good exists.<sup>90</sup>

One can readily see the striking differences in how the two ontological arguments are formulated and expressed. Parrish goes into great detail explaining and testing this modal form of the argument against other versions and criticisms and concludes that the argument is not only logically sound but can withstand a wide array of criticisms lodged against it.<sup>91</sup> Clearly, it does

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<sup>89</sup> For example, David Hume attacked the argument on just this point. "Nothing, that is distinctly conceivable, implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently, there is no being, whose existence is demonstrable." David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 141. For a critique of Hume on this see Robert Merrihew Adams, "Has It Been Proved That All Real Existence Is Contingent?," in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 195–208. Simply put, what God is does not depend upon our powers of conceivability.

<sup>90</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 81. Parrish uses *maximally great being* and *a being with maximal excellence* slightly differently. Parrish's restatement takes a version of Plantinga's argument developed in his Alvin Plantinga, "Is Theism Really a Miracle?," *Faith and Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (1986): 115–116. Plantinga has developed other similar versions in Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*; and *The Nature of Necessity* as previously noted. See also Greg Welty, *Alvin Plantinga, Great Thinkers* (Phillipsburg NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023). Welty provides the best accessible introduction and overview of Plantinga's thinking. On the ontological argument see chapter 4, "Plantinga on Theistic Arguments."

<sup>91</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*. See the entire chapter 4 which develops this in great detail; much more detail than can be presented here. Parrish concludes, "Although I have not examined every variant of every objection, I believe all significant attacks on the modal ontological argument have been answered above."

not merely define God into existence. Against Kant, Parrish shows how the term “existence” in the argument can be taken as a qualified predicate of actuality.<sup>92</sup> Parrish’s conclusion - the argument is logically valid, not logically contradictory; the GPB is therefore a logically coherent concept. If so, given S5 modal logic, it is reasonable to conclude that this God exists essentially and in actuality. Necessary existence of God who is maximally great, is analytic to the notion of the GPB. Finally, the argument rationally affirms Theism, a particular account of Theism, Perfect Being Theism, but by no means constitutes a “proof” for the existence of God.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, the argument can be and has been resisted in a variety of ways. The parody is one of the most famous strategies for resisting the argument.<sup>94</sup>

What to make of Huemer’s parody cited above? Even though the ontological argument is logically valid, the parody seeks to show that there must still be something wrong with the argument if it allows for all kinds of perfect but non-existing entities. Huemer’s Spizza, the perfect pizza, is one of many attempts at this sort of parody. But when analyzed, does the Spizza parody work? The parody, of course only works given a parallel *equivalence* to the arguments. As Huemer rightly points out, the Theist must show that the Spizza argument *is not parallel* to

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 56–63. Parrish makes three important distinctions as follows:

*x* has *A-existence* if and only if *x* exists extra-mentally in the actual world.

*x* has *P-existence* if and only if *x* exists in any way.

*x* has *N-existence* if and only if *x* exists in every possible world.

Both *N-existence* (necessary existence) as well as *A-existence* (actual existence) add something to the notion of existence. Existence can thus be meaningfully predicated of things so characterized *ibid.*, 60. Even G.E. Moore weighed in on this issue, see W. Kneale and G. E. Moore, “Symposium: Is Existence a Predicate?,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 15, no. 1 (July 5, 1936): 154–188. See also Frank B. Ebersole, “Whether Existence Is a Predicate,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 60, no. 18 (August 29, 1963): 509; Murray Kiteley, “Iv.—Is Existence a Predicate?,” *Mind* LXXIII, no. 291 (1964): 364–373; P. F. Strawson, “Is Existence Never a Predicate?,” *Critica* 1, no. 1 (January 1967): 9–15; J. William Forgie, “How Is the Question ‘Is Existence a Predicate?’ Relevant to the Ontological Argument?,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 64, no. 3 (December 2008): 117–133; Vera Peetz, “Is Existence a Predicate?,” *Philosophy* 57, no. 221 (July 1982): 395–401; J. Michael Dunn, “Is Existence a (Relevant) Predicate?,” *Philosophical Topics* 24, no. 1 (1996): 1–34.

<sup>93</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 116. Plantinga says also that the argument only shows that it is rational to accept its conclusion. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 221.

<sup>94</sup> Gaunilo’s of Marmoutiers perfect island is the first such parody used against Anselm’s original argument. For an interesting defense of Anselm against Gaunilo’s argument see William E. Mann, “The Perfect Island,” *Mind* 85, no. 339 (July 1976): 417–421.

the God argument.<sup>95</sup> To answer this, however, we must dig a bit deeper into the argument with some important distinctions in hand. The most relevant distinction is a distinction in kinds of properties relative to kinds of things or beings that exist. Consider the following.

*F* is an *E-property* of *x* if *F* belongs to *x* in each world in which *x* exists.

*F* is an *N-property* of *x* if and only if *x* exists in every possible world and *F* is an *E-property* of *x*.

*F* is a *C-property* of *x* if *x* has *F* in some possible worlds but not in others.<sup>96</sup>

With the following distinctions in hand, we can now clarify why the Spizza parody does not work. Consider first the God side of the matter. In the modal ontological argument premises, 3 and 4 spell out what a maximally great being is essentially. Note that these must all be *N-properties* as specified above. As such, they are analytic to the nature of the GPB, given they are intrinsic and essential to the nature of the GPB. By contrast, Spizza must necessarily be composed of both *N-properties* and *C-properties*.<sup>97</sup> The perfect pizza must be a physical entity, a finite, contingent entity; it must have a particular size, shape, texture, composition, the perfect pepperoni, or sauce, and so on. These are all *C-properties*. In different possible worlds, these would be or could be otherwise. Even in the actual world, Spizza would be different according to personal tastes and preferences. In any case, the *N-properties* of Spizza depend upon the *C-properties*. This is incoherent. *N-properties* are indestructible; they cannot cease to exist, cannot be other than they are, and do not vary from world to world. Essentially, this is what necessity is; this is what an *N-property* is. By contrast, *C-properties* can cease to exist. The necessity of *N-properties* (that which cannot be otherwise) cannot depend upon *C-properties* (that which always can be otherwise or fail to exist) for their necessity. For instance, the abstract number 2 cannot be

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<sup>95</sup> Huemer, *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*, 137.

<sup>96</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 26. Parrish takes these to be primarily intrinsic properties but they might also include relational properties.

<sup>97</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, "The Logical Structure of Anselm's Arguments," in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 229, 236. Adam's makes just this point in examining Anselm's 2<sup>nd</sup> argument in the *Proslogian*.

dependent upon the number 2 slice of Spizza for its necessity. This shows not only that the notion of Spizza, as Huemer has specified, is incoherent, but it is also notably different than the GPB of the strongest modal ontological arguments. The modal ontological argument aims to show that the GPB is the *only* concrete, primary (non-derivative) necessary being that is maximally great that can be coherently conceived.<sup>98</sup> Spizza is not only incoherent but will vary from world to world. Thus the parody fails. Conversely, the modal ontological argument stands, and it is reasonable to believe that the GPB exists necessarily.<sup>99</sup> Up until now, this project has assumed PBT. With the preceding argument in place, we have established the rational acceptability of this central idea for our project going forward.

### **Phenomenal Conservatism: A Critical Analysis**

How well does the phenomenal conservatism of Huemer, upon which his ethical intuitionism is built, stand up to critical scrutiny? This is now the question. What is the explanation Huemer offers for the phenomenal conservatism he takes to be central to his account of truth and Reality? There is an awfully tight “fit” or “match” in direct realism between our knowing capacities and Reality for this to be chalked up to the way things just happen to be. Direct realism requires a precision of “fit” or “match” that must come from two directions; from our perceptual and knowing capacities to things known, then from things known, as intelligible and knowable, to our perceptual and knowing capacities. This exquisite and extreme fit can be no happenstance relation. As we have seen, Huemer considers PC a necessary and not merely

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<sup>98</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 86. It is realized here that my critique of Huemer’s parody does not utilize his explication of the left side of the parody. In defense of this move, I maintain that for his parody to be philosophically stout, it would have to stand up to the strongest modal ontological argument.

<sup>99</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*. In chapter 6 Parrish explains that one of the key reasons for accepting or rejecting the modal ontological argument is the worldview of the person evaluating the argument. He refers to “worldviews” as “ultimate noetic structures” that are evaluative. The position taken here agrees with this way of seeing things.

contingent epistemological relation. There is no possible world in which PC is false.<sup>100</sup> Although he stipulates that this is an epistemological claim and not a metaphysical one, naturally, such a narrower claim pushes out to the wider metaphysical and ontological account that supports the claim. When considering these broader questions, a side-by-side comparison of Huemer's direct realism with Stephen Parrish's Theistic conceptual direct realism is instructive.

Table 1

Category of Comparison	<i>Huemer's Intuitive, Nonnaturalistic Direct Realism</i>	<i>Parrish's Theistic Conceptual Direct Realism</i>
God	God is irrelevant to the necessity of logic, the mathematical, or the moral. These truths are a priori. God's existence is slimly possible but highly doubtful. Impersonalist Grand Story of the universe and world; appears to reject a generalized, causal naturalistic grand story, instead accepts exotic naturalism; the multiverse. This occurs by cosmic chance, in whatever ways this might be defined. <sup>101</sup>	The personal God of Theism exists out of his own necessity. This personal God is both the creator of all things as well as the one upon whom all things continue to be dependent. <sup>102</sup>
Ultimate Reality	Ultimate Reality is both brute and impersonal.	It seems obvious that a personal being is, in some fundamental sense, greater than an impersonal being. Our own personal being is inexplicable in a totally impersonal universe of wide, bottom-up processes of mere physics and chemistry. <sup>103</sup>
Abstract Objects	Abstract objects (universals) exist independently. An autonomous Third Realm of abstract objects	Abstracta do not exist independently but exist as Ideal Objects in the mind of God.

<sup>100</sup> Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 103.

<sup>101</sup> Klaas J. Kraay, ed., *God and the Multiverse: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015).

<sup>102</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 344.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

	exists. Third Realm Platonic realism is true. Again, abstract objects, however conceived, are impersonal abstracta.	There is no autonomous Third Realm. AOs are essentially objects for and of minds. <sup>104</sup>
Laws of Logic and Necessary Moral Truths	<p>The existence or non-existence of God makes no difference in the areas of ...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Laws of Logic and mathematics</li> <li>2. Objectivity and necessity of moral truths.</li> <li>3. There is no grounding required for any of the above truths to obtain.</li> </ol> <p>These are all brute necessities.</p>	God is a logically necessary being, the GPB. All necessary truths are consonant with God's being and mind and exist in a relation of asymmetric dependence upon God.
The Physical and the Mental	Both physical entities and conscious ones exist in the first place because of chance, after that by laws. In any case, both are ultimately brute.	Both physical and conscious entities exist because God has created them, and...
The Match of Physical and Mind	The physical and conscious entities work together because one supervenes on the other. But supervenience fails to explain the supervenient relation itself. There is no account on offer for this relation. It is brute.	The physical and conscious entities work together because God, being rational, good, and omniscient, has created the world so that they do, and finite minds are analogs of God's infinite mind. Some version of the Leibnizian theory that possible worlds are Ideal Objects in the mind of God. <sup>105</sup>
Creation <i>ex nihilo</i>	There is some credible evidence that the universe is created. However, the theory of evolution supplants this evidence. A generalized and exotic evolutionary story is Ultimately brute. <sup>106</sup>	The factor that separates the actual world from all other worlds, given Theism, is the free agency of God, the will of God, the creative power of God. God wills and continues to will that the actual world exists. This world alone is willed by God to be instantiated. <sup>107</sup>
Contingent World	That the actual world exists in the first place, and exists as it does, is	The question why this possible world is the one that is

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Huemer, *Approaching Infinity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 258. On these things, in the final analysis, Huemer candidly admits that he does not know.

<sup>107</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 323.

	a brute fact.	actualized is a significant question. A critical outcome of this question is that the actual world looks to be incontestably contingent. Neither it nor the things in it, including ourselves, must necessarily exist. <sup>108</sup>
Intelligibility of World	The intelligibility of this world is a brute fact. There is no Ultimate explanation for either our own rationality or the intelligibility of the actual Universe. Foundationalism stipulates that no such Ultimate explanation is possible or required.	Intelligibility is the fact that the universe is the instantiation of Divine Ideas (IR-Realism) by design and, therefore, the product of a rational mind and thus knowable to rational minds.
Match of Mind and World	The “fit” or “match” between mind and world is direct, necessary, yet brute. PC is based on “appearances” or “seemings” that require no additional justification in the absence of defeaters. Such seemings possess propositional content and commit one to, upon reflection, categorical belief; that one knows P. PC is a version of foundationalism.	The Necessary shape of Consciousness. We are created by God in his image. This is the doctrine of the <i>Imago Dei</i> . Our mind is an analog of God’s mind hence there is a direct and necessary “match” between mind and world. This is a version of Theistic foundationalism.
Moral Agency	Free agency is affirmed (as opposed to determinism) but is nevertheless inexplicable and brute.	Being created in God’s image This includes relative free agency. <sup>109</sup>
Universals	Phenomenal aspects of consciousness involving universals is ultimately brute.	Qualia, the phenomenal aspects of consciousness are mediated by the mind, judgments, which are direct, of such propositions; they are thus true or false. <sup>110</sup>
Mind Body Dualism	Affirms some version of mind-body dualism, but how this works is mysterious as well as brute (Mysterianism).	Mind-body Dualism in a Theistic conceptual understanding that is not Mysterianism. <sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., See appendix 1, pp. 351-359 for a brief but useful discussion of free agency.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., See final summary on dualism, pp. 346-350.

The first thing that should be noticed in the foregoing comparison is that Huemer's PC is ultimately a version of brute fact theory (BFT). Even the necessity of the necessary is brute. But this brute necessity is oxymoronic if not an outright logical incoherence. BFT is a rather poetic way to refer to the idea that all concrete beings are logically contingent but inexplicably so. The universe ultimately exists by inexplicable chance, in whatever formal or metaphysical way that this happens to be defined.<sup>112</sup> The range and kinds of brutality in Huemer's wider account are truly staggering. This, then, is a fundamental problem, a crippling problem, for PC. PC purports to delineate a kind of transcendental necessity for phenomenal "appearances" that is built into the very structures and processes of knowing itself. Yet this foundationalist necessity must itself be ultimately brute.<sup>113</sup> Hence PC cannot account for the self-understanding of PC itself. This undermines PC itself. This problem is part of what will here be called the *problem of exponential cumulative brutality*;  $PECB^x$  to the *nth degree*, for short. That the *problem of exponential cumulative brutality* is not a "one off" kind of problem of either "kinds" or "quantities" of brutality is argued here.

Reflecting on it only a little bit will show that cumulative brutality very quickly morphs into an exponential explosion of ramified brutality to the *nth degree* encompassing large swaths of Reality. This is what makes it ramified brutality. This is what makes it a very big and crippling problem. As an exercise in logical tracing, that begins at any single point from within the universe, one can trace all the individual webs of branching's, connecting links, various layers, and laws of brute posits; pick a point, any point, and work it out. Exquisite fine-tuning of

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<sup>112</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*. See chapter 8 for an extensive discussion of BFT. In that chapter Parrish concludes, "As the falsity of Brute Fact theory is a necessary presupposition to any thought whatsoever, the falsity of brute fact is actually a transcendental principle." Ibid, pp. 214-215. See also William A. Dembski, "The Chance of the Gaps," in *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science*, ed. Neil A. Manson (New York: Routledge, 2003), 251–274.

<sup>113</sup> Parrish, "Brute Facts All the Way Down."

our universe for life is brute, complex specified information is brute, order is brute, laws are brute, teleology is brute, design is brute, the emergence of mind is brute, the match of mind and world is brute – all brute - and the list could easily be extended. It is a very useful exercise of tracing to confirm the PECB<sup>x</sup> to the *nth degree*. The problem of *cosmic bruteness* is really the exponential collection of the various posits of cumulative bruteness. Bruteness means that whatever is brute is what it is for no reason. There is no explanation. There are two kinds of brute facts, epistemic and ontological. *Epistemic* ones have no explanation of which we are aware, though there might be an explanation. These, however, are not truly brute.

*Ontological* brute facts are ones for which there are no reasons or explanations as to why they exist or exist in the manner in which they do.<sup>114</sup> If positive cumulative evidence supports a position, then cumulative negative evidence must also count negatively toward rejecting a position. In SMNN, Reality is shot through and through with such bruteness. PECB<sup>x</sup> to the *nth degree* exists at every level; it thus stands as negative cumulative evidence against BFT as an Ultimate explanation of the Universe, things, and people, especially the moral domain.

Additionally, bruteness is not a unifier; it does not and cannot logically or metaphysically unify. There is no such thing as deep, cohering, cosmic, brute unity. Brute unity is a thin ontological chimera. Nor is bruteness a necessity. Bruteness is ultimately arbitrary. Brute necessity is incoherent. That which is ultimately arbitrary can be neither logically necessary nor logically or ontologically unifying. Finally, such cosmic bruteness is by its very nature impersonal. In fact, it is the natural outcome of an Ultimately impersonal ontology of SMNN. Thus, the reason for persons, as such, given impersonal cosmic bruteness is inexplicable. All versions of SMNN suffer from this deep and wide problem of ramified cumulative bruteness to the *nth degree*.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

## A Theistic Transcendental Argument and Test

The second thing that should be noticed in the above comparison is the explanatory resources that are available to Theistic foundationalism. These are more specifically spelled out in the following.

Transcendental Axioms of a Theistic Foundationalism.<sup>115</sup>

1. *Axiom 1.* The order of being logically precedes the order of knowing.<sup>116</sup>
  - a. Axiom 1 is necessarily true, characterized by absolute necessity, in all possible worlds.
  - b. It entails no logical contradiction.
2. *Axiom 2.* Given PBT, the order of being is Ultimately personal. There is unified and perfect consonance in God's being and knowing. Whatever God's subjectivity might be like, God is self-knowing, perfectly and entirely so. Perfectly, God knows.
3. In PBT, Ideal objects (IOs) within the mind of God subsist in a relation of asymmetric dependence upon God. They are neither above God, nor outside and autonomous to God, but within God. To God, IOs are, therefore, concrete since God is a concrete being and thoughts are concrete. In fact, God is the paradigm case of a concrete being. This is a conceptual truth. However, in relation to us, IOs are IR-Real, i.e., real but at the same time

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<sup>115</sup> Theistic foundationalism is proposed here in response to the foundationalism proposed by Huemer.

<sup>116</sup> C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 86. This is what Evan's says of the order of being/the order of knowing. It is a "medieval distinction between the ontological order and the epistemological order. For example, Thomas Aquinas believed that God is the ground of existence for all other beings. Hence, in the order of being (\*ontology), God is primary. However, humans come to know finite objects through their senses first and must infer the existence of God from God's effects. Thus, in the order of knowing (\*epistemology), finite objects precede God." (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Section 83, Question 3). Combined with the design intuition, we are made by God, pre-disposed by God, to see God's creative hand in the created order of things outside (objectively), as well as inside (subjectively).

abstract and immaterial.<sup>117</sup> Later the argument will be made that IOs, concrete to God but abstract to us, are mediated by Information.

4. *Axiom 3.* The God of PBT is an Agent. Again, this is a conceptual truth. God's active will, as opposed to brute fact or impersonalist necessity, separates the actual world from all other worlds.<sup>118</sup> This world did not have to exist; rather, God creatively chooses that it exists. This world is, therefore, radically contingent.
5. *Axiom 4.* God is the Ultimate source of all that is; God's Being is the Reality of the Isness, of the Goodness of all that is Good. The reasons for God's existence are essentially intrinsic to his nature.
6. *Axiom 5.* God's Ultimacy is an ongoing Ultimacy as well. All that is, in some fundamental sense, *perdurantly* depends upon God, God's will, in a continuous manner.
7. *Axiom 6.* We are made in the image of God. Reality is made to be intelligible. Our minds are made to know and understand IOs, given they are thinkable things. This is because our minds are analogs of God's mind.<sup>119</sup> Knowing, as such, involves causal relations.<sup>120</sup>

*Transcendental Argument:* If the foregoing transcendental axioms are true, then God is the necessary pre-condition for the possibility of the intelligibility of the intelligible, the rationality of the rational, the knowability of the knowable, and the Informational of information. God is the precondition for the possibility of Mind, of both the knower and the known, and therefore of rational thought itself. The match between knower and known, the necessary shape of consciousness, mind, and will, comes from the side of God, the Creator of all things. God

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<sup>117</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 335.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>119</sup> Adams, "Divine Necessity," 218. Regarding our knowledge of necessary truths, he states, "I also think that that fact constitutes an argument for the existence of God." Adam's more comprehensive position is that this knowledge involves both necessary logical truths as well as necessary moral, axiological and aesthetic truths.

<sup>120</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 121.

creatively determines the causal direction of traffic of all contingent beings in the first place. Our finite minds are analogs of God's Infinite Mind. They are built to know as God knows but in finite ways. This is the doctrine of PBT combined with the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*. This means that God, a necessary being, is the necessary prerequisite for the rationality and intelligibility that is always taken as foundational to thinking and understanding itself; even by the atheist, even by the denier of rationality. Even the laws of logic should be understood as divine thoughts. Logical argument itself, presupposing the truth and normativity of logic, presupposes the existence of God.<sup>121</sup> PBT argues that God is more than a mere sufficient condition (the PSR, the principle of sufficient reason) but is rather a necessary condition (the PFSR, the principle of fittingly<sup>122</sup> suitable reason) for rationality itself. In this sense, God is transcendentally necessary.<sup>123</sup> This is the transcendental argument for Theism.<sup>124</sup>

By extension, for purposes of the moral argument presented here, God is the necessary pre-condition for the categoricity of the categorical as well as the normativity of the normative. It must be emphasized that this is not an argument *to* God. Instead, the transcendental argument is an argument *from* God. In this sense, in broad and fundamental strokes, there is something about

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<sup>121</sup> Anderson and Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic."

<sup>122</sup> The PFSR is different than the PSR. The PSR is highly disputable for a host of reasons. Consequently, the PSR is thought to be doubtful by many as an independent criteria for evaluation of necessity. However, the PFSR can be used as an independent criteria given that "fit" and "fittingness" can be made to be fairly precise and very tightly tailored criteria to very specific contexts to which it is applied. For a recent defense of the PSR see Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason*.

<sup>123</sup> James Anderson, "No Dilemma for the Proponent of the Transcendental Argument: A Response to David Reiter," *Philosophia Christi* 13, no. 1 (2011): 194.

<sup>124</sup> It should be noted that this formulation has modal features. For more on transcendental arguments, see Robert Stern, "Transcendental Arguments," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Spring 2019); Dan Zahavi, "Husserl and the Transcendental," in *The Transcendental Turn*, ed. Sebastian Gardner and Matthew Grist (Oxford University Press, 2015), 228–243; Bálint Békefi, "Van Til versus Stroud: Is the Transcendental Argument for Christian Theism Viable?," *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 2, no. 1 (March 27, 2018): 136–160; even David Enoch deploys a version of the argument, see Enoch, "A Transcendental Argument for the Concept of Personhood in Neuroscience." He also claims that his IBE argument might be deemed a kind of transcendental argument for normative truths, Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 71., nt.79. Parrish takes his argument in *God and Necessity* as a multi-faceted transcendental argument, see pp.278-279. He takes this sort of argument to be the most fundamental argument of all the arguments for Theism.

the kind of God that God is that anticipates what the world will be like and the kind of beings who will reflect his image; namely, moral rational beings, who are moral agents, in a rational intelligible Universe. This is the Theistic ontological background. *All SMNNs assume this rational background while rejecting Theism.* However, on the basis of their own beliefs and ontology, they render their own rational assumptions problematic. For the Theist, this way of seeing things is not at all problematic. It is all grounded in God because it all creatively proceeds from God and is, in some fundamental ontological sense, contained within God and depends upon God. Furthermore, if God is the necessary precondition for the possibility of the possible, God is also the limit for the impossible. The impossible is the logically contradictory, manifest in logical incoherence. This is the modal transcendental argument of Stephen Parrish (MTAP for short). This way of seeing things is common to Nicholas Wolterstorff, Alvin Plantinga, Robert Adams, Carl F.H. Henry, Gordon Clark, William Lane Craig, Greg Welty, and others, and goes back much further through Leibniz, Augustine, and Paul (Col 1:16-20) and John (John 1:1-18), and back ..... even to ....God! So says the Theist.<sup>125</sup> If true, this is clearly the logical result. But in this case, God is not merely a thin brute explanatory stopping point because of our limited epistemological capacities and the inscrutability of Reality. From the ontology of God's essential nature conceptually flows all of the abounding plenitude and fullness of what is, what may possibly be, and what cannot possibly be. In moral debate concerning the nature of categoricity and the nature of Right and Good, this is of fundamental ontological importance. Once the MTAP is put in place, the task of navigating the various debates between Theists and SMNNs on these issues becomes much more manageable. In the end, the SMNN may still disagree, but the

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<sup>125</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 335–336. For a fuller discussion of this see chapter 9, especially additional references in endnote 54, pp.401-402.

nature of the differences between Theists and SMNNs will be much sharper and clearer. This will advance the debate concerning Theism and the secular moral project.

For the Theist, the moral domain and the moral nature of humanity are then taken to be, in their own right and in their own unique way, evidence for the existence of God, as Aquinas put it, *from the standpoint of the order of knowing to understanding the nature of the order of being*. From our viewpoint of the order of knowing, the moral argument must work all the way back to fundamental ontology, all the way to God. The MTAP contains a set of axioms that can provide the Theist with a foundation for critically navigating the challenging and complex task of engaging secularist views. A simple question, a transcendental test, is a useful tool for testing the metal of the MTAP against conflicting worldviews. This test is as follows.

*The Transcendental Test:* Is the thinker's own thinking undercut or contradicted by the thinker's own system of thought, life, and Reality? Call this the *T-test*.

The upshot of Parrish's transcendental argument is that it is not possible for God not to exist. *God, the GPB, is a singular, necessary being of a certain sort*. By contrast, atheism fails the T-test on many fronts and, therefore should be rejected. This then provides a complex, interlocking set of axioms, arguments, queries, and a T-test that must be run to see how it works out and ends up in metaphysical debates. It literally might be worked from any point, at any side, and in any direction. It can be worked out from backward to forward (or the reverse), top-down to bottom-up (or the reverse), from the outside in, to the inside out (or the reverse). Pick a point, any point, settle in, systematically trace things out, and work out the argument from the selected point and see how it runs. In any case, it is bound to be interesting and compelling for the Theist

Huemer's PC and ethical intuitionism, when worked from the inside out (cognitive faculties to world) or the outside in (world to cognitive faculties), fails the T-test. Ramified, exponential, cumulative brutality to the *nth degree* stands as cumulative evidence against

Huemer's account and all such similar accounts. It entails fundamental, ontological, cosmic bruteness. Nothing that is necessary is arbitrary.<sup>126</sup> That which is brute is ultimately arbitrary. Brute necessities are, therefore, a logical incoherence. Theists, on the other hand, have a comprehensively adequate ontology and epistemology that accommodates direct realism well. But, the wider secular metaphysical account fails to adequately support the thin epistemological account of Huemer's non-Theistic direct realism. It's a one-inch-deep ocean of impersonal Reality that utterly lacks explanatory power and unity. God, the GPB, who is personal, who is Mind, after whom our minds are fashioned, is a deep and wide explainer and unifier of Reality. God is the Living God. The two accounts present a stark and vivid contrast in terms of their central metaphysical core and their explanatory adequacy.

### **Intuitionism, Ethical Intuitions, and the Design Intuition**

Ethical intuitionists such as Huemer take ethical intuitions to be true. As we have seen, they take such intuitions as part of a wider account of intuitionism in general. For Huemer, this wider account is that of PC. In this section, it will be argued that the design intuition should be similarly construed as true. This is something that no advocate of intuitionism has heretofore discussed.<sup>127</sup> The position advocated here is this: epistemological intuitionism, ethical intuitionism, and the design intuition should be construed holistically and in a complimentary fashion. If ethical intuitionists affirm ethical intuitions, then they should also affirm the design intuition. If they reject the design intuition, then this rejection is arbitrary and unfounded. Suppose they accept the design intuition and the objective features of design in the universe. In that case, this should figure into how they understand intuitionism in general and ethical intuitionism in particular. If they do this, to be fully coherent and consistent, ethical intuitionists

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<sup>126</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 84.

<sup>127</sup> At least in the research undertaken for this project none has been found.

should take the moral nature of humanity and the moral domain as ultimately sourced in God. This is because humanity's rational and moral nature is designed by the same God who made the intelligible cosmos for life. They are fitted and matched to each other. Similarly, this same God who created the cosmos for life, and persons like us, must also figure into our understanding of the moral domain itself. Again, we are fitted and matched to this domain. Consequently, God stands at the center of our moral lives and the moral domain in deeply fundamental ways. If this thesis is successful, then this section will help support our larger moral argument for God's existence, albeit in a limited way.

Douglas Axe has written an engaging book entitled *Undeniable: How Biology Confirms our Intuition that Life is Designed*.<sup>128</sup> In the book, Axe, a research biologist, focuses more on explaining and illuminating the amazing complexity of the actual biology of life and how it matches our intuition that life is designed. But he focuses very little on the design intuition itself. However, several researchers have empirically investigated the design intuition, with some noteworthy results.<sup>129</sup> Deborah Kelemen's thoroughgoing research shows that children have a built-in cognitive bias to see living entities as intentionally and purposefully created by a

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<sup>128</sup> Douglas Axe, *Undeniable: How Biology Confirms Our Intuition That Life Is Designed*, First edition. (New York, HarperOne, 2016). Axe's vitae of technical publications on various aspects of innovative experimental biological research are extensive and impressive. Any simple search will reveal these; they will not be fully documented here.

<sup>129</sup> Helen De Cruz and Johan De Smedt, "Paley's iPod: The Cognitive Basis of the Design Argument Within Natural Theology," *Zygon* 45, no. 3 (September 2010): 665–684; Helen De Cruz and Johan De Smedt, "Paley's iPod: The Cognitive Appeal of the Cosmological Argument," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 23, no. 2 (2011): 103–122; Deborah Kelemen, "Are Children 'Intuitive Theists'? Reasoning About Purpose and Design in Nature," *Psychological Science* 15, no. 5 (May 2004): 295–301; Deborah Kelemen and Cara DiYanni, "Intuitions About Origins: Purpose and Intelligent Design in Children's Reasoning About Nature," *Journal of Cognition and Development* 6, no. 1 (February 2005): 3–31; Elisa Järnefelt, Caitlin F. Canfield, and Deborah Kelemen, "The Divided Mind of a Disbeliever: Intuitive Beliefs About Nature as Purposefully Created Among Different Groups of Non-Religious Adults," *Cognition* 140 (July 2015): 72–88; Joshua Rottman et al., "Cultural Influences on the Teleological Stance: Evidence from China," *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 7, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 17–26; Eric Schwitzgebel and Fiery Cushman, "Philosophers' Biased Judgments Persist Despite Training, Expertise and Reflection," *Cognition* 141 (August 2015): 127–137.

nonhuman agent.<sup>130</sup> The nonhuman agent would be someone akin to God. These results have been confirmed cross-culturally as well. These findings are relevant and tie into our examination of moral intuitionism. As a result of the argument Michael Huemer provided about appearances and appearances previously reviewed, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the appearances and seemings of design should be constructed alethically, realistically, and objectively, regardless of one's belief in Neo-Darwinian evolution.<sup>131</sup> If this is the case, then we expect to find a fit or match between our design intuitions, built into our cognitive faculties, and the objective features of design that are detectable and identifiable in the intelligible world. In fact, this is what is found. This finding is not based on unspecified patterns of order, but rather on identifiable complex and abstract features of specified information.<sup>132</sup> Design detection is able to pick out CSI<sub>nf</sub> as well as CSI<sub>nt</sub>.<sup>133</sup> Detection of design works from the intuitional seeming or appearance of design to picking out identifiable objective features by which such design is

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<sup>130</sup> Kelemen, "Are Children 'Intuitive Theists'?. Reasoning About Purpose and Design in Nature," 295. It should be noted also that Kelemen and others have recently taken these findings to build children's story books that reshape these natural biases for acceptance of evolutionary theory that conflicts with these inbuilt cognitive biases. See for example, Natalie Emmons, Kristin Lees, and Deborah Kelemen, "Young Children's Near and Far Transfer of the Basic Theory of Natural Selection: An Analogical Storybook Intervention," *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 55, no. 3 (March 2018): 321–347; Samuel Ronfard et al., "Inhibiting Intuition: Scaffolding Children's Theory Construction about Species Evolution in the Face of Competing Explanations," *Cognition* 211 (June 2021): 104635. J. Maex et al., "The Impact of an Education Program About Evolution on the Shift from Teleological to Evolutionary Explanations Among Belgian Children Around the Age of Ten," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2010): 2539–2543. Suffice it to say that the storybooks are largely fictional creations by the authors and have little grounding in the real, hard-documented evidence for various conjectured evolutionary transformations. To be sure, this is nothing new. See Jonathan Wells, *Icons Of Evolution: Science Or Myth? Why Much Of What We Teach About Evolution Is Wrong* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2002).

<sup>131</sup> Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*. Plantinga has convincingly argued that the conflict lies more with the God excluding commitments and beliefs of metaphysical naturalists in the sciences than with any evidence for evolutionary theory itself.

<sup>132</sup> William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science & Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999). See especially chapter 6 entitled, "Intelligent Design as a Theory of Information."

<sup>133</sup> Dembski, *No Free Lunch*, 165–166. With respect to what is called here CSI<sub>nt</sub>, Dembski points out that one of the central features of CSI<sub>nf</sub> is that it is holistic, where the parts are related to the whole in a preplanned and top-down manner. As well, CSI<sub>nf</sub> must be contingent. It is neither deterministic function nor deterministic natural law; it requires contingency, *ibid.*, 155.

specified, leading then to an inference of design. Such is the design inference.<sup>134</sup> This inference is then a 2<sup>nd</sup> order judgment that is objectively confirmable and testable. Coupled with the fact that we live in a goldilocks universe, a universe of exquisitely fine-tuned parameters; the cumulative evidence for Theism is indeed strong.<sup>135</sup> Huemer recognizes that all of this is credible evidence for God, but he also rightly points out that this cannot establish the existence of the God of PBT.<sup>136</sup> In this, he is correct. The God of PBT is reasonably established to exist in other ways, as has been shown. However, all of this evidence moves cumulatively in the same direction. All strong cumulative evidence points to God as part of a more comprehensive case for his existence.<sup>137</sup> As previously pointed out, the design and fine-tuning elements of the argument for God should be taken to run all the way from the beginning of the universe to the very kinds of beings that we are. All of the following should be tied together.

1. The Grand Story beginning, the origination of our actual, contingent universe...

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<sup>134</sup> William A. Dembski, *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance Through Small Probabilities* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Dembski, *No Free Lunch*.

<sup>135</sup> Stephen C. Meyer, *The Return of the God Hypothesis: Compelling Scientific Evidence for the Existence of God* (New York: HarperOne, 2020), in Meyer see chapters 7 and 8 for well documented discussions; on fine-tuning arguments see Robin Collins, "A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. Louis P. Pojman and Michael C. Rea, Seventh edition. (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 210–227; Collins, "The Teleological Argument: An Exploration of the Fine-Tuning of the Universe." See also recent works Geraint F. Lewis and Luke A. Barnes, *A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely-Tuned Cosmos* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Michael Denton, *The Miracle of Man: The Fine Tuning of Nature for Human Existence* (Seattle WA: Discovery Institute Press, 2022). Michael Behe also has a useful discussion, see his Michael J. Behe, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism* (New York: Free Press, 2008). See p. 216 for a very useful chart that illustrates the surprising depth of fine-tuning in our universe for life. For an introduction and overview of design arguments see Elliott Sober, *The Design Argument* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Waller, *Cosmological Fine-Tuning Arguments*. There is also an interesting version of the design argument that works from the positive evaluative goodness of the created order of things, that is, the world exists because it is good that it should exist, see Mark Wynn, *God and Goodness: A Natural Theological Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2013), as well a version that works from the beauty of the created order to God, see Brian Ribeiro, "The Argument from Beauty," in *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief*, ed. C. P. Ruloff and Peter Horban (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 220–235.

<sup>136</sup> Huemer, *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*, 148–149. "Life is only possible....because our universe luckily started out very far from thermal equilibrium, i.e. with extremely low entropy, 14 billion years ago, for some unknown reason."

<sup>137</sup> Even Anthony Flew and Thomas Nagel, both atheists, recognize the strength of this evidence. Antony Flew and Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

- a. It's ordered and lawful features...
  - b. It's being exquisitely fine-tuned for life...
  - c. It's being intelligible for knowing beings...
2. The origination of information and specified complexity...
3. The origination of complex biological information and life...
4. The origination of sentient life...
5. The origination of complex biological persons such as ourselves; persons with knowing minds; moral, rational, agential beings.<sup>138</sup>

Once all of these are tied together and considered as a whole, cumulatively, over time, each utterly novel previous phase being required for the following phases, leading up to the moral, rational beings that we are, then the moral argument for God's existence is seen to have a cumulative evidential power that it does not possess in isolation from this chain of diachronic evidence. *The design intuition shows that any argument to God from design should also include the design intuition itself.* We are designed by the Designer to detect and understand design and its implications by the designer as part of the design plan. The property of design is an alethic, objective, and detectable property. The intuitional fit or match between mind and world, moral order, and human nature, central to all versions of intuitionism, indicates a common creative, personal, unified source of origin for all these, namely the living God. Surely, this is a rich and powerful cumulative case for Theism. It stands in stark contrast to the ramified, cumulative, evidentially negative, brute fact theory of Huemer that *ultimately* explains nothing.

### **Some Specific Objections to Theism**

But Huemer has some specific objections to Theism that should be answered.

*Objection 1:* Huemer says, it isn't obvious that if there were a creator of the universe we would be obligated to obey that creator. What if you actually found out that you were created by Satan? Would you be *morally obligated* to obey Satan's will in all things?<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> This mirrors the six really hard problems previously listed, see p. 114 as well as the final chapter, p. 314 .

<sup>139</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 58–59; Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality*, 153–154.

*Reply:* This objection fails to fully account for God's uniqueness and the nature of the relationship that we necessarily have with God by which we are categorically obligated to God. More will be said on this below. However, there is a straightforward reply to Huemer's hypothetical. The hypothetical should be rejected because it undercuts the very moral intuitions that allow it to work as a hypothetical in the first place. The hypothetical actually works on the moral differences between God and Satan, Satan being evil and God being good. It further works on the unstated assumption that existence is good.<sup>140</sup> Without these moral distinctions in place, the hypothetical makes no sense and cannot even get off the ground. But Satan being evil, as well as the creative source of our being, which is good, is entirely counterintuitive. The hypothetical then works by undercutting our entrenched moral intuitions about God, Satan, and the goodness of being. If this is the case, then clearly, the hypothetical undercuts our moral intuitions. If it undercuts our moral intuitions, then these are untrustworthy, and ethical intuitionism should be rejected. If our ethical intuitions are untrustworthy, Huemer's ethical intuitionism should be rejected. If that is true, then Huemer's hypothetical fails the T-test. His hypothetical undercuts his intuitionism; it thus only works if we reject his intuitionism. If this is true, then the hypothetical should be rejected outright; it cannot even get off the ground. Of course, we should not obey Satan; Satan is evil; a good being gone bad. Of course, we should obey God; God is good; intrinsically and essentially. This is in line with our moral intuitions and the goodness of being.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> It was Thomas Aquinas who strongly identified being and goodness, hence the intrinsic goodness of being. For an excellent review of this see Jan Aertson A., "Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good," in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 56–73. Robert Adams argues, [belief] in the existence of an evil or amoral God would be morally intolerable." Robert Merrihew Adams, "Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief," in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 159.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 192. Morris makes this same point by appealing to what many Theist's would take to be

*Objection 2:* Divine command theory (DCT) metaethics should be viewed as a version of ethical subjectivism. Take, for example, rightness. In DCT, rightness is reducible to and dependent on the attitudes of an observer, in this case, God. DCT holds “that right actions are right only because God commands them.”<sup>142</sup> Huemer’s objection is very similar to the position of Russ Shafer-Landau that DCT is a version of constructivism. The answers provided there will, therefore, not be repeated here.<sup>143</sup> The same solution works for both cases.

*Reply:* The reply to this again is straightforward. It only applies to certain theological voluntarist versions of DCT. The real question here is this; in what does the objectivity of the objective consist? Objective in what sense? Objectivity is a relation that can be deployed in various ways.<sup>144</sup> Huemer and Theists simply understand the term and use the term in different ways. His dubbing of DCT, therefore as subjective is toothless in every respect; “potato, patata” – a negligible and idiosyncratic distinction that makes little substantive difference. Even Huemer acknowledges in his endnotes that this objection does not fully work in the case of the DCT advocated by Robert Adams in his *Finite and Infinite Goods*.<sup>145</sup> God, as Adam’s would put the matter, just *is* The Good. This good of God is, therefore, objective *to us*. That is the substantive and vital difference. Theistic metaethics is consequently not to be taken as a version of subjectivism.

There is, however, another problem with Huemer's ethical intuitionism that deserves scrutiny. He has a problem with categorical moral obligations. This is illustrated in a piece where

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an intuitive, necessary truth. “Any non-divine created person has a *prima facie* duty to be thankful to God for his existence.”

<sup>142</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 55.

<sup>143</sup> See pp 176-179. Huemer’s actual argument is listed in *ibid*, 58.

<sup>144</sup> The matter of objectivity was discussed in the section on David Enoch, chapter 2.

<sup>145</sup> Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. See chapter 1 of Adams. Find Huemer’s comments and qualifications in this regard p.261, nt.12. Also, Craig in debate has it right when he says that DCT is objective in the sense that God’s commands are rooted in, entailed in God’s nature, and reflected in his will and affirmations. Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality*, 194-196.

he discusses the ontology of moral realism.<sup>146</sup> In this piece, Huemer explains that moral duties are based on our reasons for doing or not doing things. For him, these reasons are prudential and categorical. By prudential, he means not self-interested. By categorical, he means "...reasons for actions that do not derive from an action's favorable relation to the satisfaction of the agent's desires."<sup>147</sup> Categorical reasons are also said to be "objective" in the sense that they are "observer-independent." He then deploys *The Probabilistic Reasons Principle*, which specifies the conditions for reasons (*because of*, or *in virtue of*) for or against undertaking particular actions. He aims then to apply and test this account of reasons. His discussion of reasons testing revolves around what he refers to as *The Antitorture Argument*. This argument is a paradigm case sort of argument, an argument against the recreational torture of babies. Using this paradigm case, one can theoretically examine what kind of moral reasons, what kind of categorical reasons (if any) are consistent with a particular system of metaethics and what implications this may have for assessing that system. He explains that this is the best outcome of the argument he can aim for. "It is not an argument that it is *wrong* to thus torture babies (such a conclusion being too ambitious for one philosophy paper). It is only an argument that we have *some reason* to avoid torturing babies."<sup>148</sup> Huemer's argument for moral realism is of course his argument for moral intuitionism, and for him, this must boil down to the fact that our reasons flow out of our intuitions; both to refrain from torturing babies, but also that we have no positive intuitive reasons to engage in such torture. This is as strong as categoricity gets for Huemer's intuitionism. Does Huemer's intuitionism then make it *categorically wrong* to torture babies in any strong realist ontological sense? No, it does not; it cannot. It only provides one with *some*

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<sup>146</sup> Michael Huemer, "An Ontological Proof of Moral Realism," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 30, no. 1–2 (January 2013): 259–279. Substantive discussion of ontology is noticeably absent in the article.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 261. This of course is pitted against a Humean account of motivation and desire.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 265–266.

*reason* not to do so, as he himself acknowledges. There is obviously a crucial and fundamental problem here.

The Theist will point out that Huemer has the whole matter backward. The Theist maintains that we have categorical reasons *because* we are obligated; we are not categorically obligated *because* we have reasons.<sup>149</sup> In a Theistic account of categoricity, it is simply categorically wrong to torture babies recreationally. In Theism, the order of knowing proceeds from the order of being. Our having reasons proceeds from the ontology of God's being; God's Goodness, moral perfection, and excellence. As God's commands reflect His being, their categorical nature reflects the categorical nature of our obligations, and these obligations are loaded with full-blooded authority, God's authority; in this case, that the recreational torture of babies is necessarily wrong, absolutely, in all possible worlds. Conversely, that it is right, good, and true to refrain from such. Even if no actual babies existed, it would still be categorically wrong to torture them. Only Theism can provide grounding for this strength and kind of moral categoricity. It is both necessary and universalizable categoricity. This is quite different from merely having *some* (prudential and weak categorical) *reason* not to torture babies recreationally. *Objections 3*: There is no real Theistic grounding of morality until someone explains why we should obey God.<sup>150</sup>

*Reply*: If we understand two things, we will understand how it is that we should obey God. First, Who God is, the kind of being God is, and second, our relationship to God, given the kind of being God is. God is essentially Good, essentially Righteous, exists necessarily, is Creator of all

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<sup>149</sup> Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality*, 200.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

things, the source of all that is.<sup>151</sup> God, as Ultimate source, is the ground of moral right and good; as Ultimate Being, is personal and continues to will our being out of his abundance of grace and love. Furthermore, we are made in God's image, designed to know God and to live in loving relation to Him. Our being, and its goodness, is a reflection of God's being and His goodness. If God is the ultimate source of our being, then we always-already stand in a participative relation to God in an ongoing, dependent relationship that carries with it categorical, intrinsic, and necessary obligations to Him. This provides both necessary and sufficient Theistic grounding for moral good, moral right, and moral duties. This explains why we should obey God.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This section has examined Theism and ethical intuitionism. It looked at the history of intuitionism and various versions of the new intuitionism. It undertook a detailed analysis of the ethical intuitionism of Michael Huemer with a focus on his direct realism. The section then undertook a critical defense of Theism, given Huemer's criticisms, with a focus on the modal ontological argument of Alvin Plantinga. Following this, the section then moved forward by comparing a version of Theistic direct realism, that of Stephen Parrish, with Huemer's secular version. This comparison clearly illustrated the substantial differences between a secular version of direct realism and a Theistic version. Out of this comparison, the section then argued that secular versions of ethical intuitionism, Huemer's as only one example, suffer from a pervasive problem of cumulative bruteness; this makes them implausible. A brief transcendental argument was then introduced, the design intuition was defended as alethic and real in the same sense as intuitionism generally and moral intuitions specifically, then some specific objections to Theism that Huemer has raised were answered. With the last of these, the section ended with the

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<sup>151</sup> For an expanded account of this see the enlightening account in Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation, The Aquinas lecture 46, 1982* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1982). The same point is made in Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 413.

conclusion that Theism has good grounds for the claim that we should obey God; that we stand in a categorically obligable relation to God.

## Chapter 6

### God, Abstract Objects and Secular Moral Nonnaturalism

#### The Secular Moral Platonism of Christopher Kulp

##### Summary of the Chapter

This section aims to work through the various issues and debates that revolve around the claim of SMNNs that moral properties and truths are grounded in some form of autonomous realm, variously referred to as Plato's heaven, the Third Realm, or a domain of universals, or abstracta, and the like. The outline of the chapter is as follows. Firstly, the debate between Theists and SMNNs will be framed and clarified by looking at what the early SMNNs had to say about the ontology of the Third Realm; that moral properties are somehow nonnatural or *sui generis*. Secondly, this will then be compared to what current SMNNs understand this ontology to consist of. Current SMNNs are aiming to be ontologically heavyweight in their ontology and metaphysics. A very brief excursus is required to show that this strategy is clearly distinguishable from that of current ontologically lightweight nonnaturalists, sometimes called quietists. A discussion of Plato's heaven, otherwise known as the Third Realm of abstract objects, and the problems associated with this kind of ontology will follow. This discussion will add needed detail by fleshing out the current SMNN heavyweight ontological position. The realist account of abstracta will be briefly contrasted with the many non-realist proposals for understanding these things and various Platonized naturalistic proposals. Thirdly, the details of the debate between Theists and SMNNs will be engaged with a focus on the positive account of Theism, an account of Theistic conceptualism (TC). The central notion developed here will be this - what are taken to be abstract objects (AOs) are instead best construed as ideal objects (IOs)

in the mind of God. This thesis, ideal objects in the mind of God, will then naturally lead into the third section that takes propositions to be fundamentally “thinkable things” by the appropriate kinds of minds. Following Stephen Parrish, it will be argued that since certain moral propositions are not logically necessary, entailing narrow logical contradiction if denied, they are instead appropriately characterized as “synthetically” necessary. Synthetic necessary propositions are made true given their essential nature and with reference to things external to themselves. This involves a correspondence theory of truth developed in a truthmaker account. It will be argued that God’s being and affirmation provide the essential grounding for such true, synthetically necessary moral propositions. The moral propositions that God affirms are necessarily true because they stem from God's nature and affirmations, which are unchanging and eternal. As such, the moral propositions that God affirms have an essential source of grounding that is eternal and unchangeable, providing the necessary basis for them to be synthetically necessary. In this sense, they are absolutely necessary; that is, true in all possible worlds since God exists necessarily in all possible worlds, including the actual world.

### **The Early Secular Moral Nonnaturalists**

As was reviewed in an earlier section, G.E. Moore, in the *Principia Ethica*, focused on the nature of good. He argued not only that good was the central subject matter of ethics, he characterized good as primitive, ultimate, intrinsic, nonnatural, irreducible, unanalyzable, indefinable, timeless, an end in itself, and somehow objective. All of this amounts to good being inexplicable.<sup>1</sup> Core nonnaturalists that followed him, for the most part, argued similarly. One of the legacies of this characterization of ethics was the resulting aftermath of non-cognitivism.<sup>2</sup> Another consequential legacy was the demise of nonnaturalism itself and any system of ethics

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<sup>1</sup> Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study*. Vol. 3: *From Kant to Rawls*, 633.

<sup>2</sup> For a full review of this see Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics*. For the classic account of non-cognitivism, otherwise known as logical positivism, see A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*.

that attempted to build upon such an opaque and thin notion of good. The point here is that Moore and his predecessors never developed a clear ontological picture of the good or any so-called Third Realm that might be associated with it.<sup>3</sup> It should also be pointed out that Moore explicitly argued against what he termed “metaphysical” interpretations of the good, by which he intended a “Supreme Good” that existed in some nonnatural “supersensible” realm.<sup>4</sup> As Moore worked with his opaque and thin notion of good, it seemed impossible for him to give a clear, substantive, and detailed ontological account of good so characterized.<sup>5</sup> And such proved to be the case for the core nonnaturalists that followed him.<sup>6</sup> Robert Shaver makes a convincing historical interpretation that Moore and the core nonnaturalists that followed him never developed a substantial nonnaturalist ontology since that was not what they envisioned when analyzing the fundamental ethical notion of good.<sup>7</sup> Their efforts are instructive. Metaphysical accounts about something so opaque and thin are undoubtedly challenging to provide.<sup>8</sup> How much can be said of good in this sense? What kind of basis for metaethics can this really provide?

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<sup>3</sup> Bengson notes that the expression “third realm” owes to Frege, who held that some entities “are neither things in the eternal world nor ideas. A third realm must be recognized. Anything belonging to this realm has it in common with ideas that it cannot be perceived by the senses, but has it in common with things that it does not need an owner so as to belong to the contents of consciousness.” Quoted in John Bengson, “Grasping the Third Realm,” in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, ed. Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 38, nt. 1. The Fregean view is defended by Colin P. Ruloff, “Divine Thoughts and Fregean Propositional Realism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 76, no. 1 (August 2014): 41–51. It can thus rightly be said that the current SMNNs owe as much to Frege as they do to Moore.

<sup>4</sup> This takes up the entire 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Principia Ethica*. Presumably this refers to classical Platonism.

<sup>5</sup> Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study. Vol. 3: From Kant to Rawls*, 633.

<sup>6</sup> These thinkers would be Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*; C.D. Broad, “Is ‘Goodness’ a Name of a Simple Non-Natural Quality?,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 34 (1934 1933): 249–268; Alfred C. Ewing, *The Definition of Good*, 1948th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012); Ross, *The Right and the Good*; Ross, *Foundations of Ethics*.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Shaver, “Non-Naturalism,” in *Themes from G.E. Moore: New Essays in Epistemology and Ethics*, ed. Susana Neccetelli and Gary Seay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 283–306. As Shaver comments, “Indeed it is hard to reconstruct an argument for an ontological view from the arguments that the nonnaturalists give.” *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>8</sup> It is recognized that Moore did not have available a well-developed account of either properties or supervenience, both of which have proven invaluable to subsequent accounts of the axiological and the ethical. The “Preface to the Second Edition” of the *Principia Ethica* clearly shows this. See Moore's second preface, *Principia Ethica*, 1–27.

## New-Wave Secular Moral Nonnaturalism

As was true of Moore and the earlier core nonnaturalists, the new wave SMNNs are threading a path that rejects both ethical naturalism and ethical supernaturalism as they carry forward the secular moral project. However, they do so with a distinctive, robust realist, nonnaturalist, heavyweight ontology. This heavyweight ontology advances the debate in some critical and unique respects.<sup>9</sup> However, their accounts of metaphysics are still largely lacking in ontological detail. This lack of detail is a problem for SMNNs, given the essential and distinctive role that the Third Realm of abstracta plays in their metaethics. Without it, SMNN simply would not be SMNN. It would not be distinctive. It would collapse back into some form of naturalistic moral realism, the same system of metaethics that SMNNs regard as inadequate in the first place.

A careful reading of David Enoch shows that he refers to robustly real normative properties throughout his work in an ontologically heavyweight sense. Yet, his account of the ontology of “Plato’s heaven” is relatively thin and provides little substantive detail.<sup>10</sup> A careful reading of Erik Wielenberg shows a similar lack of substantive ontological detail of the Third Realm.<sup>11</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau works his nonnaturalism in terms of *a priori* philosophical truths that are ontologically heavyweight; these are naturalistically constituted, but he likewise lacks

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<sup>9</sup> The larger metaphysics of Moore is only skeletal. It is generally taken that Bertrand Russell, Gottlob Frege, G.E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein stand at the forefront of early analytic philosophy and set its subsequent course. Moore accepted the existence of universals, which he also called “abstract ideas.” See his section “Being, Fact, and Existence” as well as “Abstractions and Being” in G. E. Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Collier Books, 1953); see also good analysis and commentary in David O’Connor, *The Metaphysics of G.E. Moore* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1982). Moore also took propositions to be real, given an identity theory, close to a correspondence theory of truth, as apprehended facts about the world. He also took propositions to be truths that might exist without any minds at all, see Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, 324. See also Michael Potter, “The Birth of Analytic Philosophy,” in *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy*, ed. Dermot Moran (London: Routledge, 2008), 49. However, Moore seems never to have made the explicit connection so as to synthesize his views of the metaphysics of universal properties, relations and propositions with his understanding of metaethical, moral properties, relations and propositions. These issues form the heart of the current project of SMNNs as they carry forward the nonnaturalist, secular, moral project that the early work of Moore has inspired.

<sup>10</sup> Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*.

<sup>11</sup> Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*.

ontological detail in his account.<sup>12</sup> Michael Huemer's ethical intuitionism, with a strong Platonist flavor, also does not fare much better regarding discussing substantive nonnaturalist ontology as it relates to metaethics.<sup>13</sup> Christopher Kulp and David Kaspar provide more ontological detail in their accounts of nonnaturalism with considerably more discussion of the various issues involved.<sup>14</sup> Kulp's account will be examined more carefully later on in this chapter.

### Other Options to Heavyweight Moral Platonism

It needs to be pointed out that not all SMNNs are of the ontological heavyweight sort. There are a considerable number of significant realist ethical thinkers that believe nonnatural ethical truths can be had without the heavyweight ontological commitments of robust realism.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, there are realist Platonist naturalists who eschew nonnaturalistic Platonism altogether and take abstract entities in a strictly ontological naturalistic sense.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, once the field is surveyed beyond these options, there is a dizzying array of various arealist, conventionalist, and antirealist proposals regarding abstract objects; the field quickly becomes bewilderingly

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<sup>12</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*.

<sup>13</sup> Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*. Huemer has discussed ontology a bit more in his work *Approaching Infinity*. In this work however, as interesting as it is, he does not discuss the ontology of the Third Realm directly or his metaethics in light of abstract objects.

<sup>14</sup> Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth*; Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality*; Kaspar, *Intuitionism*.

<sup>15</sup> This is often referred to as reasons based, normative ethics, or quietist ethics. See Derik Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1, 2 and 3 of 3 vols., The Berkeley Tanner Lectures (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011); Matthew H. Kramer, *Moral Realism as a Moral Doctrine* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*; Thomas Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); John Skorupski, *The Domain of Reasons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton NJ: Princeton university press, 1978). For critical examination of quietist ethics see Doug Kremm and Karl Schafer, "Metaethical Quietism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 643–658; Sarah McGrath, "Relax? Don't Do It! Why Moral Realism Won't Come Cheap," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, vol. 9 (New York: Clarendon Press : Oxford University Press, 2006), 186–214; Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, section 5.3, 121–133. For a critical examination of Parfit from a Theistic perspective see Jakobsen, *Moral Realism and the Existence of God: Improving Parfit's Metaethics*; see also Georg Gasser, "Normative Objectivity Without Ontological Commitments?," *Topoi* 37, no. 4 (December 2018): 561–570; Kian Mintz-Woo, "On Parfit's Ontology," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 5 (2018): 707–725.

<sup>16</sup> William FitzPatrick J., "Ontology for an Uncompromising Ethical Realism," *Topoi* 37, no. 4 (December 2018): 537–547. See also Bernard Linsky and Edward N. Zalta, "Naturalized Platonism Verses Platonized Naturalism," *Journal of Philosophy* 92, no. 10 (n.d.): 525–555. Linsky and Zalta have developed a very elaborate account of Platonized naturalism.

complex and challenging to navigate.<sup>17</sup> The bottom line, based on the above, is this: when it comes to realist accounts of abstract objects, any explanation of a specific domain (such as morality, normativity, axiology, mathematics, necessary beings, etc.) must be anchored in some broader metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology of abstract objects. It is incumbent, therefore, that robust realists and Theists provide just this sort of wider explanatory account in the debates concerning SMNN. For the most part, robust realists have failed to do this.

### **Abstract Objects and the Third Realm of Abstracta**

Questions about the nature of the Third Realm and its denizens loom over the proposals of all SMNNs. By itself, the claim of SMNNs within the context of metaethics appears to be somewhat plausible. However, suppose one tries to set that isolated claim within a broader metaphysical account of the Third Realm. In that case, difficulties become apparent as one works toward developing the contours, character, and content of the more overall metaethical account. What does the more comprehensive metaphysical understanding of the Third Realm look like? How does SMNN fit within and integrate within this broader account? What sort of more comprehensive ontology is involved here? What of the epistemology of this more general account in light of the motivations driving the metaphysics of the SMNN account? Can the kind of necessity the SMNN aims for be had by appeal to the Third Realm? If so, what are the philosophical costs? If not, why not, and what are the implications? From just these few questions, it is not hard to see that merely appealing to Plato's heaven or some unspecified account of modern Platonist ontology will not suffice to bolster their version of metaethics. The

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<sup>17</sup> All of the various different views are surveyed and thoroughly analyzed by William Lane Craig in, *God Over All*; and, *God and Abstract Objects*. These various accounts would be arealism, conventionalism, which both view the question of abstract objects to be meaningless. Then there are the various antirealist positions such as neutralism, free logic, fictionalism, ultima facie accounts, neo-meinongianism, and pretense theory. Craig ends up endorsing a version of Theistic anti-realism (nominalism), *ibid.*, 488. See also Rosen, "Abstract Objects"; Matteo Plebani, "Recent Debates over the Existence of Abstract Objects: An Overview," in *Abstract Objects: For and Against*, ed. José L. Falguera and Concha Martinez Vidal (Cham: Springer, 2020), 1–14.

wider account with sufficient detail will require more than a limited and single-focused analysis of the metaethical and the Third Realm. The Third Realm itself must be considered as a whole, and the metaphysics of SMNN must be situated within this larger context; otherwise, the SMNN account remains piecemeal and largely underdeveloped. Many of the metaphysical claims made by SMNNs can only be adequately understood once elaborated with the larger metaphysical framework of the Third Realm as a whole. The ontological structure of the Third Realm must heavily shape SMNN's account of the nature of Reality. Furthermore, until this is worked out, the position's broader coherence (or incoherence) will remain largely hidden and undisclosed. In short, the account requires development and precisification. Therefore, SMNNs incur an obligation to meet this challenge.

SMNNs do not claim to be reviving the Platonism of old. Contemporary Platonism is different than the Platonism of Plato. Plato's heaven for contemporary Platonists is notably different. It is couched in a somewhat different ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology. Plato believed in a god of sorts, the Demiurge, a personal, finite creator god. SMNNs deny God's existence or the relevance of God for metaphysics or metaethics. For Plato, it is not certain whether Ultimate Reality, as related to the forms, is to be taken as personal or impersonal.<sup>18</sup> Most likely, it is impersonal. It is evident, however, that Ultimate Reality *must be* impersonal for contemporary SMNNs. The orthodox Platonic doctrine of the forms also plays no part in the current debate. As we will see, the present discussion turns on matters related to abstract objects (AOs hereafter).

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<sup>18</sup> Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy. Vol. 1: Greece and Rome: [From the Pre-Socratics to Plotinus]*, 13, vol. 1 (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1993), 189–203; Andrew S. Mason, *Plato, Ancient Philosophies* (New York: Routledge, 2014). See especially chapter 8 of Mason for a good discussion of God as rendered in Plato. See also John Dillon and Daniel J. Tolan, “The Ideas as Thoughts of God,” in *Christian Platonism*, ed. Alexander J. B. Hampton and John Peter Kenney. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 34–52. Note that the early Greek philosophers were not secularists, typically, they were not *a*-theistic as they are often portrayed in modern secularist assimilations. See Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers: The Gifford Lectures*, 1936.

Theists of old found ancient Platonism quite amenable to their metaphysics, but in Christian Theism, everything was centered in and flowed out of the infinite personal God. Theists could craft Platonism along distinctive Theistic lines. The main historical traditions were that of Plotinus and Augustine. Plotinus influenced Augustine. This is one of the reasons why Platonism was so attractive to the Theists of old. The position developed in this work is Augustinian. For Augustinian Theists, Platonic forms were taken to be ideas or ideal objects (IOs hereafter) in the mind of God. Given this long and venerable history and intellectual tradition, the current challenges posed by modern moral Platonism to Theism are not at all entirely novel for Theists. Indeed, there are differences between the ancient and the contemporary debates, but it is the same family of challenges that the Platonism of old posed initially. In this regard, robust realism is the new kid on the block. In Theism, this debate has deep roots and history.<sup>19</sup> Sorting out these various issues will take us to the heart of the differences between Theists and moral secularists with Platonist leanings. Undoubtedly, robust realism is in deep metaphysical trouble if its appeal to the Third Realm fails. Thus the whole matter warrants careful examination.

For the Theist, God is no mere theoretical posit such as an abstract object. Given the being that God is and God's powers, God fills out the metaphysical work required by the theory because God can be and do the actual comprehensive and wide-ranging work in Reality that the theory proposes. After all, in Theism, God is *the Living God*, a creative agential being. Without a doubt, nothing - no being, entity, or power- matches God in any secular theory. All such attempts by secularists, in various ways, to mimic God in His being, powers, or works must fail. For the

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<sup>19</sup> For a good collection of essays on this see Alexander J. B. Hampton and John Peter Kenney, eds., *Christian Platonism: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021). See also Louis Markos, *From Plato to Christ: How Platonic Thought Shaped the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021) with an interesting section of the Christian Platonism of C.S. Lewis; Gareth Matthews, "Anselm, Augustine and Platonism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 61–83.

Theist, this extends the notion that the order of being precedes the order of knowing, to the idea that the order of knowing not only flows out of the order of being but that the order of knowing is grounded in the order of being. God's being and work in Reality thus precede any theoretical work in the account that any finite thinker might craft. The theory worked out here is simply an attempt to accurately capture and describe God's being and work in Reality. It does not create God or his works. It does not merely conjecturally posit God. Instead, it works out the complex implications of God's being, the being that God is, and the philosophical ramifications of these truths for metaphysics and metaethics.

At first glance, the claim of SMNNs within the context of metaethics by itself appears to be plausible. However, once that isolated claim is set within a broader metaphysical account of the Third Realm, difficulties become apparent as one works to develop the contours, character, and content of the broader metaethical account. In whatever ways the totality of the Third Realm happens to be conceived, AOs of SMNN must make up a very thin slice of this. What does the more expansive metaphysical account of the Third Realm then look like? How does SMNN fit within and integrate within this account? What sort of broader ontology is involved here? What of the epistemology of this wider account in light of the motivations driving the metaphysics of the SMNN account? Can the kind of necessity the SMNN aims for be had by appeal to the Third Realm? If so, what are the costs? If not, why not, and what are the implications? From these few questions, it is not hard to see that merely appealing to Plato's heaven in some unspecified account of modern Platonist ontology will not suffice. The more expansive version must be explored and filled out with sufficient detail. This comprehensive detail will require more than a single focused, rough, and ready analysis of the metaethical or merely gesturing in the direction of the Third Realm.

By contrast, the Theist will argue that Platonist arguments for the autonomy of AOs (e.g., Frege and others) given some feature beyond the ken of the human mind are *eo ipso* an argument for the Mind of God rather than for Platonism. This is the argument that will be developed here. Theism can co-opt any such secular argument and always take it one step further to the being and mind of God. By doing so, Theism can draw on the argument to explain phenomena that appear to be beyond human comprehension. A mind, as such, or God's mind in particular, is a more natural terminus for things that are thinkable, like numbers, equations, propositions, moral principles, and the like. The intuitive premise is that all of these AOs are initially taken to be mind-related sorts of entities. They are things thought. They can then be further taken as "things fundamentally thought" in the mind of God, that is, as IOs in the mind of God. This has been the position of Theists advocating Theistic Conceptualism for millennia. The upshot, then, is this. The force of the Platonist arguments pushes us in the direction of personalist Theism, God as Mind, rather than towards impersonalist autonomous AOs of the Third Realm. As an example, let us briefly review the moral Platonism of Christopher Kulp and then examine his account in more detail as we advance the discussion.

### **The Secular Moral Platonism of Christopher Kulp**

In his book, *The Metaphysics of Morality*, Christopher Kulp sets out to develop and defend a thoroughly worked out metaphysics of ordinary, tutored, everyday, commonsense morality that he takes to be implicit in the moral thinking of most people. Most people, he argues, believe that certain things are morally right and morally wrong for everyone at all times. They believe objective moral truths exist and are not made true by merely believing them so. But also, Kulp fully acknowledges that people are fallible in their judgments and can be mistaken in

what they take to be morally right, wrong, good, evil, true or false.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Kulp will defend the thesis that the core of our everyday moral beliefs is true.

While his main goal is to develop a metaethical metaphysics, that is, a 2nd-order, metaethical account of moral metaphysics, much of the effort throughout his works is spent analyzing the character of various 1<sup>st</sup> order moral propositions and drawing out the 2nd-order metaethical implications of this analysis.<sup>21</sup> He argues for an explicitly Platonic moral ontology that grounds 1<sup>st</sup> order moral truths, 1<sup>st</sup> order moral facts, and 1<sup>st</sup> order moral properties. This ontological domain of *sui generis* moral properties exists independently of human cognition.<sup>22</sup> Kulp's account is developed as a version of intuitionist moral realism.<sup>23</sup> His is a secular, non-theistic, moral nonnaturalism.

In *The Metaphysics of Morality*, Kulp initially reviews the gamut of various non-realist metaethical positions<sup>24</sup>, which clears the way for him to develop the basic details of the positive case for his version of intuitive non-naturalism.<sup>25</sup> He first focuses on the propositional character of everyday moral locutions. Morality is communicative and interpersonal, and propositional. According to Kulp, one of the most important features of such moral locutions is that they are

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher B. Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth*, 112.

<sup>21</sup> Most of the philosophical work regarding first order moral propositions is done in the first book, Christopher B. Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth: A Theory of Metaethics and Moral Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017); Other relevant works are Christopher B. Kulp, "The Pre-Theoreticality of Moral Intuitions," *Synthese* 191, no. 15 (2014); Christopher B. Kulp, "Moral Facts and the Centrality of Intuitions," in *The New Intuitionism*, ed. Jill Graper Hernandez (New York: Continuum, 2011), 48–66; Christopher B. Kulp, "Disagreement and the Defensibility of Moral Intuitionism:," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2016): 487–502.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher B. Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 17. All citations here are from the print version of Kulp's book. See also Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth*, 17, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth*, 115–116. Kulp notes that among intuitionists moral intuitions are understood in one of two ways, either, doxastically; as a class of moral belief, or non-doxastically, as a disposition for moral belief. Kulp accepts both senses of moral intuition but sides with a doxastic interpretation. This means that for him, moral intuition is a class of *moral belief*. He also notes that no contemporary intuitionist thinks that all justified moral belief and knowledge is intuitional. *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>24</sup> This takes up chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> This begins in chapter 3.

“truth assessable.”<sup>26</sup> In Kulp’s understanding, propositions are to be counted as abstract entities which express the fact-based content of morally declarative sentences.<sup>27</sup> Given this understanding, the nature of moral truth, moral facts, moral properties, and moral sentences take center place in the metaphysics of Kulp’s moral realism. This is the core of his project.<sup>28</sup> Kulp affirms the necessity of three logical laws as foundational in his discussion of propositional truth: the law of non-contradiction, the law of identity, and the law of excluded middle. These laws govern all rational thought and belief. He then develops what he describes as “alethic realism” by linking together two truth-related criteria that help establish that which is true. The first is a criterion developed by William Alston dubbed the “T-schema,” namely, “the proposition that *p* is true *iff p*.”<sup>29</sup> The second is a broader metaphysical criterion that asserts that a true proposition is made true by the way the world is. Kulp reiterates that this is a metaphysical conception of truth and not an epistemological one; he also acknowledges the lack of details as regards the thorny problem of the correspondence (or truthmakers) between a true proposition and the way the world is. Still, he is content that this minimalist theory of truth is adequate for his purposes. Next, the notion of truth is linked to facts; facts, in turn, are worked out in terms of the notion of “states of affairs.” By “states of affairs,” Kulp means “something’s being, doing, or having something.”<sup>30</sup> States of affairs, which constitute facts, either obtain or do not obtain. States of affairs instance different ontic types as well, for example, physical, numerical, mental, relational, and moral properties, to name just a few.<sup>31</sup> In the case of moral states of affairs, moral states of affairs strongly supervene on physical states of affairs but are not reducible to them. Moral

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<sup>26</sup> Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality*, 71.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–75, 77.

<sup>28</sup> He begins taking up this complex set of issues in chapter 4.

<sup>29</sup> Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality*, 106. This is developed in William P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996). For our purposes, it should be noted that the late Alston (1921–2009) was a notable and strong Theistic philosopher in the Academy.

<sup>30</sup> Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality*, 112–113.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 118–119.

properties are emergent properties that supervene on base physical properties with the given moral state of affairs that obtains. So Kulp then subscribes to a version of moral emergentism, of emergent moral properties.<sup>32</sup> He says, "...if no such physical state of affairs obtained, no corresponding moral state affairs could obtain."<sup>33</sup> Kulp subscribes to strong supervenience. In further fleshing out details regarding moral facts and their relation to physical states of affairs, Kulp asserts, "...no physical universe, no morality."<sup>34</sup> He then briefly entertains a question that the Theist might regard as central; namely the status of morality before the Big Bang, and also how the moral order came into being in the first place, and how this is to be taken as it relates to the Grand Story of the physical universe, human existence, and the moral domain.<sup>35</sup> Kulp, however, never broaches the actual question of God and morality in relation to these big and fundamental questions. Kulp's secular moral project requires more or less dispensing with God. He then moves on to develop the details of his metaphysics of moral properties.<sup>36</sup> These details are a core issue in most SMNN accounts, Kulp's included. He acknowledges that any theory of properties faces difficulties.<sup>37</sup> Kulp asks a straightforward question as regards Platonic AOs, namely, "Do entities of type T exist?" He argues that such entities exist, given that numbers,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 115. This issue of emergent properties will not be dealt with in this critical assessment of Kulp's thinking. Emergent properties are themselves metaphysically problematic. J.P. Moreland complains that "emergence" is merely a name for what needs to be explained rather than a legitimate explanation of the phenomenon of emergence. See Moreland's further critical assessment of emergence, Craig, Wielenberg, Johnson, et al., "Wielenberg and Emergence: Borrowed Capital on the Cheap." See also Olivier Sartenaer, "Sixteen Years Later: Making Sense of Emergence (Again)," *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 47, no. 1 (April 2016): 79–103; Jaegwon Kim, "Making Sense of Emergence," *Philosophical Studies* 95 (1999): 3–36; Michael Silberstein and John McGeever, "The Search for Ontological Emergence," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 49, no. 195 (April 1999): 201–214; D.T. Timmerman, "Are Naturalistic Theories of Emergence Compatible with Science?," *Philosophia Christi* 19, no. 1 (2017): 37–58; Timothy O'Connor, "The Metaphysics of Emergence," *Nous* 39, no. 4 (December 2005): 658–678. Dembski says, "Alchemy continues to flourish, through nowadays it goes by the name emergence." Dembski, *No Free Lunch*, 243. See his entire chapter 12 of this volume entitled, "The Emergence of Irreducibly Complex Systems" where he ably critiques the entire notion of emergence in the sciences. His critique can be easily complimented and used to critique the metaphysics of emergent moral properties.

<sup>34</sup> Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality*, 124. See footnote 39 on this page. Kulp takes "physical" or "descriptive" to be entities and properties studied by the empirical sciences, *ibid.*, 62.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth*, 49, note 51.

<sup>36</sup> This is taken up in chapter 5 of *The Metaphysics of Morals*.

<sup>37</sup> Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality*, 143.

propositions, and the like also appear to exist as AOs. Note the typical analogy drawn between the moral and the mathematical. He also argues that our best account of the actual world, by way of inference to the best explanation, should include AOs and that Occam's razor does not require that we reject them.<sup>38</sup> As was earlier argued, this is the well-worn argument from indispensability. However, he thinks a Platonic realist understanding of properties as transcendent universals that are AOs best handles the various problems associated with the different philosophical accounts of properties. In this view, such properties can be instantiated, uninstantiated, or uninstantiable.<sup>39</sup> They necessarily exist in the Third Realm of abstracta. He also does not think that the problem of epistemological access, raised in the context of mathematical Platonism, presents insoluble difficulties for his view.<sup>40</sup> Given this account, Kulp rejects a strictly naturalistic, physicalist account of moral properties in favor of mind-independent, non-naturalist moral properties as AOs, which supervene on physical states of affairs in the actual world.<sup>41</sup> Kulp then summarizes his account of intuitional, Platonic, and moral non-naturalism and briefly sets it against the various meta-ethical alternatives discussed throughout his work to conclude the book.<sup>42</sup> Notably, Theism is never seriously discussed. Kulp's work is yet another demonstration of SMNNs dispensing with God. As we have repeatedly witnessed, on the one hand, AOs are considered indispensable, whereas God is considered entirely dispensable. The dispensability of God is a standard move by virtually all SMNNs. But once we dive into deep metaphysics, is God so easily dispensed with? This work has argued otherwise. In what follows, Kulp's metaethical account will be critically examined as a foil to help us work through the entire question of metaethics and AOs, IOs, and God. But first,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 149, 156.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 146. For example, a round square is uninstantiable.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 151–157.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 174, 226–229.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 189–251. This is worked out in chapter 5.

there is a need for an excursion into the nature of AOs and the wider ontology of the Third Realm. This is needed to help give the analysis that follows detail and context.

### Characterizing Abstract Objects

In the case of both moral thinkers and mathematical thinkers with Platonist leanings, there is a strategic move to the Third Realm of abstracta that is roughly analogous.<sup>43</sup> For moral thinkers, it is typically argued that ethical naturalism (in various versions) cannot fully support ethical realism and truth, thus the need to invoke and move toward the Third Realm. For mathematical thinkers, it is typically argued that mathematical truths outstrip the capacity of the human mind to generate such truths; such truths then must be “out there” in the Third Realm awaiting discovery, given that such truths are somehow objective and independent of the human mind.<sup>44</sup> From this similarity is concluded that both moral and mathematical truths are “out there” and awaiting discovery. Both deploy some version of the indispensability argument for AOs, as we have seen. Hence, an autonomous Third Realm of abstracta is posited to account for the truth of the moral and the mathematical domains. The notion of *autonomous* does important work here; it means self-existing, necessarily, independently, and, or ontologically existing of/from

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<sup>43</sup> For a critical comparison of the moral/mathematical analogy see Justin Clarke-Doane, “The Ethics-Mathematics Analogy,” *Philosophy Compass* 15, no. 1 (2020): 1–12; Michael B. Gill, “Morality Is Not Like Mathematics: The Weakness of the Math-Moral Analogy,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 57, no. 2 (June 2019): 194–216; a fully comprehensive analysis is given by Clarke-Doane, *Morality and Mathematics*. David Roberts, “Explanatory Indispensability Arguments in Metaethics and Philosophy of Mathematics,” in *Explanation in Ethics and Mathematics: Debunking and Dispensability*, ed. Uri D. Leibowitz and Neil Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 185–203. See also appendix 4 for a brief synopsis of the comparison. The real modern controversies about the moral/mathematical analogy come when the moral is compared to the higher and more speculative developments of mathematics. At this level of debate, the moral may actually be more secure and less speculative than the higher and more complex branches of mathematics. For a fictionalist perspective on these disputes see Mary Leng, “Taking Morality Mathematically,” in *Explanation in Ethics and Mathematics: Debunking and Dispensability*, ed. Uri D. Leibowitz and Neil Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Mary Leng, “XI - Naturalism and Placement, or, What Should a Good Quinean Say about Mathematical and Moral Truth?,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 116, no. 3 (October 2016): 237–260.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Roger Penrose states, “The Mandelbrot set is not an invention of the human mind: it was a discovery. Like Mount Everest, the Mandelbrot set is just *there*.” Roger Penrose, *The Emperor’s New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds and the Laws of Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 124.

itself. The preferred term to capture this idea is the term *a se*. AOs are said to exist *a se*; that is, of or from themselves. They are autonomous.

Likewise, for Theists, God is said to exist *a se*. Herein lies the crux of the debate between SMNNs and Theists. The entire debate will revolve around and turn on this core issue. If AOs exist *a se*, then we naturally are led to ask what accounts for the Third Realm itself. How is the Third Realm of abstracta as a whole to be taken? To retort that it just is, that it's just there, will do no good. This retort would mean that the entire Third Realm, whatever it may consist of, is entirely brute. Can it really be the case that the whole eternal and necessary domain of the Third Realm of abstracta, in which is grounded all fundamental moral and mathematical truth, is simply brute? As we will see, a brute Third Realm of this magnitude would be a massive and inexplicable philosophical pill to swallow, involving substantial philosophical costs for SMNNs.<sup>46</sup>

So then, precisely what is an AO? What are abstracta? How is the Third Realm of abstracta to be characterized, and how do abstracta work in the metaethics and wider metaphysics of SMNN? And why should any of this matter for thinkers in metaphysics, metaethics, or ethics proper? Contrary to typical first impressions of total weirdness and irrelevant philosophical esotericism, debates concerning abstracta, says Sam Cowling, are among the most important in metaphysics.<sup>47</sup> On the Platonist interpretation, an AO is considered a self-

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<sup>46</sup> For ease of analysis and comparison, the following tally in chart form shown below has been developed. It will be referenced throughout the discussion. The entire chart in all its detail will not be discussed in this chapter; only limited portions will be discussed in detail. However, with a bit of effort, most of the comparisons not discussed can be worked out in a fairly straightforward manner. Call the chart AOs (Abstract Objects) & IOs (Ideal Objects in the Mind of God) – an A to Z Comparison Chart.

<sup>47</sup> Cowling, *Abstract Entities*, 2. Note that throughout the discussion here the notion of “abstract entity” and “abstract object” are equivalent. AO is used here throughout this work for consistency and clarity. The book by Cowling is one of the best introductions to AOs available; see especially the introductory chapter. It also contains an excellent glossary, bibliographical recommendations for further study at the end of each chapter, along with excellent and clear analysis throughout. However, the discussion is cast strictly along the lines of the Platonist/nominalist debate and does not discuss AOs and their relation to God. For the discussion as it relates to

existing entity; an abstract, as opposed to a concrete entity. The collection of AOs makes up what is referred to as abstracta. The domain or realm that contains these abstracta is called the Third Realm (or sometimes also “Plato’s heaven”). The Third Realm is taken to be “third” because it is claimed that it is neither a natural realm of physical entities (first realm) nor a supernatural realm involving God and supernatural powers and properties (second realm).<sup>48</sup> Cowling defines an AO as 1) an entity that lacks location in time and space (non-physical), 2) lacks causal powers (cannot itself physically cause any event in the actual world, or by itself enter into causal relations, sometimes described as causally effete, or causally inert), as well as non-living. 3) It is typically held to exist necessarily (i.e., to exist *a se*, could not have failed to exist, and cannot go out of existence), and 4) eternally (outside of time).<sup>49</sup> Some examples of entities taken to be AOs are numbers, various properties, propositions, and so on. Finally, 5) AOs are contrasted with concrete entities. Concrete entities include electrons, people, automobiles, hurricanes, water, and the like. Concrete entities are spatiotemporal entities that can enter into causal relations. These are also entities that the various sciences can typically study.

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God, see the excellent work done by William Lane Craig, especially Craig, *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism*. For an expanded and more technical discussion of this same set of issues in relation to the metaphysics of mathematics see Craig, *God and Abstract Objects: The Coherence of Theism: Aseity*. Craig’s primary focus is on God and the question of God’s aseity. For an excellent and accessible introduction to the issues related to Theism, see Paul M. Gould, “Introduction: The Problem of God and Abstract Objects,” in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 1–19. This same volume is one of the best accessible books for assessing the debates and differing Theistic views on AOs.

<sup>48</sup> The “Third Realm” may also be counted as “third” in the sense of being neither physical nor of the mind.

<sup>49</sup> Cowling, *Abstract Entities*, 252. See also Craig’s excellent but short piece on this, William Lane Craig, “God and Abstract Objects,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Science and Christianity*, ed. J. B. Stump and Alan G. Padgett (Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012), 441–452.

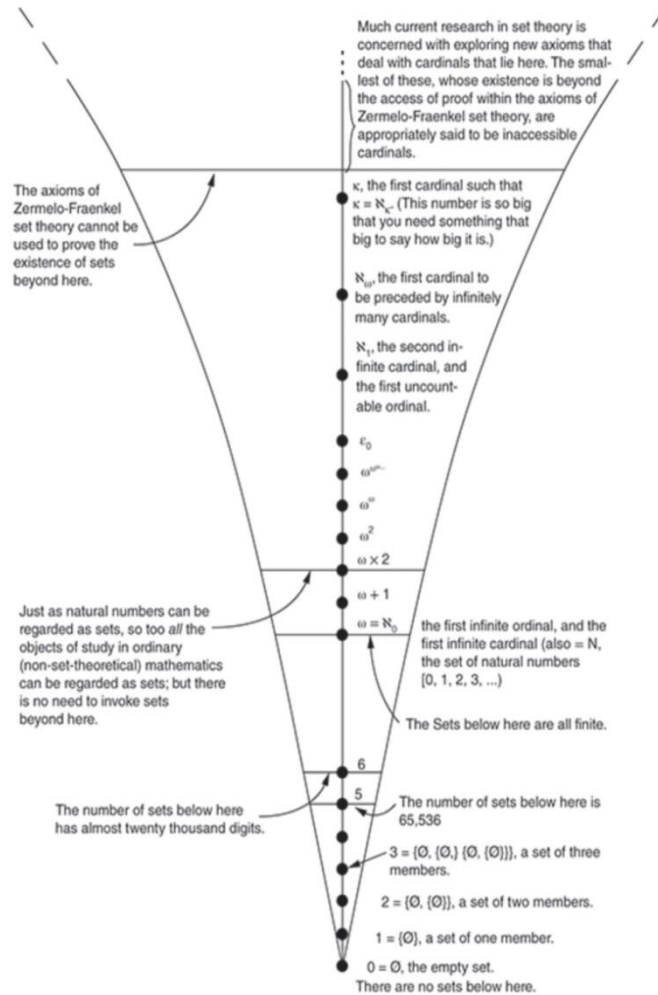


Figure 2

The abstract/concrete distinction is basic and fundamental to understanding AOs and is taken for granted throughout the entire debate.<sup>51</sup> All of the above is then part of the standard and generally accepted view of AOs and the Third Realm that is being considered here.

<sup>51</sup> See Cowlings rather thorough discussion of the abstract/concrete distinction in chapter 2. Cowling, *Abstract Entities*, 69–105. The version of Theistic conceptualism advocated here will challenge this distinction partly by denying that there are autonomous AOs. Welty takes “lack of spatio-temporal location” (LOSTL), and acausality to be the most plausible characteristic for secular thinkers that marks the abstract/concrete distinction. However, God, is a concrete being, God also is not located in time/space (that is LOSTL), God is a causal being, as God is the Creator of all things. All of this as referenced to God introduces difficulties with the secular conceptions of AOs. In the end, Welty opts for a “functional-role” based understanding of AOs, that then opens the way for Theistic conceptualist, ontological interpretations of AOs. See chapter 1 Greg Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism: The

If the above accurately describes *the standard view* of AOs, then a few additional questions naturally arise.<sup>52</sup> 1) Why should we believe that there are AOs in the first place? Why should we believe that they are real, and what does a realist ontology with reference to AOs involve? 2) What kinds of specific entities count as AOs, and 3) just how many of them might there be? The answer to the first question is that AOs are taken to be indispensable to our best account of the world, our best theories of Reality; we cannot theorize and think without them. This view, of course, is the well-worn indispensability argument that we encountered in the robust realism of David Enoch. In fact, the indispensability argument is thought to be the strongest argument for believing that there are AOs.<sup>53</sup> The answer to our second question is a bit more complicated and disputed. There is no consensus on the range of entities that count as AOs or even whether AOs are real. Some deny that there are AOs at all. Some say we cannot know. Some approve of the existence of AOs but do so with very qualified proposals on how they are to be understood. But for those who accept the existence of AOs into their ontology, there is a range of variation as well. So then, the range of entities that are taken to count as AOs by those realists who favor their existence are legion and diffuse and largely depend on the ontology of any particular account and the wider metaphysics of that account.<sup>54</sup> This diversity in scope is not

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Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas” (DPhil diss, University of Oxford, 2006). God as “concrete” is also discussed below as #10, of 12 takeaways regarding God and AOs and IOs, see pp.267-271.

<sup>52</sup> These questions are also taken up in Chris Swoyer, “Abstract Entities,” in *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, ed. Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Cowling, *Abstract Entities*, 48. This is also the reason that William Lane Craig has relentlessly attacked the indispensability argument. This author agrees with most all of Craig’s criticisms.

<sup>54</sup> One might take such things as AOs: kinds, or classes, laws, categories, dimensions, concepts, states of affairs, universals such as phenomenal color, propositions, or types, as in types/tokens. All these and more can be explicated in terms of AOs. As one example see Linda Wetzel, “Types and Tokens,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Fall 2018); Linda Wetzel, *Types and Tokens: On Abstract Objects* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). Also David Kasper develops his account of ethical intuitionism in terms of AOs, he claims that there are abstract moral kinds or categories of ethical truths. See his Kasper, *Intuitionism*; David Kasper, “The Natures of Moral Acts,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 5, no. 1 (2019): 117–135; David Kasper, “Moral Knowledge Without Knowledge of Moral Knowledge,” *The Journal of Ethics* 26, no. 1 (March 2022): 155–172. Kasper’s account, although interesting and meriting attention, will not be analyzed in any detail in this work. For a useful critique of Kasper see Matthew

hard to illustrate. Take, for example, the hierarchy of set theory, as illustrated above. If one takes mathematical sets to be real,<sup>55</sup> to be AOs, as in Cantorian set theory orthodoxy, then considering set theory as a single example, their number alone is infinitely infinite.<sup>56</sup> The set of all countable numbers itself is infinite, then the set that contains that set, then the set that contains this set, and so on. On top of that, we might also add the properties of all these numbers and then the sets that contain these sets of *properties* as well. One might also add to this all the *relations* between all these sets to be counted as AOs, or further the *categories* of all these sets,<sup>57</sup> and possibly the *propositions* that describe these sets, and so on, and on this could go. In the case of sets and set theory, this literally never ends. Contrast this with the finite number of actual items in the contingent universe; however, these might be reckoned. AOs of the Third Realm involve a literal exponential explosion to multiple infinities, all couched within infinities that never end. Bear in mind, in the case of set theory, this is only *for a single area of mathematics*, albeit a major area. Nevertheless, this is merely the tip of the iceberg regarding the vast Platonic horde. At the very

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Pianalto, "Intuitions, Experience, and Moral Concepts: A Critique of Kaspar's Intuitionism," *Reason Papers* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 12. Again, for a useful overview of this with substantial references see Plebani, "Recent Debates over the Existence of Abstract Objects: An Overview."

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Menzel, "The Argument from Collections," in *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, ed. Trent Dougherty and Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 29–58. Menzel has crafted this, following Alvin Plantinga, into an argument for the existence of God. Similarly, Tyron Goldschmidt has crafted the natural numbers as an argument for the existence of God. See Tyron Goldschmidt, "The Argument from Natural Numbers," in *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, ed. Trent Dougherty and Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 59–75. For an interesting early exchange on Theism and set theory see Alvin Plantinga and Patrick Grim, "Truth, Omniscience, and Cantorian Arguments: An Exchange," *Philosophical Studies* 71 (1993): 267–306.

<sup>56</sup> Illustration taken from Craig, *God Over All*, 42. Craig describes this as the set theoretical hierarchy, starting at zero and proceeding up through the natural numbers to transfinite numbers. Craig has adapted this from A. W. Moore, *The Infinite*, third edition. (London: Routledge, 2019), 157. Michael Huemer for one denies the existence of sets in the ontologically heavyweight sense though he does acknowledge that the number of AOs is clearly infinite, see Huemer, *Approaching Infinity*, 4–5. See his discussion in the relevant sections in Huemer, *Approaching Infinity* on his rejection of sets in the commonly accepted mathematical orthodoxy. For an excellent historical survey and analysis of Christianity and the infinite see Graham Oppy, "Science, Religion, and Infinity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Science and Christianity*, ed. J. B. Stump and Alan G. Padgett (Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012), 430–440. The infinite is also a central theme in Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*.

<sup>57</sup> Emily Riehl and Dominic Verity, *Elements of  $\infty$ -Category Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

least, such an expansive ontology should get our attention and give one pause. Indeed, Craig rightly puts the matter this way.

Platonism posits infinite realms of being which are metaphysically necessary and uncreated by God. The physical universe which has been created by God would be an infinitesimal triviality utterly dwarfed by the unspeakable quantity of uncreated beings. To appreciate in some measure the vastness of the realms of uncreated being postulated by Platonism, consider the set theoretical hierarchy alone as displayed [see above]...the profligacy of Platonism in this respect truly takes away ones breath.<sup>58</sup>

No matter how a particular thinker might conceptualize the domain of abstracta, the Platonic Horde is, as Craig describes it, exactly. This makes it evident that there is a need for SMNNs to provide considerably more detail on just how their *sui generis*, robust realism, fits into this broader ontology of the Third Realm. Failure to do so would be akin to situating a house in the middle of London and ignoring the fact that it was situated in the middle of London. So, for example, when Kulp describes the metaphysics of various states of affairs as instantiating sundry properties and “ontic types” such as the physical, the mathematical, or the moral, he thinks that the “state of affairs expressed by the proposition ‘ $3 > 2$ ’ is... [an] (eternally obtaining) ‘numerical’ state of affairs.”<sup>59</sup> Unarguably, this description is to be understood and evaluated in terms of this broader ontology of the Third Realm and the vast Platonic horde, which is undeniably part of the more comprehensive picture here. This kind of isolated claim by robust realists cannot conceal the fact that it is situated within the immeasurable and unsurveyable ontological context of the horde. So then, the SMNNs owe us a more comprehensive explanation of how all this should fit together and work. They need to explain how the expansive hodgepodge of the horde and their sequestered metaphysics relate to each other. It will do no

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<sup>58</sup> Craig, *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism*, 41. Parrish makes the same point, He states, “This is a fundamental issue, because it can be argued that everything in the universe, both physical and phenomenal, is, in fact, constituted by abstract entities.” Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 314.

<sup>59</sup> Kulp, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 115. As Kulp says, “We may say it obtains *eternally*, or *atemporally*.” (emphasis in original).

good to shrug off this ontological profligacy by claiming it is metaphysically untroublesome or calling it trivially true.<sup>60</sup> So as Kulp merely gestures toward the extensive horde of abstracta, he never fully acknowledges its existence as the backdrop of his claims about moral propositions, properties, and ontology. Kulp may not admit it, but he is in the expansive Platonic heaven. If Cantor's set theory is a mathematician's paradise,<sup>61</sup> then Plato's heaven is a robust realist's equivalent. It is a kind of heaven of necessity and normativity, where robust realists can have anything they want, in any way they might like it, at any time it might be needed, with unlimited and infinite quantity. Presumably, then, this is why it is called "heaven." However, everyone would admit that handy heavens like this are easy metaphysics rather than serious metaphysics.<sup>62</sup> As has been pointed out, the presumption of the triviality<sup>63</sup> of abstracta is typical in the work of SMNNs from G.E. Moore on down. But if the horde is explanatorily apt, as is argued here, then this kind of heaven isn't "just there." The SMNN shouldn't dismiss the demand to explain their broader ontology in light of the horde, as feigning ignorance by protesting, "What part of *necessary* don't you understand?" The Theist should retort by quipping, "What part of *please*

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<sup>60</sup> This is how Michael Huemer describes his own Platonism. See his comments in Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson, *A Debate on God and Morality*, 155.

<sup>61</sup> See David Hilbert, "Über Das Unendliche," *Mathematische Annalen* 95, no. 1 (December 1, 1926): 170. This is how Hilbert describes Cantor's set theory with its infinite cardinal numbers. Notably Michael Huemer rejects what he describes as the "Cantorian Orthodoxy of Platonist set theory" for a host of philosophical reasons. See Huemer, *Approaching Infinity*, 71–89. Rejecting Cantorian orthodoxy, Huemer takes the cardinal numbers instead to be a kind of numerical property that he says is best described "ostensively," that is, by simply giving examples of such. This is an interesting and well defended position. In this regard he notes that his thinking is unoriginal and follows the work of Byeong-uk Yi, "Is Two a Property?," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 4 (April 1999): 163–190; Byeong-Uk Yi, "The Logic and Meaning of Plurals. Part I," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 34, no. 5–6 (October 2005): 459–506; Byeong-uk Yi, "The Logic and Meaning of Plurals. Part II," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 35, no. 3 (June 2006): 239–288. What is notable is that Cantor was a Theist and had no problem with such incomprehensible numbers since God was infinite and could know all things. As Huemer comments, "...mainly because Cantor believed that God was infinite. Believe it or not, he developed a whole new branch of mathematics to vindicate his theological views by showing that the idea of an actual infinity is coherent." Huemer, *Approaching Infinity*, 71. If one agrees with Cantor, as this author does in many respects, then one is in good company, and this is especially so, if Theism is true, as this work argues.

<sup>62</sup> This phraseology famously comes from Frank Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2008).

<sup>63</sup> Trivial in the mathematical sense simply means obvious or easily worked out; something that everyone should be able to accept and believe.

*explain this matter* do you not understand?” The previous lays bare a gaping and glaring deficiency that ought to be remedied by SMNNs. Against the secular position, the position argued for in this work is a version of Theistic conceptualism (hereafter TC).<sup>64</sup>

### **Theistic Conceptualism – God and the Argument from Logic**

In developing the position of TC as used here, the exposition will rely on two key thinkers, Stephen Parrish and Greg Welty.<sup>65</sup> Parrish’s take on AOs and IOs is worth fully quoting.

If God is a necessary being, who necessarily knows all things and can do all things, with what he cannot do being determined by his nature, rather than by some outside factor, then he is necessarily the source of all concrete necessity and possibility. As it is truth that  $2 + 2 = 4$  in all possible worlds, this equation is a necessary truth. But if God exists, and exists necessarily, and if abstract objects [as IOs] subsist in God, then God is the foundation of all abstract or logical necessity and possibility. Abstract objects [as IOs] would necessarily exist in the mind of God. As there is nothing external to God which limits his ability to do something, all limitations are imposed internally by his nature. The laws of contradiction, as they are known and subsist in the mind of God in all possible worlds, are not extrinsic to God in this viewpoint. Gordon Clark writes, ‘The law of contradiction is not to be taken as an axiom prior to or independent of God. The Law is God thinking.’<sup>66</sup>

It is worth expanding on this thought of Parrish concerning the laws of logic. Greg Welty and James Anderson have built a positive argument for the existence of God from the laws of logic.<sup>67</sup> By the laws of logic, their argument has in view the following:

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<sup>64</sup> Also, sometime also referred to a Divine Conceptualism. For a useful overall introduction to this position see the relevant sections in Craig, *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism*.

<sup>65</sup> Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas”; Greg Welty, “The Conceptualist Argument,” in *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief*, ed. C. P. Ruloff and Peter Horban (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023); Greg Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism,” in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 81–111. Also, this section also leans heavily on the critical work done by William Lane Craig in reference to AOs and divine aseity as well as the extensive work in Analytic Philosophy done by Alvin Plantinga. .

<sup>66</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 276. The quote from Gordon Clark is found in Clark H. Gordon, *Logic*, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1988), 121.

<sup>67</sup> Anderson and Welty, “The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic.”

1. Law of identity: that every true statement is true and every false statement is false.
2. Law of Noncontradiction: that no statement can be both true and false.
3. Law of excluded middle: that every statement must be either true or false.

They ask two key questions to provide an opening for their argument. First, what *are* the laws of logic? Second, what *kind* of things are they? Minimally, the laws of logic are truths, normative truths. But what is a normative truth? Minimally, a truth is a language-independent “proposition” that is a bearer of truth value. Since the same proposition can be stated in multiple languages, such propositions must be language-independent. Since the laws of logic are propositions, they cannot be merely conventional linguistic tokens; they are what make conventional linguistic tokens possible in the first place. So as laws, they are normatively governing for all rational thought and language; hence, they are considered *laws* as such.

Given the foregoing, the laws of logic are propositions about propositions, truths *about* truths. What kind of truths are the laws of logic? They are necessary normative truths. Furthermore, as propositions, the laws of logic exist, but they are not physical entities or autonomous abstract entities. If necessary, then the laws of logic necessarily exist; they cannot fail to exist and cannot possibly contingently exist. The laws of logic are then non-physical, normative propositions, necessary truths about truths, which cannot fail to exist, given they exist necessarily. They are true in all possible worlds, even impossible worlds. In fact, they make impossible worlds conceptualizable since the laws of logic govern impossible worlds as logically contradictory worlds.

But then, a pivotal turn in the argument is made. What metaphysical category of Reality do such propositions fall under? It is argued that they fall under the category of *thoughts*. This is because the laws of logic exhibit intentionality, a distinctive mark of mental entities. As such,

they exhibit aboutness and directedness, which are key marks of the mental.<sup>68</sup> They then summarize that “the laws of logic are propositions; propositions are intrinsically intentional; the intrinsically intentional is none other than the mental; therefore, the laws of logic are mental in nature. The laws of logic are thoughts.”<sup>69</sup> Now, the laws of logic cannot be reducible to human thoughts only; they cannot merely be our thoughts, the products of the collection of all human minds. They must be thoughts of a necessarily existent mind. Furthermore, a necessarily existent mind must be the mind of a necessarily existing person. This person is taken to be God.

The above is then a form of the transcendental argument proposed earlier.<sup>70</sup> Here, however, that argument is taken at least a step further. It is not merely the case that the concept of God is not illogical, that is, that it contains no contradictions, or that it conforms to the laws of logic, or that the laws of logic presuppose the existence of God, that in turn govern all rational thought. Instead, it is the case that the laws of logic themselves *conform* to the mind of God. They are not above God or extrinsic to God. They are intrinsic to God as omniscient mind. God just is as God thinks. God thinks as God knows. God knows all there is to know. But precisely, how does God do it? Only God fully knows how God knows as God knows. On this matter, why should we care?<sup>71</sup> The laws of logic are God’s thinking, and in turn, for us to think rationally, our minds must conform to the mind of God, to the thinking of God, given the normativity of the laws of logic as intrinsic to the mind of God. Or, as Parrish would put it, the laws of logic *intrinsically subsist* in the mind of God. God’s mind then *just is* the necessary shape or structure

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<sup>68</sup> Tim Crane, “Intentionality as the Mark of the Mental,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 43 (March 1998): 229–251. Tim Crane, “Intentionality,” ed. Edward Craig, *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Routledge, 1998). Lorraine Juliano Keller, following Plantinga, has developed this into an argument for the existence of God. See Lorraine Juliano Keller, “The Argument from Intentionality,” in *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, ed. Trent Dougherty and Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11–28.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson and Welty, “The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic,” 335. They point out that Frege referred to propositions as *Gedunken* (“thought”), *ibid.*, note 29.

<sup>70</sup> See pp. 223–226.

<sup>71</sup> William E. Mann, *God, Modality, and Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 73.

of all rationality. This way of thinking about these things is essential to Theistic conceptualism.<sup>72</sup> And this essential feature is a decisive component in how Theists understand AOs in relation to God. If the laws of logic are intrinsic to the mind of God, then it also makes sense to extend this insight to understand that AOs do not stand outside the scope of the mind of God either. This is why advocates of TC deny the autonomy thesis of AOs; that is, that AOs exist completely and entirely apart from God in some necessary and separable mind-independent Third Realm. Advocates of TC deny the autonomy of AOs given the essential nature and mind of God.

How, then, are AOs to be taken in relation to God? It is denied that there are AOs in the fully autonomous sense; instead, these are to be taken as IOs. These are Ideal Objects (IOs) in the mind of God. As ideas in the mind of God, these are an essential part of God's mind, God's thoughts, and God's concepts. It should be noted that the term "object" in this case,<sup>73</sup> should not be construed that somehow IOs are independent of God, autonomous to God, separable from God, or even as the "content" of God's thoughts. Instead, IOs are pure thoughts, God's concepts, that are fully and perfectly in consonance with God's essential nature; God's mind. IOs are contained "in" God, as concepts, as an essential part of God's mind. The laws of logic are consonant with God's mind, given that they conform to God's mind. This view is called here the *perfect consonance* view, namely, that the laws of logic are the structure and shape of all rational thought because all rational thought conforms to God's thinking structure.

### **Twelve Takeaways – God, AOs, and IOs**

At this point, it is helpful to draw out some of the consequences of TC concerning the problem of the Third Realm in the critique of SMNN. 1) The being of God as God does crucial

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<sup>72</sup> Rasmussen argues similarly, see Joshua Rasmussen, "Does Atheism Entail a Contradiction?," *Manuscript* 44, no. 4 (December 2021): 46.

<sup>73</sup> José L. Falguera, Concha Martínez Vidal, and Gideon Rosen, "Abstract Objects," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab, Summer 2022), 4. Falguera points out that the term "object" is also used in a highly qualified way in secular accounts of AOs.

and necessary work in the Theistic account. How could it be otherwise? AOs do lots of work for Platonism, but they cannot possibly do *all* the work necessary for the theory to be fully workable. For Theism, God can do *all the work necessary in the theory* given that God can actually do all the work *in Reality*. God, a living being, *is* things, and God *does things* that AOs can never, ever possibly be or do. 2) The bigger the horde (however conceived in SMNN), the bigger the mind of God that contains the horde (on Theism).<sup>74</sup> But also, it will be argued further here that the Third Realm is fundamentally brute and suffers from the cumulative bruteness problem highlighted earlier in the section on Huemer.<sup>75</sup> Any metaphysical account that suffers from cumulative bruteness is rendered highly implausible. Moreover, once cumulative bruteness and ontological extravagance are combined, they form a double strike against abstracta of the Third Realm.<sup>76</sup> SMNNs *must own* the Platonic horde in whatever ways the horde might be conceived. 3) God is personal. Hence Ultimate Reality on the Theistic account is personal. By contrast, Ultimate Reality on any secular account *must be* impersonal. This difference is fundamental. Consequently, God answers to the personal beings that we are, whereas impersonal nonnaturalism does not and cannot.<sup>77</sup> But also, the unique category of persons to which moral principles apply generates a particular ontic cosmic coincidence problem for SMNN.<sup>78</sup> How do moral propositions such as AOs just happen to be about and apply to the unique category of morally complex persons who are wholly contingent beings? For SMNN, this is a massive coincidence. However, given that God is a person, the Creator of all things, Theism faces no such ontic cosmic coincidence problem. 4) God is plenitudinous. The mind of God can account

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<sup>74</sup> Eric C. Steinhart, "A Mathematical Model of Divine Infinity," *Theology and Science* 7, no. 3 (August 2009): 261–274. God's infinity can encompass the infinitely infinite of secular infinities.

<sup>75</sup> See pp. 222–224.

<sup>76</sup> For a quick look at this see the comparison chart laid out in appendix 4.

<sup>77</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 340.

<sup>78</sup> Hussain, "The Ontic Cosmic Coincidence Problem for Non-Naturalism about Morality."

for the totality of abstracta and much more. Take, for example, propositions. There are far too many propositions for any human mind or all human minds combined to account for the totality of propositions that are or might possibly be. The mind of God encompasses any and all propositions. God's creativity and mind are thus plentitudinous.<sup>79</sup> The God of Theism then possesses great explanatory power, scope, and depth in the theory of TC. 5) As well, on the TC account, Reality is inherently, intrinsically, and essentially knowable. This, given it was conceived, designed, and created by the God after whom our own minds are fashioned and created. As Parrish puts the matter – given God, there is a match between our minds and the world. Our minds are analogs of God's mind. This means that the very nature of being entails intelligibility. Intelligibility is an essential property of being, of the world, of our minds.<sup>80</sup> All possible worlds are known and knowable by God. "Reality is, therefore, by itself, essentially related to consciousness; it is part of the very nature of being that it is knowable."<sup>81</sup> The argument here is that the intelligibility of Reality further entails that the moral dimension is knowable in a true and realist sense. Hence, on TC, there is realist though limited (and corrupted, given the doctrine of sin)<sup>82</sup> moral knowledge. In short, moral Reality and the moral domain are essentially knowable. In a fundamental sense, it is built into our minds, being, and worlds. This explains why we are fundamentally and inescapably moral beings. We live in God's universe, a moral universe. We reflect God's being; we are *Imago Die*. 6) The previous point puts the issue of epistemology front and center. As for AOs, Chris Swoyer rightly observes, "Epistemology is

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<sup>79</sup> Plantinga makes the same point with respect to mathematical entities and mathematical truths. See Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 287–291.

<sup>80</sup> Parrish cites a Brouwer axiom to explain what is meant by the notion of essential: *F* is an essential (or *E*) property of *x* if and only if *x* belongs to (is a property of) *x* in every world in which *x* exists. *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>81</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 305. The argument presented here is worked out from chapter 9 of this book, entitled "The Match of Mind and World." As Parrish points out, Bernard Lonergan makes a similar point. See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1978), 672–673.

<sup>82</sup> Oliver Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin* (Burlington, VT: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005).

the Achilles' heel of realism about abstracta. [Given that we] are biological organisms thoroughly ensconced in the natural, spatiotemporal causal order, Abstract entities, by contrast, are atemporal, non-spatial, and casually inert, so they cannot affect our senses, our brains, or our instruments for measuring and detecting.”<sup>83</sup> Given the argument developed in a previous section, referred to as the “plausible mechanism problem,” or the PMP; the epistemological problem looks to be an insuperable problem for SMNN.<sup>84</sup> It is argued here that epistemology amounts to big metaphysical trouble for the thesis of autonomous AOs as understood by SMNNs. 7) As both Parrish and Welty argue, AOs (on the secular account), which the Theistic conceptualist takes to be IOs in the mind of God, are fundamentally and essentially *thinkable things*. This idea will be developed in more detail as we advance. 8) Then there is the relevance problem for any account of AOs (Including strong Theistic accounts). Welty tells us what this means. “Why should the existence of entities [AOs] spatiotemporally isolated from me, whether concrete or abstract, have any relevance in making it the case that the universe could be as these entities represent it to be?”<sup>85</sup> The relevance problem is especially acute given that AOs possess no causal powers and no teleological capacity for planning or foresight.<sup>86</sup> In short, AOs are teleological flops. The relevance problem leads into *the moral relevance problem*. 9) This point leads to another crucial point. It isn't just that AOs are teleological flops that lack planning and foresight; there is a much

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<sup>83</sup> Swoyer, “Abstract Entities,” 27. See also David Liggins, “Epistemological Objections to Platonism,” *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 1 (January 2010): 67–77.

<sup>84</sup> See pp. 109–120.

<sup>85</sup> Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism,” 92.

<sup>86</sup> For an especially useful exposition of this idea, see Walter Schultz, “The Actual World from Platonism to Plans: An Emendation of Alvin Plantinga's Modal Realism,” *Philosophia Christi* 16, no. 1 (2014): 81–100. This author fully endorses Schultz's formulation of God's “omnicompetence.” Omnicompetence pairs God's omniscience with God's knowledge of his own powers to create and actualize the universe, or creatable things. The relevance problem is also related to the normative authority problem. See Shamik Dasgupta, “XV—Normative Non-Naturalism and the Problem of Authority,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 117, no. 3 (October 1, 2017): 297–319.

deeper problem here; the horde has no engine to motor it. Necessity of itself is powerless.<sup>87</sup> It is necessarily powerless. No matter how vast the horde gets or how diverse or complex it might be, there is still no engine to motor the horde causally. 10) Consider also that God is a concrete being, not an abstract object.<sup>88</sup> It follows then that divine thoughts are concrete. They are God's concepts to God. As concrete to God, divine thoughts are fully determined by God and fully determinate to God.<sup>89</sup> It follows then that in TC, God's thoughts, while concrete *to God*, as pure concepts, as IOs, are nevertheless abstract relative *to us*. Thus the notions of both "concrete" and "abstract" are uniquely qualified in TC. Briefly put, God's thoughts as IOs are concrete to God but abstract relative to us.<sup>90</sup> This makes it difficult to label the position advocated here. In this work, this position will henceforth be called IR-Realism with respect to AOs.<sup>91</sup> God is a concrete being; thus, God is not only real but the Ultimate Reality. But God's thoughts *to us*, as IOs to God, are ontologically IR-Real when conceptualized and instantiated. From the vantage point of the human thinker, bottom-up, IOs work and look just like AOs, given they fill the role of AOs relative to us.<sup>92</sup> Thus the Theistic conceptualist maintains that AOs themselves are an indication of God; they point beyond themselves to the mind of God. In this respect, Theism can co-opt any argument for autonomous AOs and argue that, taken one step further, they take us to the mind of God. In the mind of God, these are IOs, God's pure concepts. 11) If God is a person, the

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<sup>87</sup> Schrenk, "The Powerlessness of Necessity." Schrenk brings out this point well. On this same idea, Bedke comments, "...it seems that direct discovery of any non-natural property or relation (were this possible) would be as idle to the action's judged normative status as a man's height is to the judgment that he won the lottery. None of these discoveries about the non-natural domain can be expected to have much impact on what we think of our values, duties, and virtues." Matthew Bedke S., "A Menagerie of Duties? Normative Judgements Are Not Beliefs About Non-Natural Properties.," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (July 2014): 197.

<sup>88</sup> Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?," *Noûs* 24, no. 4 (September 1990): 581–598.

<sup>89</sup> Böhn, Einar Dueger, *God and Abstract Objects* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3.

<sup>90</sup> Stephen E. Parrish, "Defending Divine Conceptualism," *Philosophia Christi* 20, no. 1 (2018): 102. That God is a concrete being is standardly accepted by Theists, see Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics.*, 42. See also the recent discussion of this issue in Johnson, *Divine Love Theory*, 99–103.

<sup>91</sup> This follows Parrish's suggestion. See Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 335. This would be similar to Plantinga's "anti-realism." See Plantinga, "How to Be an Anti-Realist."

<sup>92</sup> IOs are IR-Real to us when instantiated and conceptualized. This is similar to Welty's position. See Welty, "Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas," 21–26.

archetype of personhood, thus personal, then analytic to the concept of being a person, is the concept of having a will. The will of God and the creative omniscience of God are the engine, the difference maker between that which creationally exists and that which does not.<sup>93</sup> God as creator is also a free moral agent; again, the archetypal free moral Agent. 12) Finally, modality, modal truths, and truths about possible worlds fit well into the TC account. On this, the Brouwer axiom is important.

If P is the case, then it is necessarily true that P is possible.<sup>94</sup>

As Parrish develops his account of TC, he concludes concerning the problems associated with modality, “that some version of the *Leibnizian theory* that possible worlds are ideal objects in the mind of God is the best solution.”<sup>95</sup> That is the best solution for understanding modality. This author agrees. This insight is critical for the analysis that follows.

### **The Conceptualist Argument from Propositions**

Greg Welty has developed what he calls *the conceptualist argument* for the existence of God. This argument is significant for our purposes and will be deployed here for two reasons. First, it is an argument built around the nature of propositions, a central element of the moral argument presented here. Secondly, the argument is designed to lead to God and a particular account of God. So the argument is also specific to our central theme; the necessary God of Perfect Being Theism. Like all Theistic arguments, this argument is only a limited, albeit critical

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<sup>93</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 265; Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 32. This notion of “analytic” “analytic to” “analyticity” is an important part of the manner in which Parrish goes about developing the notion of God as a necessary being. More will be said on this in the final argument.

<sup>94</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 305. This axiom also figures heavily in the work of Alexander Pruss. See Pruss, “The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument,” 44. This axiom will also figure heavily in our final argument developed in the final section. For Parrish’s defense of S5 see Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 10–13. For Leftow’s most recent defense of S5 see chapter five of Leftow, *Anselm’s Argument: Divine Necessity*.

<sup>95</sup> Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 322. Emphasis original. This will figure importantly into our argument below. Parrish adds that a further critical factor that separates the actual world from all other worlds is the will of God, p.323. Brian Leftow, following Plantinga, has developed this into an argument for the existence of God. See Brian Leftow, “The Argument from Possibility,” in *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, ed. Trent Dougherty and Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 406–416.

component in building towards an evidentially strong, ramified, and cumulative conclusion concerning God. Welty summarizes the conclusion of his argument this way.

...if we have good reason to be realists about propositions (and we do), then we have good reason to be theistic conceptual realists about propositions, and therefore good reasons to be theists.<sup>96</sup>

The argument combines two components: a) an *argument for entity role* as well as b) an *argument for entity identification*, and goes as follows.

**Step 1:** Realism (argument for entity-existence): “Propositions exist.”

- a. The proposition  $1 + 1 = 2$  can be expressed in many different informational forms, all forms expressing the same truth, and all that comprehend and believe the proposition believe the same thing. Differing forms of the same proposition show that the proposition is different from the forms it takes.
- b. All that understand and believe the proposition believe that it is true.
- c. Furthermore, all that understand and believe the proposition believe that it is true no matter what.
- d. All that understand and believe the proposition believe that it is true independently of our thinking and expressing it.
- e. We all believe that there are an innumerable number of claims just like this one.
- f. The proposition possesses both alethicity, namely, the capacity to be true or false, and doxasticity, that is, the capacity to be believed or disbelieved.

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<sup>96</sup> Welty, “The Conceptualist Argument,” 284. Kindle edition. All citations hereafter are from the Kindle edition. The argument as presented here will be summarized. Welty points out in endnote 3, p. 301, that in the vicinity of the conceptualist argument there are at least four arguments, 1) An argument for God from propositions, 2) an argument for God from the laws of logic, Anderson and Welty, “The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic.” 3) An argument for God from propositions and possible worlds, Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas.” 4) An argument for God from properties Greg Welty, “A Theistic Theory of the Property ‘Truth,’” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 55–69.

Therefore, we have good reason to believe in a plentitude of necessarily existing objects possessing alethicity and doxasticity. These objects are called “propositions.”<sup>97</sup>

Four additional considerations buttress this conclusion.

- g. Our normal use of everyday language, with sentences such as, “there is a highest mountain in the world” indicates an object is in view here. This might be true even of fictional type objects. Cognitive verbs of attribution (e.g. “I feel the warm fire. Do you feel it too?”) show that these objects are intersubjectively available.
- h. The preceding true claims make a difference in our lives, a causal difference at that. For example, bridges will fall and cars won’t start if  $1 + 1 = 2$  is not true.
- i. We seem to take the truth of such objects to be distinct from our attitudes towards them.
- j. Ontological preconditions of property attribution seem to imply propositional existence. How could objects bear properties if they do not exist? Could  $1 + 1 = 2$  be true if it did not exist? It seems very hard to make sense of the idea that non-existing objects can have properties.<sup>98</sup>

**Step 2:** Functionalism (argument for entity-role): “Propositions must be the kind of things which play six specific roles.”

Frist, note that the entities in question cannot be just anything at all. For example, a prime minister might propose propositions for our consideration, but she couldn’t *be* a proposition as

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<sup>97</sup> Welty, “The Conceptualist Argument,” 286. Keller notes that naturalism, as regards propositions, suffers from the scarcity objection. Given naturalism, there simply aren’t enough propositions to go around and fit the bill. Keller, “The Argument from Intentionality,” 19. For a useful defense of conceptualism also see Richard Davis, “God and the Platonic Horde: A Defense of Limited Conceptualism,” *Philosophia Christi* 13, no. 2 (2011): 289–303.

<sup>98</sup> Welty, “The Conceptualist Argument,” 288. Plantinga affirms this strongly, he calls this “serious actualism,” in Alvin Plantinga, “Actualism and Possible Worlds,” in *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, ed. Matthew Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 103–121.

such. There is a connection between entity-existence and entity-role. Second, if we need X's because they *must* be able to do this or that in our ontology, then X's must be included in our ontology. Identification means getting the right X's into our ontology. Also, there must be some constraints on what qualifies as an X. In our case, what qualifies as a proposition? The following proposal applies six conditions, or constraints, on any successful account of propositions.

1. **Objectivity.** They are objects.
2. **Necessity.** They necessarily exist, no matter how the universe turns out to be. They could not have failed to exist.
3. **Alethicity.** They are truth-bearers that can be true or false.
4. **Doxasticity.** They can be believed or disbelieved.
5. **Plentitude.** There is an infinity of propositions. There need to be enough propositions to cover all possibilities, and any ontology that cannot meet this condition is likely false.
6. **Simplicity.** Simplicity is a constraint on metaphysical theories in general. Along with this, parsimony should also be included.

**Step 3:** Metaphysics (argument for entity-identification): “Only propositions as divine thoughts can fill all six roles.”

Broadly speaking, there are three main theories of propositions on offer: 1) Conceptualism, 2) nominalism, and 3) Platonism.<sup>99</sup> The basic nature of propositions differs in each of these theories. Nominalism typically identifies propositions with material particulars. Modern Platonism typically identifies propositions with abstracta of the Third Realm. Conceptualist theories identify propositions with mental particulars (such as thoughts), so they end up being mental entities of one sort or another. Theistic conceptualists identify propositions as divine thoughts in the mind of an infinite and perfect God.

Below, five different proposals are compared against the six conditional constraints listed above and then ranked according to how each proposal meets these *role* criteria. These are also noted as to how well they can incorporate a key feature of propositions; intentionality. Then

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<sup>99</sup> These of course are not the only options.

there is a limited summary commentary for the various proposals so that the rankings can be easily reviewed in thumbnail form.

Table 2

Overall Ranking	Category	Assessment Tally	+ Intentionality (Propositions make claims, they are declarative, they possess aboutness. This is a fundamental feature of propositions) <sup>100</sup>	Commentary
First Ranked	Propositions <i>as divine thoughts</i> (Theistic Conceptualism).	+Objectivity +Necessity +Alethic +Doxasticity +Plentitude +Simplicity	Does this option accommodate intrinsic or derived intentionality? Yes, Theism supports both. Propositions are intrinsic to God's mind as God's thoughts, as well as derivative from God's mind in the form of divine propositions expressed. God's thoughts to God are fully determined by God and fully determinate to God, Thus they are Pure Thoughts; Pure here meaning self-transparent to God	A divine mind satisfies the conditions for truth and possibility. Existent thoughts are required; they must be thoughts of a necessarily existent mind. These thoughts would have extramental existence relative to our minds – i.e. objective. They must exist independently of our cognitive activities.

<sup>100</sup> John R. Searle, *Intentionality, an Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 26–29. This distinction that Searle makes between *intrinsic* and *derived* intentionality is quite important. In our examples here, sentences and sets seem to have derived intentionality, since these are representations that derive from a thinker (as a thought) or speaker (as a thought expressed). Thoughts on the other hand have intrinsic intentionality since they represent states of mind of those who deploy them. See Welty, “The Conceptualist Argument,” 297–298; Crane, “Intentionality as the Mark of the Mental.”

			in all respects. The intentionality of propositions is one of the deepest and most fundamental features of propositions. Intentionality explains why they have alethic and doxasticity. <sup>101</sup>	
Second Ranked	Propositions <i>as abstracta</i> (autonomous Platonism).	+Objectivity +Necessity +Alethic +Doxasticity +Plentitude <del>-Simplicity</del>	Does this option accommodate intrinsic or derived intentionality? Neither. Abstracta do not appear to be intrinsic intentional entities. Their derived intentionality is also problematic.	Cannot be thoughts or sentences, but are <i>like</i> thoughts and sentences in representing the world as it could be, so can be true/false (A), believed or disbelieved (D) as well as O, N and P. Violates S. The problem of the horde. <sup>102</sup>
Third Ranked	Propositions <i>as thoughts</i> . (Mental particulars of some sort).	+ Alethic + Doxasticity + Simplicity <del>-Objectivity</del> <del>-Necessity</del> <del>-Plentitude</del>	Does this option accommodate intrinsic or derived intentionality? Both intrinsic and derived.	Fails O,N,P. O = my thoughts, your thoughts, are not objective. N=contingent, not necessary. P=not enough to account for all P's. <sup>103</sup>
Fourth Ranked	Propositions <i>as sentences</i> . (Linguistic nominalism, as tokens of some sort)	+ Alethic + Doxasticity <del>-Objectivity</del> <del>-Necessity</del> <del>-Plentitude</del> <del>-Simplicity</del>	Does this option accommodate intrinsic or derived intentionality? Only derived.	Fails for same reasons as third ranked thoughts. Fails S given diversity and proliferation of languages. <sup>104</sup>
Fifth Ranked	Propositions <i>as sets</i> . Set theoretic nominalism, a	+Objectivity +Necessity <del>-Alethic</del>	Does this option accommodate intrinsic or	Sets fail S because unduly extravagant. Fail A, D, and P given

<sup>101</sup> Welty, "The Conceptualist Argument," 297–298.

<sup>102</sup> Welty, "The Conceptualist Argument," 295–296. On this, Welty rightly comments, "Perhaps it is best to say: Platonists do multiply kinds, and so, violate simplicity (so, -S), but if they are correct that no material or mental theories are adequate, then their multiplication isn't beyond explanatory necessity after all (so, +S)." The question then is whether Platonism is true.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 294.

	proposition is a set of possible worlds. Possible worlds themselves are spatiotemporal wholes. <sup>105</sup>	<del>Doxasticity</del> <del>Plentitude</del> <del>Simplicity</del>	derived intentionality? Neither intrinsic nor derived.	sets are not the kind of thing that can be true/false, believed/disbelieved. Fails P given all sets are the same proposition, the set of all possible worlds. <sup>106</sup>
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Platonism and Theistic conceptualism will be discussed in a bit more detail since these are the two key comparisons that are relevant to the argument here. Welty then works to draw the argument to a conclusion. He points out that given intentionality – *all theories require conceptualism*.<sup>107</sup> This is an intriguing insight that warrants further consideration. He explains.

Propositional intentionality can ultimately be accounted for most simply in terms of mental states, not material objects like sentences or sets, since the intentionality of the latter presupposes mental states. (Failing the simplicity condition is the price [Platonist's] play for satisfying the intentionality condition.) ....The intentionality of the mental is *doubly* primitive: it not only explains other aspects of thoughts (their alethicity and doxasticity), but also the intentionality of other entities besides thoughts.<sup>108</sup>

He then draws four important conclusions given the above critical comparison. First, if we already accept persons with minds into our ontology, and God is a person with a mind, then TC does not require that we accept an altogether different category of being than we already accept into our ontology. In contrast to this, Platonists postulate an infinite Third Realm that is neither material nor mental. So, not only does the horde radically violate simplicity, but it is also categorically queer. Secondly, not all violations of simplicity are created equal. What do we really know about abstract entities as a category of being? To claim they are indispensable tells us nothing about their ontology; as to what they actually are. In this regard, very little can be said

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<sup>105</sup> David K. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 53, 105 and 5-69. This is cited in Welty. Parrish briefly critiques Lewis's extreme modal realism, see Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 317–322.

<sup>106</sup> Welty, "The Conceptualist Argument," 294–295.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

about abstracta. This reinforces the previous point but in a slightly different way. Thirdly, Welty rightly asks, why think abstracta have intentionality at all apart from the thinkers that think them? As Parrish argues, propositions as IOs are essentially thinkable things.<sup>109</sup> This is an essential feature that makes IOs what they are. But this is not true for autonomous and impersonal AOs. Imagine the Third Realm in a universe with no minds, no thinking beings. What might intentionality for AOs mean in this case? Where would it be? From whence is it possible? This seems to point to a location problem for AOs regarding intentionality, as well as the fact that the apparent intentionality of AOs looks parasitic on our own intentionality.<sup>110</sup> As for propositions specifically, just what is an intrinsically representational entity that neither is a thought nor presupposes a thought?<sup>111</sup> This seems incoherent, especially so, if propositions are fundamentally thinkable things. It would seem then that propositions presuppose the mind of a thinker. In Fregean terms, they naturally have an owner.<sup>112</sup> Finally, God alone is the mind that thinks all propositions in Theism.<sup>113</sup> Infinite propositions require the mind of an infinite and necessary God. The conceptualist argument from propositions, while not the entire argument for God, certainly leads us in the direction of God as Mind, God as the thinker of all propositions, that all propositions that exist or could possibly exist, exist as IOs in the Mind of God.<sup>114</sup> If moral

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<sup>109</sup> ‘...abstract entities are essentially ideal objects, and thus are essentially objects for and of minds.’ Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 335.

<sup>110</sup> Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis*. The notion of a location problem as regards the ethical is discussed more fully in chapter 5 of Jackson’s work.

<sup>111</sup> Welty, “The Conceptualist Argument,” 299.

<sup>112</sup> Frege of course denied that such propositions either had an owner or required an owner. For a viewpoint critical of Welty’s argument see Ruloff, “Divine Thoughts and Fregean Propositional Realism”; for a review critical of Frege see Peter Milne, “Frege’s Folly: Bearerless Names and Basic Law V,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Frege*, ed. Tom Ricketts and Michael D. Potter, Cambridge companions to philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 465–508. Milne shows that the entire notion of bearerless names is logically contradictory and cannot be endorsed given Frege’s commitment to logic and rationality.

<sup>113</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, *What Is, and What Is in Itself* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). See chapter 11 entitled “God and Possibilities.”

<sup>114</sup> There is another argument from Intentionality that is worth mentioning worked out by Lorraine Keller. It goes like this:

(1) Propositions represent essentially. [premise]

truths are propositions, the conceptualist argument from propositions is one more critical element in the moral argument for the existence of God.

### Analyzing the Specific Case of Moral Propositions

In light of the previous arguments, a comparative case examining moral propositions will now be worked out in limited detail. In the final section of this chapter, the moral Platonism of Kulp will be critically compared and contrasted with the Theistic moral realism consistent with TC, as worked out by Parrish in his forthcoming book.<sup>115</sup> The focus will be on select paradigm examples of first-order moral propositions and how the respective metaphysical accounts of 2<sup>nd</sup>-order metaethics of Theism and SMNN can successfully work with these propositions in their respective accounts, and then some final conclusion will be drawn. The paradigm examples in the critical comparison that will be used are as follows:

1. MP1 = *murder* is morally wrong.<sup>116</sup>
2. MP2 = *torturing* innocent children for fun is morally wrong.
3. MP3 = *stealing* is morally wrong.<sup>117</sup>

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- (2) Only agents represent fundamentally. [premise]
  - (3) So propositions depend for their existence on agents. [from 1,2]
  - (4) There are propositions that no finite agent entertains (transcendent propositions). [choice argument]
  - (5) The representation of transcendent propositions is independent of the representation of finite agents. [from 4]
  - (6) So, transcendent propositions cannot depend on finite agents. [from 3,5]
  - (7) Therefore, there is an infinite agent.

Keller, "The Argument from Intentionality," 24.

<sup>115</sup> Stephen Parrish, *The Nature of Moral Necessity* (forthcoming).

<sup>116</sup> MP of course is shorthand for moral proposition.

<sup>117</sup> In the case of stealing, appeal to a single AO would be much too simple. If we put aside for a moment the more complex metaphysical questions about supervenience, and assume a SMNN account (even though there is no single account on offer, our five thinkers all differ on the details of supervenience) there is still a problem. The problem with stealing is that it requires culture specific norms of property and ownership in order for those norms to be violated, i.e. for an act to be genuinely counted as an act of stealing, and thus for the act to be truly blameworthy in terms of rightness and wrongness. Anthropologists have demonstrated that there are no specific, universal norms of property ownership across all cultures; different cultures have different cultural property and ownership norms. See for example Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991). A single AO therefore cannot be drawn up or identified whereby *all* specific acts across all cultures at all times can necessarily count as acts of stealing in all cases. Thus no single AO could possibly do all the work required. The SMNN, on the one hand, would be obligated to give an account of multiple AOs for the various culture specific norms of ownership/property that are operative for a particular culture. That would be very metaphysically messy. On the other hand, an account of how the subvenient base (descriptive or physical) is somehow "fixed" and "holds" with respect to the supervening

4. MP4 = *breaking one's promises* is morally wrong.

Five salient features (or properties) of these paradigm moral propositions are as follows:

1. MP is somehow, and in some sense, *necessary*.
2. MP is, in some sense, *universal*.
3. MP is *person related*.
  - a. MP is intentional.
4. MP is *essentially good and right*.
5. MP is *categorical*.

Of course, these propositions could be recast and discussed in many different ways; as commands, moral principles, or as normative reasons (as in normative ethics), duties, or terms of moral semantics, and so on. They might also instructively be used to compare and analyze the distinctive metaethical account of each of our five thinkers.<sup>118</sup> Here, however, the focus will only be on Christopher Kulp's account, which was discussed earlier in the chapter, and only the five key properties listed will be discussed.

The first important thing to point out in this critical comparison, to remedy any possible confusion is this - the term "proposition" in the first-order English sentence, for example, the declarative sentence that "torture of this sort is wrong"<sup>119</sup> is different than the term "proposition" as used in the Conceptualist Argument above of Greg Welty.<sup>120</sup> For Welty, propositions take the place of AOs as divine ideas in the mind of God. For Kulp, propositions are to be taken as "abstract entities which express the content of declarative sentences [i.e., moral locutions]."<sup>121</sup>

For both Welty and Kulp, propositions then are to be distinguished from locutions. Propositions

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Third Realm norm in the particular case of a specific act would have to be worked out. Again, that would be very metaphysically messy. So any account that appeals to a single AO by which a particular act is an act of stealing will not work; it would be much too simple. One could take this as yet another example of the ontic calibration problem earlier cited, wherein an AO must be specifically calibrated to relative cultural acts and events. I owe this commentary to Stephen Parrish.

<sup>118</sup> This would be a very useful critical exercise, however, there is no space for that here.

<sup>119</sup> Often called "locutions" by the philosophers, a fancy word for 1<sup>st</sup> order moral propositions, or moral statements, sentences, or verbal claims.

<sup>120</sup> "Proposition" for Welty is a divine idea, what is being here called an IO in the mind of God.

<sup>121</sup> Kulp, "Disagreement and the Defensibility of Moral Intuitionism," 77.

exist in both the Theistic and Platonic accounts; the key difference between them is their metaphysical and ontological status.<sup>122</sup> For Kulp, first-order moral locutions are truth bearers whose truth values are determined by how they correspond to propositions. In turn, how these reflect a moral state of affairs instantiating physical and supervening, nonnatural, emergent moral properties.<sup>123</sup> Kulp is thus committed to a realist ontology regarding moral propositions as AOs. But moral propositions as AOs are, in turn, conjoined to a Platonic, emergentist account of abstract, moral properties and states of affairs. These moral properties are all modal properties in one way or another.<sup>124</sup> The critical analysis here will focus on both the moral propositions and emergent moral properties in Kulp's metaphysics.

A 2<sup>nd</sup>-order, metaethical moral truth can be expressed as a first-order moral locution in unlimited ways.<sup>125</sup> To illustrate this, the 2<sup>nd</sup> order (meta-ethical) proposition, the moral universal that, "torture of this sort is wrong," can be expressed in German as "Folter dieser Art ist falsch," or in Hangul (Korean) as, 이런 종류의 고문은 잘못된 것이다 ("torture of this sort is wrong")<sup>126</sup> or in Tagalog as "Ang ganitong uri ng pagpapahirap ay mali", ("torture of this sort is wrong") or in any number of unlimited linguistic forms.<sup>127</sup> Hence, the same universal moral proposition can be expressed in an unlimited number of ways, all expressing the same moral truth; the same moral proposition.

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<sup>122</sup> Welty, "Theistic Conceptual Realism"; see Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality*, 77. Here Kulp states that he can do without moral propositions, [read, locutions] if they are merely declarative sentences.

<sup>123</sup> These essentially possess necessity, universality, are good, right, and categorical.

<sup>124</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Two Concepts of Modality: Modal Realism and Modal Reductionism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 1 (1987): 189–231.

<sup>125</sup> Kulp, *Metaphysics of Morality*, 3. Here Kulp explains these things well.

<sup>126</sup> If it helps, note that this is pronounced, "ileon jonglyuui gomun-eun jalmosdoen geos-ida." Korean script is read from left to right. Google translate is a very helpful way to hear the English expression of MP2, torture of this sort is wrong" in a wide variety of languages.

<sup>127</sup> This would also include computer code, Morse code, various programming languages and so on; even "angelic" language if angels exist (and I believe that they do exist).

So then, if our four paradigm moral propositions (MPs 1-4) are true, each of these expressions possesses truth values (affirming alethic realism) as it relates to the various moral properties (affirming ontic realism) that are listed: each would be taken in some sense to be necessary, person related (involving intentionality), expressing essential moral good and right, as well as possessing binding moral categoricity.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, to refrain from these things (murder, torture, stealing, and breaking of promises) is said to be praiseworthy (morally good), and one who engages in such things is said to be blameworthy (engaging in what is morally wrong).<sup>129</sup>

Take note of the fact that these moral facts are also a species of alethic modal facts. If so, a key question concerning modality would be as follows. What features of Reality make *just these* modal, *just these* moral facts, to obtain in the ways they do?<sup>130</sup> Could things have been different about the truth of MPs 1-4? If so, how so? If not, how not so? As Pruss rightly points out, the modal question is not the same as the explanatory question, which asks *why* such facts obtain. In most cases, the *why* question comes to a stopping point that is brute, after which there is no explanation for *why*. Instead, the modal question is different; it asks, for example, could things have been different with regard to moral truths; moral propositions? If not, then from *whence comes the possibility for* the necessity which grounds the necessary? Or from *whence comes the possibility for* the categoricity by which something is truly categorical? Or *from whence comes the possibility for* the universality by which the universal just is universal? Again, given what is essentially good and right, what features of Reality make *just this rightness* and *just this goodness* essential as the goodness and rightness it is? These modal questions focus on

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<sup>128</sup> Kulp, *Knowing Moral Truth*, 26–27. In Kulp’s theory of truth, he combines both alethic realism and ontic realism and see an intimate connection between them. This author agrees.

<sup>129</sup> Elinor Mason, *Ways to Be Blameworthy: Rightness, Wrongness, and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). This is a useful book to help in further understanding these ideas.

<sup>130</sup> Pruss, “The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument,” 33. This is the key question that stands at the base of Pruss’s Leibnizian cosmological argument. As Pruss rightly puts the matter, “Alethic modality is a deeply puzzling phenomena.” Ibid..

the terms of possibility; that is, they have in view the things that are possible, might be possible, or impossible. Concerning the moral domain specifically, the modal questions bring into view just those features of Reality that make it such that MPs 1-4 hold as they do. Behind this, of course, is the more significant and broader modal question, how is possibility itself to be understood, and how is the moral domain placed into this more comprehensive understanding of modality?

We noted earlier that Parrish opted for a Leibnizian version of the modality of possible worlds. This work will follow his lead in this. This means that possible worlds are best understood as IOs, as pure concepts, in the mind of God. God knows all possibilities. God's creative being and mind shapes all possibilities. Regarding modal questions concerning the moral domain, Parrish also answers these questions from a modal metaphysics worked out in terms of Theistic conceptualism. Theistic conceptualism relates moral possibilities to God's being, mind, and will. This is radically different from the impersonal, autonomous Platonism of virtually all SMNN accounts. Personalist Theism fundamentally differs from appeal to an autonomous Third Realm of abstracta. It is to Parrish's exposition of these differences that we now turn.<sup>131</sup>

Anything that possibly exists - exists necessarily as a possibility, given standard S5 modal logic. Possibility, necessity and impossibility are what they are, given the nature or essence of things (in terms of properties) and concepts (in terms of essences). Worked with the law of non-contradiction, what is and is not possibly existent can be determined. If it is possible that MPs 1-4 are true, then it is necessarily possible that they are true. This, given that it is a

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<sup>131</sup> Parrish, *The Nature of Moral Necessity* (forthcoming). By and large, what follows will be a summary of his positions developed in this forthcoming book. This will avoid excessive citations here.

necessary feature of the nature of Reality that MPs 1-4 are true and necessarily so.<sup>132</sup> Yet, what makes this so? That which is necessary must come from that which has necessary existence. Platonic abstracta are taken to be intrinsically necessary; that is, they are taken to exist of their own necessity, *a se*, and in turn, that which is tied to them is thought to be necessary. *Securing necessity is the chief reason that SMNNs appeal to the autonomous Third Realm.* However, whereas abstracta may be eternal and necessary, the tie to abstracta that secures necessity in the case of moral truths is not necessarily necessary, and it also creates significant metaphysical troubles. The Third Realm is supposed to be that feature of Reality that settles the modal questions concerning moral truths. The logic of SMNN goes something like this. Suppose the Third Realm of abstracta is necessary. In that case, that which is backed by the Third Realm is also thereby made necessary, made universal, is given necessary content, and is what it is, necessarily. Hence, given the Third Realm of abstracta, necessity is secured for moral principles, truths, facts, and so on. There is no need for God.

However, this logic is fraught with problems. These problems become apparent once we bring into view the modal questions. It is not fully satisficing to arrive at and stop at necessary objects such as AOs, or even an entire realm of necessary AOs. Instead, we are after understanding that by which necessity itself is thereby made possible. AOs must themselves be situated in a web of modal possibilities; they do not themselves comprise this web of modal possibilities. What, then, in Reality, makes the necessity of the Third Realm of abstracta itself possible? That is the crucial question. As the modal questions are more extensive than the Third Realm itself, asking about that within which the Third Realm itself is metaphysically situated, it is evident that the Third Realm itself cannot account for the possibility of its own necessity. It then also does not automatically secure the necessity for any moral truths grounded in the Third

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 91.

Realm of abstracta. What accounts for the possibility of this grounding; for the possibility of the necessity of this grounding? The part cannot explain the whole or be the entire reason for the whole. Only something above and beyond can explain the whole, of which the Third Realm of abstracta is merely a part. So then, once we ask, from whence comes the possibility for the necessity which grounds the necessary? We can see that a mere appeal to the Third Realm of abstracta will not suffice to answer the modal questions. This might lead SMNN into a kind of infinite regress – a regress of infinite ascent into modal ontological priority. However, God, the God of Perfect Being Theism, is ontologically fundamental and will suffice for modal finality regarding these sorts of questions.

Furthermore, the autonomy of the Third Realm, supposedly its metaphysical strong point, also brings with it the isolation of the Third Realm, its causal impotence, its bruteness, its ontological extravagance, its category queerness, its epistemological problems, and other such metaphysical troubles and oddities. So then, the Third Realm of itself cannot answer the fundamental modal questions regarding the more extensive whole of modal Reality, within which the Third Realm of abstracta itself is situated. This seems to cut the legs of necessity from underneath the autonomous Third Realm of abstracta. Moreover, securing necessity does not by itself secure universality. For example,  $2+2=4$  and MP2 (*torturing* innocent children for fun is morally wrong) are both necessary propositions, but they are not necessary in the same sense or same way. Denying  $2+2=4$  entails a logical contradiction, while strictly speaking, denial of MP2 does not. On a moral Platonist account, MP2 is not and cannot be truly universal; that is, it is not true in all possible worlds, even though some may call it “a universal” truth. But merely calling something “a universal” does not thereby make it universal; that is, true in all possible worlds.

On Theism, given God, MP2 is true in all possible worlds. Given Theism, given that God exists in all possible worlds, it is thus truly universal. This is not the case on the SMNN account.

Now Parrish brings up another excellent point. In Plato's heaven, at least two propositions must exist: MP2 = *torturing* innocent children for fun is morally wrong, but also, MP2a = *torturing* innocent children for fun is not morally wrong. How is it the case that one proposition is true while the other is false? How or why is it the case that we are obligated to live by MP2 rather than MP2a? In Plato's heaven, who or what selects or affirms one as true and the other as false? And then where does its categoricity come from? From whence does its truth come? What is it about the Third Realm of abstracta that makes the one true and the other false, the one morally obligatory but the other not? Must one appeal to yet another higher-order truth, category, or selection function by which the one is made true and the other false? This would seem to lead to an infinite regress in the upward direction. In this case, the plentitude of Plato's Heaven clearly works against the SMNN. In Parrish's account, MPs 1-4 are synthetic necessities, that is, made true by reference to things external to themselves.<sup>133</sup> Given Theism, MPs 1-4 are true in all possible worlds, given they are grounded in the being, mind, and will of God. God, who is the Good, based on his nature, affirms the truth of MP2 and affirms the falsity of MP2a, in perfect consonance with his morally perfect being, mind, and will.

Yet there is a further insight that can be drawn along this same line of thought. Abstracta of the Third Realm do not possess intrinsic intentionality, nor do they appear to possess derivative intentionality. They are necessarily impersonal and, thereby, absolutely morally indifferent. If this is true, then abstracta cannot care about, nor have concern for, regard for, awareness of, or knowledge of, any personal moral-related matter. Not only is it the case that abstracta do not care, they cannot possibly care if one tortures children for fun, thus violating

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 95–96.

MP2. Abstracta possess no such intrinsic or derivative intentional capacity by which they could possibly care. By contrast, given Theism, the personal God indeed cares about such things.

In addition, MPs 1-4 as propositions are “thinkable things” that can be thought of in this way. They are God’s thoughts. In this case, God’s thoughts are original paradigm, exemplar cases of thoughts, and an indefinite number of the requisite minds can think these same thoughts. Since human beings are made in the image of God, our minds are analogs of God’s mind. God designs us to know moral truths, moral good, and moral evil as God knows these things, neither exhaustively nor infallibly, but truly. The moral propositions that God affirms are necessarily true because they stem from God's nature and affirmations, which are intrinsically Good, unchanging, and eternal. As such, the moral propositions that God affirms have an essential source of grounding that is eternal and unchangeable, providing the necessary conditions for them to be synthetically necessary. In this sense, they are absolutely necessary, true in all possible worlds given God exists in all possible worlds.

Finally, Theism handles the modal questions quite well. As we have seen, if we ask *from whence comes the possibility for* the necessity which grounds the necessary? Or *from whence comes the possibility for* the categoricity by which something is truly categorical? Or *from whence comes the possibility for* the universality by which the universal just is universal? Again, given what is essentially good and right, what features of Reality make just this rightness and just this goodness essential as the goodness and rightness it is? God’s being, mind, and will possess both modal and explanatory fit. If we ask, how can abstracta of the Third Realm be truly and genuinely categorical? The short answer is that they cannot. If Ultimate Reality is fundamentally impersonal, emerging out of the impersonal, flowing back into the impersonal, and standing over and above and underneath as impersonal, from *whence comes the possibility*

*for* the categoricity by which something is truly categorical for us as persons? Impersonalist abstracta of the Third Realm possess no intrinsic or derived authority or categoricity that binds us; they do not possess the modal capacity for such essential moral properties as this. By their very nature, this is precluded. This inherent metaphysical problem flows from the very nature of any account of metaethics that is fundamentally grounded in the Third Realm of impersonalist abstracta.

In summary, then the position elaborated here is as follows. As regards MPs 1-4, God, who is the Good and the Righteous, based on His nature, affirms the truth of MPs 1-4 in all possible worlds. These truths are thus personal, strongly realist, knowable, aimed at moral agents, fully obligable, categorical, necessary, universal, and essentially right and good. Theism thus provides a very deep, comprehensive, and unified modal and explanatory fit for these truths. It is ontologically fitting, metaphysically fitting, and epistemologically fitting, and fitted to the kinds of personal, moral beings that we are. The God of perfect being Theism, the only necessary being, is thus the sound basis of the Theistic moral project. SMNN, given its impersonal, autonomous, Platonist abstracta of the Third Realm, has problems with all of the above. Thus, this author concludes that the secular moral project continues to flounder in finding its footing. The Third Realm of autonomous abstracta cannot provide such footing. The chart below provides a reasonably comprehensive, thumbnail summary of the findings of this chapter regarding God, Abstract Objects, and Secular Moral Nonnaturalism.

**AOs & IOs – An A to Z Comparison Chart (Table 3)**

<b>Category of Comparison</b>	<b>Theoretical Problem Or Question to be Addressed</b>	<b>Abstract Objects</b> (Autonomous Third Realm) Autonomous Platonism	<b>God</b> (Ideal Objects in the Mind of God) Theistic Conceptualism

A. AOs or IOs in the mind of God?	The central metaphysical and ontological thesis of each theory.	(What work do AOs do for Moral Platonism?)	(What work does God do for Theistic metaethics?)
B. How is the Third Realm characterized and utilized by each thinker that has been reviewed?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enoch – IBE, indispensability.</li> <li>2. Wielenberg – an assumed posit (brute) to develop a plausible metaethical account</li> <li>3. Shafer-Landau – a priori truths (moral and others).</li> <li>4. Huemer – brute Platonic universals.</li> <li>5. Kulp – moral propositions as AOs, emergent, Platonic account of moral properties.</li> </ol>	No developed wider account of AOs in any of these thinkers.	Theism has a well-developed account of IOs that continues to be refined and worked out: Augustine, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Leibniz, Adams, Plantinga, Leftow, Welty, Parrish, Schultz, and so on. God as God – God is things (being, ontology) and does things that AOs could never be or do. AOs are best explained in God involving ways.
C. Centrality to the Theory	How central is either the Third Realm or God to the respective theories?	The Third Realm is Fundamental – without it, the distinctiveness of SMNN collapses (back into some version of naturalism)	God is central and does all the fundamental work in the theory.
D. The abstract/concrete distinction	How is the abstract/concrete distinction drawn and worked out in the respective accounts?	There is a clear distinction drawn but no account that fully works out the details of the distinction. All SMNN accounts rely heavily on	The distinction can be worked out in various ways within Theism. Theistic conceptualism (TC), one of a number of views, is the position developed in this

		supervenience to elaborate this distinction.	work.
E. Personalist, Personalism	Is Ultimate Reality personal or impersonal? Why do persons exist at all?	Impersonal – any impersonalist account of metaethics will have difficulty accommodating human personhood and mind, especially intentionality.	Personal - the common sense intuitive fit of Theistic ethics seems to follow naturally in part from its personalist character.
1. Match to our Personhood	Given Ultimate Reality, what answers to our own personhood? How does our own personhood fit or not fit with Ultimate Reality?	SMNN is Ultimately an impersonal ontology. AOs are incapable of life. They cannot be living things.	Theism is Ultimately a personalist ontology. God is a person, a living being.
2. The personal can encompass the impersonal (but not vice versa)	Is the personal God of Theism greater than an impersonal AO?	Given SMNN, God is entirely dispensable; thus, autonomous AOs displace God. No impersonal entity that is an AO is self-knowing.	It seems self-evident that a personal God is greater than an impersonal AO. God as personal is self-knowing and a free agent. This God is the GPB.
F. Mindedness	Is Ultimate Reality Minded or non-minded?	Non-mind	Mind
1. Match to our own minds	Are there only finite human minds? How are AOs or IOs matched to our own minds?	Presumably, yes, in any case, no Divine Mind is required.	No, God is an infinite mind, omniscient, who creates our finite minds as analogs to His own infinite mind. This is the doctrine of the <i>Imago Dei</i> .
2. As thinkable things	Since AOs or IOs seem to be thinkable things, how does this fit with the respective account?	Infinitely infinite number and kinds of thinkable things presses one	Infinite number of thinkable things known by God who is omniscient. This

		to accept autonomy thesis of AOs.	co-opts the Platonist argument. The infinite mind of God contains all IOs; God knows all things and all possibilities.
3. The question of our own minds	Are human minds required in the respective account?	No – Reality, the universe, must ultimately be impersonal on the secularist account. Mind is a relatively recent, comparatively small, and rather peculiar phenomenon in our universe.	No – God’s mind exists before any human mind; all human minds are created by God and depend upon God’s mind.
G. In Relation To The Moral Domain	How is the moral domain characterized relative to AOs or IOs in the respective account?	Rejection of ethical naturalism and all versions of ethical non-realism appeal to AOs as essential to their account of metaethics.	Theistic moral realism – this can be construed in many ways: Divine command theory, Divine motivation theory, Divine affirmation theory, natural law theory, and so on.
H. The problem of Supervenience	How does supervenience work in the account?	An essential part of the mechanics of SMNN but not adequately explained on the account. <i>S/V does not</i> explain moral necessity.	A limited, but useful way to articulate elements of the Theistic metaethical account.
I. In Relation To The Mathematical Domain	How is the mathematical domain characterized concerning the moral domain in the account?	Analogous. SMNN’s draw on mathematical indispensabilism and are	IOs in the mind of God. God knows <i>all</i> mathematical truths and has already worked out <i>all</i>

		committed, in a strong sense, to the autonomy thesis of AOs.	mathematical truths, equations, calculations, and answers.
J. Information (realism) – accounting for the ubiquity of information and the nature of information. <sup>134</sup>	What role does information play in the respective theories?	None	Informational realism, an essential way of thinking about Reality in relation to God. God is the conceiver and creator of all information.
K. Intelligibility	How is it that things are knowable as they are?	SMNN's do not have an adequate overall account of intelligibility; nevertheless, each account assumes and/or proposes a realist knowledge of Reality. Ultimately this is brute.	Theists understand that since we are created in the image of God, this is the basis for our capacity to know the world as it is. Given God, all things are therefore in principle knowable as they are.
1. Epistemological	What are the epistemological challenges of the respective accounts?	Epistemology is deeply problematic on the secular account. The PMP. Epistemology is the Achilles' heel of Platonism.	Epistemology is a challenge to the account. The position advocated here is Theistic direct realism.
L. Simplicity (Parsimony)			
1. Metaphysical	Does the respective account achieve parsimony/simplicity, given its metaphysics?	No	Yes
2. Ontological	Does the respective	No. The problem	God, being God,

<sup>134</sup> William A. Dembski, *Being as Communion: A Metaphysics of Information*, Ashgate science and religion series (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2014). The informational realism advocated here is partly worked out here by Dembski.

	account achieve parsimony/simplicity, given its broader ontology?	of the abstract horde	must always fully encompass any horde that the Platonist proposes. However, no abstract horde outstrips God, given that God is a being than which there is no greater. This is Anselm's argument. <sup>135</sup>
M. Fit, fittingness, suitability	What is the extent of fit or ad hocness that characterizes the theory?	A high degree of ad hocness once the theory details are sufficiently worked out and precisified.	God is the GPB and therefore there is no God of the gaps. Theism unifies in a non-ad hoc manner along multiple dimensions.
1. Explanatory fit	How do the various parts of the account fit together?	Brute	PFSR – the <i>principle of fittingly suitable</i> reason and the PSR, the <i>principle of sufficient reason</i> .
2. Fit to Reality, how does fit work as it relates to the real world?	How does the account fit to Reality? To human experience?	It can be made to fit, but personalist humanism and genuine human freedom dissolve in the secular impersonal account.	There is fit to Reality and God. God answers to our humanness since we are created in the image of God.
N. Complexity	How well does the account handle real complexity?	Real complexity far outstrips the account.	Real complexity outstrips the human account but not God's being, mind, will, and creativity.
1. Modal Complexity	How well does it handle modal complexity?	Limited	God knows all possibilities.
2. Informational	How well does it handle	Limited	God is an

<sup>135</sup> Leftow, *Anselm's Argument: Divine Necessity*.

Complexity	informational complexity?		informational God.
3. Mathematical Complexity	How well does it handle mathematical complexity?	Limited	God is a mathematical God.
4. Moral Complexity	How well does it handle moral complexity?	Limited	God is a morally perfect being, righteous and worthy of our worship, and the source and purveyor of all wisdom, justice, and good.
O. Unity, Unifying (The problem of pluralism)	Is the account a broadly unified account across the various domains?	A non-unified account	A unified account along multiple dimensions but also openly creative in many respects.
1. Explanatory unity of the particular account	Is the intra-theoretical account unified?	No	Yes
2. The diversity and conflicting heterogeneity problem (the hodgepodge infinite horde problem)	Can the account effectively deal with the conflicting heterogeneity of the horde of abstracta?	No Once the horde is in view, ad hocness becomes readily apparent.	Yes
P. Integration	The need to broadly integrate the various domains - the integration problem. (The integration challenge is closely related to the coherence challenge as well as to explanatory fit). <sup>136</sup>	No	Yes
1. Metaphysical matching 2. Epistemological		These are all very difficult to achieve on <i>any</i>	Given God, there is match to these three key areas of the

<sup>136</sup> Laura Schroeter and François Schroeter, "The Generalized Integration Challenge in Metaethics.," *Noûs* 53, no. 1 (March 2019): 192–223.

matching 3. Ontological coherence		secular account.	account.
Q. Normativity	How is normativity understood, and in what respects does normativity flow out of the account? What is the nature of normativity given the account?	Normativity is brute	Normativity is grounded in God's being, knowing, affirming, commanding, and so on. But Theism also provides for real human freedom given normativity.
R. Categoricity (the categorical nature of)	From whence do moral propositions receive their categoricity? How and in what sense are these authoritative; fully, and genuinely categorical?	Categoricity is problematic on the secular account. It is brute.	Categoricity flows organically out of the Theistic account given who and what God is.
S. Authority (the envisioned nature of authority)	From whence do moral propositions receive and press their authority? How and in what sense are these authoritative? How does such authority work in practice (this is closely related to the problem of categoricity)?	An AO of itself has no authority. Authority is no part of the <i>a se</i> of a secular and impersonal AO. (The relevance problem). <sup>137</sup> The relevance problem is a fundamental problem for SMNN. <sup>138</sup> In the end, this must be simply brute.	God, as righteous, embodies all moral authority. This is not arbitrary but is consonant with God's moral perfection, excellence, goodness, and justice.
T. Necessity (the problem of the necessary nature of)	What sort of necessary beings (entities, objects) are posited in the account? In what sense are these necessary?	There are necessary beings (entities) in the account. The problem is that	God, the GPB, is the only necessary being.

<sup>137</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 548–549. Dasgupta, “XV—Normative Non-Naturalism and the Problem of Authority.”

<sup>138</sup> Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism,” 92–93.

	How is necessity characterized and worked out in the respective accounts?	necessity, of itself, is causally powerless as well as brute. The Platonic account lacks an engine that motors Reality. AOs have no engine. Necessity of itself is powerless.	
U. Universality	Does the account achieve modal universality across all possible worlds?	No	Yes
V. Creation, the Creation of things (contingency, the <i>ex nihilo</i> problem)	In the respective accounts, how do things come into being in the first place? How then does this relate to AOs or IOs?	Brute, impersonal chance and time.	The infinite, omniscient God creates the finite universe. The contingent universe comes into being by God's creative vision, power and will.
W. Perdurantism (the problem of the continuance of things as they are)	Contingency and continuance of things.	Brute, there is no Ultimate reason for this.	The universe continues to exist as it does by the omniscient power and will of God. <sup>139</sup>
X. The Wider Dynamics Problem (Given the Account, how and why do things actually work as they do?)	>>>>	Brute, tends toward necessitarianism.	God's creative power and will; created dispositions and powers. The laws of nature are God-created,

<sup>139</sup> See Schultz, "The Actual World from Platonism to Plans." The notion of omniscience used here is crafted from the work of Walter Schultz. Note that this author is personally less certain about Schultz' commitment to mathematical structuralism though this author does find mathematical structuralism an intriguing account of the mathematical domain and mathematical truths. See his Walter Schultz, "Toward a Realist Modal Structuralism: A Christian Philosophy of Mathematics," *Philosophia Christi* 12, no. 1 (2010): 102–117.

			contingent <i>laws of natures</i> . <sup>140</sup>
1. Dynamic Conceiving as Mind	>>>>	Rejects this	TC builds upon this.
2. Dynamic Causality as Agency	>>>>	Rejects this	TC builds upon God's volitional agency.
3. Dynamic Powers of (Various Entities)	>>>>	Brute	TC can include some version of dispositional essentialism.
Y. Dynamics of Supervenience	>>>>	Brute	TC can work with this notion. <sup>141</sup>
Z. Dynamics of Functional Roles	>>>>	Brute	God designed
1. As Universals	>>>>	Brute	God conceived & designed <sup>142</sup>
2. As Properties (attributes)	>>>>	Brute	God conceived/designed and created.
3. As Propositions	>>>>	Brute	God conceived and manifested as well as humanly conceived and manifested.
4. As Information		No account	Information is metaphysically neutral, because it forms and mediates creative encoding in Reality; God

<sup>140</sup> Orr, *The Mind of God and the Works of Nature: Laws and Powers in Naturalism, Platonism, and Classical Theism*, 164.

<sup>141</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 22. Here Leftow makes an interesting use of supervenience in relation to PBT.

<sup>142</sup> Brian Leftow, "God and the Problem of Universals," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 325–356. God can do the work of universals.

			designed it to encode things, including our own minds and worlds. Reality is informationally structured. God designed AOs as structuring structures; mechanisms by way of informational encoding. <sup>143</sup>
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Given the findings of chapter 6, presented below is a summary argument that autonomous AOs are instead to be taken as IOs in the mind of God on a Theistic Conceptualist account. The argument can be formulated in this way.

P1 – Any ground of necessary things is itself necessary.

P2 – Any necessary thing “in” the Mind of God is grounded in God.

P3 – AOs, taken instead to be IOs (thinkable things), are necessary and “in” the Mind of God.

C1 - IOs thus taken are grounded in the Mind of God (P1, P3).

C2 - Therefore, God necessarily exists and grounds IOs (P2, P3, C1) <sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Edward N. Zalta, *Abstract Objects: An Introduction to Axiomatic Metaphysics* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1983); Bøhn, *God and Abstract Objects* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Falguera, et. al., “Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” *Abstract Objects* (2020): 38–43. This last reference provides an accessible introduction to Zalta’s highly technical 1983 work. Zalta’s work develops the function of AOs as “The Way of Encoding.” Only AOs encode properties. Bøhn attempts an exploratory exposition of AOs in light of Theism, however this is merely a light and summary introduction. The key here is the function of encoding; informational encoding that bridges the function of AOs to both God’s mind and omniscience and creativity. Encoding is not the same thing as “exemplifying.” The distinction between exemplifying and encoding is a primitive distinction (see Falguera, et. al. p. 38). So then, on the interpretation adopted here, AOs are effectively informational structuring (i.e. encoding) mechanisms, designed by God to encode things, which in turn enables these things to be creatively exemplified or actualized. Informational realism is thus central to the theory developed here.

<sup>144</sup> This argument is a rework of the argument of Einar Duenger Bøhn, “Divine Necessity,” *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 11 (November 2017): 5.

## Chapter Seven

### A Moral Argument for the Existence of God

The final chapter will develop a positive moral argument for the existence of God, taking into account the respective critiques and the positive elements put in place in the previous sections. The positive argument will be a deductive, apagogic, and abductively cumulative case argument, with a transcendental and modal component. The argument proceeds from what Theistic metaethics and secular nonnaturalist metaethics agree on. This set of shared beliefs is our CONCORD, our agreement. The argument is as follows:

CONCORD: We are moral rational beings that live in a rational-intelligible universe. Surely this astonishing fact cries out for explanation.<sup>1</sup>

Q1: How do we explain the moral-rational beings that we are in the rational-intelligible universe in which we live?

Q2: What is the best explanatory account of our moral nature and being in our universe?

Q3: What kind of Ultimate possible answers are available to us, what are they, and how might they work to explain CONCORD? I find three.

P1 – Ultimately – Chance, Necessity, or a Necessary Being exist.

Given:

1. There is an answer.
2. Nothing necessary is arbitrary.
3. Nothing true requires God's non-being.
4. The actual universe and our moral being are logically contingent.

P2 – The moral-intelligible universe and moral-rational beings that we are do not exist by necessity.

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<sup>1</sup> CONCORD builds from the long list of things that Theists and SMNNs agree on that was enumerated on pp.46-48.

P3 – Chance cannot originate, order, or sustain the moral-intelligible universe in which we live or the moral-rational beings that we are.

C1 - Therefore, there is a Necessary Being; God. It will be argued that this God is the Greatest Possible Being, the God of Perfect Being Theism.

Theists and SMNNs largely agree on CONCORD. The dialectical strategy is to take the limited metaethical debate between Theists and SMNNs to account for CONCORD and situate it within the broader Ultimate options for the explanation of all things: Chance, Necessity, or a Necessary Being. This will facilitate developing a positive moral argument for the existence of God.

### **Gathering Together the Arguments of the Previous Sections**

What carries forward from the previous sections? The key criteria for evaluating what carries forward are as follows. First, does the presentation and critique of each thinker's metaphysics of metaethics stand? Second, what are the arguments for Theism *suggested* in the previous sections? Thirdly, what are the *actual* arguments for Theism already developed and put forward in the previous sections? Finally, how might all of this contribute to the final moral argument for the existence of God, a Necessary Being?

In the review of Sidgwick and Moore, two moral arguments for the existence of God were suggested. Sidgwick's juggernaut, the *dualism of practical reason*, threatened the very rationality of the ethical enterprise itself and thus provided an opening for an argument for moral rationality given the existence of God.<sup>2</sup> As for G.E. Moore and his quest to understand the nature of good as the central ethical question, again, the Theist understands that the person God, as the

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<sup>2</sup> See pp. 33-35. See also Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument*, 269; see chapter 7 in Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*. This chapter deals with moral rationality, namely, that the existence of God, as well as life beyond death, ground the Ultimate rationality of moral good and virtue. The telos of individual virtue harmonizes with the Ultimate telos of all things in God.

Good, more than adequately grounds our variegated understanding of ethical Good. God as the Good is a central moral argument for God.<sup>3</sup> The understanding of God's essential Goodness grounds the ontology of all Theistic metaethics.

In chapter two, the metaethics of David Enoch was critically examined. The centerpiece of Enoch's account of robust realism is his argument from deliberative indispensability. As shown, the argument does not go through as Enoch argues. Among the criticisms, the following are pertinent:

1. There are problems with indispensability arguments in general.<sup>4</sup>
2. Instrumental indispensability is not "truth-directed." Thus, instrumental indispensability merely amounts to a form of pragmatic indispensability. Irreducible normative *truths* are thereby not secured on his pragmatic account.
3. Related to the previous point, indispensability is not an independent guide to ontology, certainly not the heavyweight ontology of Enoch's robust realism.
4. The above shows that the centerpiece of Enoch's argument is not successful.
5. Explaining supervenience is a problem for all SMNNs going forward, including Enoch. The various accounts of supervenience merely state the supervenient relation but do not actually explain the relation. All versions of SMNN are subject to a revised form of Plantinga's supervenience argument against naturalism. The key to Plantinga's objection is that supervenience, as developed by naturalists and SMNNs alike, does not by itself exclude God. In fact, the Theist maintains that God more than

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<sup>3</sup> Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. "God as the Good" is the entire first chapter of Adam's work. It not only provides a workable framework for metaethics but can also be taken as a response to the range of Moore's questions given the self-admitted failure of Moore's project.

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 64-83.

adequately explains the relations of supervenience that might be fixed and might hold.<sup>5</sup>

6. The Third factor account of epistemology that Enoch puts forward, a (Godless) pre-established harmony, does not go through. In the final analysis, Enoch's Third Factor account begs the question by smuggling in a notion of teleological "good" that his naturalistic evolutionary account cannot support. His (Godless) pre-established harmony ends up being brute. However, a God created pre-established harmony is entirely plausible. But Enoch never entertains this possibility.
  - a. The central epistemological challenge of explaining correlations between Plato's heaven and moral knowers results in metaphysical cosmic coincidence problem #1 for Enoch, and it extends to the various versions of SMNN as well.<sup>6</sup>
7. All versions of SMNN are subject to the undercutting defeater of the Plausible Mechanism Problem (PMP) as developed in this chapter.<sup>7</sup> It is argued that the PMP is crippling for all versions of SMNN.
8. In this chapter, no specific positive arguments for Theism are proffered. It is clear that Enoch never takes Theism seriously as he develops his account of robust realism. The failures of robust realism open a number of paths for positive Theistic arguments to God. First, God as Ultimate normative source and ground. Second, God as the source of a full-blooded moral categoricity and authority. Thirdly, a God created pre-established harmony that shapes and grounds all our knowing, including moral epistemology.

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<sup>5</sup> See pp. 85-108.

<sup>6</sup> See pp. 105-108.

<sup>7</sup> See pp. 109-121.

Chapter three looked at Eric Wielenberg's Godless normative realism. Notably, Wielenberg rejects Enoch's Third Factor account in favor of his own that combines what he calls D-supervenience coupled with the Making-as-causation-relation (MaCR). Wielenberg's Third Factor account is centered in our moral cognitive faculties. Wielenberg's reworking of supervenience is an indication that SMNNs understand that supervenience presents problems for their metaethics. The critique of Wielenberg's account focused on three fundamental problems.

1. There is the problem of the exemplification of moral properties. Exemplification is brute. As well it runs Wielenberg into the ontic calibration problem. This problem involves the ontic problem of explaining just how it is that individual human worlds and the abstract moral domain are matched, integrated, and calibrated to manifest moral properties in just the ways that they so happen to be exemplified in our moral being and the moral domain.<sup>8</sup>
2. There is also the problem of brute-necessities being logically incoherent.<sup>9</sup>
3. Finally, his Third Factor account dissolves the moral agent and moral agency in a whirl of epiphenomenal automaticity.<sup>10</sup>
4. The PMP also carries forward as a problem for Wielenberg's account.

The following problems with Wielenberg's account provide three related openings for Theism.

1. God, as paradigm moral agent, not only anticipates our own moral agency, but God creates us to know moral truth and to be moral agents. Here the doctrine of *Imago Dei* is central. We are created in God's image to be the moral knowers and moral agents that we are.

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<sup>8</sup> See pp. 143-151.

<sup>9</sup> See pp. 152-157.

<sup>10</sup> See pp. 157-166.

2. God is the paradigm causal creative agent that brings the created order into existence *ex nihilo*. God as paradigm moral agent and creative causal agent nicely complement one another in the Theistic account of metaethics.
3. As a necessary being, God is not a logically incoherent brute necessity. Brute necessities are an outcome of the impersonalist and non-unified ontology of SMNN. All explanation eventually dead ends at the level of a fundamentally impersonalist ontology. This is fundamental bruteness. By contrast, as a necessary being, necessity is analytic to the very being that God is; it flows out of God's own nature.

Chapter four investigated Russ Shafer-Landau's account of SMNN, which is centered in the idea that ethics is philosophy. Metaethics is a moral-rational discipline wherein moral truths are *a priori* discoverable, self-evident, and intuitively knowable.

1. Shafer-Landau opts for yet another different kind of supervenience account, a constitutive account wherein moral facts are constituted out of natural facts. Supervenient relations are "fixed" and "hold" by virtue of what? Somehow their being fixed is necessary. This author dubs such fixings as "fixessities." Their supervenient "fixessary" nature is never explained; it is inexplicable because it is brute.
2. A deeper problem for Shafer-Landau is that our rationality itself is problematic on a generalized naturalistic account of origins. The PMP is a problem for his account. His account of rationality, therefore, fails the T-test (transcendental test).<sup>11</sup>
3. Shafer-Landau rejects a Theistic account of metaethics, arguing that Theistic ethics is constructivist. He rejects the common argument that moral laws require a lawmaker.

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<sup>11</sup> See p. 227. Recall that this test asks, "Is the thinker's own thinking undercut or contradicted by the thinker's own system of thought, life, and Reality?" A commitment to a generalized naturalistic account of the origins of our rational knowing capacities undercuts *a priori* truths.

However, Shafer-Landau fudges on his view of laws in general. Natural laws, moral laws, and mathematical laws are all laws in different senses.

- a. By comparing the case of natural laws and moral laws, it is shown that such laws do require a lawmaker. This is so, given that such laws are not logically necessary; they are logically contingent (TCBO = things could be otherwise).<sup>12</sup>
4. Shafer-Landau argues that objective moral laws create a Euthyphro problem for Theism.
  - a. However, Euthyphro is only a problem for a strong voluntarist account of Theistic metaethics. It is not a problem for PBT, which grounds the ethical in the being, mind, and will of God.<sup>13</sup>
5. Shafer-Landau then argues in favor of a secular account of eternal and necessary moral principles, which he describes as if-then conditionals that ground moral facts.
  - a. A counter argument is put forward that eternal and necessary moral principles provide reasons to accept an eternal, morally necessary being, who is God.<sup>14</sup>
6. The next section of the chapter assessing Shafer-Landau's metaethics provides a comprehensive critique of the thesis of the moral fixed point thesis (MFTs).<sup>15</sup> The moral fixed point thesis works from the idea that certain moral propositions are "fixed" as essentialist moral conceptual truths. This thesis is critiqued and found to be implausible. While the moral fixed points may be conceptual truths, they are not indexed to worlds in conceptually necessary ways. The critique provided by David Copp argues this point well.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See pp. 170-176. It might be argued that these laws are metaphysically (i.e. essentially) necessary but then this thesis would have to be defended as other than brute.

<sup>13</sup> See pp. 176-180.

<sup>14</sup> See pp. 179-184.

<sup>15</sup> Note once again that "fixed" "fixedness" of the "fixessary" and "fixessities" is central here.

<sup>16</sup> See pp. 185-196.

7. That laws require lawmakers carries forward to the final moral argument for God. That eternal necessary moral principles require an eternal and morally necessary God likewise carries forward to the final argument.

Chapter five explores the intuitionist version of SMNN of Michael Huemer. The early history of moral intuitionism shows that Theism and moral intuitionism are natural partners. This is also seen in the work of Robert Audi, a Theist, who is a leading thinker in the new intuitionism. Huemer's account of ethical intuitionism is a version of rationalist foundationalism. It is worked out from his intuitional epistemology, referred to as phenomenal conservatism. This is a version of direct realism. The central claim of phenomenal conservatism is that our knowledge of direct, intuitional "seemings" should be taken as true, necessary, and defeasibly justified in the absence of defeaters. Huemer argues that the same holds true for our ethical intuitional seemings.

1. Huemer rejects all arguments put forward by Theists for the existence of God. His handling of the ontological argument is evaluated, and it is shown that the modal ontological argument survives Huemer's criticisms and parody. The argument thus stands as reasonable to accept. There is no logical contradiction in the conception of God as the GPB.<sup>17</sup>
2. In contrast to Huemer's direct realism, a version of Theistic direct realism, developed by Stephen Parrish, is put forward. Huemer's foundationalism is challenged by a version of Theistic foundationalism based on a set of transcendental axioms, followed by a transcendental argument for Theism and a transcendental test by which Theists and Non-Theists alike can test their beliefs about Reality.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See pp. 212-219.

<sup>18</sup> See pp. 225-230.

3. The final focus of this section examines the design intuition. It is argued that the design intuition, like ethical intuitions, should be construed objectively and alethically. If so taken, then this should also change how ethical intuitions are viewed; as Theistically grounded.
4. Huemer's ethical intuitionism suffers from the problem of cumulative bruteness. All versions of SMNN likewise suffer from the problem of cumulative bruteness. Cumulative bruteness makes the position widely implausible.<sup>19</sup>
5. The ontological argument carries forward to the final moral argument for God's existence. Likewise, the transcendental axioms, the transcendental argument and transcendental test carry forward to the final argument. As well, a design argument via the design intuition is also suggested that carries forward.

Chapter six critically works through *God, Abstract Objects and Secular Moral Nonnaturalism* with a focus on the moral Platonist version of Christopher Kulp. Since SMNNs rely so heavily on Third Realm, autonomous AOs, this chapter is a critical and weighty turn in the overall critique. There is a long and venerable history between Theism and Platonism. All versions of SMNN are ontologically thin on details regarding the Third Realm. They have not fully come to terms with the heavyweight ontology that they are proposing. They have not fully come to terms with the Platonic horde. It is argued that Plato's heaven is a profligate and extravagant ontology. By contrast, Theism is simple and unifying. The moral Platonism of Christopher Kulp is explicated and critically examined.<sup>20</sup> The nature of abstract objects (AOs) is analyzed. Autonomous AOs are rejected in favor of IOs (Ideal Objects as thinkable things) in the mind of God. This view is a version of Theistic Conceptualism that is developed and defended.

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<sup>19</sup> See pp. 229-230.

<sup>20</sup> See pp. 250-255.

God and the Argument from Logic is developed and defended.<sup>21</sup> Twelve takeaways from the analysis of AOs and IOs are discussed.

1. God can do all the necessary work in Theistic theory, whereas autonomous AOs cannot do all the work required in the metaethics of SMNN.
2. The bigger the horde, the bigger the mind of God.
3. God is personal, AOs are non-living impersonalist entities.
4. God is plentitudinous yet simple and unifying. God's plentitudinous nature fundamentally and ontologically grounds all Reality and all possible worlds.
5. On TC, all Reality, given God, is essentially knowable.<sup>22</sup>
6. The epistemology of the Third Realm is a problem for all SMNN accounts. The PMP and cosmic coincidence problem #1 are important problems for those committed to autonomous AOs.
7. On TC, there are no autonomous AOs. What are taken to be autonomous AOs by SMNNs are instead IOs in the mind of God. These IOs are essentially thinkable things that can also be thought by the requisite minds. We are made in the image of God and so possess the requisite minds.
8. There is a relevance problem for autonomous AOs. They are teleological flops.
9. Necessity, of itself, is powerless. There is no engine to motor the horde.
10. God is a concrete being; God's thoughts are concrete to God but abstract to us.
11. God as a person, has a will. As such, God is a moral agent and a causative creative agent.
12. Modality fits well in a TC account of metaphysics and metaethics.

Welty's Conceptualist Argument from Propositions was presented and the relevance of this to moral propositions was discussed.<sup>23</sup> Given these findings, presented below is a summary argument that autonomous AOs are instead to be taken as IOs in the mind of God on a Theistic Conceptualist account. The argument can be formulated in this way.

P1 – Any ground of necessary things is itself necessary.

P2 – Any necessary thing subsisting “in” the Mind of God is grounded in God.

P3 – AOs, taken instead to be IOs (thinkable things), are necessary and subsist “in” the Mind of God.

C1 - IOs are thus taken and are grounded in the Mind of God (P1, P3).

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<sup>21</sup> See pp. 263-266.

<sup>22</sup> See pp. 220-222. This was earlier noted in the section that developed Theistic direct-realism.

<sup>23</sup> See pp. 279-288.

C2 - Therefore, God necessarily exists and grounds IOs (P2, P3, C1) <sup>24</sup>

Collecting the overall cumulative weight of the criticisms of the five thinkers examined, using abductive reasoning, a form of inference to the best explanation (IBE), it can be concluded that Theism is a better, if not the best explanation of our moral nature and the moral order of things. Thus, even before a final argument is fully worked out, the overall case *against* SMNN is strong and the overall case *for* Theistic metaethics is also quite strong.

### **A Moral Argument for the Existence of God – Some Initial Commentary**

The moral argument is unique. It can take within its purview the other arguments for the existence of God, collect these arguments together in a cumulative and ramified way, and then take each argument in a combined way to close the polemic gap one step closer to God.<sup>25</sup> Significantly, the moral argument fills in the content of God's being and character in ways that no other argument for God's existence can. The moral argument requires that our full humanity be accounted for (moral, rational beings) as well as the kind of universe in which we live (a rational, intelligible universe).

### **This Version of the Moral Argument – Some Analysis**

The mutually exclusive options (Ultimately – Chance, Necessity, or a Necessary Being) are brought to bear on and fully come to terms with the same set of questions generated by CONCORD. Chapter one laid out a rather extensive tally of the things that Theists and SMNNs agree on.<sup>26</sup> Once these areas of agreement are fully considered, it can be seen that the argument largely turns on the strength of the broader metaphysics of each account, that is, the SMNN account of the Third Realm or the strength of the Theistic account of God as a Necessary Being.

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<sup>24</sup> This argument is a rework of the argument of Bøhn, "Divine Necessity," 5.

<sup>25</sup> Pruss, "The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument," 98. The "gap" problem is a problem noted by Pruss in his conclusion.

<sup>26</sup> See pp. 46-48.

The choice is between the God of PBT, the GPB, or SMNN that combines necessitarian and autonomous AOs plus a generalized naturalistic (or exotic multiverse) account of origins. The particular version of the moral argument developed here is characterized by the following:

1. It has a deductive structure.<sup>27</sup>
2. It involves an abductive argumentative strategy. The abductive strategy is inferring the best explanation (IBE) from competing explanations. Abductive reasoning is important but also limited in how strongly conclusions might be drawn from the evidence and arguments.
3. It builds a cumulative case and is ramified in multiple different ways.
  - a. Cumulative evidence *for* as well as cumulative evidence *against* is at work in the argument.
  - b. No one argument can make the entire case for or against Theism or atheism.
  - c. When abductive reasoning is combined with cumulative evidence, and this involves multiple threads of evidence knit together, the broader weight of the evidence strengthens or weakens the argument as a whole to a final conclusion.
  - d. Ramified evidence is simply any and all relevant lines of evidence for or against a conclusion coherently woven together.
4. It is apagogic. This methodology involves disproving the mutually exclusive propositions that contradict the one to be established.<sup>28</sup> Providing the mutually excluding propositions sufficiently cover all options, the proposition to be established is thus taken to be true since it is the only one remaining. This is argument by eliminating other possible alternative explanations. It is a last-man standing form of argument.

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<sup>27</sup> The broad deductive structure is drawn from Parrish's work in *God and Necessity*.

<sup>28</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 180.

5. The transcendental component.

- a. As Parrish puts the matter, “The only premises that could not be denied would be those that stand as the basis of all rational thought.” These premises would be transcendental. The problem is accounting for the very nature of rational thought itself. God is the basis for the possibility of our own moral, rational being in the rational intelligible universe in which we live, thus God is a transcendently Necessary being.<sup>29</sup>
- b. The transcendental axioms previously laid out,<sup>30</sup> the transcendental argument built from these, along with the transcendental test, form the transcendental components of the argument. God is the necessary rational and moral precondition for any rationality and morality. Our own rationality is fitted to the rational intelligible universe in which we live. Our world, the universe, is essentially fully knowable since God knows all things.

6. The modal components.

- a. The modal components of the argument include the modal ontological argument, essentialism, and a modal notion of causality.
- b. The ontological argument also supports the case for Divine necessity. Divine necessity grounds moral necessity in a Maximally Great Being, a Perfect Being, who is thereby a Necessary Being.
- c. Additionally, a Leibnizian, Theistic conceptualist account of possible worlds is deployed. This kind of account is defended in Welty.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>30</sup> See pp. 225-230.

<sup>31</sup> See further discussion of possible worlds in Appendix 5. Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas.” In Welty’s work, a Theistic Conceptualist account of possible

How the term “Ultimately” is designed to work in the argument in critical. Stretching the argument to this Ultimate level to account for CONCORD does essential work in the argument. That which is Ultimate is ontologically fundamental to everything else and comprehensively fitting to Reality as it is, in very fine grained and multidimensional ways. The Ultimate is also the ground for all that exists, explanatorily unifying and thus final. There would be nothing beyond the Ultimate. Every worldview must have Ultimates of this sort; that to which everything in the system refers, that upon which everything in the system depends, and that around which everything in the system coheres. The argument here is that God, a Necessary Being, is the Ultimate sole Reality to whom all things refer.<sup>32</sup> God is the Ultimate sole Reality upon whom all things depend and, being necessary, depends on nothing extrinsic to His nature.<sup>33</sup> Nothing other than God can possibly account for either God’s existence or essential attributes. This does not make God brute as bruteness goes. On the contrary, God is no mere explanatory stopping point where explanation dead ends. The moral argument shows that God is an infinitely plentitudinous being who grounds all things, who creates all things. Ultimately, God is thus the plentitudinous beginning of all explanation. God is the Ultimate explainer of things because all created things depend upon God. The argument has four “givens” that will only be briefly touched upon. They are “given” because they are assumed in the argument.

#### 1. There is an answer.<sup>34</sup>

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worlds takes up the entire section 3 “Realism About Possible Worlds,” 63-101, as well as section 5, “Conceptualism About Possible Worlds,” 131-164. Possible worlds are taken to be ideas in the mind of God, who, given omniscience, knows all possibilities. This account is very much in line with Plantinga’s account as Welty’s exposition shows.

<sup>32</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Divine Ultimacy is the central thesis defended in Leftow. His introduction to the issues is helpful. See *Ibid.*, 3–28.

<sup>34</sup> SMNNs by and large are optimistically engaged in the metaethical debates in such a way that they affirm given #1. None of them express metaphysical nihilism and all of them reject moral nihilism, otherwise known as moral error theory. That “there is an answer” also nicely compliments Theistic direct realism wherein all Reality is essentially knowable given God is omniscient; God knows all things, therefore “there is an answer.”

2. Nothing necessary is arbitrary.<sup>35</sup>
3. Nothing true requires God's non-being.<sup>36</sup>
4. The actual universe and our moral being are logically contingent.<sup>37</sup>

## On CONCORD

CONCORD is no trivial or uninteresting fact; it is as an “astonishing fact” that ought to be explained. To trivialize CONCORD makes the entire enterprise of our seeking understanding pointless. SMNNs, at times, seem to hedge on this matter.<sup>38</sup> Theists do not equivocate on this matter. This argument also rejects that CONCORD is an utterly mysterious fact, that no explanation is possible.<sup>39</sup> To help flesh out CONCORD, to which the moral argument is directed, consider the six really hard problems listed below. The moral, rational beings that we are depend, in crucial respects, on each of these prior creative miracles. These are as follows:

The six really hard problems:

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<sup>35</sup> Necessity here is broadly logical necessity (see discussion on pp. 153-155). That which is arbitrary is that for which there is no reason, cause, or explanation for being what it is or as it is. That which is necessary cannot be other than it is. That which is arbitrary might not be in the first place or could be other than it is. Parrish states and utilizes this proposition in his rebuttals to those who object to the modal ontological argument, see Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 84. That nothing necessary is arbitrary seems self-evidently true.

<sup>36</sup> Not only is atheism not the default, presumptively true, view of Reality, given #3 only requires that the possibility of God's existence remain a live and open possibility. The non-existence of God cannot be proved. J. N. Findlay, “Can God's Existence Be Disproved?” *Mind* LVII, no. 226 (1948): 176–183. However, if the possibility premise itself is challenged, namely that God as a necessary being is logically impossible, then that is a significant challenge to PBT. See for example David Blumenfeld, “On the Compossibility of the Divine Attributes,” in *The Concept of God*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 201–217. The argument of Blumenfeld proposes to demonstrate that the God of PBT is logically contradictory, logically incoherent and thus impossible. Parrish responds to a similar argument by Michael Martin, see Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 268–275. See also chapter 9 in Alexander R. Pruss and Joshua L. Rasmussen, *Necessary Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 173–194. Chapter 9 of Pruss and Rasmussen systematically works through various arguments against a Necessary Being; Rasmussen, “Does Atheism Entail a Contradiction?” This author takes that these various arguments against a Necessary Being can be effectively answered and therefore given #3 is proposed as given. Peter van Inwagen echoes a similar view, “Therefore, anyone who thinks he knows, or has good reason to believe, that there is *no* necessary concrete being is mistaken.” Van Inwagen, “Ontological Arguments,” 386 (emphasis original).

<sup>37</sup> That is, each of these could have failed to exist, might not have existed. Nothing in the area of narrow logical truth(s) requires the existence of such. One cannot successfully argue that logically, the universe and or moral being must exist or could not have failed to exist. That which is logically contingent would be different from that which is metaphysically contingent. The various necessity claims of SMNN grounded in the Third Realm by and large grant this assumption. For this reason, in this argument, given #4 is a given.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Enoch describes epistemological correlations as merely a “small miracle.” Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 172–174. SMNNs would naturally seem to deflate the “astonishing” nature of CONCORD.

<sup>39</sup> From Given #1, “There is an answer.” This rejects that no explanation is possible. Both SMNNs and Theists reject that no explanation is possible.

1. There is the problem of how our actual universe begins in the first place.
  - a. How to explain the ordered and lawful features of our universe.
  - b. How to explain that our universe is exquisitely fine-tuned for life.
  - c. How to explain the intelligibility of our universe.
2. The problem of how information itself and specified complexity originate in the first place.
3. The problem of how biological information and complex biological life originate in the first place.
4. The problem of how sentient biological life originates in the first place.
5. The problem of necessary truths and propositions, how we know them, and how they fit into the rest of Reality.
6. The problem of how complex persons, such as ourselves, originate in the first place; persons that are moral-rational agents living in a rational, intelligible universe.

Then there is the problem of the ultimate purpose, meaning, and telos of human life.<sup>40</sup> Any explanation of CONCORD must reckon with these six really hard problems.

### **Priming the Moral Argument for Theism as Opposed to Atheism**

What in the universe answers to the kind of moral, rational beings that we are? Theism *anticipates* CONCORD whereas atheism does not and cannot. If we argue retrojectively *from* God, that is, from our current standpoint back to the Ultimate origin of all things and then back again to ourselves, intuitively, CONCORD is more naturally anticipated on Theism. That Theism anticipates CONCORD is not intended to be a technical argument from God but simply an intuitively commonsense type of argument from our own moral being back to God, and then back again to us.<sup>41</sup> As used here, to anticipate simply means that what God is, on a Theistic

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<sup>40</sup> Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*. See chapter 8.

<sup>41</sup> Luke A. Barnes, "A Reasonable Little Question: A Formulation of the Fine-Tuning Argument," *Ergo* 6, no. 42 (2020): 1220–1257. Here Barnes presents a formal Bayesian defense of this sort of fine-tuning argument.

account, is reflective of what we are and so naturally anticipates the kind of beings that we are. We more naturally might expect a universe like ours with beings like us on Theism, given who and what we are as moral, rational, personal beings that live in a rational intelligible universe and given God is a living being, a personal being, a powerful creator, a rational and moral being. By contrast, CONCORD *is not at all* expected on impersonalist cosmic atheism. In fact, personhood, minded-moral personhood, is entirely anomalous on impersonalist cosmic atheism. Mind itself is queer on impersonalist cosmic atheism.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, nothing in the Third Realm anticipates personal beings like us or a rational, intelligible universe like ours. A generalized naturalism (or even an exotic multiverse), on which SMNNs rely, runs into the following problems that have been previously argued.

1. There is the problem of truth realism and moral realism given a totally impersonal and indifferent universe (TotIU).<sup>43</sup>
2. Cosmic coincidence troubles. Each cosmic coincidence problem is made up of two facts and a cosmic coincidental “match” between the two facts that is left unexplained and mysterious. On SMNN these coincidences must be considered brute.
3. Cosmic coincidence problem #1 – the problem of accounting for rationality itself as well as the epistemology problem as to how we have contact with, connection to, and knowledge of the Third Realm.<sup>44</sup>
4. Cosmic coincidence problem #2 – the problem of causality. Given that the Third Realm is causally effete how do we explain the match and integration required for causal traffic

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<sup>42</sup> This is the basis for what has here been referred to as a revised queerness objection regarding mind itself.

<sup>43</sup> This of course is the PMP that was previously argued, see pp. 109-121.

<sup>44</sup> This was discussed in the section on Enoch, pp. 105-109, but also applies in some respects to all SMNNs discussed here. The cosmic coincidences are all “striking” and call out for explanation. See Dan Baras, “Why Do Certain States of Affairs Call Out for Explanation? A Critique of Two Horwichian Accounts,” *Philosophia* 47, no. 5 (November 2019): 1405–1419.

that reaches into and integrates with the Third Realm?<sup>45</sup> This is a causal isolation and causal calibration problem.

5. Cosmic coincidence problem #3 – the ontic problem of a necessary Third Realm that contains moral and rational principles apparently fitted to contingent beings like us who might not have existed.<sup>46</sup>

Theism faces no such similar mysterious cosmic coincidence troubles. That we are moral rational beings is complexly and fittingly matched to God and naturally flows out of Theism. That we know rational truths is matched to God on Theism since we are made in the image of God, our minds are analogs of God's mind, and so we are designed to know such truths. That we are fitted to know moral rational principles matches the eternal and necessary God whose infinite mind and being is the essential shape and content of such truths. These kinds of fittingly suitable "matches" are not mysteriously, cosmically, coincidental on Theism. Instead, these matches can be judged as solid evidence *for* Theism, given the *principle of fittingly suitable reason* (PFSR). Reality is tightly fitted to God, cosmically fine-tuned by God, who accounts for rationality and intelligibility, causal efficacy, and axiological good. Given the PFSR, CONCORD is complexly, multidimensionally and fittingly suited to God, who best explains the kind of beings we are and the kind of universe in which we live.

### **The Three Ultimate Possibilities**

The three Ultimate possibilities within which the explanation for CONCORD is to be explanatorily situated are as follows.

- 1) Brute Fact Theory (BFT = Chance)<sup>47</sup>, 2) Necessary Universe Theory (NUT = Necessity), 3) A Necessary Being (PBT, the GPB).

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<sup>45</sup> This was discussed in the section on Wielenberg, see pp. 143--151. This likewise applies in some sense to all SMNNs discussed here.

<sup>46</sup> This was discussed in the section of Shafer-Landau, see pp. 179-184, see also notes 42 and 43 on these same pages. This similarly applies to all SMNNs discussed here.

In so far as CONCORD is concerned, both Theists and SMNNs agree that metaphysical naturalism does not provide a sufficient account of the moral domain or the moral nature of humanity. Since this is the case, the various metaphysical naturalistic accounts of metaethics have not been discussed throughout nor will they be discussed here. For the most part, Theist's will side with SMNNs in their fairly comprehensive critiques of naturalism and other non-realist versions of metaethics. Various versions of naturalistic metaethics have been thoroughly critiqued by both Theists and SMNNs.<sup>48</sup>

### **Necessary Universe Theory (NUT)**

Necessary Universe Theory is the view that the existence of the Universe is necessary in some fundamental sense; that is, that the universe should exist, or somehow must exist in the way that it does, and that it cannot fail to exist as it does.<sup>49</sup> In this view, necessity of the sort that the Universe purportedly exhibits is Ultimate. However, as Parrish successfully argues, none of these Ultimate necessities or principles can be explained and justified as Ultimately necessary. Ultimate necessity must therefore be brute. In the final analysis, any Necessary Universe Theory eventually collapses into Brute Fact Theory.<sup>50</sup> In our context of debate, SMNN is not put forward as a version of Necessary Universe Theory. SMNNs by and large acknowledge that the universe is logically contingent. It might be otherwise than it is or it might not have been at all. None of

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<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, that which is "brute" and that which occurs by "chance" are for the most part taken to be the same thing here. Chance, however defined is ultimately inexplicable. As such it is brute. This is what Jason Waller calls the "Brute-Chance Identity Thesis" as opposed to the "Brute-Chance Distinction Thesis." See his discussion Jason Waller, *Cosmological Fine-Tuning Arguments: What (If Anything) Should We Infer from the Fine-Tuning of Our Universe for Life?* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 46–53. In our argument Ultimate Chance and Bruteness are taken as analogous, namely, that on SMNN there really is no explanation of the phenomena in question; in this case, of CONCORD. .

<sup>48</sup> In the literature by SMNNs, these are too numerous and too dispersed throughout the various writings for citation but can be readily seen by any quick skim reading of the various thinkers covered in our critique of SMNN. Also, in our review of the contemporary moral argument, a brief synopsis history, many of these arguments by Theists were noted, see pp. 9-12.

<sup>49</sup> Parrish critiques a number of differing Necessary Universe Theories, see the entire chapter 9, Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 217–250.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 250. This is Parrish's conclusion regarding NUT.

the thinkers reviewed seriously argues that the universe, or our moral being, is Ultimately necessary in either a narrowly logical or broadly logical sense.<sup>51</sup> As Peter van Inwagen aptly pints out, even if the universe were in some sense necessary, it still would not follow that the existence of moral rational beings such as we are is necessary, that “the universe” *must* eventually produce, or give birth to, or generate, moral rational beings like us.<sup>52</sup> Given all of this, NUT does not warrant a detailed analysis in the final argument here. The critical analysis worked out in the previous chapters has sufficiently shown that SMNN is instead a version of BFT.

### **Brute Fact Theory (BFT)**

Without God SMNN is a version of Brute Fact Theory.<sup>53</sup> The universe is brute, the Third Realm is brute and causally effete, and the entirety of relations between them is brute and marked by a series of cosmic coincidences and metaphysical oddities. By default SMNN is committed to a generalized naturalistic Grand Story, a generalized naturalism that Ultimately amounts to a version of BFT. More specifically, to explain CONCORD, SMNN is a combination of a generalized naturalism (even if exotic naturalism, such as a multiverse<sup>54</sup> theory) wherein we

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<sup>51</sup> The one exception to this might be Eric Wielenberg’s conjecture that the laws of nature might somehow be metaphysically necessary, Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 166–175. Wielenberg floats this speculative conjecture in an attempt to avoid the problems associated with the contingent evolutionary development of our cognitive moral faculties, that in turn gives rise to problems of reliability and integration with objective moral facts. A careful reading of Wielenberg shows that this is a highly speculative and dodgy move that he himself in the end does not seriously defend or accept. For a clear and rather comprehensive rebuttal of Wielenberg’s speculative conjecture see Johnson, *Divine Love Theory*, 186–191. It should be pointed out that Wielenberg in *Robust Ethics* fully acknowledges that secular, evolutionary theory involves the contingent and accidental evolutionary origin of our moral cognitive faculties. The logical conclusion to be drawn from is that what Wielenberg proposes as our nativist moral intuitions might have been different than they are given a different evolutionary landscape. See Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 51, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 2015), 192.

<sup>53</sup> Parrish critiques quite a number of differing BFT proposals. This takes up the entire chapter 8, Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 185–216.

<sup>54</sup> Dembski, “The Chance of the Gaps”; Dembski, *No Free Lunch*. See also Roger White’s objection to multiverse theory, Roger White, “Does Origins of Life Research Rest on a Mistake?,” *Nous* 41, no. 3 (September 2007): 453–477. White’s objection has become known as the “This Universe” objection. Even if there are other universes, they do not then explain the origin of this universe, the actual universe.

live in a contingent universe that combines with Third Realm necessitarianism to explain our moral being and the moral domain.

### **Brute Fact Theory and Chance**

In the argument as laid out, given #2, that “nothing necessary is arbitrary,” gives trouble to all versions of SMNN. This is because, inexplicable Chance is Ultimately arbitrary. It is equivalent to cosmic accident. By this is meant that there is no reason, cause, or explanation for inexplicable Chance as an Ultimate originating power or an Ultimate sustaining power. Simply put, a brute universe is spun out of inexplicable chance. Brute entities possess no intrinsic necessity and no relational necessity. It is crucial to be clear on the fact that *it does not matter how Chance is defined or conceived*. That inexplicable chance is Ultimately arbitrary gives trouble to all versions of BFT and therefore it gives trouble to SMNN since it is a version of BFT.

Furthermore, the six really hard problems earlier tallied, leading up CONCORD, are not explained by BFT, so SMNN as a version of BFT is highly implausible. The more strongly brute a theory is the less acceptable the theory becomes. It has been shown that SMNN is shot through and through with bruteness and suffers from a grand cosmic problem of exponential cumulative bruteness to the *nth* degree. Cumulative bruteness ramifies therefore as powerful, negative, cumulative evidence against the plausibility of SMNN.

In the argument, given #4 is important, namely, that “the actual universe and our moral being are *logically* contingent,” they are not logically necessary. An argument that builds from this can run as follows. Either something has a reason for existing in the manner that it does or it does not. If it does not, then it is brute. If it does, then this reason is either logically necessary or it is not, this reason is either metaphysically necessary or it is not. If it is not logically necessary,

then it is brute. If it is not metaphysically necessary then it is brute, and so on *ad infinitum*. This leads to bruteness all the way down; exponential cumulative bruteness to the *n*th degree. Clearly, the existence of the Universe is not logically necessary, nor is it broadly metaphysically necessary. The universe does not have to exist or exist in the way that it does. It is logically contingent. It is metaphysically contingent. Therefore, NUT is to be rejected as false.<sup>55</sup> So then, Ultimately, the existence of the universe, and our being the beings we are in the universe in which we live, must be either Brute or depend on a Necessary Being. If Brute, then there is no explanation for CONCORD. SMNN fails to adequately explain CONCORD. However, there is an explanation for CONCORD. Therefore, there is a Necessary Being that explains CONCORD (both its being possible and actual). CONCORD also helps us to understand in what the necessity of God the GPB consists; intrinsic Maximal Greatness and Perfections as well as the axiological expression of these in the existence of beings like us in a universe like ours. This Being, God, explains CONCORD.<sup>56</sup> That BFT is false is a transcendental principle.<sup>57</sup> It fails the transcendental test by undercutting the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of rationality itself, normativity, and by extension our moral rational being, including CONCORD. By contrast, God is transcendentally foundational and necessary.

### **A Necessary Being**

The argument presented here has also stipulated given #3, “Nothing true requires God’s non-being.” If this stipulation stands then this must leave open the possibility not only that God exists, but that the God whose existence is possible is a Necessary Being. However, the argument is prepared to defend the logical coherence of God as the GPB, the God of PBT, against those

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<sup>55</sup> Pruss, “The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument.” This is the conclusion rightly drawn from Pruss’s argument.

<sup>56</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 198–199. This argument is drawn from here.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

who argue that God as a being who is maximally great and perfect is logically impossible because contradictory and incoherent.

The modal ontological argument stands as reasonable to accept. The concept of the GPB is logically coherent and PBT is a logically sound proposal that fittingly and comprehensively explains CONCORD. Given the reasons to reject the moral Platonism of SMNN as a version of BFT, the critical failures of each of the various versions of SMNN also stand as part of this critique. These critiques also provide multiple openings for different positive arguments for Theism. In quick summary, as noted earlier, these various openings for Theistic arguments run as follows.

- a. The *dualism of practical reason* provides for an argument to God given ultimate *moral rationality* grounded in God and life after death in light of God (Sidgwick).
- b. The failed quest to explicate *the nature of ethical good and duties* suggests an argument for God as the ground, source, and telos of intrinsic Good and moral duties (Moore and Ross).
- c. God as *ultimate source of moral authority, categoricity, and normativity* (Enoch).
  - i. Given Theism, the normative order is *objective to us* (Enoch).
- d. God is the *paradigm moral agent and ultimate causative source* of all things (Wielenberg). We are created in the image of God to be moral agents and creatively causal beings.
- e. God is the basis for our *moral rationality* and the existence of *a priori discoverable and intuitively knowable morally necessary truths*. God is argued to be a morally necessary being given eternal necessary moral principles (Shafer-Landau).

- i. It is argued that *laws, moral and natural do in fact require a lawmaker* (Shafer-Landau).
- f. God is the one who forms our *moral intuitive capacities* and who conceives, designs, creates and fine-tunes our universe for life and knowability (Huemer).

This forms the basis for CONCORD.

- i. God is *the transcendental foundation for rationality, normativity, necessity and categoricity*. SMNN fails the T-test by undercutting all of these.
- g. God is the best explanation for what are taken by secularists to be autonomous AOs of various sorts (Kulp).
  - i. The argument to God from *logic* stands. God's Mind is the necessary and essential shape of logic itself.
  - ii. The conceptual argument to God from *propositions* stands. God's Mind contains all propositions.
  - iii. The argument to God from *moral propositions* stands. God being, mind and will alone account for all six key objective features of normative moral propositions.
  - iv. A version of Theistic conceptualism is proffered wherein autonomous AOs are instead taken to be *IOs in the mind of God*; essentially thinkable things that can be thought by the requisite minds. God is the paradigm Mind within which IOs essentially subsist.

### **In What Does God's Necessity Essentially Consist?**

If we arrive at a "Necessary Being" as a result of 1) the critical rejection of the various versions of SMNN, given a panoply of detailed arguments against the respective positions, 2)

inference to God as the best explanation for CONCORD, 3) that SMNN suffers from a deep implausibility of exponential cumulative bruteness to the *nth* degree, which stands as powerful negative evidence against the position, and 4) apagogic elimination of NUT and BFT, with consequent establishment of the conclusion that there exists a Necessary Being, then some initial commentary is in order regarding this Necessary Being.

The first focus about a Necessary Being should be on “*a* being” as such. This focus is to be distinguished from what might be described as some version of “being itself” in various guises such as pantheism, panentheism, or even possibly panpsychism. Regardless, the focus should still turn toward the ontological side of things. “A being” is a particular being. This being is individuated in specific ways, a being for whom necessity is intrinsic to the being that it is, a being, given CONCORD, that is a personal being, a being individuated as *the* Ultimate normative being, the Ultimate source of all things. This is the force of “Ultimately” that is intended here regarding the Necessary Being that is in view. Ultimately, neither Necessity nor Chance is explanatory in the ways that this Necessary Being is.

Next, if this particular being is a “Necessary Being,” the question naturally arises, necessary in what sense, necessary in what ways? Given that the focus of this presentation is a moral argument for the existence of God, we have argued that God is a morally necessary being. All SMNNs argue that there are morally necessary principles, truths, proposition, or facts. The Theist agrees with the SMNNs in this regard. If this is the case, consider the following argument previously enumerated.<sup>58</sup>

P1 - Eternal Moral Principles<sup>59</sup> require informational content.

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<sup>58</sup> See pp. 178-182.

<sup>59</sup> Whether we are referring to necessary moral principles, truths, propositions or facts does not matter, all require complex, specified informational content.

P2- Thus, if there are such moral principles that contain informational content then there must be that by which such content is eternally specified.

P3 - Such informational content must have definite informational properties. It must be quantified, complex, specified, intentional, conceptual, and semantically encoded.

- Without this, the “moral” and “meaningful” side of such “moral principles” is not possible.

P4- The informational content of Eternal Moral Principles can only come from a Mind of a certain sort. Given the moral, mind is ineliminable.

P5 - This mind must be (while possessing other qualities) Eternal, Rational, Communicative, Morally Good, Truthful, Personal, and Necessary.

C1 - God’s mind is the only candidate for such a mind.

C2 - Therefore, if there are Eternal Moral Principles, God is the being in whose mind such content is eternally given.

There are Eternal Moral Principles.

God is the being of these Principles.

C3 - If these Eternal Moral Principles subsist in God’s Eternal Mind, then it is not possible for God not to exist.

C4 - God is, therefore, a Necessary being, viz., a morally Necessary being.

The next aspect of necessity that has important and far-reaching consequences for the argument presented here is the transcendental component of the argument. God is transcendently necessary.<sup>60</sup> The specific sense in mind here is the Kantian-inspired sense for rational knowledge. The existence of God is the *necessary* precondition for the *possibility of* rational knowledge, particularly moral, rational knowledge. However, there is no intent here to

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<sup>60</sup> See pp. 225-229.

borrow Kant's particular account of epistemology. A Theistic direct-realist account of knowledge was briefly reviewed and worked out.<sup>61</sup> SMNN, a form of moral rationalism, cannot account for the very rationality upon which its specific version of moral realism is founded and rests.<sup>62</sup> Therefore SMNN fails the T-test, which states,

*The Transcendental Test:* Is the thinker's own thinking undercut or contradicted by the thinker's own system of thought, life, and Reality?

The PMP has shown that no general naturalistic account of origins that combines atheism and naturalism in a neo-Darwinian framework can account for either logical or moral rationality presumed in CONCORD. Effectively, denial of God is denial of the transcendental condition for the possibility of rationality itself and moral rationality in particular. Furthermore, SMNN cannot explain the rational intelligible nature of the universe in which we live. In CONCORD the “rational” is planted at two distinct sides of the proposition, at two distinct poles of Reality: in our *being moral rational agents* and our living *in a rational intelligible universe*. The two differing and distinct dimensions of rationality are related and indicate a single source for both. Reality is intrinsically and essentially knowable. Theism is able to account for both of these dimensions in a powerful, unified and causal way; the Necessary Being who is God, Creator of all things also knows all things and creates Reality to be intelligible. By contrast, SMNN is unable to account for either of these dimensions of rationality much less their relation and

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<sup>61</sup> See pp. 220-223. For a fuller account of this see Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, particularly chapter 9, entitled, “The Match of Mind and World.”

<sup>62</sup> Recall that Enoch has proposed his indispensability argument as a transcendental argument, David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 79, nt. 79. That Wielenberg's postulational Platonism has not accounted for the objective and basic ethical facts of his account, Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 38. Recall also that Russ Shafer-Landau appeals to a form of transcendental argument to justify ethics as philosophy, as *a priori*, see Shafer-Landau, “Ethics as Philosophy: A Defense of Ethical Nonnaturalism,” 228–229. Also, Huemer has argued that his phenomenal conservatism is epistemologically transcendental, it is true in all possible worlds, Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 103. For Kulp the laws of logic are central to his whole case for knowledge of moral abstracta. The transcendental and logical components of our argument are directed at these various claims of SMNNs. None of these claims necessarily exclude God, and all of the claims can be better integrated into a Theistic account of epistemology, ontology, metaphysics and metaethics.

unification. Rational knowledge is undercut on a strictly, generalized naturalistic account and a rational intelligible universe is inexplicable and brute on such an account. Ultimately, as a product of inexplicable Chance, such a universe is exponentially brute to the *nth* degree. After his lengthy critique of various versions of Necessary Universe theory and Brute Fact theory, Parrish concludes his work in this way.

Brute Fact and Necessary Universe [theories] are unable to account for the universe as it is, or any specific ordered universe, or for knowledge....God is the *sine qua non* of all thought and proof. Those who do not believe in God nonetheless presuppose his existence whenever they think. Similarly, irrationalists depend upon the laws of contradiction and identity whenever they make their case. Therefore the existence of God is transcendental in more respects than one....

Thus, the transcendental argument is the most fundamental of the theistic arguments because it shows the existence of God is a necessary presupposition of any thought, it undercuts any world-view or probability structure which denies the existence of God.<sup>63</sup>

The next aspect of the transcendental component of the argument presented here is the argument to God from Logic.<sup>64</sup> God's mind provides the necessary ontological structuring for logic itself as well as the transcendental foundation for rational knowledge and by extension moral rationality. The final aspect of the transcendental argument is that God's being, mind and will form the necessary transcendental and logical basis for moral truths having five essential properties. Moral propositions are 1) necessary (absolute necessity), 2) universal (true in all possible worlds), 3) person-related (intentional), 4) essentially good and right, and 5) fully categorical.<sup>65</sup> The interweaving of these various aspects of God's necessity provides a solid foundation to build our argument for a Theistic account of metaethics. This foundation has far-reaching implications for how to understand and explain CONCORD.

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<sup>63</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 278. Recall that Parrish has previously concluded after critiquing brute fact theory that the falsity of brute fact theory is a "transcendental principle," *ibid.*, 215.

<sup>64</sup> This was presented in chapter 6. See pp. 262-266. Anderson and Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic."

<sup>65</sup> See p. 277.

Next, with respect to CONCORD, God is fundamentally, ontologically, necessary. God's maximal greatness and perfection entails his necessity. This is Perfect Being Theism. As Thomas Morris observes, on this matter, there is a good degree of "fundamental unity which can be found in philosophical theology."<sup>66</sup> PBT as a theological method is "intuitively plausible."<sup>67</sup> Still, he cautions that it provides no exact *a priori* and self-evident understanding of how to fully fill in our conception of God. There is no "mechanical procedure" of derivation for this.<sup>68</sup> However, the moral argument goes a long way to providing content and detail to the character and being of God. Maximal greatness and divine perfection combine to form the hub of an intuitively plausible conception of God. Morris continues,

Standardly employed, perfect being theology issues in a conception of God as a necessarily existent being who has such attributes as omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, eternality and aseity as essential properties"<sup>69</sup>

Morris suggests that we proceed in an ascending order of greatness in metaphysical status or stature. Crucially, this revolves around questions of intrinsic-good. God is conceived as:

1. conscious (a minded being capable of thought and awareness)
2. a conscious agent (capable of free action)
3. a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent
4. a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with significant knowledge
5. a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with significant knowledge and power
6. a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with significant knowledge, power who is the creative source of all else
7. a thoroughly benevolent, necessarily existent conscious agent with unlimited knowledge and power who is the ontologically independent creative source of all else.<sup>70</sup>

Morris also notes,

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas V. Morris, "Symposium Papers and Abstracts: Perfect Being Theology," *Nous* 21, no. 1 (1987): 22-23.

<sup>67</sup> On the Anselmian intuition regarding God see Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, 189-190. Here Morris correctly observes that if God exists, God's creating us to know him makes intuitive sense. For an insightful piece on answering some objections to PBT see George Schlesinger N., "Divine Perfection," *Religious Studies* 21, no. 2 (June 1985): 147-158.

<sup>68</sup> Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*, 41. Here Morris rightly points out that there is plenty of room for disagreement among those who conceptualize God in Anselm's way.

<sup>69</sup> Morris, "Symposium Papers and Abstracts: Perfect Being Theology," 25.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

All that perfect being theology requires is that God have the greatest possible array of *compossible* great-making properties, not that he have all great-making properties.<sup>71</sup>

Here the modal ontological argument previously defended also comes into play.<sup>72</sup> Stephen Parrish's slight reworking of Plantinga's modal ontological argument runs as follows.

1. The proposition *there is a maximally great being* is possible in the broadly logical sense...
2. There is a possible world in which there is a maximally great being...
3. Necessarily, a being with maximal greatness would be necessarily existent and would have (at least) omnipotence, omniscience and moral perfection essentially...
4. What is necessary does not vary from possible world to possible world (so that if it is possible that *p* is necessary, then *p* is necessary).
5. [T]herefore, a being that is necessarily existent and essentially omniscient, omnipotent and wholly good exists.<sup>73</sup>

We saw that Huemer's parody of this argument was not successful.<sup>74</sup> To reiterate earlier commentary, the argument is not put forward as a "proof" for the existence of God. So then, what is the argument good for? It provides another reasonable basis that God, as understood by classical Theists, exists.<sup>75</sup> But this form of the argument also links together the necessary and fundamental ontology of God's being, this is the most critical conclusion to draw from the argument. Furthermore, it is logically valid, can withstand criticism, is not irrational, contradictory or incoherent, showing that is reasonable to accept the conclusion of the argument regarding God's essential being; namely Perfect Being Theism. The ontological argument is therefore a wider, logical, force-multiplier to the moral argument for the necessary existence of

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<sup>71</sup> Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*, 64. Emphasis original.

<sup>72</sup> See pp. 214-218.

<sup>73</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 81. Parrish uses *maximally great being* and *a being with maximal excellence* slightly differently. Parrish's restatement takes a version of Plantinga's argument developed in his Plantinga, "Is Theism Really a Miracle?," 115-116. Plantinga has developed other similar versions in Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*; and *The Nature of Necessity* as previously noted.

<sup>74</sup> See pp. 217-219.

<sup>75</sup> Parrish, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*, 218-219.

God. Necessarily, the Greatest Possible Being cannot fail to exist, and exists in all possible worlds, which must include the actual world, as well as the actual universe.

Moreover, Brian Leftow has recently strongly defended a version of Anselm's argument in a very detailed and comprehensive way that further buttresses the argument given here. He answers a slew of objections to the argument.<sup>76</sup> By contrast, chapter 6 showed the failure of impersonal and autonomous AOs across numerous fronts to do all the work necessary for an adequate ontology and epistemology of metaethics for SMNNs.<sup>77</sup> These failures were especially notable once the issues turned to modal considerations.<sup>78</sup> In short, God, who is maximally great, essentially, intrinsically excellent and perfect, can do all the work in Theistic metaethics. In both being and doing, God can do all the required work in Reality, given who and what God is and the powers that God possesses.

### **The Six Really Hard Problems – To Conclude**

1. There is the problem of how our actual universe begins in the first place.<sup>79</sup>
2. There is the problem of how information itself and specified complexity originate in the first place.<sup>80</sup> Information is ubiquitous throughout our universe. Information requires contingency.

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<sup>76</sup> Leftow, *Anselm's Argument: Divine Necessity*; see also Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 175–208. I can only refer the reader to the meticulous and technical arguments that Leftow works through. This author is in substantial agreement with Leftow's defense of Anselm's argument. This strongly supports the move to Perfect Being Theism made here.

<sup>77</sup> See the chart, AOs & IOs – an A to Z Comparison, pp. 288-298.

<sup>78</sup> See pp. 283-287.

<sup>79</sup> As Roger Penrose observes, "The probability of finding ourselves in a universe of such a degree of specialness, if it had come about just by chance, has the utterly absurdly tiny value of around  $1/10^{10^{124}}$  (1 to the 10 to the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 124<sup>th</sup>) irrespective of inflation. This is the kind of figure that needs some completely different kind of theoretical explanation." Penrose, *Cycles of Time: An Extraordinary New View of the Universe*, 127. Kindle edition. This number exceeds the number of all particles in the universe. Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind*. Kindle loc. 7332. He also comments, "The very uniformity...of the initial space-time geometry was what was special about the Big Bang. The fact that an initial singular state for the universe need not have been so..." Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 733.

<sup>80</sup> Seth Lloyd, *Programming the Universe: A Quantum Computer Scientist Takes on the Cosmos* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 46. Lloyd emphasizes, "*The Big Bang was also a Bit Bang.*" (emphasis original). Lloyd conjectures that the universe, "...all at once sprang from nothing." Ibid., 44. Lloyd appears to be advocating a version of NUT as

- a. How to explain that our universe is exquisitely fine-tuned for life?<sup>82</sup>
- b. How to explain the intelligibility of our universe?<sup>83</sup>
3. The problem of how biological information and informationally rich and specified, complex biological life originate in the first place.<sup>84</sup>
4. The problem of how sentient biological life originates in the first place.<sup>85</sup>
5. The problem of necessary truths and propositions and how they fit into the rest of Reality, particularly their ontology and our capacity to know them.<sup>86</sup>
6. The problem of how complex persons, such as ourselves, originate in the first place: moral-rational agents living in a rational, intelligible universe. Not only is all of this explanatorily apt, but these are all astonishing facts that cry out to be explained.

Consider the six really hard problems tallied above. The array of interlocking physical and metaphysical dependencies and fittedness is utterly astounding (the PFSR).

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contrasted with accident, *ibid.*, 5. This can only mean nomological necessity, that is, by the natural laws of physics and information. He ignores the simple fact that, as Dembski rightly points out, information must necessarily be contingent, for without contingency there can be no information. See Dembski, *No Free Lunch*, 155. Dembski has developed a view he refers to as informational realism. See Dembski, *Being as Communion*. This author endorses this view.

<sup>82</sup> Lewis and Barnes, *A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely-Tuned Cosmos*. Martin Rees, *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). Waller, *Cosmological Fine-Tuning Arguments*.

<sup>83</sup> As Einstein is famously quoted as saying, “The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible.” Again, says Einstein, “I want to know how God created the world...I want to know His thoughts, the rest are details.” For citations see “Albert Einstein” (Reasonable Faith, n.d.). For discussion see Patrick Sherry, “Einstein, Dawkins, and Wonder at the Intelligibility of the World,” *The Heythrop Journal* 60, no. 1 (January 2019): 5–15; Lewis S. Feuer, “Noumenalism and Einstein’s Argument for the Existence of God,” *Inquiry* 26, no. 3 (January 1983): 251–285. See also Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Wesley Richards, *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos Is Designed for Discovery* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2004).

<sup>84</sup> Sara Imari Walker and Paul C. W. Davies, “The ‘Hard Problem’ of Life,” *arXiv:1606.07184 [q-bio]* (June 23, 2016).

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Nagel states, “The appearance of animal consciousness is evidently the result of biological evolution, but this well-supported empirical fact is not yet an explanation – it does not provide understanding or enable us to see why the result was to be expected or how it came about...there is no physical explanation of why this is so – nor any other kind of explanation that we know of.” Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Benacerraf, “Mathematical Truth”; Clarke-Doane, “What Is the Benacerraf Problem?” Paul Benacerraf formulated one version of this problem. Roger Penrose, “Mathematics, the Mind, and the Physical World,” in *Meaning in Mathematics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 41–48. See also Brian Leftow’s discussion in Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 71–76, as well as Angus Menuge, “Knowledge of Abstracta: A Challenge to Materialism,” *Philosophia Christi* 18, no. 1 (2016): 7–27.

1. Each one is a big bang type event. A highly complex and fine-tuned big bang type event.
2. Each following big bang type event diachronically depends on the preceding event(s) and thus extends the preceding events in entirely novel and creative ways.
3. Each preceding and following event is fine-tuned, and both are mutually fitted and integrated to each other.
4. All combined, there are multiple, interlocking, exquisitely fine-tuned, diachronic and concatenated dependencies and relations of mutual fittedness, amounting to a necessary, but not sufficient set of conditions for the possibility of our own contingent, moral, rational existence. It isn't necessary that we exist as we do or that the universe exists as it does.

It's not too hard to see how all of this relates to the moral argument for the existence of God. On the first really hard problem: The various cosmological arguments are a compliment that ramifies evidence for God from the beginning of the universe and the contingency of the universe. The universe is neither necessary nor accidental. It is not inexplicably brute. On a Theistic account, God creates all things *ex nihilo*, outside of Himself. This is the Big Bang. From the very beginning of the universe, whatever later unfolds *must be built in from the very beginning*. Thus, one of those many things, CONCORD is built in from the very beginning. On the second really hard problem: The informational compliment ramifies evidence for God from ubiquitous coding, contingency, and thus mind that is evident and at work in the very fabric of the universe. The Big Bang is a Bit Bang. God is fundamentally an informational Being. Information bespeaks mind *before* the beginning of the universe. The universe doesn't just happen to be ubiquitously coded. Clearly, CONCORD requires information.

Related to the previous items, the various design arguments are a compliment that ramifies evidence for God from the universe's various ordered and lawful features. God is the God who conceives, designs, and creates all that bears the unique signature of design, from quantum structures to dark energy, to a stable and perdurant world, from protons to persons, and everything else in between. It is evident that CONCORD is designed. On the third and fourth really hard problems: The various cosmic fine-tuning arguments are a compliment that ramifies evidence for God from the teleological and purposive features of the universe. The universe is fine-tuned for life by God. As life-friendly, it permits but does not necessitate the existence of informationally rich biological beings as well as sentient biological beings. The cosmological fine-tuning of the Universe is an evidential force-multiplier to all of the preceding evidences. On the fifth really hard problem: The problem of necessary truths and propositions and how they fit into the rest of Reality bespeaks mind; the Mind of God (intentionality). As regards the moral, Mind is shown to be ineliminable. God's mind gives shape to logic itself, including all necessary truths, possible and impossible worlds. All of these are well integrated into a Theistic conceptualist account of God's Mind. Our minds are designed and made as analogs of God's Mind. Reality is inherently intelligible and knowable. CONCORD requires that our minds are fitted to know, understand, and be responsive to necessary truths and propositions.

Furthermore, the various ontological arguments are a compliment that argues for the maximal greatness of God, that God is the Greatest Possible Being, a Necessary Being, the God of Perfect Being Theism. On the sixth and final really hard problem: All of the previous, multiple threads of evidence are woven together to combine and ramify support for a single cumulative and powerful conclusion – an initial cosmic creation and fine-tuning that works to bring about the self-knowing, moral, rational beings that we are in the intelligible universe in which we live.

Moral, rational beings are unique; unique in the universe, in their self-reflective and cognitive powers, and their ethical and valuational powers. Once pulled together and taken as a whole, this looks to be exponential, multidimensional, creativity, and fine-tuning to the *nth* degree, all done by, and thus explained by, God. Indeed, this work of God is astonishing. The conclusion to be drawn from all of this is that God, who is Ultimately personal, fittingly, suitably, and sufficiently explains CONCORD. The moral argument for God's existence takes this wide-ranging yet highly specific cumulative evidence into its purview to form a focused, unified, powerful and multi-evidential explanation for CONCORD. By contrast, the six really hard problems reveal the paucity of supporting evidence for the broader claims of SMNN. Fundamentally and ontologically, SMNN must necessarily be an impersonalist view of Ultimate Reality. On such a fundamental ontology, persons, minds, and even rationality are problematic. They are queer. Furthermore, things are brute at every turn – from our moral, rational being - back to the impersonalist beginning of all things and everything in between. SMNN thus utterly fails to explain CONCORD. So then,

Ultimately – Chance (BFT), Necessity (NUT), or a Necessary Being exist.

From the preceding analysis, it is evident that the moral-intelligible universe and moral-rational beings we are do not exist by necessity. Necessity (NUT) cannot explain CONCORD. Ultimately, inexplicable Chance (BFT) cannot originate, order, or sustain the moral-intelligible universe in which we live or the personal, moral-rational beings that we are. Brute Fact Theory does not explain CONCORD. Therefore, there is a Necessary Being; God. It has been argued that this God is personal, the Greatest Possible Being, the God of Perfect Being Theism. This God Ultimately explains CONCORD.

Given the explanatory failures of *both* naturalistic metaethics and the non-naturalistic metaethics of SMNN, these are not plausible and coherent alternatives to Theism. No Ultimate principle of Necessity is equal to God. No Ultimate principle of Chance is equal to God. No combined principle of inexplicable Chance and Necessity is equal to God. Any such combined principle itself could only be Ultimately brute. Moreover, Reality, on the whole, is not brute. Neither our moral being nor the nature of the normative moral domain is brute. If successful, the moral argument presented here shows that God is necessarily necessary; a personal being of Maximal Greatness, imbued with plentitudinous and intrinsic perfections. In this sense, God is Absolutely Necessary, and Ultimately, this God comprehensively grounds and explains CONCORD, our very moral being and the rational, intelligible universe in which we live. We are led to give thanks and bow to this God in worshipful adoration, love, and praise. Knowing this, how can we do otherwise?

## Appendix 1

### Summary of William Sorley's Moral Argument for the Existence of God

The following is a Summary outline of William Sorley's Moral Argument for the Existence of the God of Theism in his *Moral Values and the Idea of God* (The Gifford Lectures 1914-1915)

The Moral Argument of William Sorley is a deliberate reversal that argues from "ought" to "is" rather than from "is" to "ought."<sup>1</sup> Sorley refers to it as "a striking extension of the cosmological argument."<sup>2</sup> I.e. God as "final cause" (as opposed to "first cause") and God as "perdurant cause" (i.e. cause of the continuance of things).<sup>3</sup>

The aim of the argument - a fundamentally ethical Universe is best explained as a Theistic Universe.<sup>4</sup> The argument is not put forward as a rigid demonstrative proof.<sup>5</sup>

P1 - There exists an order of nature in which good (intrinsic moral value) is not realized.<sup>6</sup>

P2 - There exists a realm of moral values in which person dependent good (intrinsic moral value) is realized.

P3 - The categorical ought is thoroughly personalist.

In our world of moral experience these two orders, the order of value and the physical order, are indissolubly joined. They are differing aspects of the same world (the wholist assumption). For this reason, any explanation of this order should be unifying. There is a unity of values; i.e. that to which all values are related.<sup>7</sup>

- A1 - This realm of moral values is objective (the realist assumption).
- A2 - This realm of moral values is person dependent, agent dependent and mind dependent (the nominalist and personalist assumptions).
- A3 - This world (the order of nature) is the purposive context in which these moral values are realized by finite, relatively free and intelligent agents (the personalist, purposive and agency related assumptions).
- A4 - The validity of universal and ideal values does not depend upon any particular finite agents (the universal validity claim and the particularist problem).

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<sup>1</sup> Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 289–290.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 352.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 467. Perdurant is a term that I use to describe the enduring character of things.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 517.

<sup>6</sup> An interesting comparison it would be to compare, contrast and evaluate the "Foundations of Ethics" chapter of Robert Nozick to that of Sorley. See Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 53.

C1 - Therefore, this purposive realm of objective moral values is not adequately explained by either the order of nature itself (the nonnaturalist move) or particular, finite moral agents (the Theistic move).

- These must exist in a mind (eternally in the mind of God).<sup>9</sup>

C2 - This purposive realm of objective moral values points beyond itself as requiring explanation.

- Various versions of particularism cannot adequately explain this order; they fail to unify (e.g. naturalism, Platonism, deism, monadism).
- Various versions of monism cannot adequately explain this order; they cannot account for the objective and personalist, as well as the particular features of this order (e.g. Hegelian Absolute Idealism, pantheism).

Counterfactual Conditional: If there is a unifying and universal purpose, it is the purpose of a Supreme and Creative Mind upon whom nature, the realm of moral values and finite minds/agents depends.

Abductive Conclusion: The God of Theism, the Supreme Mind, the Supreme Will, the Supreme Good, infinite in power and goodness best explains both the natural order and the moral order in a unified, comprehensive and coherent manner. Thus the Personal God of Theism best explains Reality on the whole, the Universe as we know it, and the domain of personal moral experience. Sorley puts forward a version of Perfect Being Theism.

“God must therefore be conceived as the final home of values, the Supreme Worth – as possessing the fullness of knowledge and beauty and goodness and whatever else is of value for its own sake.”<sup>10</sup>

(Two provisos that Sorley adds: 1. In some basic sense the ethical unity of the Universe is a unity still to be attained; i.e. Kantian rationality of virtue to be attained. 2. The problem of evil remains a challenge, but Sorley argues that it is not inconsistent with Theism).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 351.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 474.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 349–350.

## Appendix 2

### **Enoch's Circle of Reinforcing Logic of Indispensability**

Deliberative indispensability is always *for* or *to* a certain purpose or project.

Key aim: (indispensabilism) to show that indispensability arguments can be belief forming methods we are justified in employing as basic.<sup>1</sup>

(Strictly speaking, this refers to belief forming methods. That is, that something follows inferentially from the proper deployment of an indispensable method).

This aims at a form of pragmatic vindication of IBE <sup>2</sup>



(So, we require *instrumental* indispensability)

**Instrumental indispensability involves:**

- 1) Engaging in a practical project (that requires deciding what to do), 2) utilizing normative/guiding reasons (involving implicit beliefs) that 3) cannot be eliminated from that project without 4) undermining the project.

We therefore have:

- i. Engaging in practical projects.
- ii. Normative/guiding reasons.
- iii. Normative/ guiding content.
- iv. Implicit background beliefs.
- v. (Positive) Essential to the project.
1. (Negative) These cannot be eliminated without undermining the project.

(So, we require *intrinsic* indispensability)

**Intrinsic indispensability involves:** Key stipulation - a project must be rationally non-optional. This is designed to...



(... Stipulate three things)

- a) Limit the set of acceptable projects (or limit set of admissible purposes)<sup>3</sup>  
(Rule = acceptable projects must conform to rational standards)  
(Condition = functions as intrinsic normative condition, we are intrinsic rational creatures).
- b) Ground ontological commitment.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 60-64. IBE, that is, inference to the best explanation.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 69.

(Rule = ontological commitments must be adequately grounded in abductive inferences).

- c) A Non-optional feature<sup>5</sup> (this is strongly *intrinsic* to intrinsic indispensability).

(Functions as intrinsic normative condition = that fundamental normative feature of the kind of beings that we are) namely:

- We are constitutively deliberative/we are essentially deliberative creatures

Why are we doing this?



Key overall reasons:

1<sup>st</sup> personal deliberations = to deliberate and decide what to do.

Or

3<sup>rd</sup> personal account = to abductively infer from what we do (in deliberation) to what there is (by explanation); to ontology.

How are we doing this?



By utilizing a belief forming method justified as basic (pragmatically vindicated) that is shown to be indispensable in the ways specified.

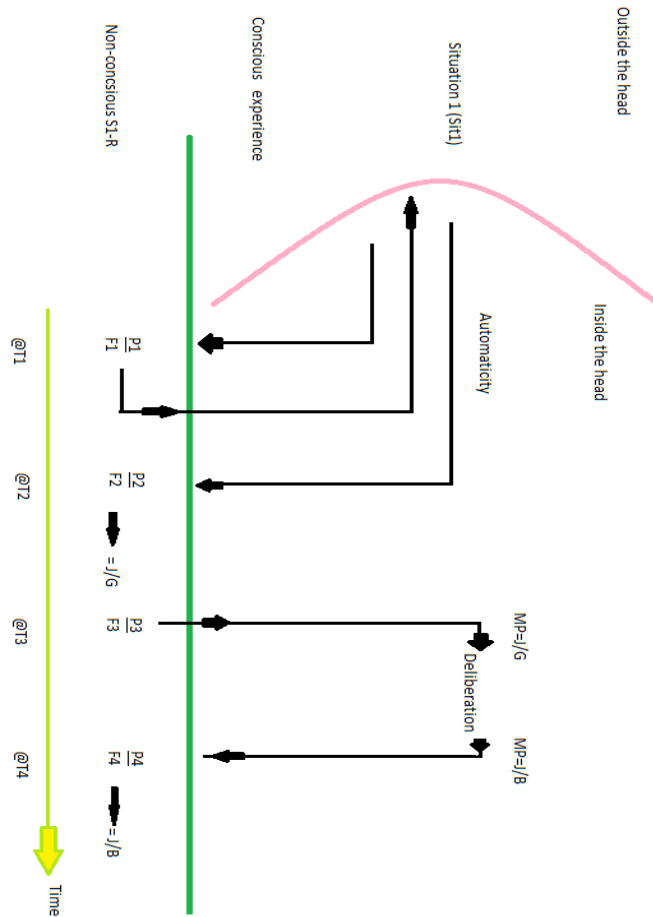
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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 70.

### Appendix 3

#### Diagrammatic Illustration of Wielenberg's Moral Model



## Appendix 4

### The Moral and the Mathematical: A Thumbnail Comparison

Point of Comparison	The Moral	The Mathematical
Logical contradiction	Denial of moral proposition does not entail a narrow logical contradiction.	Denial of a mathematical truth such as $2+2=4$ does generate a logical contradiction.
Moral Obligations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relational</li> <li>2. Between persons.</li> <li>3. Value laden.</li> <li>4. Commitment oriented.</li> <li>5. Meaning laden.</li> <li>6. Categorical</li> <li>7. Participative</li> </ol>	None of these things are relevant to the mathematical.
Category of ontology	A real category of being, but ontologically different than the mathematical.	A real category of being, but ontologically different than the moral.
Different sorts of properties.	Different ontic types than the mathematical.	Different ontic types than the moral.
Right and wrong.	Involving acts that are praiseworthy or blameworthy.	True/false, correct/incorrect. Only Logical properties apply.
Guilt and shame	Involves guilt and shame	Not relevant
The nature of necessity	Synthetic necessity	Analytic necessity
The nature of objectivity	Objective as discoverable. Stance independent.	Objective as discoverable. Logically necessary.
Categoricity	Involves real and binding categoricity. Binding only on persons and between persons.	Involves no such categoricity. Instead, it involves logical necessity.
Normativity	Normative in different ways than the mathematical. Violation is genuinely blameworthy.	Normative in different ways than the moral. Violation is irrational and logically contradictory.
Beliefs and commitments	Doxastic yet practical as related to ethical action.	Doxastic yet practical as related to logical expressions.
	Ethical truths do not bear on the behavior of the physical universe.	Mathematical truths might well bear on the behavior of the physical universe, given its mathematical structure.
Different in how they are explanatory.	Yes	Yes
Different in ways that they might be deemed	Yes	Yes

indispensable.		
Different in the ways that they relate to practical action.	Yes	Yes
Higher order mathematics and metaethics	The moral typically taken to be less certain than the mathematical.	Higher level mathematics not necessarily involving a higher degree of certainty than the metaethical. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Justin Clarke-Doane, "Justification and Explanation in Mathematics and Morality" (2015): 24; Clarke-Doane, "Moral Epistemology"; Clarke-Doane, *Morality and Mathematics*; Leng, "Taking Morality Mathematically."

## Appendix 5

### Possible Worlds

Given that the use of possible worlds is never technically discussed throughout the dissertation, this section provides an account of how this notion is being used throughout this work. All of the SMNNs reviewed in this work use the modal conception of possible worlds without discussing how possible worlds are to be understood. This dissertation takes a Theistic conceptualist and realist (TCR) view of possible worlds built mainly out of the work of Alvin Plantinga but modified in the account of Greg Welty and Stephen Parrish.

Hoffman and Rosenkrantz provide a helpful classification of differing models for understanding possible worlds (PWs).<sup>1</sup> First is *the conceptualist model*, wherein PWs are considered mental constructions, for example, complexes of thoughts or concepts. They reject this model because it appears to get things backward by making the possibility of things dependent upon one or more thinkers who have the idea of a particular thing. Second, there is *the combinatorial model* wherein the actual world is the set or collection of everything there is; PWs are the possible combinations of the things that exist in the actual world. They also reject this model, given that many things that might exist extend beyond mere combinations of things that actually exist. Thirdly, there is *the abstract worlds model* wherein a possible world is an abstract entity, for example, a maximal or complete conjunction of propositions.<sup>2</sup> Fourthly, there is *the concrete worlds model* wherein a possible world is a concrete entity.<sup>3</sup> And fifthly, there is the view that will be briefly discussed here: a *Theistic conceptualist realist view* (TCR) wherein possible worlds are thoughts or ideas in the Mind of God; that is, IOs that subsist in the Mind of

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<sup>1</sup> Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, *The Divine Attributes*, 81–89. These models will only be summarized here for the sake of brevity. They ultimately settle on the abstract worlds model as the best model.

<sup>2</sup> This view is most often associated with the thinking of Alvin Plantinga.

<sup>3</sup> This view is most often associated with the work of David Lewis.

God.<sup>4</sup> The table below summarizes Welty's analysis while using somewhat differing labels for the various theories, referred to as models.<sup>5</sup>

That PWs exist, that is, that they are real in some sense, seems to be accepted by all SMNNs however the concept of a PW is rarely made explicit in the work of the five thinkers reviewed here. Perhaps their thinking is that the notion is so commonly used, given its philosophical utility, that the entire matter is unproblematic. The issue is not unproblematic for Theism and should therefore be more precisely specified.<sup>6</sup> In all models PWs are representations of possibilities but only TCR can fulfill all of the additional constraints on a model of PWs as listed above. This would be yet another argument in favor of Theism as Welty and Brian Leftow have argued.<sup>7</sup>

What then are the Ultimate grounds of possibility? PWs are representations of absolute possibility – ways things could be (or ways things could have been). Neither AOs (abstracta) can be the Ultimate grounds of possibility, nor propositions, properties, nor states of affairs. Similarly, concrete things (Concreta) cannot be the Ultimate grounds of possibility. Instead, the

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<sup>4</sup> This is the view proposed by Welty, "Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas" see Section 1, Chapter 3 and Section 2 Chapter 5. Again, for IOs fill "the functional role" of AOs in Welty's account; see also Parrish, *The Knower and the Known*, 322. Welty's discussion cited finds problems with the abstractionist and concretist models.

<sup>5</sup> Welty, "Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas," 163. This grid was adopted from Welty, *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz make this observation, "The debate over these models of possible worlds has interesting implications for theism, for God is conceived differently within the context of AWM [abstract worlds model] than within the context of CWM [concrete worlds model]. On the one hand, God may be conceived as a being whose greatness could not be *surpassed* [on CWM]. On the other hand, God may be conceived as a being whose greatness could neither be *surpassed* nor *matched* [on AWM]. This is the conception we originally introduced. The second conception precludes the possibility of a being *other than* God who is unsurpassably great, but the first conception does not. Thus the second conception is more robust than the first. Still, both of these conceptions seem to be consistent with an Anselmian characterization of God as *a being than which non greater can be conceived*. As we shall see, AWM is consistent with *the more robust conception*. But we shall argue that although CWM is consistent with *the less robust conception*, CWM is *not* consistent with the more robust one.... We conclude that the historical notion of God should be understood in terms of the idea that he is a being whose greatness could neither be surpassed nor matched." *The Divine Attributes*, 87-88. Emphasis original. See their entire discussion for more detail on how all of these things relate together.

<sup>7</sup> Leftow, "The Argument from Possibility." See also Robert Merrihew Adams, "Theories of Actuality," *Noûs* 8, no. 3 (September 1974): 211–231; and the final chapter in the recent Adams, *What Is, and What Is in Itself*.

Ultimate grounds of absolute possibility subsist “in” the mind of God, are made possible and actualizable<sup>8</sup> given the Will of God (agency) and the powers of God. The powers of God include both the omniscience<sup>9</sup> and the creative omnipotence of God. Furthermore, God being the Ultimate ground of possibility, such grounding power is in perfect consonance with His Rational Being and Supreme Goodness. The Being and Mind of God affirm a truth value for all necessary truths and assign a truth value to all contingent truths. Thus, a TCR conception of PWs is yet another pointer in the direction of God.

### Theory of Possible Worlds – Comparison Grid

<b>Condition</b>	Conceptualist model (PWs are humanly invented mental constructions)	Combinatorial model (PWs are the set or collection of everything there is)	Abstract Worlds model (PWs are a complex, maximal abstract entity or state of affairs - Plantinga)	Concrete worlds model (PWs are sets of actual concrete worlds – David Lewis)	Theistic Conceptual Realist model (PWs are IOs in the Mind of God, whose infinite mind knows all possibilities)
Representation	X	X	X	X	X
Simplicity				X	X
Plentitude			X		X
Necessity			X		X
Objectivity			X	X	X
Relevance					X
Actualizability					X

<sup>8</sup> Alethic modal possibility, fulfilling the “relevance” condition.

<sup>9</sup> Schultz, “The Actual World from Platonism to Plans.” I.e., what God knows about His own power and possibilities.

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