UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

University of Southampton Research Repository

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis and, where applicable, any accompanying data are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This thesis and the accompanying data cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s. The content of the thesis and accompanying research data (where applicable) must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder/s.

When referring to this thesis and any accompanying data, full bibliographic details must be given, e.g.

Thesis: Author (Year of Submission) "Full thesis title", University of Southampton, name of the University Faculty or School or Department, PhD Thesis, pagination.

Data: Author (Year) Title. URI [dataset]

University of Southampton

Faculty of Humanities

Philosophy

The Metaethics of Theism: Why Theists Should Be Expressivists

by

St.John Roy Lambert

ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3390-479X

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2021

University of Southampton

Abstract

Faculty of Humanities

Philosophy

Doctor of Philosophy

The Metaethics of Theism: Why Theists Should Be Expressivists

by

St.John Roy Lambert

Most traditional theists accept the following two controversial metaethical views:

> **Cognitivism**: Moral judgements are belief-like states that represent moral properties.
>
> **Realism:** There are moral properties.

This thesis argues that theists can and should reject these controversial metaethical views in favour of their metaethical counterparts:

> **Non-Cognitivism**: Moral judgements are not belief-like states that represent moral properties. They are desire-like states that motivate us to act or otherwise respond.
>
> **Anti-Realism**: There are no moral properties.

The reasons that theists have for rejecting cognitivism and realism and accepting non-cognitivism and anti-realism are distinctly theistic, or so I argue. This thesis can be divided into two parts.

The first part argues that theists should reject realism and accept anti-realism. Chapter 2 argues that theists are committed to the claim that *if* there are moral properties, *then* these properties are immediately explained by God. Chapters 3 and 4 then divide moral properties into two classes, the *deontic* (being obligatory, being permissible, being wrong) and the *axiological* (being good, being bad, being neutral), and argue that these classes of moral properties are *not* immediately explained by God. The conclusion of the first part of this thesis is thus that theists are committed to anti-realism, at least with respect to deontic and axiological moral properties.

The second part of this thesis then considers the kind of anti-realism that theists should accept. They can either accept cognitivist anti-realism (what I call 'moral error theory') or non-cognitivist anti-realism (what I call 'expressivism'). Chapter 5 argues that theists should reject moral error theory, while chapter 6 argues that theists should accept expressivism. The conclusion of the second part of this thesis, and the thesis as a whole, is thus that theists should accept expressivism or non-cognitivist anti-realism.

Table of Contents

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: St.John Roy Lambert

Title of thesis: The Metaethics of Theism: Why Theists Should Be Expressivists

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Parts of this work have been published as:

Lambert, St.John. 2021. "Is expressivism theologically acceptable?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-021-09793-z

Signature: St.John Roy Lambert Date: 31/05/2021

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking my outstanding supervisors, Alex Gregory, Brad Hooker, and Jonathan Way, for the incredible amount of support they have given me throughout the writing of this thesis. They have been immensely generous with their time and have given me invaluable guidance and encouragement throughout. I could not have asked for better supervisors. Thank you!

I would also like to thank Martin Dunkley Smith for supplying excellent comments on various parts of this thesis. His feedback and enthusiasm for this thesis were greatly appreciated!

Next, I would like to thank the University of Southampton for funding the first year of my research, the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding the second and third year of my research, and the Royal Institute of Philosophy for funding the fourth year of my research.

I would then like to thank my parents for their constant love and support. I would not have been able to pursue my research had it not been for their help. I am incredibly grateful!

Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful wife for being a never-ending source of inspiration and happiness in my life. Her inexhaustible love and patience are what enabled me to complete this thesis. I dedicate this thesis to her!

Chapter 1 The Metaethics of Theism

This thesis considers the metaethical implications of theism. In particular, it considers whether theological considerations favour accepting or rejecting certain metaethical views. This thesis argues that theological considerations favour accepting metaethical anti-realism and non-cognitivism and rejecting metaethical realism and cognitivism. This chapter serves to introduce the thesis at hand. In section 1.1, I outline the main metaethical views. In section 1.2, I outline the thesis and its noteworthy features. In section 1.3, I outline the kind of theism that this thesis has in mind, as well as its associated method for thinking about God. In sections 1.4–5, I respond to objections to both the kind of theism that this thesis has in mind and its associated method for thinking about God.

1.1 Metaethics

Metaethics is broadly the study of the metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, and semantics of morality. Unlike the field of *ethics,* which considers first-order questions *within* morality, metaethics considers second-order questions *about* morality. In other words, it considers such questions as:

> Do moral properties exist?
>
> If moral properties exist, how do we come to know them?
>
> What are moral judgements?
>
> What does it mean to say that something is moral?

Metaethics does *not* consider such questions as:

> Is capital punishment right?
>
> Is abortion wrong?
>
> Is euthanasia good?
>
> Is affirmative action bad?

This thesis primarily considers the metaethical implications of theism with respect to the *metaphysics* and *psychology* of morality. As a result of this, there are four main metaethical views that are relevant to this thesis: *realism*, *anti-realism*, *cognitivism*, and *non-cognitivism*. The first two views—realism and anti-realism—are opposing *metaphysical* views about the existence of moral

properties. The other two views—cognitivism and non-cognitivism—are opposing *psychological* views about the nature of moral judgements.

Let's consider these views in turn, starting with *realism*:

Realism: There are moral properties.

Realism is a metaphysical view about the existence of moral properties, where moral properties are properties like moral rightness, wrongness, goodness, and badness. This view holds that moral properties exist, that moral properties are instantiated in the world. Importantly, realism is neutral about the *nature* of moral properties, on my taxonomy. That is to say, it is neutral about whether moral properties are reducible or irreducible, natural or non-natural, mind-dependent or mind-independent, constructed or non-constructed, and so on. Realism, for my purposes, is simply the view that moral properties exist.[1]

Anti-realism, by contrast, is the denial of realism:

Anti-Realism: There are no moral properties.

This view holds that moral properties do *not* exist, that moral properties are *not* instantiated in the world. Importantly, anti-realism is also neutral about the *nature* of moral properties, on my taxonomy. For my purposes, anti-realism is simply the view that moral properties do *not* exist.

It is important to see that realism and anti-realism can be characterised as "metaphysically heavy" or "metaphysically light" views. According to *metaphysically heavy realism*, moral properties exist in an *ontological* sense. That is to say, they exist in the same ontologically committing or substantive way that non-moral properties like solidity and squareness exist. According to *metaphysically light realism*, by contrast, moral properties do *not* exist in an ontological sense. They exist in only some weaker, non-ontological way.[2]

Throughout this thesis, I characterise realism and anti-realism in the *metaphysically heavy* way that embraces moral ontology. For my purposes, then, realism and anti-realism are opposing metaphysical views about the existence of *ontologically committing* moral properties, where

[1] Throughout this thesis, I use the claims 'There are moral properties', 'Moral properties are instantiated in the world', and 'Moral properties exist' interchangeably. Similarly for their negations.

[2] The metaphysically heavy/light distinction is hard to characterise. It is meant to distinguish the views of metaphysically light realists like Dworkin (1996), Parfit (2011), and Scanlon (2014) from the views of metaphysically heavy realists like Adams (1999), Brink (1989), Cuneo (2007), Enoch (2011), Jackson (1998), and Shafer-Landau (2003). For my purposes, I do not need to rely on any particular characterisation of this distinction. I discuss related issues in the appendix, though.

ontologically committing properties are properties that are just as real or robust as non-moral properties, like roughness and roundness. These views can thus be characterised as follows:

Realism: There are ontologically committing moral properties.

Anti-Realism: There are no ontologically committing moral properties.

From here on, whenever I speak of realism and anti-realism, I have the *metaphysically heavy* characterisation of these views in mind. Similarly, whenever I speak of moral properties, I have *ontologically committing* moral properties in mind, unless I explicitly say otherwise.

Let's consider the next two views, starting with *cognitivism*:

Cognitivism: Moral judgements are belief-like states that represent moral properties.

Cognitivism is a psychological view about the nature of moral judgements. This view holds that moral judgements are *belief-like states* that represent moral properties, where belief-like states are states that represent the world as being a certain way. According to cognitivism, moral judgements are belief-like states that represent the world as being a certain *moral* way. That is to say, they represent moral properties. On this view, the moral judgement that stealing is wrong is the belief-like state that represents stealing as having the moral property of being wrong. Importantly, cognitivism is silent about whether this judgement *accurately* represents the world because this view does not say whether stealing *in fact* instantiates the property of wrongness. Cognitivism is thus neutral about the truth or falsity of realism. It is a purely psychological view that makes no metaphysical claims about the existence or non-existence of moral properties.[3]

Most cognitivists are realists. They hold that moral judgements represent moral properties, and that such properties exist. Some cognitivists, however, are anti-realists. They hold that moral judgements represent moral properties, but that such properties do *not* exist. The combination of cognitivism and anti-realism is *moral error theory*. According to this view, moral judgements are systematically in error because they represent the world as being a certain way, and the world is *not* that way. That is to say, they represent moral properties, but there are no such properties. Moral judgements are thus systematically erroneous, on this view.[4]

Non-cognitivism, by contrast, is the denial of cognitivism:

[3] I identify moral judgements with belief-like states rather than beliefs, on cognitivism, to allow besire-theorists and hybrid cognitivists to count as cognitivists. For discussion, see Ridge (2014: 77–8).
[4] There are other forms that moral error theory might take, but this is the one I focus on throughout this thesis. For further discussion, see chapter 5.

Non-Cognitivism: Moral judgements are not belief-like states that represent moral properties. They are desire-like states that motivate us to act or otherwise respond.

This view holds that moral judgements are *not* belief-like states that represent moral properties. According to non-cognitivism, moral judgements are *desire-like states*, where desire-like states are states that motivate us to act or respond in certain ways. On this view, the moral judgement that stealing is wrong is not one that represents stealing as having the moral property of being wrong, but one that motivates us not to steal, or to blame those who do. To judge that stealing is wrong is thus to be *against* stealing, on non-cognitivism. It is perhaps to disapprove of stealing, or to plan not to steal, or to accept some norm that prohibits stealing.

It is important to note that non-cognitivism is almost always paired with anti-realism. This is because non-cognitivism denies that moral judgements represent moral properties and so removes any and all reason to accept that there are such properties. In addition to this, non-cognitivism has no need for moral properties because ontologically speaking, the view only requires certain desire-like states and the people who have them. For these reasons, non-cognitivism is almost always paired with anti-realism. I pair these views together throughout this thesis.[5]

Now that we have outlined the main metaethical views, we can move on to consider the thesis at hand. In the following section, I outline the thesis and its noteworthy features.

1.2 This Thesis and Its Noteworthy Features

This thesis considers the metaethical implications of theism. In particular, it considers whether theological considerations favour accepting or rejecting realism, anti-realism, cognitivism, and non-cognitivism. This thesis argues that theological considerations favour accepting anti-realism and non-cognitivism and rejecting realism and cognitivism. The conclusion of this thesis is thus that theists should accept non-cognitivism and anti-realism. This thesis can be divided into two parts.

The first part argues that theists should reject realism and accept anti-realism. To give an overview, chapter 2 argues that theists are committed to the claim that *if* there are moral properties, *then* these properties are immediately explained by God. Chapters 3 and 4 then divide moral properties into two classes, the *deontic* (being obligatory, being permissible, being wrong) and the *axiological* (being good, being bad, being neutral), and argue that these moral properties are *not* immediately

[5] Non-cognitivists might accept that there are moral properties in a minimalist or metaphysically light sense. But they won't accept that there are moral properties in a realist or metaphysically heavy sense. For discussion of non-cognitivism and moral properties, see chapter 6.

explained by God. The conclusion of the first part of this thesis is thus that theists are committed to anti-realism, at least with respect to deontic and axiological moral properties.

The second part of this thesis then considers the kind of anti-realism that theists should accept. They can either accept *cognitivist anti-realism* (what I call 'moral error theory') or *non-cognitivist anti-realism* (what I call 'expressivism'). Chapter 5 argues that theists should reject moral error theory, while chapter 6 argues that theists should accept expressivism. The conclusion of the second part of this thesis, and the thesis as a whole, is thus that theists should accept expressivism or non-cognitivist anti-realism.

Before we move on, there are three noteworthy features to note about this thesis. The first is that it challenges the prevailing consensus among contemporary philosophers that theists should accept realism and reject anti-realism. This consensus is clear. For the most influential books published in the past forty or so years on the topic of God and morality all accept the consensus view that theists should accept realism and reject anti-realism. For example, Robert Adams (1999), David Baggett and Jerry Walls (2011, 2016), Stephen Evans (2013), John Hare (2001, 2015), Tim Mulgan (2015), Mark Murphy (2011), Philip Quinn (1978), William Wainwright (2005), Erik Wielenberg (2005, 2014), and Linda Zagzebski (2004) all accept it. Moreover, all contemporary theists (that I know of) accept realism, and no contemporary theists (that I know of) accept anti-realism, let alone non-cognitivism. This thesis is thus of note because it challenges the prevailing philosophical consensus.

The second feature to note about this thesis is that it addresses an important gap in the literature on God and morality. Until now, there has been little to no discussion on the relationship between theism and anti-realist views in metaethics (presumably because of the aforementioned consensus). In particular, there has been little to no discussion on the issue of whether theists can or should accept anti-realist views in metaethics. This thesis is thus of note because it addresses an important gap in the literature by directly discussing these neglected issues.

The third and final feature to note about this thesis is that it approaches metaethics from a *distinctly theistic perspective*. In particular, it considers whether *theological considerations* favour accepting or rejecting realism, anti-realism, cognitivism, and non-cognitivism. This is significant because theological considerations are typically overlooked or ignored by contemporary metaethicists. This thesis is thus of note because it does not simply reassess familiar, non-theological considerations for and against these views. It assesses new, theological considerations for and against these views that have so far received little to no attention. This thesis is thus of note because of its distinctly theistic approach to metaethics.

This thesis is of obvious interest to theists, but is it of interest to non-theists? Yes, for the reasons above but also because it challenges the widespread assumption (especially among non-theistic metaethicists) that God's existence makes no real metaethical difference (cf. Murphy 2011: 5–6). If this thesis is right, then this assumption is false. God's existence does make a metaethical difference. For theism favours accepting anti-realism and non-cognitivism and rejecting realism and cognitivism. Indeed, if this thesis is right, then there are theological arguments for and against these metaethical views. This is something that every metaethicist should find interesting, theist and non-theist alike.

Now that we have outlined the thesis and its noteworthy features, we can move on to consider the kind of theism that this thesis has in mind.

1.3 Perfect Being Theism and Theology

The kind of theism that this thesis has in mind is *perfect being theism*. Perfect being theism takes God to be the greatest, or most perfect, possible being:

> **Perfect Being Theism**: God is the greatest metaphysically possible being.

Throughout this thesis, I accept the perfect being conception of God. There are two reasons for this. First, perfect being theism is the most widely accepted kind of theism among contemporary analytic philosophers working in philosophy of religion. So, as this thesis is a philosophical investigation into the metaethics of theism, the perfect being conception of God is the natural choice.[6]

Second, the perfect being conception of God gives us a philosophically informative method for thinking about God, a regulative ideal to guide our thoughts about what God would be like: God, were He to exist, would be the greatest possible being, that than which none greater is metaphysically possible. This method will be useful when I argue (in chapter 2) that God, were He to exist, would be the creator of all else. I shall explain the workings of this method shortly, but before I do that, there are three clarificatory points I want to make.

The first is that by accepting the perfect being conception of God, I am *not* claiming that our ordinary concept of God is identical to the concept of the greatest possible being. Instead, by accepting the perfect being conception of God, I take myself to be working within the tradition of perfect being

[6] Perfect being theism is also grounded in history and religious tradition. It has an impressive history dating back to Plato, Aristotle, Zeno of Citium, Cicero, Chrysippus, and Seneca. It also plays an important role in the major monotheistic religions: Philo of Alexandria and Maimonides for Judaism, Al-Kindi and Avicenna for Islam, and Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas for Christianity (Murray and Rea 2008: 7–8). For an overview of the history of perfect being theism, see Leftow (2011: 104–113) and Nagasawa (2017: 15–24).

theism, the tradition that takes the claim that God is the greatest possible being to be a regulative ideal for guiding reflections about God.

The second clarificatory point I want to make is that the perfect being conception of God is not unconnected to our ordinary concept of God. For central to our ordinary concept of God is the idea that God is a being who is worthy of complete devotion and unreserved admiration, and it seems to me that only the greatest possible being could be worthy of such things. For while many beings might be worthy of some devotion and some admiration, only the greatest possible being could be worthy of complete devotion and unreserved admiration. The perfect being conception of God is thus, I think, closely connected to our ordinary concept of God.[7]

The third and final clarificatory point I want to make is that perfect being theists are committed to certain claims about the expansiveness of modal space. This is because the perfect being conception of God can only capture our ordinary concept of God if modal space is *sufficiently* expansive. To illustrate, suppose that we have radically overestimated how great beings can be and that Michael Jordan is, in fact, the greatest possible being—it is metaphysically impossible for any being to be greater than Michael Jordan. Clearly, in that case, we should not conclude that Michael Jordan is God. We should conclude instead that God does not exist (see Speaks 2017: 593–4). What this illustration shows is that if modal space is *insufficiently* expansive, then not even the greatest possible being would be *great enough* to qualify as God. This means that perfect being theists are committed to certain claims about the expansiveness of modal space. Throughout this thesis, I shall assume that modal space is sufficiently expansive for our purposes.

Now that we have made these clarificatory remarks, we can turn to the method I spoke of earlier. '*Perfect being theology*' is the name for the method that uses the claim that God is the greatest possible being to work out what properties God would have. According to this method, we can work out what properties God would have by working out what properties the greatest possible being would have. The starting point of perfect being theology is the following claim:

GPB: God is the being with the greatest possible array of great-making properties.

In order to explain how the method of perfect being theology works, we should clarify what great-making properties are, and what is it for a being to have the greatest possible array of them. Let's consider these issues in turn.[8]

[7] For further discussion, see Leftow (2012: 11), Murphy (2017: 3), and Wainwright (2009).
[8] For discussion of the method of perfect being theology, see Leftow (2012: 7–12), Mawson (2019: 3–14), Morris (1991: 35–40), Murphy (2017: 10–16), Murray and Rea (2008: 7–12), and Speaks (2018).

Great-making properties are properties that make a being great. That is to say, they are properties that, all else being equal, contribute to the greatness of the being that has them. But what is meant by 'greatness'? Yujin Nagasawa helpfully distinguishes between four distinct senses of 'greatness':

> A. *Great for oneself*: For example, the property of being smart is great for a criminal to have because it benefits the criminal.
>
> B. *Great for the world and others*: For example, the property of being smart is great for a well-intentioned inventor to have (but not great for a criminal to have) because [the well-intentioned inventor's being smart] is beneficial to the world and others.
>
> C. *Great in one's character/capacity*: For example, the property of being sharp is great for a knife to have qua knife.
>
> D. *Great intrinsically*: For example, the properties of being knowledgeable, powerful, benevolent, beautiful, and so on are great in themselves, regardless of their greatness in the above three senses. (Nagasawa 2017: 53–4)

The sort of greatness that perfect being theologians have in mind is *intrinsic greatness*. In other words, it is that which is great *in and of itself*. As Thomas Morris says:

> A great-making property is any property, or attribute, or characteristic, or quality which it is intrinsically good to have, any property which endows its bearer with some measure of value, or greatness, or metaphysical stature, regardless of external circumstances. (Morris 1991: 35)

Great-making properties are thus properties that are intrinsically great to have.[9] They are intrinsically great properties that, all else being equal, contribute to the greatness of the being that has them. According to perfect being theology, God has the greatest possible array of great-making properties. Morris helpfully explains what this means. He writes:

[9] As far as I know, there has been no substantive discussion as to what intrinsic greatness is. This is perhaps because intrinsic greatness is thought to be its own irreducible kind of value. It is worth noting, however, that some perfect being theologians talk in terms of *intrinsic goodness*. For example, Morris (1991), Murphy (2017), and Murray and Rea (2008). So perhaps intrinsic greatness is thought to just *be* intrinsic goodness. (I take no stand on this issue.) It is also worth noting that most perfect being theologians seem to have *final* or *non-instrumental greatness* in mind. That is to say, that which is great in its own right (and not merely because it brings about something else that is great). They do not seem to have *intrinsic greatness* in mind, understood as that which is great solely in virtue of its intrinsic or non-relational properties. (The distinction between final value and intrinsic value is discussed in chapter 4.) To be clear, I take 'intrinsic greatness' to be *final* or *non-instrumental greatness* throughout this thesis.

> [By thinking of God] as having the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties, we are thinking of God's nature as consisting in a cluster of properties intrinsically good to have, properties which can all be exemplified together, and which are such that their additive value, as a group, is unsurpassable by any other possible array of great-making properties. And if God is being thought of as singularly the greatest possible being, He is thought to be the sole possessor of such an array of properties. (Morris 1991: 37–8)

God is thus thought to have the best overall package of great-making properties on perfect being theology. He is thought to have the best possible combination of such properties. This thought by itself does not tell us what properties God has, but it does give us a way or method for working out what properties God has: perfect being theology. The method of perfect being theology consists of two stages: the prima facie and the ultima facie stage.

The first stage of perfect being theology is the identification of great-making properties. This is the 'prima facie' stage of the method because we arrive at claims to the effect that, *prima facie*, God has some great-making property. This stage proceeds as follows. Take any property, P. If P is an intrinsically great property that, all else being equal, contributes to the greatness of the being that has it, then P is a great-making property, and so God should be thought of as prima facie having P. If P is also a degreed property (that is, a property that something can have more or less of), then God should be thought of as prima facie having P to the maximal degree.

Take the properties of being powerful, being knowledgeable, and being good. These properties are plausibly great-making properties because they are intrinsically great properties that, all else being equal, contribute to the greatness of the being that has them—a being is greater having power, knowledge, and goodness than otherwise, and the more power, knowledge, and goodness the better. God should thus be thought of as prima facie having power, knowledge, and goodness to the maximal degree—that is, as being omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good—at least according to the first stage of perfect being theology.

The reason for the 'prima facie' qualifications here is that some great-making properties might *conflict*, in which case not even God, the greatest possible being, could have *all* great-making properties. Consequently, we can't say that if P is a great-making property, then, *ultima facie*, God has P. For not even God could have *all* great-making properties if *some* such properties conflict. We must therefore qualify our claim (at this stage at least) and say that if P is a great-making property, then, *prima facie*, God has P. As Brian Leftow explains:

> Given that there is the live possibility of conflict, for any … "great-making" attribute, it is a live option that the last stage of perfect-being reasoning (taking us from *prima* to *ultima facie* ascription of an attribute) rules against it. So it is precisely the case that [God] could lack a particular … great-making property … because [He] is the greatest possible being. For the greatest possible being has the greatest compossible set of great-making attributes, and perhaps that particular great-making property is not compossible with one it is even better to have. (Leftow 2011: 117)

The possibility of conflicting great-making properties is the reason why perfect being theologians do not say that God has *all* great-making properties. They only say that God has the *greatest possible array* of such properties. It is important to see that perfect being theologians are not *denying* that God has all great-making properties in saying this. They are simply allowing for the possibility that God does not have all great-making properties. For the claim that God has the greatest possible array of great-making properties is compatible with—but does not entail that—God has all great-making properties.

The second stage of perfect being theology is the identification of the great-making properties God has—the properties that are among the greatest possible array of great-making properties. This is the 'ultima facie' stage of the method because we arrive at claims to the effect that, *ultima facie*, God has some property. This stage proceeds as follows. List all the great-making properties that God *prima facie* has, and then consider whether these properties are compossible. (This will involve giving accounts of each great-making property.) If they are compossible, then conclude that, *ultima facie*, God has these properties. If they are not compossible, then compare rival sets of compossible great-making properties, and see which set is unsurpassable in terms of greatness, and conclude that, *ultima facie*, God has that set.

The ultima facie stage of perfect being theology is a serious philosophical undertaking, and I shall not attempt to engage in it here. My aim here is merely to describe the method of perfect being theology. I shall engage in the method later in chapter 2.

Now that we have outlined the kind of theism that this thesis has in mind and its associated method for thinking about God, we can move on to consider the main objections that have been raised against them. There are two objections that are worth considering. The first is an objection to perfect being theism. The second is an objection to perfect being theology.

1.4 Perfect Being Theism and Value Commensurability

The first objection states that perfect being theism is implausible because it is committed to universal value commensurability:

> **Universal Value Commensurability**: Every possible being is value commensurable with every other possible being. (Nagasawa 2017: 50)

Value commensurability can be defined follows:

> **Value Commensurability**: x and y are value commensurable if and only if the greatness of x is (i) equal to, (ii) greater than, or (iii) worse than the greatness of y. (Nagasawa 2017: 51)

This objection states that perfect being theism is committed to universal value commensurability because the claim that God is the greatest possible being implies that there is a single objective scale of value that ranks *all* possible beings in terms of their greatness, with God occupying the top of this scale. This commitment is said to be implausible because universal value commensurability is "a position which is clearly false" (Morris 1984: 182). Morris writes:

> It is argued that the notion of a greatest possible being makes sense only if there is some single, all encompassing objective scale of value on which every being, actual and possible, can be ranked, with God at the top. But surely, it is insisted, not all things are commensurable with respect to value. It just makes no sense to ask which is of greater intrinsic value, an aardvark or an escalator. (Morris 1984: 180)

The objection here is thus that perfect being theism is implausible because it is committed to universal value commensurability, and universal value commensurability is false, since some possible beings are not value commensurable, for example, aardvarks and escalators.

There are two replies to this objection. The first is that perfect being theism is *not* committed to universal value commensurability, because it does not imply that every possible being is value commensurable with every other possible being. It only implies that every possible being is value commensurable *with God*. So long as every being is value commensurable with God and God is greater than every other being, God can still be the greatest possible being, even if many possible beings are not value commensurable with one another. So perfect being theism is not committed to universal value commensurability. It is only committed to:

> **Universal Divine Value Commensurability**: Every possible being is value commensurable with God. (Nagasawa 2017: 52)

Universal divine value commensurability, I submit, is not implausible. In fact, it is prima facie plausible. For it seems that for any other possible being, God is greater than that being, and so every possible being is value commensurable with God.[10]

The second reply is that universal value commensurability is plausible, and so even if perfect being theism were committed to universal value commensurability, perfect being theism would not be implausible. According to Morris, universal value commensurability is implausible because it "makes no sense to ask which is of greater intrinsic value, an aardvark or an escalator" (1984: 180). But this objection is unpersuasive, because there are plausible explanations for why it might seem to make no sense to ask which is of greater intrinsic value, an aardvark or an escalator, apart from Morris' explanation that they are value incommensurable. Nagasawa offers two such explanations:

> The first [explanation] says that it does not seem to make sense to compare the greatnesses of an aardvark and an escalator … because of our intellectual limitations. That is, we cannot confidently compare the greatnesses of these beings because it is extremely difficult for us to list all the great-making properties (or all the worse-making properties) that they have and perform a highly complex calculation of their overall greatnesses. But this … is just an epistemic, not a metaphysical, problem. The second [explanation] … says that it does not make sense to ask which is greater, an aardvark or an escalator, because while they are value commensurable, neither is greater than the other. That is, their overall greatnesses are equal. Contrary to what Morris' assertion implies, [universal value commensurability] does not demand that for any pair of beings one has to be greater than the other. It demands only that for any pair of beings one has to be greater than or *equal to* the other. If it is impossible for us to tell which one is greater between an aardvark and an escalator, it might be reasonable to conclude that their overall greatnesses are equal. (Nagasawa 2017: 75–6)

The first explanation for why it might seem to make no sense to ask which is greater is that it is too hard for us to work out which is greater. But this, as Nagasawa says, is an epistemic, not a metaphysical, problem. One being might *be* greater than the other, even if we can't *know* which one it is. The second explanation is that these beings are of equal value. If this is true, then, as Nagasawa says, it makes no sense to ask which being is greater, for the question assumes that one being *is* greater than the other. We can thus reject Morris' claim that universal value commensurability is "a position which is clearly false" because there are plausible explanations for why it might seem to

[10] Morris (1984: 180–2) endorses this reply. See also Nagasawa (2017: 52–3).

make no sense to ask which is greater that are compatible with universal value commensurability.[11] We can thus dismiss the first objection.[12]

1.5 Perfect Being Theology and Value Judgements

The second objection is an objection to perfect being theology. It has to do with the value judgements that perfect being theology rests on—value judgements about greatness or great-making properties. This objection states that these value judgements are "objectionably subjective" or "culturally biased" because they are affected by our own temperaments and culture. This, it is said, undermines their objectivity or reliability. Tim Mawson writes:

> Nowadays, I can say that nobody reading this could have any doubts about the answer to the question, 'Which of these was the greater person – Churchill or Hitler?' But there were sane people in Germany (and beyond) in, let's say, 1936 (not perhaps exposed to all the evidence that was even then available, but sane nonetheless) who might have reversed the ranking that we so effortlessly provide. Is our culture even now blinding us to some facet of perfection and thus skewing our use of perfect being theology? It may well be. And this prejudice may well be buried so deep within us that we cannot unearth, examine and repudiate it. (Mawson 2019: 11)

There are two replies to this objection. The first is to point out that the same objection could be raised against other areas of philosophy, such as moral philosophy, because moral judgements are similarly affected by our own temperaments and culture. This reply then claims that since moral philosophers are entitled to appeal to moral judgements in the context of moral theorising, perfect being theologians are entitled to appeal to value judgements in the context of theological theorising. In short, this reply claims that perfect being theology is no worse off than moral philosophy with respect to this objection.

One might retort, however, that if the same objection can be raised against moral philosophy, then this doesn't count in perfect being theology's favour. It simply counts against moral philosophy. In other words, it's an objection to moral as well as other value-laden areas of philosophy, too. But this

[11] Alternatively, one could argue that it *does* make sense to ask which is of greater intrinsic value, because aardvarks and escalators *are* value commensurable. Following Rogers (1993: 64), one could argue that aardvarks are *greater* than escalators because aardvarks live sentient, conscious lives and escalators don't.
[12] One might offer other pairs of putative incommensurable possible beings apart from aardvarks and escalators, but it seems that Nagasawa's line of response will extend to them.

reply is self-defeating. For the same objection can be raised not only against value-laden areas of philosophy, but against philosophy itself. As Mawson writes:

> The dependence of Perfect Being Theology on value judgements and these on our cultures and individual temperaments is then, I concede, 'an issue', but it is hardly one unique to Perfect Being Theology … Arguably the issue arises in philosophy per se, as there are values presupposed in argument per se—e.g. that it's bad to be inconsistent. Thus, judgements of value are needed however value-free the subject matter of the arguments we're considering. The best we can do is—as always because of necessity—our best. We can't let the fact that the best may well not be good enough … undermine our resolve. (Mawson 2019: 11)

If Mawson is right and philosophy relies on values or value judgements, then the objection can be raised not only against perfect being theology, but against philosophy itself. This gives us reason to think that the objection is problematic. For the objection is itself a philosophical objection, and so relies on values or value judgements. The objection is thus self-defeating: it relies on the very thing—value judgements—it argues are unreliable.

This brings us on to the second reply to the objection. This reply says that the value judgements that perfect being theology rests on are based on intuitions about value. It then says that such intuitions are to be trusted or taken as reliable until shown otherwise. According to this reply, intuitions are judgements about what seems to be true. For example, we intuitively judge that 2 + 3 = 5, that nothing can be red and green all over, that no human could be a coconut, that pain is intrinsically bad, and so on. Intuitions, this reply says, are among the most basic judgements we have, because they are the judgements we use to judge the plausibility of other judgements. Morris writes:

> We could not even begin to use logic, mathematics or scientific method without an intuitive judgement that their most basic assumptions, propositions and principles are true. Some critics ask why we should trust such intuitions, or any intuitions at all. But to ask why anyone should ever rely on intuition is like asking why anyone should ever believe what seems to him to be true. The point, however, should be made that not all intuitions are equal. It seems there are degrees of intuitive support a proposition can have—some intuitions are just stronger than others. And some are reliable, whereas others are not. Most practitioners of perfect being theology take our intuitions about matters of value, as they do most other intuitions, to be innocent until proven guilty, or reliable until proven otherwise. The alternative is a form of scepticism with few attractions. (Morris 1991: 39)

According to Morris, then, intuitions should be trusted or taken as reliable until shown otherwise because intuitions are judgements about what seems to be true, and we should only doubt such judgements when presented with good reason to think them unreliable. The alternative, he notes, is a radical form of scepticism with few attractions.

One might reply that the objection at hand actually gives us reason to think that our value intuitions are unreliable. But this is mistaken. The objection merely points to the *possibility* that our value intuitions are unreliable. It does not actually give us reason to think that our value intuitions *are* unreliable. To do that, the objection must actually show that our temperaments and culture *have* negatively affected our intuitions. But it has not done that. Until it does, this second objection to perfect being theology can, I think, be dismissed.

1.6 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the main metaethical views, the thesis, and the kind of theism that this thesis has in mind, as well as its associated method for thinking about God. I then responded to two objections to perfect being theism and perfect being theology. For the remainder of this thesis, I'll use the term 'theism' to mean 'perfect being theism' and will take God to be the greatest possible being. Moreover, I will employ the method of perfect being theology at various stages. In the next chapter, I will argue that theists are committed to the claim that *if* there are moral properties, *then* these properties are immediately explained by God.

Chapter 2 Theism, Explanation, and Moral Properties

This chapter argues that theists are committed to the claim that *if* there are moral properties, *then* these properties are immediately explained by God. In section 2.1, I make some clarificatory remarks. In sections 2.2–3, I defend Mark Murphy's argument for the claim that God is immediately involved in the explanation of everything that exists. In section 2.4, I consider what Murphy's argument rules out with respect to God's explaining moral properties. In section 2.5, I divide moral properties into two classes and consider how God might immediately explain them. I end by giving a preview of the argument to come.

2.1 Clarifications

It will be useful to begin by clarifying what it is, or what it would be, for God to explain moral properties. I take it that for there to be an explanation of moral properties is for there to be an answer to the question 'Why do moral properties obtain?'. Thus, for God to explain moral properties is for there to be an answer to this question that involves facts about God. In other words, for God to explain moral properties is for facts about God to explain why moral properties obtain. I take it that to say that facts about God explain why moral properties obtain is to say the following:

> That moral properties obtain *in virtue of* facts about God.
>
> That moral properties obtain *because* facts about God obtain.
>
> That facts about God *make* moral properties obtain.

By 'facts about God' I mean facts about God's nature, activity, relations, and so on. Thus, that God has this property, that God commands this action, and that God stands in this relation, are all examples of what I call 'facts about God'. For ease of exposition, I shall say that *God explains* when I really mean to say that *facts about God explain*.

It is important to note that in this chapter, I shall *not* argue that God explains moral properties. I shall instead argue that *theists* are committed to the claim that *if* there are moral properties, *then* these properties are explained by God. This point is important to grasp because if I were to argue that God explains moral properties, I would be committing myself to both the existence of God and the existence of moral properties (because God can't explain moral properties unless both God and moral properties exist). Since I shall *not* argue that God explains moral properties, I shall *not* commit myself to their existence. I shall nonetheless talk, however, *as if* God and moral properties exist. I

shall do this to simplify sentences. In particular, I shall say that *God explains moral properties* when I really mean to say that *if theism is true and there are moral properties*, *then God explains moral properties*. This way of talking, I should emphasise, is purely for presentation. Nothing I say in this chapter or thesis hangs on this way of talking.

With these clarificatory remarks out of the way, we can move on to consider Mark Murphy's argument for the claim that God explains moral properties.

2.2 Creation and Sovereignty

Murphy (2011: 6–12) argues that God explains moral properties because God is involved in the explanation of everything that exists (see also Quinn 1990). According to Murphy, the received view is that God is creator of all else; that is, that God is creator of everything that is not divine. If this view is right, then everything that exists is explained by God. Murphy writes:

> God is the creator of everything that is not divine. (That is, necessarily, if x is not divine, then God creates x.) Now, if God is the creator of everything that is not divine, then everything that exists is explained by God. Whatever God creates is explained by God's activity. And whatever God does not create is divine, on this view, and so its existence is explained by being somehow related—being identical to, or an aspect of, etc.—the self-existent God. (Murphy 2011: 7)

Murphy's argument is thus that if God is creator of all else, then everything that exists is explained by God, because it is either created by God or divine. If it is created by God, then it is explained by God's creative activity. And if it is divine, then it is explained by being somehow related to God. Thus, if God is creator of all else, then everything that exists is explained by God.

What requires further defence here is the claim that God is creator of all else. For one might wonder why we should accept this claim. Murphy argues that we should accept it because *being-creator-of-all-else* is entailed by God's *being a perfect* or *greatest possible being*. In other words, it is entailed by one of God's great-making properties or, what Murphy calls, *God's perfections*. It is worth noting that many theists claim that *being-creator-of-all-else* is entailed by omnipotence. For example, Michael Murray and Michael Rea write:

> Central to all theistic conceptions of God is the notion that God has maximal power or omnipotence. Such great power is thought to follow not only from the fact that power is itself a perfection, but also from God's pre-eminent place among existing things. *God's power explains and entails that God creates all that there is, sustains it in existence, and confers on*

> *those things the powers and limitations that they have.* Power of this sort entails that God is in complete control of what things there are, and of what those things do (though, of course, it doesn't by itself entail that God determines what everything or everybody does). (Murray and Rea 2008: 15 emphasis added)

Peter van Inwagen makes a similar claim. He writes:

> To say that God is the creator of all things beside Himself is not to say that He formed them out of some pre-existent stuff, like the cosmic craftsman of the *Timaeus*. If there is a God, then there never was a chaos of prime matter that existed independently of His power and His will, waiting through an eternity of years for Him to impress form on it. *This could not be, for, if there is a God, nothing does or could exist independently of His will or independently of His creative power*. God creates things from the ground up, ontologically speaking. His creation is, as they say, ex-nihilo. (van Inwagen 2006: 29 emphasis added)

But contrary to these philosophers, omnipotence does *not* entail *being-creator-of-all-else*. For omnipotence entails that God has the ability to create anything. But it doesn't follow from this that God has created everything distinct from God. For there could be uncreated objects that are distinct from God. (That God *can* create anything does not entail that God *has* created everything.) One might reply that omnipotence also entails that God has power over everything. But it doesn't follow from this either that God has created everything distinct from God. For there could be uncreated objects that God has power over. (That God has *power* over everything does not entail that God has *created* everything.) We can see that omnipotence doesn't entail *being-creator-of-all-else* by considering what would happen were I to take an omnipotence pill. Clearly, I would become very powerful. But would I become creator of everything distinct from myself? No. So omnipotence doesn't entail *being-creator-of-all-else*.[13]

What perfection can we appeal to in order to show that God is creator of all else? Murphy suggests that we think about this by considering the following scenario. He writes:

> Suppose, counterpossibly, that a particle comes into existence *ex nihilo* without being created by anyone. What is it about this supposition such that one who accepts it is committed to the view that there is no perfect being? Omniscience need not be threatened; God might well know that a particle, unless prevented, would come into existence. Omnipotence need not be

[13] One might reply that God has *always* been omnipotent, and it follows from God's always having been omnipotent that everything distinct from God has been created by God. But this is mistaken. For there could be uncreated objects that exist co-eternally alongside God, even if God always has been omnipotent. (This is what theistic Platonists believe, that uncreated *abstract* objects exist co-eternally alongside God.)

> threatened; God might well have had the power to preclude any such particle's coming into existence, but have chosen not to exercise that power, and God might well have the power to annihilate the particle once it has come into existence. What perfection can we appeal to in order to rule out the possibility of this waywardly existing particle in a world in which God exists? (Murphy 2011: 9–10)

According to Murphy, the perfection we can appeal to is *divine sovereignty*—the perfection that *everything distinct from God depends on God*. That the spontaneously existing particle threatens God's sovereignty is clear. For the particle comes into existence *independently of God*. God is not the source of its coming into existence. God is not what makes the particle come into existence. God simply reacts to its coming into existence. Moreover, that we can appeal to the perfection of divine sovereignty to rule out the possibility of the spontaneously existing particle is also clear. For if everything distinct from God depends on God for its existence, then nothing comes into existence independently of God. We can thus conclude that if sovereignty is a divine perfection, then God is creator of everything else, because *sovereignty entails being-creator-of-all-else*: for everything else to depend for its existence on God just *is* for God to be the creator of all else.

In what follows, I argue that there is good reason to believe that sovereignty is a divine perfection, a great-making property that God has. I will employ the method of perfect being theology that I introduced in chapter 1.

Recall that the first stage of perfect being theology is the identification of great-making properties. We can start this stage by noting that sovereignty is plausibly a great-making property—a property that, all else being equal, contributes to the greatness of the being that has it—because a being who is the cause of everything else's existence is plausibly greater than a being who is not, at least all else being equal. We can further support the idea that sovereignty is a great-making property by noting that God's greatness would be augmented were everything else's existence dependent on God and diminished were only some other things' existence dependent on God. Sovereignty is thus plausibly a great-making property that contributes to God's greatness. God should thus be thought of as prima facie being sovereign, at least according to this first stage.[14]

The second stage of perfect being theology is the identification of the great-making properties that God has. We can start this stage by recalling that God is the being with the greatest possible array of great-making properties. We can thus note that if sovereignty is among that array, then God is sovereign. We can then note that the only reason why sovereignty wouldn't be among that array is if

[14] For further discussion, see Craig (2016: 41) and Leftow (2012: 19–22).

there is an even greater, great-making property that conflicts with it. For if two great-making properties conflict, then only one such property can and will be among that array—the greater one. We can thus show that, *ultima facie*, God is sovereign by showing that sovereignty doesn't conflict with any of the other great-making properties that God is traditionally thought to have.

We can then note that God is traditionally thought to have the great-making properties of being omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. We can then note that sovereignty doesn't conflict with any of these properties, because sovereignty doesn't entail any lack of power, knowledge, or goodness. We can thus conclude that sovereignty coheres well with these great-making properties. We can then note that sovereignty also *entails* that God has many of the great-making properties that God is traditionally thought to have. As Murphy writes:

> For God to be necessarily sovereign entails *divine aseity* [independence], on pain of vicious circle of dependence. For God to be necessarily sovereign entails *divine providence*, God's control over all else, not just qua individual beings but qua system. For God to be necessarily sovereign entails *omnipotence*, for whatever possibly exists would have to be brought into existence by God. For God to be necessarily sovereign entails *omnipresence*, not only understood as divine knowledge but divine activity, for everything everywhere depends on God for its existence. And so forth. (Murphy 2011: 11)

Now, to decisively show that sovereignty is among the greatest possible array of great-making properties, we would have to give accounts of each great-making property and show that they don't conflict. But this task is beyond the scope of this thesis. So we will settle for a more modest conclusion, the conclusion that there is good reason to believe that God is sovereign, that sovereignty is a divine perfection. For we can note that sovereignty is a great-making property that coheres well with, and even entails, many of the great-making properties that God is traditionally thought to have. At the very least, then, we can conclude that the burden of proof is on those who would deny that God is sovereign. For it is not at all clear why God wouldn't be sovereign. In what follows, then, we shall take God to be sovereign.

The upshot of this is that perfect being considerations commit theists to the claim that God is involved in the explanation of everything that exists. For to hold that there is something that exists that is not explained by God, not dependent on God, is to hold that God is not sovereign. This extends to moral properties. Theists are thus committed to the claim that God explains moral properties. Of course, this is not to say anything about *how* God explains moral properties. It is just to say that God is *somehow* involved in their explanation.

In the following section, I outline and defend Mark Murphy's argument for the claim that God is *immediately* involved in the explanation of moral properties.

2.3 Theistic Immediacy

Murphy (2011: 61–8) argues that God is *immediately* involved in the explanation of moral properties because God is immediately involved in the explanation of everything that exists. But what is it to be immediately involved in an explanation? To immediately explain is to directly explain. If ball A hits ball B, which in turn hits ball C, causing it to move, then ball C's movement is *immediately* explained by its being hit by ball B, but only *mediately* explained by ball B's being hit by ball A. Murphy defines the notion of immediacy as follows:

> **Immediacy**: x's obtaining immediately explains y's obtaining just in case x's obtaining brings about y's obtaining, and there is no set of states of affairs (not including y) such that x's obtaining brings about y's obtaining only in virtue of bringing about the obtaining of some member of that set. (Murphy 2011: 62)

We can thus say that x immediately explains y just in case x brings about y, and x does not bring about y *only by* bringing about some distinct state of affairs which in turn brings about y. So, for example, we can say that God immediately explains moral properties just in case God brings about moral properties, and God does not bring about moral properties *only by* bringing about some distinct state of affairs, which in turn brings about moral properties. (In other words, there is no explanatory *intermediary* between God and moral properties.)

The notion of immediacy should be distinguished from the notion of *completeness*. What is it to completely explain? To completely explain is to be the *only* thing that explains. If God creates the world *ex nihilo*, for example, then God *completely* explains the world's creation, because there is nothing distinct from God that explains the world's creation. Murphy defines the notion of completeness as follows:

> **Completeness**: x's obtaining completely explains y's obtaining just in case x's obtaining brings about y's obtaining and there is no state of affairs wholly distinct from x the obtaining of which brings about y's obtaining. (Murphy 2011: 62)

We can thus say that x completely explains y just in case x brings about y, and there is nothing distinct from x which brings about y. Thus, for example, we can say that God completely explains

moral properties just in case God brings about moral properties, and there is nothing distinct from God which brings about moral properties.

It is clear that completeness *entails* immediacy. For if x completely explains y, then x does not bring about y *only by* bringing about some distinct state of affairs which in turn brings about y. For if x completely explains y, then, *ex hypothesi*, there is nothing distinct from x which brings about y. It is also clear that immediacy does *not* entail completeness. For if ball A hits ball B, which in turn hits ball C, causing it to move, then ball C's movement is *immediately* explained by its being hit by ball B, but its movement is not thereby *completely* explained by its being hit by ball B. For there might be other things that explain ball's C movement. Thus, completeness entails immediacy, but not vice versa.

Murphy argues that God immediately explains moral properties because God is immediately involved in the explanation of everything that exists. He calls the thesis that God is *immediately* involved in the explanation of everything that exists 'theistic immediacy'. He notes that this thesis is a strong one, but that it should not be confused with the even stronger thesis called 'theistic completeness', according to which God is *completely* involved in the explanation of everything that exists. Murphy argues that we should accept theistic immediacy, but not theistic completeness.[15]

Murphy's argument for theistic immediacy has to do with the perfection of divine sovereignty. According to Murphy, the perfection of divine sovereignty requires that God enter *immediately* into explanations. In other words, it does not permit God to enter *mediately* into explanations.

Murphy distinguishes between objects' *coming into existence*, objects' *continuing to exist*, and objects' *operating in their characteristic ways*. One might think, Murphy notes, that reflection on the perfection of divine sovereignty and the spontaneously existing particle shows that sovereignty only requires that God be *immediately* involved in the explanation of objects' *coming into existence*; it does not require that God be *immediately* involved in the explanation of objects' *continued existence* and *operating*. In other words, one might think that God's explanatory role can be fully *mediated* with respect to objects' *continued existence* and *operating* without compromising the perfection of divine sovereignty.

This proposed view of God's explanatory role is, essentially, *deism*. According to deism, God creates the world, but does not sustain the world or interact with it. Upon creation, the world is self-sufficient with respect to its continued existence and operating. On this view, God is *immediately*

[15] It is important to note that Murphy (2011: 62) characterises theistic immediacy as the thesis that God is immediately involved in the explanation of everything *that is explanation eligible*. I drop the 'explanation eligible' qualification here for presentation. (I take it to be obvious that instantiated moral properties have explanations.)

involved in the explanation of the world's creation, but only *mediately* involved in the explanation of the world's continued existence and operating. (Since the world can't continue to exist or operate without coming into existence, and God explains the world's coming into existence, God *mediately* explains the world's continued existence and operating. In other words, He explains the world's continued existence and operating *only by* explaining its initial coming into existence.)

Murphy notes that deism is typically rejected by theists. The reason for this is that deism seems to be incompatible with the perfection of divine sovereignty. For the idea that objects continue to exist and operate without *immediate theistic involvement* puts them, according to Murphy, outside the scope of divine sovereignty. It gives them an independence from God that seems incompatible with the perfection of divine sovereignty.

Take objects' continued existence. If objects continue to exist without immediate theistic involvement, then while God explains their *coming into existence*, He does not explain their *continued existence*. For God does not *make* objects continue to exist. They continue to exist without God's involvement. This gives objects an independence from God that seems incompatible with divine sovereignty, for objects' continued existence is not dependent on God, since God does not *make* objects continue to exist. The only way to avoid this is to hold that God is *immediately* involved in the explanation of objects' continued existence—that objects can't continue to exist without *immediate theistic involvement*.[16]

One might object that objects that continue to exist without immediate theistic involvement are *not* outside the scope of divine sovereignty. For God can annihilate these objects whenever He wants, so their continued existence *is* dependent on God. But this objection fails. For just as the fact that God can prevent the spontaneously existing particle from coming into existence does not show that the particle's coming into existence is dependent on God, the fact that God can prevent objects' continued existence does not show that their continued existence is dependent on God. Thus, the fact that God can annihilate objects does not show that their continued existence is dependent on God. As Murphy explains:

> [W]hat divine sovereignty requires is that, counterpossibly, if God did not exist, then nothing could come into existence. If it is possible for a particle to pop into existence without theistic

[16] What if God explains something else which in turn explains objects' continued existence? In that case, I would say that objects' continued existence is dependent on the something else, not on God. For God does not *make* objects continue to exist. He only *makes* the something else continue to exist, which in turn *makes* objects continue to exist. It thus seems to me that objects would be dependent on the something else for their continued existence, not on God.

> involvement, then it would seem that this counterpossible would be false. The fact that God could act so as to prevent particles from popping into existence does not make a difference to the truth of that counterpossible. But, similarly, we should say that, counterpossibly, if God ceased to exist after creating, then nothing could continue in existence; for that it could continue to exist would mean that by creating God has brought something into existence that no longer depends on God. The fact that God could prevent a thing from continuing in existence should not lead us to reconsider the truth of the counterpossible. (Murphy 2011: 65–6)

Murphy notes that the same considerations show that theists should take God to be immediately involved in the explanation of objects' *operations*. For if objects operate—bring about effects in the world—without immediate theistic involvement, then while God explains their *coming into existence*, He does not explain their *operating*. For God does not *make* objects operate. They operate independently of God. This gives objects an independence from God that seems incompatible with divine sovereignty, for objects' operations are not dependent on God, since God does not *make* objects operate. The only way to avoid this is to hold that God is *immediately* involved in the explanation of objects' operations—that objects can't operate without *immediate theistic involvement*.

Murphy's conclusion is that the perfection of divine sovereignty requires theistic immediacy with respect to the coming into existence, continued existence, and operating of what is not divine. In other words, it requires that God be immediately involved in the explanation of the *non-divine*. Since God is immediately involved in the explanation of the *divine*,[17] it follows that theistic immediacy is true. God is immediately involved in the explanation of everything that exists, the divine and the non-divine. This conclusion seems to be right. For it is hard to see how God could be sovereign (how everything else could be dependent on God) if God were not *immediately* involved in the explanation of everything that exists. In what follows, then, I shall take theistic immediacy to be true.

Before proceeding, it is worth considering whether divine sovereignty requires that God be *completely* involved in the explanation of everything that exists. That is, whether it requires not

[17] Note that the claim here is *not* that God is immediately involved in the explanation of *every divine fact*. Rather, it is that God is immediately involved in the explanation of *every divine fact that is explanation eligible*. (As I said in footnote 15, theistic immediacy is really the thesis that God is immediately involved in the explanation of everything *that is explanation eligible*.) But why think this claim is true? According to Murphy, it is trivial: "That theistic facts are immediately involved in the explanation of what is *divine* is of course trivial" (2011: 66). Clearly, if the fact that God exists is a theistic fact, then Murphy is right. For the fact that God exists will enter immediately into the explanation of every theistic fact that is explanation eligible. But even if the fact that God exists is not a theistic fact, the claim is still, I think, plausible, for it seems that for *every theistic fact that is explanation eligible*, there will be some further, deeper theistic fact that immediately explains it.

merely theistic immediacy, but theistic completeness. I don't think it does. For theistic immediacy satisfies divine sovereignty by ensuring that everything else depends on God. For if God is immediately involved in the explanation of everything that exists, then nothing comes into existence without God's involvement, nothing continues to exist without God's involvement, and nothing operates without God's involvement. Theistic immediacy thus secures divine sovereignty by ensuring that everything else depends for its existence and operating on God. To allow that non-theistic facts also enter into explanations does not undermine this. So divine sovereignty only requires theistic immediacy, not completeness.

It is important to see that I am not saying that theistic completeness is false. I am only saying that divine sovereignty doesn't require its truth. In other words, theistic completeness might be true, but if it is, it is not true because of considerations of divine sovereignty. For our purposes, then, I shall remain neutral about the truth of theistic completeness. I shall not take theists to be committed to it. I shall only take theists to be committed to immediacy.[18]

The upshot of this is that considerations of divine sovereignty commit theists to the claim that God is *immediately* involved in the explanation of everything that exists. This extends to moral properties. Theists are thus committed to the claim that if there are moral properties, then these properties are immediately explained by God. In other words, they are committed to the claim that the immediate explanation of every moral property includes facts about God.

In the following section, I consider what theistic immediacy rules out with respect to God's explaining moral properties.

2.4 What Does Theistic Immediacy Rule Out?

Theistic immediacy rules out at least two views of how God explains moral properties. The first view is that *God explains moral properties only by explaining moral principles*. To clarify, this view takes God's explaining moral principles to *consist in* God's conferring on various things the power to make moral properties obtain. Take the principle of utility, according to which an action is morally obligatory just in case and because it maximises happiness. On this view, God's explaining the principle of utility *consists in* God's conferring on the property of maximising happiness, and only this

[18] It is worth noting that Murphy doesn't have an argument *against* theistic completeness. He writes, "I do not think I can show why completeness does not follow from the divine perfection, while immediacy does. My best answer is that we do in fact hold views on reflection that are incompatible with completeness and we lack any successful argument from divine perfection to the view that theistic explanation must be complete" (2011: 64).

property, the power to make moral obligations obtain. This view then takes the property of maximising happiness' having this power to be *what it is* for the principle of utility to obtain. On this view, then, what explains why something is obligatory is (i) the fact that it has the property of maximising happiness and (ii) the fact that maximising happiness has the power to make moral obligations obtain. This view is ruled out by theists' commitment to immediacy because God only *mediately* explains why moral obligations obtain. In other words, He *only* explains why moral obligations obtain *by* explaining why the principle of utility obtains, that is, *by* explaining why maximising happiness has the power to make moral obligations obtain. Since God does not *immediately* explain moral obligations, on this view, this view is ruled out by theistic immediacy.[19]

The second view that theistic immediacy rules out is *normative divine command theory* (Choo 2019: 376, Hare 2015: 18, Murphy 1998: 11). According to this view, there is a general obligation to obey God's commands that is *not* explained by God. On this view, all (other) moral obligations are explained by God's commands and the general obligation to obey God's commands. So, for example, the act of loving our neighbours is obligatory because (i) God commands us to love our neighbours, and (ii) there is a general obligation to obey God's commands. This view is ruled out by theistic immediacy because the general obligation to obey God's commands is *not* explained by God. (It is simply a brute fact that we are obligated to obey God's commands.) To put the point another way, *obeying God's commands* instantiates the property of being obligatory, but God is not immediately involved in the explanation of *this* moral property. This view is thus ruled out by theistic immediacy.

It is important to see that I am not saying that theistic immediacy rules out *all* divine command theories. For *many* divine command theories respect theistic immediacy by denying that there is a general obligation to obey God's commands. According to *metaethical divine command theory,* for example, all moral obligations are explained by God's commands, without appeal to any unexplained, general obligation to obey God's commands (see Adams 1999, Evans 2013, Quinn 1978, Wierenga 1989). On this view, there is no general obligation to obey God's commands, yet moral obligations nonetheless obtain only in virtue of God's commands. Thus, the act of loving our neighbours is obligatory, on this view, simply *because* God commands us to love our neighbours.

[19] Note that I am *not* saying theistic immediacy rules out the view that moral principles explain moral properties. I am only saying that theistic immediacy rules out the view that God explains moral properties *only by* explaining moral principles. Note also that this view does not take moral principles to be mere summations of the distributions of properties. It takes them instead to be statements of the powers various things have to make moral properties obtain. For discussion of immediacy and moral principles, see Murphy (2011: 110–11).

This view respects theistic immediacy because all moral obligations are immediately explained by God's commands. (I discuss this view in more detail in chapter 3).[20]

In the following section, I divide moral properties into two classes and consider how God might immediately explain them.

2.5 How Might God Immediately Explain Moral Properties?

Moral properties can be divided into two classes, the *deontic* and the *axiological*. The former class is concerned with the *obligatory*, the *wrong*, and the *permissible*, while the latter class is concerned with the *good*, the *bad*, and the *neutral*. We can see that these classes of moral properties are distinct by noting that there are at least three differences between them.

The first difference to note is that the deontic is concerned with what we *must*, *mustn't*, and *may* do, while the axiological is *only* concerned with moral *value* and *disvalue*. To clarify, if something is obligatory, then we *must* do it. If something is wrong, then we *mustn't* do it. And if something is permissible, then we *may* do it. By contrast, if something is good, then it has moral *value*. If something is bad, then it has moral *disvalue*. And if something is morally neutral, then it has *neither moral value nor moral disvalue*. We can see that these notions are distinct by noting that they can come apart. For example, things can be morally good but not morally obligatory (joining doctors without borders), morally bad but not morally wrong (failing to perform some courageous act), and morally permissible but not morally neutral (loving one's friends and family).

The second difference to note is that the deontic applies *only* to actions, and perhaps also to beliefs, decisions, choices, intentions, and emotions, while the axiological applies to all sorts of additional things, like persons, states of affairs, and possible worlds. For example, persons can be morally good, bad, and neutral, but they can't be morally obligatory, wrong or permissible, and similarly for states of affairs, possible worlds, and other things.

The third difference to note is that the deontic is plausibly tied to notions of blame and guilt, while the axiological is not. If I fail to do what I am obligated to do, then (in the absence of a sufficient excuse) it is appropriate for me to feel guilty, and for others to blame me. But if I fail to do what is

[20] One might think that there are no moral principles on metaethical divine command theory. But this is mistaken. For in virtue of God's commands having the power to make moral obligations obtain, a moral principle obtains. For God's commands having this power just is *what it is* for the moral principle "An action is morally obligatory just in case and because God commands it" to obtain. So metaethical divine command theory accepts at least one moral principle. (I discuss issues relating to divine command theory, theistic immediacy, and moral principles further in section 3.2.5.)

merely morally good for me to do, then (even in the absence of a sufficient excuse) it is *not* appropriate for me to feel guilty, or for others to blame me. For example, if I donate to charity A instead of charity B and I have no obligation to donate to charity B, then I fail to do something that is morally good—namely, donate to charity B. But it is not appropriate for me to feel guilty for not donating to charity B, or for others to blame me. For I should only feel guilty for not donating to charity B if I had an obligation to do so and I failed to do it.[21]

The deontic and the axiological are thus distinct.[22] In chapters 3 and 4, I consider whether God explains these classes of moral properties separately, on an individual basis. I do this because there is a general consensus (among philosophers who think that God explains moral properties) that God explains these classes of moral properties in different ways (see Miller 2018: 209). According to the consensus view, deontic moral properties are explained by facts about *divine states,* while axiological moral properties are explained by facts about *divine resemblances.* This consensus is clear. For Adams (1999), Alston (1990), Baggett and Walls (2011), Craig (2008), Copan and Flannagan (2014), Evans (2013), Hare (2015), Jordan (2013), Miller (2009a), Quinn (2006), Wierenga (1989), and Zagzebski (2004) all accept that deontic moral properties are explained by facts about divine states, and most of these philosophers also accept that axiological moral properties are explained by facts about divine resemblances. (The main exception is Zagzebski (2004) who thinks that deontic and axiological moral properties are both explained by facts about divine states.)

Throughout this thesis, I accept the consensus view that if moral properties are immediately explained by God, then deontic moral properties are immediately explained by facts about divine states and axiological moral properties are immediately explained by facts about divine resemblances. I accept this view because it is the most widely defended (and in my opinion, plausible) view of how God immediately explains moral properties. Throughout this thesis, I shall call the view that deontic moral properties are immediately explained by divine states *theological stateism*, and the view that axiological moral properties are immediately explained by divine resemblances *theological resemblanceism*. I shall consider theological stateism in chapter 3 and theological resemblanceism in chapter 4.[23]

[21] Consequentialists might reply that whether it is appropriate for me to feel guilty, or for others to blame me, depends *not* on whether I have failed to do what I am obligated to do, but rather on whether feelings of guilt and blame would produce the best consequences. For discussion and a response, see Adams (1999: 236–7).
[22] Further potential differences between the deontic and the axiological are that the deontic is subject to *ought implies can*, while the axiological is not, and that the axiological comes in *degrees*, while the deontic does not. For further discussion of these differences, see Tappolet (2013).
[23] I do not discuss other moral properties for the sake of scope. For what it's worth, I think that *being a moral reason* is a deontic moral property and that *being morally better* or *worse* are axiological moral properties.

To preview the argument to come, I shall argue that theological stateism and theological resemblanceism are both implausible. I shall thus argue that deontic and axiological moral properties are *not* immediately explained by God. Since I have just argued that theists are committed to the claim that:

(1) If there are moral properties, then these properties are immediately explained by God.

And I shall argue in chapters 3 and 4 that the following claim is true:

(2) Deontic and axiological moral properties are *not* immediately explained by God.

I shall conclude that theists are committed to the claim that there are no deontic or axiological moral properties. I shall thus conclude that theists are committed to *anti-realism*, at least with respect to deontic and axiological moral properties. Theists should thus be anti-realists.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I argued that theists are committed to the claim that *if* there are moral properties, *then* these properties are immediately explained by God. I started by defending Mark Murphy's argument for the claim that God is immediately involved in the explanation of everything that exists. I then considered what this argument rules out with respect to God's explaining moral properties. I then divided moral properties into two classes and considered how God might immediately explain them. In the next chapter, I argue that deontic moral properties are *not* immediately explained by God by arguing that theological stateism is implausible.

They would thus receive theological stateist and theological resemblanceist treatments, respectively. For a theological stateist treatment of *being a normative reason*, see Harrison (2018).

Chapter 3 Theological Stateism

This chapter argues that deontic moral properties are not immediately explained by God by arguing that theological stateism is implausible. In section 3.1, I outline theological stateism. In sections 3.2–5, I consider *general* and *specific* objections to theological stateism. I argue that at least one general objection shows that theological stateism is implausible and that several specific objections show that theological stateism is implausible. I conclude that deontic moral properties are not immediately explained by God.

3.1 Theological Stateism

Theological stateism is the view that moral properties are explained by divine states, where divine commands, intentions, desires, and other attitudes all count as divine states (Wielenberg 2014: 73). This view can be represented with the following schema:

> **Schema**: Moral property P stands in explanatory relation E to divine state D.[24]

This schema shows that theological stateists must make at least three decisions when formulating their view. They must say (i) what *moral properties* are explained by divine states, (ii) what *divine states* explain moral properties, and (iii) what *explanatory relation* holds between moral properties and divine states. Let's consider these decisions in turn.

First, theological stateists must say what *moral properties* are explained by divine states. They can either say that *all* moral properties are explained by divine states, or they can say that only *some* moral properties are explained by divine states. Theological stateism is widely held to be most plausible when it claims that only *deontic moral properties* (being obligatory, being wrong, and being permissible) are explained by divine states. This is because the view is thought to be less vulnerable to standard objections when the range of moral properties it purports to explain is restricted in this way. While some theological stateists hold that *axiological moral properties* (being good, being bad, and being neutral) are explained by divine states (early Quinn 1978, Zagzebski 2004), most theological stateists reject this and hold that only deontic moral properties are so explained (Adams 1999, Alston 1990, Baggett and Walls 2011, Craig 2008, Evans 2013, Hare 2015, Quinn 2000). Throughout this chapter, I assume that theological stateism only purports to explain deontic moral

[24] For discussion of this schema, see Murphy (2014) and Quinn (2000).

properties. I thus take theological stateism to be the view that *all and only* deontic moral properties are explained by divine states. I focus on the moral property of being obligatory for presentation.

Second, theological stateists must say what *divine states* explain moral obligations. There is considerable variation among theological stateists as to what divine states explain moral obligations. While many theological stateists hold that *divine commands* explain moral obligations (Adams 1999, Baggett and Walls 2011, Evans 2013, Hare 2015), many theological stateists reject this. Some hold that *divine intentions* explain moral obligations (Murphy 1998, Quinn 2000), while others hold that *divine desires*, *approvals*, and *emotions* explain moral obligations (Miller 2009a, Jordan 2013, and Zagzebski 2004, respectively). Throughout this chapter, I take no stand on the issue of what divine states explain moral obligations, on theological stateism. I remain neutral on this issue throughout.

Third and finally, theological stateists must say what *explanatory relation* holds between moral obligations and divine states. It is important to see that most theological stateists hold that divine states *immediately* explain moral obligations. That is to say, they hold that divine states do not bring about moral obligations *only by* bringing about some distinct state of affairs which in turn brings about moral obligations. Rather, they hold that divine states directly bring about moral obligations. We can see that they hold this by noting that most theological stateists specify further relations between moral obligations and divine states that underwrite the immediate explanatory relation.

Consider the views of the two most influential theological stateists, Robert Adams and Philip Quinn. Robert Adams is a divine command theorist. He holds that moral obligations are explained by God's commands, that something is obligatory just in case and because God commands it. But Adams also holds that moral obligations are *constituted* by God's commands (see Adams 1979, 1999: 249–50, 2002: 482–3). According to Adams, to be morally obligatory just *is* to be divinely commanded: the latter constitutes the former. It is thus clear that divine commands *immediately* explain moral obligations, on Adams' view. For divine commands do not bring about some distinct states of affairs which in turn brings about moral obligations. Rather, they directly bring about moral obligations by constituting them. Adams thus accepts immediacy with respect to explaining moral obligations.[25]

Philip Quinn, by contrast, is a divine intention theorist. He holds that moral obligations are explained by God's intentions, that something is obligatory just in case and because God intends it. Unlike Adams, Quinn *denies* that moral obligations are constituted by divine intentions. On Quinn's view, moral obligations are *wholly distinct* from God's intentions, yet moral obligations nonetheless obtain only in virtue of God's intentions (see Quinn 2000: 54–5). According to Quinn, the relation between

[25] For further discussion, see Murphy (2012: 680–1).

moral obligations and God's intentions is one of *bringing about*. He stipulates that the bringing about relation is *immediate*, among other things. Quinn writes:

> My current view is that dependence of morality on God is best formulated in terms of a relation of bringing about, though care must be taken to distinguish this relation from various causal relations familiar from science and ordinary life. In particular, the divine bringing about in question will have the following marks: totality, exclusivity, activity, *immediacy*, and necessity … By immediacy, I mean that what does the bringing about causes what is brought about immediately rather than by means of secondary causes or instruments. (Quinn 2000: 54–5)

Throughout this chapter, I take no stand on the issue of whether theological stateists should accept Adams' constitutive view or Quinn's bringing about view. What I do take a stand on, however, is whether theological stateists should accept *immediacy* with respect to explaining moral obligations. For I take theological stateism to be the view that moral obligations are immediately explained by divine states. The view can thus be formulated as follows:

> **Theological Stateism**: Deontic moral properties are all immediately explained by divine states.

For the remainder of this chapter, I argue that theological stateism is implausible. I consider two types of objections to theological stateism: general and specific objections. *General objections* are objections that target *all* formulations of theological stateism, no matter what divine state is said to explain moral obligations, while *specific objections* are objections that target only *some* formulations of theological stateism, formulations that claim that a specific divine state explains moral obligations. In section 3.2, I consider general objections to theological stateism. In sections 3.3–5, I consider specific objections to the three leading formulations of theological stateism:

> **Divine Command Theory**: S is morally obligated to A if and only if and because God commands that S A.
>
> **Divine Intention Theory**: S is morally obligated to A if and only if and because God relevantly intends that S A.
>
> **Divine Desire Theory**: S is morally obligated to A if and only if and because God relevantly desires that S A.

I argue that at least *one* general objection shows that theological stateism is implausible and that *several* specific objections show that the leading formulations of theological stateism are

implausible. I conclude that theological stateism is implausible, and so conclude that deontic moral properties are not immediately explained by God.

One presentational point before we begin. I frame my discussion of the general objections to theological stateism in terms of *divine command theory*. This is because most other discussions of these objections are framed in this way. So, to make my discussion fit better with these other discussions, I frame my discussion of these objections in terms of divine command theory, too. This, I should emphasise, is purely for presentation. Nothing I say in this chapter hangs on this way of presenting things.

With that out of the way, we can move on to consider the general objections to theological stateism. Let's start by considering the famous Euthyphro dilemma.

3.2 General Objections: The Euthyphro Dilemma

The Euthyphro dilemma appears in the Platonic dialogue, *Euthyphro*. In this dialogue, Socrates raises the following question: "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" (Euthyphro 10a). In the context of divine command theory, Socrates' question is altered to address the relationship between God's commands and moral obligations. The question thus becomes: "Does God command something because it is obligatory, or is it obligatory because God commands it?" This question is supposed to be a dilemma for divine command theorists on account of the unacceptable consequences that follow from accepting either horn.

That divine command theorists can't accept the dilemma's first horn is clear. For if God commands something *because* it is obligatory, then moral obligations exist prior to and independently of God's commands, and so God's commands can't *explain* moral obligations. The first horn is thus unacceptable. Divine command theorists must therefore accept the second horn instead, that something is obligatory *because* God commands it. But this horn is also thought to be unacceptable, on account of the five general objections that follow from it: the *divine goodness objection*, the *anything goes objection*, the *revised anything goes objection*, the *no reasons objection*, and the *sufficiency objection*. In what follows, I argue that only the fifth sufficiency objection shows that theological stateism is implausible. Let's consider these five general objections in turn.

3.2.1 The Divine Goodness Objection

The first objection is the *divine goodness objection*. According to this objection, if something is morally good *because* God commands it, then God can't properly be called morally good. William Alston formulates this objection as follows:

> [If] the standards of moral goodness are set by divine commands, [then] to say that God is morally good is just to say that He obeys His own commands. And even if it makes sense to think of God as obeying commands that He has given Himself, that is not at all what we have in mind in thinking of God as morally good. We aren't just thinking that God practices what He preaches, whatever that may be. (Alston 1990: 305)

The divine goodness objection is thus that if moral goodness is explained by God's commands, then God's moral goodness consists in God's obeying His own commands. But, the objection goes, God's moral goodness can't *simply* consist in God's obeying His own commands, because there must be more to God's moral goodness than this. For while there is perhaps *some* moral goodness in obeying one's own commands, there is not *enough* moral goodness for God to merit His status of being a morally perfect being. Thus, the objection concludes, moral goodness is not explained by God's commands.

How should divine command theorists respond to this objection? They should respond to it by saying that while the divine goodness objection might be a good objection to views which claim that *moral goodness* is explained by God's commands, it is not a good objection to views which claim that *only moral obligations* are explained by God's commands. For such views are not vulnerable to the divine goodness objection, since they do not accept the claim that moral goodness is explained by God's commands.

Defenders of the divine goodness objection might try to respond to this by formulating a *revised* version of the divine goodness objection that targets *obligation only* divine command theories. One revised formulation of this objection is as follows:

> [I]f to be morally good is to do no wrong, and if what is wrong is what is forbidden by God, then to say that God is good is just to say that He never does what He forbids Himself to do. But there is no *moral* value in never doing what one forbids oneself to do; so the divine command theorist is unable to maintain that God is good. (Wierenga 1989: 222)

But this revised divine goodness objection is unconvincing, because it makes an overly strong claim about what moral goodness consists in. It claims that moral goodness *simply* consists in doing no

wrong. But this claim is too strong. As Wierenga helpfully points out, "never doing what is wrong is only *part* of what is involved in being morally good. Exercising the moral virtues, for example, being loving, just, merciful, and faithful, is also part of moral goodness" (1989: 222). Thus, following Wierenga, divine command theorists can respond to the revised divine goodness objection by *denying* that God's moral goodness *simply* consists in His doing no wrong. They can say that God's moral goodness *also* consists in His being supremely virtuous, that is, in His being supremely just, loyal, merciful, faithful, benevolent, and so forth. Importantly, divine command theorists can appeal to the moral virtues when explaining God's moral goodness, because divine command theory does *not* explain the moral virtues in terms of God's commands. It does not say, for example, that God's justice consists in God's obeying His own commands. Divine command theorists can thus appeal to the moral virtues when explaining God's moral goodness. They can say that God is good, not simply because He does no wrong, but also because He is supremely just, loyal, merciful, faithful, benevolent, and so forth. The divine goodness objection can thus, I think, be dismissed. (I discuss the relation between God and the moral virtues in chapter 4.)

3.2.2 The Anything Goes Objection

The second objection is the *anything goes objection*. According to this objection, divine command theory is implausible because it implies that *anything* could be morally obligatory. As Philip Quinn puts it: "If actions are obligatory because they are commanded by God, then it seems that obligation is completely arbitrary, because God could, just by commanding it, make any action whatsoever obligatory, and no matter how horrendous an action might be, it be would be obligatory if God were to command it" (2006: 74). Ralph Cudworth presents the anything goes objection in his *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*. He writes:

> Divers Modern Theologers do not only seriously, but zealously contend … [t]hat there is nothing Absolutely, Intrinsically, and Naturally Good and Evil, Just and Unjust, antecedently to any positive Command of God; but that the Arbitrary Will and Pleasure of God, (that is, an Omnipotent Being devoid of all Essential and Natural Justice) by its Commands and prohibitions, is the first and only Rule and Measure thereof. Whence it follows unavoidably that nothing can be imagined so grossly wicked, or so foully unjust or dishonest, but if it were supposed to be commanded by this Omnipotent Deity, must needs upon that Hypothesis forthwith become Holy, Just and Righteous. (Cudworth 1976 [1731]: 9–10)

Consider the "grossly wicked" and "foully unjust" action of inflicting gratuitous pain on innocent children. The anything goes objection holds that because divine command theory is committed to the following claim:

> (1) If God were to command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, then it would be morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children.

And the following claim is true:

> (2) There is a possible world in which God commands us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children.

The theory is committed to the truth of the following claim:

> (3) There is a possible world in which it is morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children.

But (3) is false. There is no possible world in which it is morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children. So, the anything goes objection concludes, divine command theory is implausible because it is committed to (3), the *false* claim that it could be morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children.

Clearly, if divine command theory is committed to (1), and (2) is true, then the theory is committed to (3). But why think that (2) is true, that God *could* command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children? According to many divine command theorists, we *shouldn't* think that (2) is true. For, according to them, God *can't* command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, because there is an essential feature of God's character that keeps God from issuing abhorrent commands. Call this the *essential character traits reply*. This reply runs as follows. Since God is essentially good, there are constraints on the commands that God can issue. In particular, God can only issue those commands that are consistent with His essentially good nature. Since it is inconsistent with God's essentially good nature for God to issue the command to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, it follows that God *can't* command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children. Therefore, (2) is false: there is no possible world in which God commands us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children. The anything goes objection thus fails.[26]

[26] For discussion of the essential character traits reply, see Adams (1999: 280), Baggett and Walls (2011: 130–3), Copan and Flannagan (2014: 167–9), Evans (2013: 92), Quinn (2000: 69–71), and Wierenga (1989: 221).

There are three things to note about the essential character traits reply. The first is that it doesn't merely claim that God *won't* issue abhorrent commands. It claims that God *can't* issue such commands. This is important because if God *could* issue such commands, even if He never *would*, the objection would still run, because the objection only requires that God *could* issue abhorrent commands (Baggett and Walls 2011: 207). The second thing to note is that the reply only works if one endorses a divine command theory that denies that *moral goodness* is explained by God's commands. This is because God's moral goodness can only constrain God's commands if God's moral goodness is *prior* to and *independent* of God's commands. The third and final thing to note is that while I've formulated the reply in terms of God's *essential goodness*, it could also be formulated in terms of God's *essential justice*, God's *essential love*, and so on.

There are three responses to the essential character traits reply that are worth considering. The first response comes from Brad Hooker (2001). Hooker argues that divine command theorists can't endorse the essential character traits reply (at least with respect to God's *essential justice*) because the reply has objectionable consequences. Hooker argues that divine command theory is committed to the truth of the following claim:

> (4) Before God made any commands, there were no moral requirements.

Clearly, Hooker is right, because divine command theory holds that all moral requirements are explained by God's commands, and thus holds that before God made any commands, there were no moral requirements or obligations.

Hooker then argues that if God's *essential justice* constrains God's commands, then the following claim is true:

> (5) Even before God made any commands, there were requirements of justice constraining God's commands.

Hooker then notes that if (4) and (5) are true, then the following claim is true:

> (6) Requirements of justice were not *moral* requirements.

Hooker argues, however, that requirements of justice *are* moral requirements, and that if requirements of justice *are* moral requirements, then they also *were* moral requirements. Hooker thus infers that (6) is *false*.

Hooker's conclusion is that divine command theorists must reject (4) or (5) in order to avoid being committed to (6). But he notes that divine command theorists can't reject (4) on pain of rejecting

divine command theory, and they can't reject (5) on pain of rejecting the essential character traits reply (at least with respect to God's *essential justice*). Hooker thus concludes that divine command theorists who endorse the essential character traits reply are implausibly committed to (6), the *false* claim that requirements of justice were not moral requirements.

How should divine command theorists respond to Hooker? They should respond to him by rejecting (5), the claim that even before God made any commands, there were requirements of justice constraining God's commands. Hooker doesn't say why divine command theorists should accept (5). He simply takes the claim that God's essential justice constrains God's commands to *entail* that there are requirements of justice that constrain God's commands. But divine command theorists shouldn't accept this. They should say that what constrains God's commands are not *requirements of justice* but *features of God's just character* that make it impossible for God to issue unjust commands. It is thus open to divine command theorists to reject (5). Indeed, this is exactly what Philip Quinn does in his response to Hooker. Quinn writes:

> On my view, before God issued any commands, if there were such times, there were no requirements or obligations binding anyone, and so there were no requirements or obligations of justice constraining God's commands. What constrained God at such times were not requirements of morality but features of the divine nature or character that made it impossible for God to do certain kinds of things or to issue commands of certain sorts. Hooker's error is to attribute to me the view that, before God issued any commands, there were requirements of justice inherent in God's nature. I am prepared to say that the attribute of being essentially perfectly just is inherent in God's nature. But it is not my view that this divine attribute must be explicated in terms of God's perfect satisfaction of requirements of justice or fulfilment of obligations of justice. (Quinn 2006: 83)

In order to respond to this, Hooker needs to show that if features of God's just character constrain God's commands, then there are requirements of justice that constrain God's commands. But Hooker has not done this. Divine command theorists can thus plausibly dismiss Hooker's response to the essential character traits reply.

The second response to the essential character traits reply comes from Wes Morriston (2009b). Morriston argues that the essential character traits reply is implausible, because it implies that God is not omnipotent. According to Morriston:

> Few divine-command theorists would want to give up the claim that God is omnipotent, but I believe that quite a strong case can be made for saying that omnipotence entails the ability to

> [issue abhorrent] command[s], in which case premise (2) [the claim that there is a possible world in which God commands us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children] must be true. Admittedly, there is an unproblematic sense in which even an essentially good God has the ability to [issue abhorrent] command[s]. *If* He chose to [issue an abhorrent] command, He would succeed in doing so. What an essentially good God could *not* do is *choose* to exercise this power. Given His essential goodness, such a choice is impossible for Him. (Morriston 2009b: 251)

Morriston goes on to argue that a being that has the ability to choose to issue abhorrent commands is "more powerful" than a being that doesn't. This leads Morriston to conclude that omnipotence entails the ability to choose to issue abhorrent commands. His conclusion is that the essential character traits reply is implausible, because it implies that God is not omnipotent, since according to the reply, God does not have the ability to choose to issue abhorrent commands.

There are two points to make in response to Morriston's argument. The first is that Morriston's claim that a being that has the ability to choose to issue abhorrent commands is "more powerful" than a being that doesn't is highly contentious. Many philosophers reject it (Morris 1986, Wielenberg 2000). Some philosophers also point out that not all abilities are *powers*, because some abilities are *liabilities*—abilities that make one *less* powerful rather than *more* powerful (Mawson 2002, 2005). For example, the ability to make mistakes is plausibly a liability rather than a power, as is the ability to believe falsehoods, and the ability to perform actions that one ought not perform. Consequently, if Morriston's argument is to succeed, he needs to show that the ability to choose to issue abhorrent commands is a power rather than a liability. Unfortunately, he has not done this. Divine command theorists can thus reject his claim that omnipotence entails the ability to choose to issue abhorrent commands.

The second point to make is that even if the essential character traits reply did imply that God is not omnipotent, it is doubtful that this would show that the reply is implausible. For proponents of the reply could simply respond to Morriston by replacing the claim that God is omnipotent with the weaker claim that "God has as much power as is compatible with His essential character traits," as Copan and Flannagan (2014: 172–3) suggest. This weaker claim seems to be theologically acceptable. For, as Morriston recognises elsewhere, the weaker claim still implies that God is:

> very powerful indeed—powerful enough to create the world, powerful enough to perform all sorts of (good) miracles. Powerful enough to ensure that evil will eventually be defeated, that world history will have a wonderfully good outcome, that virtue will not go unrewarded, and that innocent suffering will not go uncompensated. Such a being would have enough power to

> satisfy our deepest longings for love and peace and justice. In sum, it would have enough power not to detract in any way from God's greatness or make Him unworthy of unconditional worship and devotion. (Morriston 2001: 158)

So even if the essential character traits reply did imply that God is not omnipotent, proponents of the reply could simply respond to Morriston by modifying omnipotence in the way described above. Indeed, even Morriston acknowledges that this response is not implausible. He writes: "Even if the weaker claim about God's power is accepted, one might still consistently say that He has the *best possible combination of attributes*. So perhaps this particular implication is not a deal-breaker" (2009b: 252). Divine command theorists can thus plausibly dismiss Morriston's response to the essential character traits reply.

The third and final response to the essential character traits reply comes from Stephen J. Sullivan (1994). Sullivan argues that the essential character traits reply is implausible (at least with respect to God's *essential love*), because it leaves considerable room for objectionable contingency in God's commands. According to Sullivan:

> It is at least arguable that love itself—even divine love—is insufficient to account for all or even most of what God is supposed to command and of what morality seems intuitively to require … If this is correct, then although God's love will constrain His commands to some extent (e.g., by precluding His commanding cruelty for its own sake) it will also leave considerable room for objectionable forms of arbitrariness. (Sullivan 1994: 73–4)

Sullivan's response thus concedes that God's *essential love* makes it impossible for God to issue abhorrent commands, but claims that even so, the essential character traits reply is still implausible because it implies that God has *some* discretion over what He commands, that is, that some of God's commands could have been otherwise.

There are three points to make in response to this. The first is that if Sullivan is to show that the claim that God has *some* discretion over what He commands is implausible, he needs to show that an essentially loving God could command something that is morally objectionable. But Sullivan has not done this. The second is that even if Sullivan could show this, divine command theorists could still respond to him by arguing that the same is not true of an essentially loving God who is *also* essentially good and just. In other words, while divine love might be "insufficient to account for all or even most of what God is supposed to command and of what morality seems intuitively to require," divine love when coupled with divine goodness and justice might not be.

The third is that, *pace* Sullivan, the claim that God has *some* discretion over what He commands is not implausible, even if it implies that certain moral obligations could have been otherwise. Consider, for example, the command that everyone, after reaching maturity, spend some period of time, such as two years, doing some kind of service for one's fellow humans (Evans 2013: 33). If God were to issue this command, then this act would have been obligatory. But I see no reason why this should be considered objectionable. Thus, that God has *some* discretion over what He commands does not seem implausible. Moreover, we can note that if God had *no* discretion whatsoever over what He commands, then that would seem to imply that God is not free with respect to commanding, at least given certain plausible assumptions about divine freedom (Murphy 2002: 84). So, that the essential character traits reply does not imply that God has *no* discretion in commanding is not a theoretical cost of the reply. It is, I think, a potential theoretical virtue. Divine command theorists can thus reject Sullivan's response to the essential character traits reply.

3.2.3 The Revised Anything Goes Objection

Recall that the anything goes objection holds that because divine command theory is committed to the following claim:

> (1) If God were to command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, then it would be morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children.

And the following claim is true:

> (2) There is a possible world in which God commands us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children.

The theory is implausibly committed to the truth of the following claim:

> (3) There is a possible world in which it is morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children.

Pace the anything goes objection, we argued that (2) is false because God's essential character traits keep God from issuing abhorrent commands, like the command to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children. Thus, there is no possible world in which God commands us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, and so divine command theory is *not* implausibly committed to (3), the *false* claim that there is a possible world in which it is morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children.

Proponents of the anything goes objection typically retreat at this point and offer the *revised anything goes objection*. They argue that even if divine command theory is not committed to (3), divine command theory is still implausible because it is committed to (1), the *false* counterfactual that if God *were* to command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, then it *would* be morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children. The revised anything goes objection is widespread in the literature:

> If, *per impossible*, God were not loving, He could make it the case that it is obligatory for someone to inflict a gratuitous pummelling on another human being. But … even this more modest claim is false. (Wielenberg 2005: 49)

> Even if God couldn't command X, doesn't the DCT still have the counterintuitive implication that if He *did* command X, X would be morally obligatory? (Morriston 2009b: 250)

> If DCT is correct, then the following counterfactual is true: If God had commanded us to torture innocent children, then it would have been morally right to do so. (Antony 2009: 71)

> Even if God in fact never would or could command us to rape, the divine command theory still implies the counterfactual that, if God did command us to rape, then we would have a moral obligation to rape. That is absurd. (Sinnott-Armstrong 2009b: 106)

It is important to see that the revised anything goes objection concedes for the sake of argument that God *can't* command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, but claims that even if this is true, divine command theory still implies the *false* counterfactual that if God *were* command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, then it *would* be morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children. Since this counterfactual is *false*, the objection concludes that divine command theory is therefore implausible.[27]

But the revised anything goes objection is not convincing, because it is not at all clear that the counterfactual (1) is *false*. On standard accounts of counterfactuals, *all* counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are trivially or vacuously *true* (Lewis 1973, Stalnaker 1968). So the counterfactual "If God were to command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, then it would be morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children" comes out as trivially true rather than false on standard accounts of counterfactuals, because the counterfactual has an impossible antecedent—*if God were to command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children*.

[27] For discussion of the revised anything goes objection, see Baggett and Walls (2011: 207–16), Copan and Flannagan (2014: 173–5), Evans (2013: 92–4), and Murphy (2011: 117).

The upshot of this is that proponents of the revised anything goes objection must defend some non-standard account of counterfactuals that implies *both* that divine command theory is committed to the non-trivial truth of (1) *and* that (1) is false. But few, if any, proponents of the revised anything goes objection have attempted to do this. They seem instead to rely on intuitions. Sinnott-Armstrong writes, for example, that the falsehood of (1) "seems plausible to most people, regardless of technical details about counterfactuals with impossible antecedents" (2009a: 104). Antony similarly writes that she's simply working "with ordinary intuitions, which do not treat all counterfactuals with impossible antecedents as true" (2009: 82).

Alexander Pruss (2009) has recently argued, however, even if we grant the central intuitions in question—that divine command theory is committed to (1) and that (1) is false—such intuitions do not settle the matter, because the very same objection could be raised against *every* moral theory. Consider, for example, the following Kantian counterfactual: "If the categorical imperative required us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, then it would be morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children." If we have reason to believe that divine command theory is committed to (1), then we have reason to believe that some Kantian moral theory is committed to the Kantian counterfactual. But just as (1) seems false, the Kantian counterfactual seems false, too. For it's not the case that if the categorical imperative required us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children, then it would be morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children. So, if the fact that divine command theory seems to be committed to (1) counts against divine command theory, then the fact that the Kantian moral theory seems to be committed to the Kantian counterfactual counts against the Kantian moral theory. But the same objection could be raised against every moral theory. The revised anything goes objection must therefore be rejected because it proves too much: if successful, it renders too many moral theories implausible.

Stephen Evans (2013: 94) helpfully notes that one can't respond to Pruss by arguing that it is impossible for the categorical imperative to imply that it is morally obligatory to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children. For that is exactly what the critic has conceded with respect to divine command theory—that it is impossible for God to command us to inflict gratuitous pain on innocent children. According to Evans, the two cases are identical in that the relevant counterfactuals both have impossible antecedents. Any difference in intuitions must therefore stem from the fact that the impossibility of God's commanding that gratuitous pain be inflicted on innocent children is not as intuitively obvious as the impossibility of the categorical imperative's requiring that gratuitous pain be inflicted on innocent children. But this, as Evans notes, "is at best an epistemic fact about us and implies nothing about what is metaphysically possible or impossible" (2013: 94). Perhaps, Evans

argues, if we understood God's nature better, the impossibility of God's issuing such a command would be even more intuitively obvious than the impossibility of the categorical imperative's requiring that gratuitous pain be inflicted on innocent children. The intuitions in question here thus don't settle the matter at hand, and so the revised anything goes objection can be rejected, too.

3.2.4 The No Reasons Objection

The fourth objection is the *no reasons objection*. Russ Shafer-Landau presents the no reasons objection as follows:

> Either there are, or there are not, excellent reasons that support God's prohibitions on (say) torture and rape. If there are no such reasons, then God's choice is arbitrary, i.e., insufficiently well-supported by reason and argument … [But if God's] commands [are] based on excellent reasons … then it is those excellent reasons, and not the fact of God's having commanded various actions, that makes those actions right. The excellent reasons that support the requirements of charity and kindness are what make it right to be charitable and kind. (Shafer-Landau 2013: 215–16)

According to the no reasons objection, either there are normative reasons that justify God's commands or there are not. If there *aren't*, then God's commands are arbitrary. If there *are*, then it is those normative reasons rather than God's commands that make actions obligatory.

Clearly, divine command theorists can't accept the claim that there *aren't* any normative reasons that justify God's commands, because if God's commands weren't based on normative reasons—considerations that count in favour of or justify God's commands—then God would not be a perfectly rational agent who always acts on the basis of good reasons. For God would issue commands when there are no considerations that count in favour of or justify His doing so (Timmons 2012: 29). This consequence is too implausible to be acceptable. So, divine command theorists must accept that there *are* normative reasons that justify God's commands *and* that God issues His commands on the basis of these reasons.

According to Shafer-Landau, however, divine command theorists can't accept this because if God's commands *are* based on reasons, then it follows that *it is those reasons rather than God's commands that make actions obligatory*. Shafer-Landau appears to accept the transitivity of 'because' here—if A because B and B because C, then A because C. In other words, he appears to accept the following argument:

> (1) A-ing is obligatory because God commands A-ing.

(2) God commands A-ing because A-ing is (say) loving.

(3) Therefore, A-ing is obligatory because A-ing is loving.

But this argument is not convincing because it is doubtful that 'because' is transitive in this context, since 'because' denotes different relations. The 'because' in (1) denotes a *metaphysical* or *grounding* 'because'—what *makes* it the case that A-ing is obligatory is that God commands A-ing. The 'because' in (2), by contrast, denotes a *motivational* or *psychological* 'because'—God commands A-ing *for the reason that* A-ing is loving. And the 'because' in (3) denotes a *metaphysical* or *grounding* 'because'—what *makes* it the case that A-ing is obligatory is that A-ing is loving. The argument thus runs as follows:

(1*) A-ing is obligatory *metaphysically-because* God commands A-ing.

(2*) God commands A-ing *motivationally-because* A-ing is loving.

(3*) Therefore, A-ing is obligatory *metaphysically-because* A-ing is loving.

But this argument is invalid. We can see this by considering the following invalid argument that employs the same reasoning:

(4) Jones can't legally drive *metaphysically-because* he has had too much to drink (what *makes* it the case that Jones can't legally drive is that he has had too much to drink).

(5) Jones has had too much to drink *motivationally-because* his girlfriend broke up with him (Jones' *reason* for drinking too much is that his girlfriend broke up with him).

(6) Therefore, Jones can't legally drive *metaphysically-because* his girlfriend broke up with him (what *makes* it the case that Jones can't legally drive is that his girlfriend broke up with him).

Divine command theorists should thus reject Shafer-Landau's argument from transitivity.[28]

But Shafer-Landau has another argument for thinking that God's commands can't be based on reasons, on divine command theory. Suppose, he says, that there are normative reasons that justify God's commands, and that God's commands are made on the basis of these reasons. According to Shafer-Landau, if God commands us not to murder, then God's command *must be based on the reason that murder is morally wrong*. Shafer-Landau writes:

[28] For further discussion of the no reasons objection, see Baggett and Walls (2011: 126–30), Brody (1981), Copan and Flannagan (2014: 161–5), Sinnott-Armstrong (2009b: 108–9), and Sullivan (1993).

> Absent divine disapproval, nothing is immoral. And yet if we want to see God's moral proclamations as backed by excellent reasons (rather than as arbitrary choices), we are compelled to think that it is the immoral nature of certain actions that provide God with the best possible reasons for their prohibition. (Shafer-Landau 2013: 215)

In other words, if God commands us not to murder for any reason other than the fact that murder is morally wrong, then God's command is inadequately justified, because the *only* reason that could adequately justify God's command is the fact that murder is morally wrong. So, if God's commands *are* based on reasons that adequately justify His commands, then murder is morally wrong prior to God's command, and so divine command theory is false.

But this argument is not convincing. For God could command us not to murder for reasons other than the fact that murder is morally wrong, without being inadequately justified (Copan and Flannagan 2014: 163). For while murder is not morally wrong prior to God's command, murder is still unjust, unkind, unloving, destructive, harmful, cruel, and morally bad prior to God's command, and so God's command could be based of these reasons instead—that murder is unjust, unkind, unloving, destructive, harmful, cruel, and morally bad. Moreover, I think that we can claim without implausibility that if God's command were based on these reasons, then God's command would be adequately justified.

Shafer-Landau might object that if the aforementioned reasons justify God's command not to murder, then they also ground our moral obligation not to murder, because they give us *weighty* or perhaps even *most moral reason* not to murder. But even if we grant the claim that the normative reasons that justify God's command not to murder give us most moral reason not to murder, this objection only works if facts about what we have most moral reason to do ground our moral obligations. But this is not the case. As Robert Adams writes:

> Suppose the preponderance of moral reasons favours your not walking on the lawn, but also favours your not worrying very much about it and not feeling guilty if you do it—perhaps because it would be better, on balance, for all concerned if we do not worry much about such things. Suppose, in other words, that it would be (mildly) irrational for moral reasons for you to walk on the grass, but also irrational for moral reasons for you to feel guilty about doing so. Suppose it would also be morally irrational for us to try to make people feel that they *must* not walk on the grass. In that case, I submit, we should conclude that walking on the lawn does not violate an obligation and is not morally wrong, though it is (mildly) irrational on moral grounds. The concept of moral obligation is not there just to tell us about balances of moral reasons, but rather to express something more urgent. (Adams 1999: 238)

As Adams' example illustrates, even though we have most moral reason not to walk on the lawn, it does not follow that we are morally obligated not to walk on the lawn. So it's not the case that facts about what we have most moral reason to do ground our moral obligations (Baggett and Walls 2016: 176–7, Baggett 2020: 146, Copan and Flannagan 2014: 164–5, Evans 2013: 9–10, 26–7). More generally, we can argue that we shouldn't equate what we have most moral reason to do with what we are morally obligated to do, because we presumably have most moral reason to perform supererogatory actions—such as donating huge sums of money to charity—yet these actions are, by definition, not obligatory (Craig 2020c: 35).[29] It thus seems to me that the no reasons objection fails. The objection can thus be rejected.

3.2.5 The Sufficiency Objection

The fifth and final objection is the *sufficiency objection*. According to this objection, divine command theory is implausible because it implies that *only divine commands are sufficient by themselves to generate moral obligations*. Erik Wielenberg develops this objection in his debate with William Lane Craig, a well-known divine command theorist. Wielenberg writes:

> [Divine command theory claims] that there is *one and only one* feature that can give rise to genuine moral obligations, and that feature is being commanded by God. But this claim is implausible. Recall the child-in-flames case I described earlier. Consider the following elements of that case: the child is in agony, you can easily reduce his agony at no cost to yourself, and no one else can help the child. Craig's position is that those features of the situation do not generate a genuine obligation to help the child. On Craig's view, [only a divine command can generate an] obligation to help. Such a position is at odds with moral common sense. (Wielenberg 2020c: 44)

According to Wielenberg, divine command theory is implausible because it implies that only divine commands are sufficient by themselves to generate moral obligations. This implication is implausible, he argues, because intuitively there are many features apart from God's commands that are sufficient by themselves to generate moral obligations. Consider the case of the child-in-flames. According to Wielenberg, it is moral common sense that the features of this case—that the child is in agony, that you can easily reduce the child's agony at no cost to yourself, and that no one else can help the child—are sufficient by themselves to generate a moral obligation to help. But divine command theory implies otherwise because it holds that only a divine command can generate an

[29] I discuss matters of supererogation in more detail in section 3.5.2

obligation to help. Consequently, Wielenberg concludes, the theory is at odds with moral common sense and is, therefore, implausible. Wielenberg summarises the problem with divine command theory as follows:

> Imagine a view according to which the one and only thing that can make you morally obligated to do something is making a promise to do that thing. On this view, if you encounter a suffering child who you and no one else can help, you're only obligated to help if you've previously made a promise to help suffering children. Indeed, you're only obligated to refrain from torturing children for your own entertainment if you've previously promised not to do so. The straightforward defect in this view is that there are a whole host of features of the world that can generate moral obligations aside from promise-making. Craig's view of morality is similarly flawed in that it mistakenly identifies one morally relevant feature as the only possible source of moral obligations. (Wielenberg 2020c: 44)

According to Wielenberg, then, divine command theory is flawed because it mistakenly identifies one morally relevant feature as the only possible source of moral obligations—God's commands. As a result of this, the theory ignores a whole host of other features that can generate moral obligations and is, as a consequence, implausible.

Craig offers two responses to Wielenberg's objection. Craig's first response takes issue with Wielenberg's claim that there is only one possible source of moral obligation on divine command theory. Craig writes:

> There can be a hierarchy of sources of moral obligation with God's commands as the ultimate source. Divine Command Theory does not claim that in every moral situation God issues a specific command to every person. That would turn the universe into a haunted house. Rather God has issued general commands to all of humanity, such as "Love your neighbour as yourself," and then in any specific moral situation it will be up to us to apply that general moral principle. In determining our duties, we'll take into account a host of derivative moral facts and principles such as "I ought to keep my promises." (Craig 2020b: 48–9)

Craig makes two points here. The first is that God needn't issue *specific* commands to generate moral obligations. He could instead issue *general* commands that apply to specific situations. For example, God could issue the general command to love our neighbours, which would then apply to the specific case of the child-in-flames, thereby generating a moral obligation on our part to help. Craig's second point is that although God's commands are the *ultimate* source of our moral obligations on divine command theory, the theory can still recognise a hierarchy of *derivative*

sources of moral obligation. For example, suppose that God commands us to keep our promises. In that case, promise-making would be a derivative source of moral obligation, because certain moral obligations would have their source in facts about promises. For example, my obligation to meet you for lunch tomorrow would have its source in the fact that I promised to meet you for lunch tomorrow—but *only because* God has commanded me to keep my promises. This is why promise-making would be a derivative source of moral obligation on Craig's view, but God's commands would be the ultimate source—God's command to keep our promises would be what makes it the case that promise-making is a derivative source of moral obligation.[30]

Craig's points here are well-taken, but they do not help him answer Wielenberg's objection. For even granting the points above, the theory still implies that only divine commands are sufficient by themselves to generate moral obligations. In other words, the theory still implies that everything else apart from God's commands is by itself incapable of generating moral obligations. For, according to divine command theory, everything else apart from God's commands has at most *derivative* power to generate moral obligations: only God's commands have the *ultimate* power to generate moral obligations *all by themselves*. Wielenberg picks up on this and responds to Craig by reiterating his objection more forcefully. Wielenberg writes:

> Craig says that only divine commands can be the ultimate source of moral obligation, meaning that only divine commands are sufficient by themselves to generate moral obligations. Again, consider the child-in-flames. Think of the child's agony and terror and how easily you could help. On Craig's view, those things by themselves cannot make it wrong for you to walk on by. Let's scale things up. Suppose you could stop a million Holocausts just by lifting a finger. To believe Craig's view, you have to believe that that by itself cannot generate a duty to lift that finger, cannot make it wrong for you to take a nap instead. Craig says that only an order from God can do that. … That simply isn't plausible. (Wielenberg 2020b: 60)

Craig's first response to Wielenberg's objection is thus unpersuasive. For the appeal to derivative sources of moral obligation on divine command theory does not help him answer Wielenberg's objection. For even granting the appeal, the theory still implausibly implies that only divine commands are sufficient by themselves to generate moral obligations. Craig's first response to Wielenberg's objection can thus, I think, be dismissed.

[30] Note that Craig's point here doesn't conflict with theistic immediacy. For my obligation to meet you for lunch tomorrow is immediately explained by the fact that God commands me to keep my promises, together with the fact that I promised to meet you for lunch tomorrow. (Recall that immediacy doesn't entail completeness. So allowing non-divine facts to enter into explanations doesn't undermine theistic immediacy.)

Craig's second response to Wielenberg's objection questions whether moral experience reveals to us the ultimate source of our moral obligations. Craig writes:

> Wielenberg tells the story of the child-in-flames to try to prove that we have moral obligations which are not ultimately grounded in God. But the story shows no such thing. It shows at best that we do experience objective moral obligations … but it does not reveal to us the ultimate source of our moral obligations, for that is far beyond our experience. (Craig 2020d: 62)

Craig's response here is thus to deny that moral experience reveals to us the ultimate source of our moral obligations. But this response misses the point. For even if moral experience doesn't *reveal* to us the ultimate source of our moral obligations, moral experience might still *rule out* various things as being the ultimate source of our moral obligations. And this, I think, is Wielenberg's point. That moral experience rules out divine commands as being the ultimate source of our moral obligations. Wielenberg suggests this in his final response to Craig:

> I pointed out that to believe Craig's view, you'd have to believe that the fact that you could stop a million Holocausts simply by lifting a finger is not sufficient by itself to make it morally wrong for you to take a nap instead. … You may have noticed that Craig didn't dispute these implications of his view; indeed, he didn't mention them at all. His only reply here is that "the ultimate source of our moral obligations … is far beyond our experience." So, I say that the fact that you could stop a million Holocausts simply by lifting a finger is sufficient by itself to make it morally wrong for you to take a nap instead; Craig says that it might *seem* that way, but really it takes an order from God to render that nap immoral. (Wielenberg 2020d: 70)

Craig's second response about moral experience is thus unpersuasive. For it fails to appreciate that moral experience might *rule out* various things—such as God's commands—as being the ultimate source of our moral obligations. Since moral experience *does* seem to rule out God's commands as being the ultimate source of our moral obligations—for, as Wielenberg points out, the fact that you could stop a million Holocausts simply by lifting a finger does seem to be sufficient by itself to make it morally wrong for you to take a nap instead—Craig's second response can thus be dismissed.

How then should divine command theorists respond to Wielenberg's objection? The most promising response is perhaps to follow David Baggett and claim that "[Wielenberg's] 'million Holocausts' objection carries no weight unless we forget it's a counterfactual" (2020: 147). According to Baggett's response, Wielenberg's objection takes the form of a *counterfactual* because it claims that were there no God or divine commands, certain actions would still be wrong. Craig considers Baggett's response in the following passage. Craig writes:

> Notice that the appeal to burning children and a thousand Holocausts, while rhetorically powerful is misleading. For as Baggett reminds us, the [objection] here is *counterfactual*: if there were no God [or divine commands], then [certain acts would still be wrong] … From a theistic point of view the relevant counterfactual has an impossible antecedent. Therefore, the theist may say either that the counterfactual has no non-trivial truth value or he may, more plausibly in my opinion, entertain such an impossibility, in which case I do not see any reason to think that objective moral values and duties would exist in a Godless world. Be that as it may, we may still wonder what explains their existence in the actual world. (Craig 2020a: 191)

Craig makes two points here. The first is that from a theistic point of view, the relevant counterfactual is really a counterpossible because it has an impossible antecedent—if there were no God or divine commands.[31] According to Craig, this counterfactual is then either trivially true and thus uninteresting, or, if one allows for non-trivial counterpossibles, it is false because, according to Craig, there is no reason to think that moral obligations would exist in a Godless world. The second and more important point that Craig makes is that we may still wonder *what explains the existence of moral obligations in the actual world*. Here, I take Craig to be saying that we needn't interpret Wielenberg's objection counterfactually. For the objection could simply be read as saying that divine command theory is implausible as an account of what explains our actual moral obligations. More precisely, it could simply be read as saying that divine command theory is implausible because it implies that *nothing in the actual world except God's commands is sufficient by itself to explain our actual moral obligations*. Wielenberg seems to endorse this reading of his objection. Wielenberg writes:

> Craig's moral axiom that only divine commands are sufficient by themselves to generate moral obligation is deeply implausible. This axiom implies that being in a situation in which you have a choice between preventing a million Holocausts and taking a nap is not itself enough to make it wrong for you to take the nap. Craig's account of what *explains* our moral obligations is thus implausible. (Wielenberg 2020a: 219)

That Wielenberg's objection needn't be interpreted counterfactually seems right. For the objection could simply be read as saying that divine command theory is implausible because it implies that *nothing in the actual world except God's commands is sufficient by itself to generate moral obligations*. This is a straightforward implication of divine command theory that doesn't require any

[31] Assuming, of course, that God is a necessary being and that some divine commands are necessary, or at least necessary given God's creating rational beings.

counterfactual reading. Moreover, it's an implication that seems deeply implausible. We can thus conclude, I think, that there is at least one general objection that shows that theological stateism is implausible. For Wielenberg's sufficiency objection shows this.

Now that we have considered the general objections to theological stateism, we can move on to consider the specific objections to theological stateism. Recall that the three leading formulations of theological stateism are *divine command theory*, *divine intention theory*, and *divine desire theory*. Let's consider the specific objections to these theories in turn.

3.3 Divine Command Theory

The first leading formulation of theological stateism is *divine command theory*. Its most notable contemporary defenders are Robert Adams (1999), William Alston (1990), David Baggett and Jerry Walls (2011), Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan (2014), William Lane Craig (2008), Stephen Evans (2013), John Hare (2015), and the early Philip Quinn (1978). This theory can be formulated as follows:

> **Divine Command Theory**: S is morally obligated to A if and only if and because God commands that S A.[32]

There are two specific objections to divine command theory that are worth considering: the *non-believers objection* and the *sincerity objection*. In what follows, I argue that both of these objections show that divine command theory is implausible. Let's consider these objections in turn.

3.3.1 The Non-Believers Objection

The first specific objection to divine command theory is the *non-believers objection*. This objection states that divine command theory is implausible because it implies that non-believers (those who do not believe in God) have no moral obligations. The non-believers objection has been developed in a number of different ways by Erik Wielenberg (2005, 2014), Wes Morriston (2009a), Matthew Jordan (2013), and John Danaher (2019). I will focus on Wielenberg's presentation of the objection because it is the most developed.

[32] Divine command theory (presumably) holds that God's commands generate *pro-tanto* moral obligations. Otherwise, when God's commands conflict, the theory would imply that we have conflicting *all things considered* moral obligations. For discussion of this issue, see Adams (1999: 282–4).

Wielenberg begins by outlining Robert Adams' account of what it is for God to issue a command. According to Adams:

> (1) A divine command will always involve a *sign*, as we may call it, that is intentionally caused by God. (2) In causing the sign God must intend to issue a command, and *what* is commanded is what God intends to command thereby. (3) The sign must be such that the intended audience could understand it as conveying the intended command. (Adams 1999: 265)

Wielenberg thinks that this account of what it is for God to issue a command is correct. But he argues that if these three conditions are meant to be jointly sufficient for God's issuing a command that *generates a moral obligation*, then an important fourth condition has been left out. He illustrates this by asking us to consider the following case:

> Suppose your friend (call him "Dave") sends you an anonymous note. The note reads: "Loan Dave your car." In this case, your friend has given you a sign that he intentionally caused and, in so doing, intends to issue to you the command to loan him your car. Moreover, you are clearly capable of understanding the note as conveying the command to you to loan Dave your car. Are you now morally obligated to loan Dave your car? The answer clearly enough is no, and it is not hard to see why: You have no idea who issued this command. More specifically, you don't know that the command was issued by Dave. Moreover, Dave (we may reasonably suppose) knew that you would not be able to tell who issued the command. In these circumstances, it seems clear that Dave, despite being capable of imposing on you the obligation to loan him your car, has failed to do so in the case at hand. He has failed to do so because he failed to get you to recognise that the command is coming from a legitimate source. (Wielenberg 2005: 60–1)

According to Wielenberg, this case suggests that commands generate moral obligations *only if the intended audience knows who issued the command.* He thinks that this general claim about commands extends to the divine case, too. Thus, Wielenberg argues, only divine commands that satisfy the following fourth condition can generate moral obligations:

> (4) The intended audience must recognise the command as having been issued by God.

Wielenberg argues that if this fourth condition must be satisfied for God's commands to generate moral obligations, then divine command theory implausibly implies that non-believers have no moral obligations, because non-believers do not recognise any command as having been issued by God, and so God's commands fail to generate moral obligations for them. Wielenberg thus concludes that divine command theory is implausible.

In response to the non-believers objection, Stephen Evans argues that we should reject condition (4). More precisely, he argues that "God's commands can generate obligations even for those who do not recognise those commands as coming from God" (2013: 112). Evans offers the following case in support of this claim:

> Suppose I am hiking in a remote region on the border between Iraq and Iran. I become lost and I am not sure exactly what country I am in. I suddenly see a sign, which (translated) reads as follows: "You Must Not Leave This Path." As I walk further, I see loudspeakers, and from them I hear further instructions: "Leaving the path is strictly forbidden." In such a situation it would be reasonable for me to form a belief that I have an obligation to stay on the path even if I do not know the source of the commands. For all I know the commands may come from the government of Iraq or the government of Iran, or perhaps from some regional arm of government, or even from a private landowner whose property I am on. In such a situation I might reasonably believe that the commands communicated to me create obligations for me, even if I do not know for sure who gave the commands. … In a similar manner it would seem possible for God to communicate commands that would be perceived as authoritative and binding without necessarily making it obvious to all recipients that He is the source of the commands. For example, God might communicate that an act is forbidden through conscience, which could be understood as a faculty that directly perceives the wrongness of certain acts. (Evans 2013: 113–14)

Wielenberg responds to this by conceding that commands can generate moral obligations even when one does not recognise who issued the command. He thus concedes that condition (4) is too strong. He argues, however, that Evans' response fails to address "the central worry," because in Evans' example, one recognises the commands one receives as commands, and one's background knowledge enables one to recognise the commands as being issued by some legitimate authority or other. According to Wielenberg, Evans' response suggests that condition (4) should be replaced with the following condition:

> (4') The intended audience must recognise the command as having been issued by some legitimate authority or other.

But, Wielenberg argues, "At least some non-believers do not construe the deliverances of their consciences as commands at all; such non-believers will fail to satisfy condition (4') and hence no moral obligation will be imposed" (2014: 79). Thus, divine command theory is still implausible, because it implies that at least some non-believers have no moral obligations.

To clarify, Wielenberg argues that at least some non-believers fail to satisfy:

> (4') The intended audience must recognise the command as having been issued by some legitimate authority or other.

This is because "some non-believers do not construe the deliverances of their consciences as commands at all" (2014: 79). Matthew Flannagan has responded to this by arguing that conscience is just one of the wide variety of ways in which God communicates His commands. According to Flannagan, God communicates His commands to us largely through the requirements and demands that other humans place on us. Flannagan quotes Adams approvingly:

> A divine command theorist should want to say that a divine prohibition of murder, for example, has been made known very widely to the human race. And the dissemination of such prohibitions has surely taken place largely through human systems of social requirement. … On this view, the divine ethical requirements will not form an entirely separate system, parallel and superior to human systems of social requirement. Rather, human moral systems will be imperfect expressions of divine commands; and the question of their relation to God's commanding will be whether and how far they are authorised or backed up by God's authority, not whether or how they agree with an eternal divine commandment laid up in the heavens. (Adams 1999: 264–5)

For Flannagan, then, human social requirements are not distinct from God's commands, insofar as they are "authorised or backed up by God's authority." Rather, they are expressions of God's commands. With this in mind, Flannagan argues that since God communicates His commands to us through human social requirements, non-believers actually satisfy (4') because:

> [non-believers] inhabit social relationships where other people, parents, teachers, spouses, children, employees, courts, governments make demands upon them that they *recognise as authoritative*. Such demands will clearly be understood as real *commands*. (Flannagan 2017: 350)

In other words, Flannagan argues that since human social requirements are expressions of God's commands, non-believers actually satisfy (4') because they recognise the commands they receive as commands that have been issued by some legitimate authority or other.

But this response is unpersuasive. For it implies that non-believers who do *not* recognise human social requirements as authoritative do not satisfy (4'), and so have no moral obligations. This implication is implausible. For non-believers have moral obligations regardless of whether they

recognise human social requirements as authoritative. Flannagan's response thus fails. We can thus conclude that the non-believers objection withstands criticism and thus shows that divine command theory is implausible. There is thus, I think, a plausible specific objection to divine command theory.

3.3.2 The Sincerity Objection

The second specific objection to divine command theory is the *sincerity objection*.[33] This objection states that divine command theory is implausible because it implies that insincere divine commands ground moral obligations. This objection starts by specifying the following sincerity condition for commands: *one sincerely commands that S A only if one intends that S A*. According to this condition, sincerity requires that the commander intend that the commanded do what is commanded. So, if I command that you shut the door, then I am sincere in issuing this command only if I intend that you shut the door. This sincerity condition has been endorsed by R. M. Hare and Mark Murphy. They write:

> It is indeed true of imperative sentences that if anyone, in using them, is being sincere or honest, he *intends* that the person referred to should do something (namely, what is commanded). This is indeed a test of sincerity in the case of commands. (Hare 1952: 13)

> It is a sincerity condition of the giving of commands that the commander intend that the commanded perform the action. (Murphy 2014: 13)

Neither Hare nor Murphy provide any arguments for this sincerity condition. But a plausible rationale for it can be provided. Consider the fact that sincere commands are characteristically *settled*. Take the command to shut the door. If I sincerely issue this command, then—at the moment of issuing the command—I am settled on the matter of your shutting the door. In other words, I have decided that you are to shut the door, and I express this decision by commanding you to shut the door.

But what explains the characteristic settledness of commands? Presumably, it is explained by the fact that sincere commands express *mental states* that possess this characteristic settledness. But what mental states might sincere commands express? They either express desires or intentions. But sincere commands can't express mere desires, because mere desires lack the characteristic settledness possessed by sincere commands. This is clear because I can desire many things without being simultaneously settled or decided on them. For example, I can desire that you shut the door,

[33] To my knowledge, the sincerity objection has only ever been briefly sketched by Mark Murphy (2014: 13). I defend what I take to be the most promising version of the objection below.

and also desire that you not shut the door, without thereby being simultaneously decided or settled on your both shutting and not shutting the door. Intentions, by contrast, do possess the characteristic settledness exhibited by sincere commands. For if I intend that you shut the door, then I am settled on the matter of your shutting the door, I have decided that you are to shut the door. Sincere commands, then, it seems, express intentions, and this explains the characteristic settledness exhibited by sincere commands.

This gives us good reason to affirm the above sincerity condition on commands, because if sincere commands express intentions, then it follows that one sincerely commands that S A only if one intends that S A. If we extend the sincerity condition to the divine case, then we get the first premise of the sincerity objection:

(1) If God sincerely commands that S A, then God intends that S A.

The next step in the sincerity objection is to argue that what God intends, obtains. There is a well-known argument for this claim that employs, as its premises, the claims that God is omniscient, perfectly rational, and that it is irrational to intend what one knows will not happen. Mark Murphy formulates this argument as follows:

> It can be shown that if God intends X, then X obtains. This follows from God's being omniscient and God's being rational. If God is omniscient, then for every state of affairs R and every time t, God knows that R obtains at t or God knows that R does not obtain at t. Now suppose that God intends that R obtain at t. If, in addition to having this intention, God knows that R does not obtain at t, then God is irrational; for it is irrational to intend some state of affairs that one knows will not obtain. But God is not irrational. So it must be the case that if God intends that R obtain at t, then it is not true that God knows that R does not obtain at t; rather, if God intends that R obtain at t, then God knows that R obtains at t. If God knows that R obtains at t, then R obtains at t. So, if God intends that R obtain at t, then R obtains at t; what God intends God gets. (Murphy 1998: 16)

The premises employed in this argument—that God is omniscient, perfectly rational, and that it is irrational to intend what one knows will not happen—are fairly uncontroversial, so I won't challenge them here. This argument gets us the second premise of the sincerity argument:

(2) If God intends that S A, then S will A.

And from (1) and (2) it follows that:

(3) If God sincerely commands that S A, then S will A.

The upshot of (3) is that sincere divine commands are never violated, because if God sincerely commands that you perform some action, then you will, in fact, perform that action. Now, if only sincere divine commands ground moral obligations, then divine command theory implausibly implies that moral obligations are never violated. So, if divine command theorists are to avoid the implausible claim that moral obligations are never violated—which they surely must—then they must hold that God issues *insincere* commands that ground moral obligations. But some divine command theorists reject this claim. Adams holds, for example, that God *never* issues insincere commands. He holds that *only* sincere divine commands ground moral obligations. Adams writes:

> [The idea that] God commands something that God does not (in the relevant way) want us to do … should not be taken as a relevant possibility in theistic ethical theory [because] the inconsistency [in God's willing and commanding] seems ground for doubt that either the volition or the command involved in it could be serious enough to constitute an obligation. (Adams 1999: 260)

According to Adams, then, divine command theorists shouldn't allow for the possibility that God issues insincere commands that ground moral obligations, because insincere divine commands are not "serious enough" to ground moral obligation.[34]

Now, in order to avoid the implausible claim that moral obligations are never violated, divine command theorists must hold that God issues insincere commands that are "serious enough" to ground moral obligation. But the claim that God issues insincere commands is itself problematic. For it implies that God is engaged in insincere or deceptive communication with us. This implication is problematic because it is widely held that God is no deceiver. Descartes famously held, for example, that God never deceives, because "the light of nature teaches us that deception must always be the result of some deficiency" (1960 [1641]: 108). Consequently, if divine command theorists are to show that their view is not implausible, then they must show that the kind of deception that God engages in is not the kind that results from any deficiency or imperfection in God. Until they can show this, it seems to me that we have good reason to believe that divine command theory is implausible. The sincerity objection is thus another plausible specific objection to divine command theory. Divine command theory is thus implausible on at least two counts.

[34] Strictly speaking, Adams doesn't say that God never issues insincere commands. He merely says that God never commands that S A when God does not *desire* or *will* that S A. But presumably, if Adams accepts this, then Adams also accepts that God never commands that S A when God does not *intend* that S A.

3.4 Divine Intention Theory

The second leading formulation of theological stateism is *divine intention theory*. Its most notable contemporary defenders are Mark Murphy (1998) and the later Philip Quinn (2000, 2006). This theory can be formulated, at least initially, as follows:

> **Divine Intention Theory**: S is morally obligated to A if and only if and because God intends that S A.

There are four specific objections to divine intention theory that are worth considering: the *no violation objection*, and *Miller's three objections*. In what follows, I argue that only Miller's third objection shows that divine intention theory is implausible. Let's consider these four objections in turn.

3.4.1 The No Violation Objection

The first specific objection to divine intention theory is the *no violation objection*. This objection states that divine intention theory is implausible because it implies that moral obligations are never violated. According to this objection, divine intention theory implies this because the theory grounds moral obligations in God's intentions, and God will never intend that agents do otherwise than what they will do, because God is omniscient and perfectly rational, and it is irrational to intend what one knows will not happen—that agents do otherwise than what they will do. Consequently, divine intention theory implies that moral obligations are never violated—that agents are never morally obligated to do otherwise than what they will do. But this is implausible, because moral obligations are routinely violated. Divine intention theory is thus implausible, or so the objection goes.

The main response to the no violation objection is to distinguish between God's *antecedent intentions* and God's *consequent intentions* and argue that if moral obligations are grounded in God's antecedent intentions, then divine intention theory does not imply that moral obligations are never violated.

The distinction between God's antecedent and consequent intentions is usually drawn as follows.[35] God's antecedent intentions are God's intentions that take all actual circumstances into account *other than agents' actual choices*, whereas God's consequent intentions are God's intentions that take all actual circumstances into account *including agents' actual choices*. So, God *antecedently intends* that S not steal just in case:

[35] For discussion of this distinction, see Adams (1999: 259) and Murphy (1998: 18–20).

> God intends that S not steal in C (given a description of C that includes all actual circumstances *other than S's actual choice to steal or not steal*)

And God *consequently intends* that S not steal just in case:

> God intends that S not steal in C (given a description of C that includes all actual circumstances *including S's actual choice to steal or not steal*)

Divine intention theorists argue that if moral obligations are grounded in God's *antecedent* intentions, then divine intention theory does not imply that moral obligations are never violated. This is because God can antecedently intend that agents do otherwise than what they will do without being irrational. Take God's antecedent intention that S not steal. Since God's antecedent intention does not take S's actual choice (to steal) into account, divine intention theorists argue that it is *not* irrational for God to antecedently intend that S not steal, because God's antecedent intention is not formed with reference to the fact that S will steal. According to these theorists, if moral obligations are grounded in God's antecedent intentions, then divine intention theory does not imply that moral obligations are never violated, because God can antecedently intend that S do otherwise than what S will do without being irrational. Thus, these theorists conclude, the no violation objection fails if moral obligations are grounded in God's antecedent intentions.[36]

This response to the no violation objection seems plausible. For it does *not* seem irrational for God to antecedently intend that S not steal when He knows that S will steal, since God's antecedent intention does not take S's actual choice into account. More precisely, it does not seem irrational for God to form the following antecedent intention:

> God intends that S not steal in C (given a description of C that includes all actual circumstances *other than S's actual choice to steal*)

If this is right and it is not irrational for God to antecedently intend that S not steal even when He knows that S will steal, then the no violation objection fails. Divine intention theorists can thus avoid the no violation objection by modifying their theory as follows:

---

[36] Why should we ascribe antecedent intentions to God? The main reason, I think, is that God is what Allan Gibbard (2003) calls 'hyperdecided'. In other words, God is maximally decided about all things, and so for any possible situation we can describe, God is decided about what agents are to do in those situations. If this is right, then God either intends that S A in C, or does not intend that S A in C—even if C is a description that includes all actual circumstances *other than S's actual choice*. If this is right, then we should ascribe antecedent intentions to God, because God's having such intentions follows from God's being hyperdecided. But why think that God is hyperdecided? The main answer, I think, is that God is the greatest possible being and the greatest possible being would be maximally decided about all things, His mind would be maximally made up. It seems to me that only a lesser being with imperfect knowledge or imagination would be undecided about things.

> **Modified Divine Intention Theory**: S is morally obligated to A if and only if and because God *antecedently intends* that S A.

But while modified divine intention theory might avoid the no violation objection, it has recently come under attack from Christian Miller. Miller argues "that there are three reasons why antecedent intentions are not the right kind of mental state to ground obligation" (2009b: 187). These reasons "have to do with certain properties of intentions in general, regardless of whether they are antecedent or not" (2009b: 187). These properties of intention are that they entail beliefs about what agents will do, are self-referential, and entail beliefs about control. Miller argues that if antecedent intentions have these properties, then modified divine intention theory is implausible. In what follows, I argue that only the third property of intention shows that modified divine intention theory is implausible. Let's consider these problematic properties in turn.

3.4.2 Intention and Belief

The first problematic property of intentions is that they *entail beliefs about what agents will do*. According to Miller, intentions entail beliefs in the sense that "having a belief of a certain kind is a necessary condition on having an intention" (2009b: 188). Miller thinks that this is true of both first and third-person intentions. According to Miller, one intends to A, or intends that S A, *only if* one believes that one will A, or believes that S will A. He writes:

> In the first-person case, if I intend to do something then I believe that I will do it. For example, if I intend to go to the gym this afternoon, then I believe I will go there, and structure the rest of this afternoon around this plan. The same claim applies to intentions *that* some event occur; if I intend that it happen, then I believe that it will. (Miller 2009b: 188)

Miller argues that if intentions entail beliefs, then modified divine intention theory is implausible. This is because if antecedent intentions entail beliefs, then God antecedently intends that S A *only if* God believes that S will A. But if this is right, then divine intention theory entails that S is morally obligated to A *only if* S will A. But this is implausible. For clearly, S can be morally obligated to A even if S will not A. Miller thus concludes that modified divine intention theory is implausible, because it implausibly implies that S is morally obligated to A only if S will A.

Divine intention theorists should respond to this by denying that intentions have the problematic property in question—that intentions entail beliefs. In other words, they should respond by denying that one intends to A, or intends that S A, *only if* one believes that one will A, or believes that S will A.

Now, while the claim that intentions entail beliefs is frequently made in the action theory literature,[37] it is not, I think, a plausible claim. Take the claim that first-person intentions entail beliefs. Michael Bratman (1987: 37–8) has argued that there are many sorts of cases in which we intend to do something that we do not believe we will do. One sort of case involves agnosticism about whether one will do what one intends. For example, suppose that I intend to stop by the supermarket on the way home, but know that I am very forgetful—especially when I get in my car, turn my radio on, and go on autopilot. In this case, if you were to ask me whether I believe I will stop by the supermarket on the way home, I would say that I'm agnostic about my stopping there, because I know I may well forget. (Note that it's not that I believe I won't stop there, I just don't believe I will.) Another sort of case involves agnosticism about whether one will do what one intends because one doesn't believe that success in doing what one intends is likely. For example, suppose that I intend to score a goal in football but know that I am only a mediocre shot. In this case, if you were to ask me whether I believe I will score a goal, I would say that I am agnostic about my scoring, because I don't believe my success in scoring is likely. (Again, it's not that I believe I won't score, I just don't believe I will.)[38] These cases suggest that first-person intentions do not entail beliefs: one can intend to do something without believing that one will do it.

The same thing can be said for the claim that third-person intentions entail beliefs—there are many sorts of cases in which we intend that another do something that we do not believe they will do. One sort of case involves agnosticism about whether the intended will do what one intends, because one believes that the intended might disobey. For example, suppose that I intend my classroom of children to quietly do their work, but know that they are often rowdy and don't do what I say. In this case, if you were to ask me whether I believe my classroom of children will quietly do their work, I would say that I am agnostic about their doing so, because I don't believe their obeying me is likely. Another sort of case involves agnosticism about whether the intended will do what one intends because one doesn't believe that the intended's success in doing what one intends is likely. For example, suppose that I intend my troops to take over a city, but believe this task to be difficult. In this case, if you were to ask me whether I believe my troops will take over the city, I would say that I am agnostic about their doing so, because I don't believe their success in taking over the city is likely. These cases suggest that third-person intentions do not entail beliefs: one can intend that another

[37] See, for example, Audi (1973: 388), Davis (1984: 43–4), Harman (1976: 432), and Velleman (1989: 113–21).
[38] One might reply that I merely intend *to try* to score a goal, and so do not form the belief that I will score a goal; I merely form the belief that I will *try* to score a goal. But this is unpersuasive. For do I really act as I intended if I try and fail to score a goal? If I merely intend *to try* to score a goal, then my intention is satisfied—I did what I intended to do by trying and failing. But this is not the intuitive way to describe my intention. After all, my teammates would be rightly upset if they found out that in failing to score, I did what I intended. So it seems to me that I do not merely intend *to try* to score a goal, I really intend *to score a goal*.

do something without believing that they will do it. This ultimately suggests that intentions don't have the problematic property that Miller thinks they have, and so implies that Miller's first objection to modified divine intention theory fails.[39]

3.4.3 Intention and Self-Referentiality

The second problematic property of intentions is that they are *self-referential*. Miller states that intentions are self-referential in the sense that "[an intention] causes behaviour and represents itself as so causing it" (2009b: 190). He thinks that this is true of both first and third-person intentions. So, in the first-person case, if I intend to A, then I represent myself as A-ing *by way of that very intention*. Similarly, in the third-person case, if I intend that S A, then I represent myself as bringing about S's A-ing *by way of that very intention*. Gilbert Harman illustrates the self-referentiality of intentions with the following example:

> Betty intends to kill someone. She aims her gun and, at the crucial moment, a noise startles her, leading her to contract her finger so that she shoots and kills him … Although she intends to kill him and does kill him, she does not do what she intends. For her intention to kill him is the intention that that very intention will lead her to pull the trigger at the crucial moment; and that does not happen. (Harman 1976: 445)

Miller argues that if intentions are self-referential in this way, then modified divine intention theory is implausible. For if intentions are self-referential and God antecedently intends that S A, then God represents S's A-ing as being brought about at least partially by way of His very intention. But this seems implausible. For what would it take for God's antecedent intention to be satisfied? In Harman's case, Betty's intention is not satisfied because her behaviour is not causally brought about by way of her very intention, but rather by accident. So, one might think that God's antecedent intention that S A is not satisfied unless S's behaviour is causally brought about by way of God's very intention. But this is implausible, because it implies that only actions that are causally brought about by way of God's antecedent intentions are morally obligatory, for the self-referentiality of intentions is widely thought to be built into the *content* of intentions, such that if God antecedently intends that S A, then God antecedently intends that S A *by way of that very intention*. If this is true and moral obligations are grounded in God's antecedent intentions, then only actions that are causally brought about by way of God's antecedent intentions are obligatory, which is implausible.

[39] One might argue that intentions entail partial beliefs in success, such that one intends to A, or that S A, only if one believes that one's success in A-ing, or S's success in A-ing, is a real possibility. But this condition doesn't undermine divine intention theory, because there is nothing problematic with the claim that S is morally obligated to A only if God believes it is possible that S A.

Divine intention theorists should respond to this by denying not that *ordinary intentions* are self-referential, but by denying that *God's antecedent intentions* are self-referential. The rationale for this response is that, unlike ordinary intentions, God's antecedent intentions don't cause behaviour, and so don't represent themselves as so causing it. That God's antecedent intentions don't cause divine behaviour is clear. For God's antecedent intentions do not take all actual circumstances into account. Since it is less than perfectly rational to act on the basis of intentions that do not take all actual circumstances into account, it is clear that God will never act on the basis of His antecedent intentions. Consequently, God's antecedent intentions will never cause divine behaviour, and so plausibly don't represent themselves as so causing it. Divine intention theorists can thus deny that God's antecedent intentions are self-referential in the problematic way that Miller describes. They can thus reject Miller's second objection to modified divine intention theory.[40]

3.4.4 Intention and Control

The third and final problematic property of intentions is that they *entail beliefs about control*. According to Miller, I can third-personally intend that you do something only if I *believe* that I have control over you. If I do not *believe* that I have control over you, then I can't form the relevant third-person intention. Miller notes that such claims about third-person intentions and control are widely accepted in the action theory literature:

> [O]ne cannot intend what one does not take oneself to control. (Baier 1997: 25)
>
> One cannot intend that something will happen if one thinks that whether it will happen or not is entirely outside of one's control. (Harman 1976: 452)
>
> One person can decide or plan the behaviour of a group for example, if he holds authority or control over the behaviour of people other than himself … If I am to settle the matter [by forming an intention], I cannot think of you as having settled it first or as being in a position to settle it later; whereas if I am to leave you to settle it, I must not pre-empt you by settling it myself. (Velleman 2000: 205)

[40] One might wonder why God's antecedent intentions should be called *intentions* if they don't cause behavior. Divine intention theorists could respond to this by pointing out that causing behavior is not an essential feature of intentions, for 'hypothetical intentions'—intentions for circumstances one knows won't arise, such as the intention to cross the Rubicon if in Julius Caesar's shoes—are real intentions that don't cause behavior. More generally, they could argue that God's antecedent intentions are intentions because they have important intention-like features—they settle questions about what agents are to do in various situations.

According to Miller, a powerful king can intend that his servants do things because the king believes that he has control over his servants. But a lowly servant cannot intend that his king do things because the servant does not believe that he has control over his king.

Miller makes several useful clarificatory remarks concerning third-person intentions and the relevant notion of control. First, he notes that a king can appropriately intend that his servants do things *only if* the king believes that his servants are obedient. If the king knows that his servants rarely follow orders, then there is something inappropriate about his forming such intentions in the first place. Second, he notes that, from the fact that an obedient servant might disobey orders, it does not follow that the king has no control over the servant. *Qua* obedient servant, the servant has submitted himself to the control of the king. His will is to do what the king intends, and so if the servant behaves *qua* obedient servant, then the king does indeed have control over his servant's actions. The servant does what the king intends because the king intends it. If the obedient servant fails by chance to do what the king intends, then it does not follow that the king has no control over the servant, or that the king's intention is inappropriate, it merely follows that the king's intention is not satisfied.

Miller argues that if these claims about third-person intentions and control are correct, then modified divine intention theory is implausible. For if these claims are true, then God antecedently intends that S A only if God believes He has control over S's A-ing, which means that S is morally obligated to A only if God believes He has control over S's A-ing. But this is not true in most cases. For only obedient believers who have submitted to God's will are under God's control in the relevant sense. Divine intention theory thus implies that S is morally obligated to A only if S is an obedient believer. In other words, it implies that only obedient believers who have submitted to God's will have moral obligations, which is implausible.

Divine intention theorists might respond to this by denying that only those who have submitted to God's will are under God's control in the relevant sense. But this response doesn't seem plausible. For one has relevant control over another in cases of third-person intentions *only if* one can settle or decide what another is going to do *by* intending that they do it. And it seems that one can *only* do this *if* the intended has submitted their will to one's control. For example, the king can *only* settle or decide that the servant bring him his dinner *by* intending that the servant bring him his dinner *because* the servant has already submitted his will to the king's control. If the servant hadn't submitted his will to the king's control, then the king wouldn't have relevant control over him: he wouldn't be able to settle or decide what the servant is going to do by intending that he do it. If this

is right, then it follows that only those who have submitted their will to God are under God's control in the relevant sense. So this response to Miller's third objection doesn't seem promising.[41]

Divine intention theorists might respond instead by denying that intentions entail beliefs about control. They might say that one *can* form third-person intentions over another even if one doesn't *believe* that one has control of them. But even if this is true, it doesn't help divine intention theorists, because the objection can be reformulated to accommodate this idea. It can be formulated as follows. It is irrational to intend what one believes one has no control over. Since God is perfectly rational, God will never antecedently intend that S A if God believes He has no relevant control over S's A-ing. If this is right, then God will only form antecedent intentions for those He believes He has relevant control over. Divine intention theory thus implies that only those that God *has* relevant control over (those who have submitted to God's will) have moral obligations, which is implausible. It thus seems that Miller's third objection—or the reformulated variant just described—withstands criticism. We can thus conclude that there is a plausible specific objection to modified divine intention theory. For Miller's third objection shows that divine intention theory is implausible.

3.5 Divine Desire Theory

The third and final leading formulation of theological stateism is *divine desire theory*. Its most notable contemporary defender is Christian Miller (2009a).[42] Since Miller has developed the most sophisticated formulation of divine desire theory, I will focus on his formulation of the theory, which can be formulated as follows:

> **Divine Desire Theory**: S is morally obligated to A in C if and only if and because after considering all the reasons relevant to S's freely A-ing in C, God desires that S freely A in C.[43]

[41] One might object that those who have *not* submitted their will to God *can* be under God's control in the relevant sense, because God can settle or decide what they are going to do by *causing* them to do what He intends. If this is right, then God *can* form antecedent intentions for those who have *not* submitted their will to God, because God can causally control their actions. This objection is problematic, however, because if people who have *not* submitted their will to God are under God's control in the causal sense, then their actions are plausibly not free. Consequently, either God won't form antecedent intentions concerning their actions (and so they won't have moral obligations), or their actions won't be free (and so they won't be morally responsible). The upshot of this is that it seems that only those who have submitted their will to God are under God's control in both the relevant and unproblematic sense. For further discussion, see Miller (2009b: 194).

[42] But see also Brody (1981) and Wierenga (1983: 390).

[43] Miller does not intend his formulation of divine desire theory to be specifically about *moral* obligation. The reason for this is that he does not know any precise way of delimiting moral from non-moral obligations, and he wants to leave open the kinds of reasons and desires that God might have. He writes, for example, that "in some cases, [God] might form a desire that I perform an action on the basis of purely prudential reasons (such as His desire that I call the hospital when I am having a heart attack), while in other cases He might form a desire that I act in a certain way based solely on moral considerations (such as His desire that I save the

There are two specific objections to divine desire theory that are worth considering: the *conflicting desires objection* and the *supererogation objection*. In what follows, I argue that only the second objection shows that divine desire theory is implausible. Let's consider these objections in turn.

3.5.1 The Conflicting Desires Objection

The first specific objection to divine desire theory is the *conflicting desires objection*. This objection states that divine desire theory is implausible because it implies that we have conflicting moral obligations in circumstances we clearly don't. According to this objection, God might desire that I volunteer at a homeless shelter, but also desire *in the same circumstances* that I volunteer at a children's hospital. If this is possible, then divine desire theory implies that I have conflicting moral obligations that are impossible to simultaneously satisfy. In other words, it implies that my performing either of these actions, or any other action for that matter, is wrong. For no matter what I do, I do something wrong. But this implication is implausible because intuitively, this is not a case in which, no matter what I do, I do something wrong. Divine desire theory is thus implausible because it implies otherwise.

Divine desire theorists might respond to this objection by denying that God can have conflicting desires. They might argue that God can't have conflicting desires because having conflicting desires entails indecision, and a perfect being would not be indecisive. But this response fails because it's not the case that having conflicting desires entails indecision. Only having conflicting intentions, or having no intentions at all, entails indecision. I might desire to go to the cinema, but also desire to go the theme park, but not be undecided about what to do, because—though I desire to go to the cinema—I intend to go the theme park, and so am decided about my going there. Having conflicting desires is thus compatible with decision.

Divine desire theorists might argue instead that God can't have conflicting desires because conflicting desires only arise in agents with incomplete knowledge or defective reasoning abilities. As William Mann puts this line of reasoning, "an omniscient and perfectly rational being would see where the weight of reason falls in any situation and desire accordingly" (2005: 288). But this argument fails, because the fact that God's desires are perfectly responsive to reasons does not show that God can't have conflicting desires. Quite the opposite. If God's desires are perfectly responsive to reasons, then God will desire A and B according to their appropriate weight, even if

drowning child)" (2009a: 108). Since Miller takes his formulation of divine desire theory to encompass moral obligation, however, and the examples of obligations we will use are clearly moral, we will talk in terms of *moral* obligation.

they conflict. As Mann explains, "If God's will is exquisitely responsive to reasons, He will, one presumes, see what is attractive, say, about alternative B and to that extent desire B, even if it should happen that reason awards higher marks to alternative A" (2005: 288). There is thus no reason to think that an omniscient and perfectly rational being would have no conflicting desires, and so this response to the conflicting desires objection fails.

Miller has offered a different response to the conflicting desires objection. Miller's response is not to deny that God could have conflicting desires, but to argue that when it comes to the desires that ground moral obligations, God only forms *one* such desire. Miller supplements his formulation of divine desire theory with the following principle:

> Only God's desires concerning free human actions which are formed on the basis of His assessment of *all* (rather than just *some*) of the relevant reasons for action in the circumstances ground deontic properties pertaining to those actions. For instance, if God's desire that S freely A in C grounds his obligation to do so, then that desire is based on God's assessment of all the reasons relevant to S's freely A-ing in C. (Miller 2009a: 110)

Miller then argues that given this principle, God will only form *one* obligation-grounding desire about what action S is to perform in C. It is worth quoting Miller at length:

> Suppose one of my free actions, such as donating to charity, is favoured more so by the balance of reasons than any other of my potential actions in C. And suppose that God as a result desires that I freely make a donation thereby rendering it obligatory. It follows from [divine desire theory] that my volunteering at a church in the same circumstances would only be obligatory as well if it were grounded in God's desire that I do so. But given [the above principle], such a desire would have to be based on God's assessment of the very same reasons used in forming the first desire. And so why would God also form this all-things considered desire that I volunteer, since by hypothesis making the donation is the action in C that is *best* supported by the reasons? In other words, why would God also want me to do something in C which is such that, were I to do it, I would be objectively irrational for doing so? (Miller 2009a: 110–11)

Miller thus argues that if the desires that ground moral obligations are based on God's assessment of *all* the relevant reasons for S's A-ing in C, then God won't form multiple, conflicting desires about what S is to do in C. For God's assessment of *all* the relevant reasons for S's A-ing in C will *only* lead to the formation of *one* desire—that S perform the action in C that is *best* supported by the relevant

reasons. According to Miller, we should think that this is true because it is hard to see why God would *also* want S to do something in C that is *not* best supported by the relevant reasons.

But this argument is not convincing for precisely the same reason that the argument stated by Mann was not convincing. True, God will desire that S perform the action in C that is *best* supported by the relevant reasons, but that does not preclude God from desiring that S perform conflicting actions. For if there are reasons for S to perform some conflicting action in C, then God will see the reasons for S's performing that conflicting action, and will desire that S perform that conflicting action in C according to the appropriate weight of those reasons. Of course, God will not desire that S perform the conflicting action to the *same* extent as He does the action that is *best* supported by the relevant reasons, for the action is not as well supported by the relevant reasons. But God will nonetheless desire that S perform the conflicting action. Miller's response to the conflicting-desires objection thus fails.

But Miller can, I think, plausibly respond to this by tweaking his formulation of divine desire theory once again and saying that it is the action that God *most* desires S perform in C that grounds S's obligation in C. Since God will *most* desire that S perform the action in C that is *best* supported by the relevant reasons, the problem of conflicting desires/obligations does not arise. (But what if two conflicting actions are equally best supported by the relevant reasons? In that case, Miller can say that God forms a disjunctive desire—that S *either* As in C *or* Bs in C. If Miller says this, which presumably he can, then Miller can avoid the conflicting desires objection.) We can thus conclude that the conflicting desires objection fails to show that divine desire theory is implausible.

3.5.2 The Supererogation Objection

The second specific objection to divine desire theory is the *supererogation objection*.[44] This objection states that divine desire theory is implausible because it rules out the possibility of supererogation. According to this objection, some actions are not wrong not to do but are nonetheless very good to do and so deserve our praise. For example, putting oneself in harm's way to save the lives of others, and donating huge sums of money to charity. These actions are *supererogatory actions*—actions that are praiseworthy but not obligatory. According to the supererogation objection, God desires that we perform such actions when we can, because God is not indifferent to our performing supererogatory actions. But if this is true and God (most) desires that we perform such actions, then divine desire

[44] The supererogation objection has also been raised against divine intention theory. For discussion, see Adams (1999: 260–1, 2002: 483–4) and Quinn (2000: 56, 2002: 461).

theory implies that such actions are *obligatory*, and so are *not supererogatory*. Consequently, divine desire theory is implausible because it rules out the class of supererogatory actions.

Miller has laid out three proposals for how divine desire theorists can accommodate the class of supererogatory actions. Let's consider these proposals in turn.[45]

The first proposal appeals to the distinction between *desires* and *aversions*, where being averse to P is the same as desiring that not-P. According to this proposal, obligatory actions are actions that God desires we perform and is averse to our refraining from performing, while supererogatory actions are actions that God desires we perform and is *not* averse to our refraining from performing. This proposal thus formulates divine desire theory as follows:

> **Divine Desire Theory$_1$**: S is morally obligated to A in C if and only if and because after considering all the reasons relevant to S's freely A-ing in C, God desires that S freely A in C *and God desires that S not refrain from A-ing in C*.

This proposal does not seem plausible, however, because it implies that God is not averse to our refraining from performing supererogatory actions. It thus implies, for example, that "God [is] indifferent to my not donating £10000 to Oxfam which would have saved a 1000 children from pneumonia" (Miller 2009a: 118). This proposal should thus, I think, be rejected.

The second proposal appeals to the notions of *guilt* and *shame*. According to this proposal, obligatory actions are actions that God desires we perform and desires we feel guilt (or shame) for not performing, while supererogatory actions are actions that God desires we perform but does *not* desire that we feel guilt (or shame) for not performing. This proposal thus formulates divine desire theory as follows:

> **Divine Desire Theory$_2$**: S is morally obligated to A in C if and only if and because after considering all the reasons relevant to S's freely A-ing in C, God desires that S freely A in C *and God desires that S feel guilt (or shame) if S does not A in C*.

But this proposal does not seem plausible either, because it implies that God has inappropriate desires. To clarify, it only seems *appropriate* to desire that S feel guilt (or shame) if S *should* feel guilt (or shame). But if this is right, then the proposal implies that God has inappropriate desires. For, on the proposal, God desires that S feel guilt (or shame) *independently of whether* S should feel guilt (or

[45] Miller's preferred response to the supererogation objection is "denying outright that from a theistic perspective, there are any supererogatory actions" (2009a: 117). But this response doesn't seem plausible, for the departure from common sense morality it requires is, I think, too much.

shame). For God desires that S feel guilt (or shame) *before*—at least explanatorily—S should feel guilt (or shame), since God's desire is what *explains* why S should feel guilt (or shame). This proposal thus implies that God has inappropriate desires. It should thus, I think, be rejected.

The third and final proposal appeals to the notion of *purely justificatory reasons*.[46] Purely justificatory reasons are reasons that justify but do not require action. In other words, they are reasons such that if one were to act on them, one would be justified in doing so, yet if one were not to act on them, then one would *not* be irrational for not doing so. According to this proposal, obligatory actions are actions that God desires we perform and the reasons we have for doing them have more requiring than justifying strength, while supererogatory actions are actions that God desires we perform, but the reasons we have for doing them have more justifying than requiring strength. This proposal thus formulates divine desire theory as follows:

> **Divine Desire Theory$_3$**: S is morally obligated to A in C if and only if and because after considering all the reasons relevant to S's freely A-ing in C, God desires that S freely A in C *and the reasons for S freely A-ing in C have more requiring than justifying strength*.

But this proposal does not seem plausible either. For this proposal says that God forms His desires on the basis of reasons that have requiring strength. But once we admit that there are reasons that have requiring strength—reasons that *require* action—particularly in a moral context, we seem to be conceding that there are moral obligations. But divine desire theorists can't accept this, because according to divine desire theory, there are *no* moral obligations prior to God's desires. Consequently, God's desires can't be formed on the basis of reasons that have moral requiring strength. This proposal should thus, I think, be rejected.[47]

Since Miller's three proposals fail to show that divine desire theory can accommodate the class of supererogatory actions, and no other proposals are forthcoming, we can conclude, I think, that the supererogation objection shows that divine desire theory is implausible. There is thus a plausible specific objection to divine desire theory.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined theological stateism and considered general and specific objections to it. I argued that at least one *general* objection shows that theological stateism is implausible—namely,

[46] For discussion of purely justificatory reasons, see Gert (2004).
[47] Miller (2009a: 119) has a fourth proposal concerning the idea of exclusionary permissions, but this fourth proposal fails for the same reasons that the third proposal fails.

the sufficiency objection. I then argued that several *specific* objections show that the leading formulations of theological stateism are implausible—namely, the non-believers and sincerity objections for divine command theory, Miller's third control objection for divine intention theory, and the supererogation objection for divine desire theory. I thus conclude that theological stateism is implausible, and so conclude that deontic moral properties are not immediately explained by God. In the next chapter, I argue that axiological moral properties are *not* immediately explained by God by arguing that theological resemblanceism is implausible.

Chapter 4 Theological Resemblanceism

This chapter argues that axiological moral properties are not immediately explained by God by arguing that theological resemblanceism is implausible. In section 4.1, I outline theological resemblanceism. In sections 4.2–3, I outline the most developed version of the view—Adams' view. In sections 4.4–6, I consider three objections to Adams' view. I argue that at least one objection shows that Adams' view is implausible. I conclude that theological resemblanceism is implausible and so conclude that axiological moral properties are not immediately explained by God. I end by drawing the first part of the thesis to a close.

4.1 Theological Resemblanceism

Theological resemblanceism is the view that axiological moral properties are explained by divine resemblances. This view is broadly Platonic in the sense that God plays the role of the Platonic Form the Good. On this view, things are good just in case and because they relevantly resemble God. The main proponent of this view is Robert Adams. Adams writes:

> The part played by God in my account of the nature of the good is similar to that of the Form the Beautiful or the Good in Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*. God is the supreme Good, and the goodness of other things consists in a sort of resemblance to God. (Adams 1999: 7)

The other main proponent of this view is William Alston. Alston writes:

> We can think of God Himself, the individual being, as the supreme standard of goodness … Lovingness is good … because God, the supreme standard of goodness, is loving. Goodness supervenes on every feature of God … just because they are features of God. (Alston 1990: 319)

According to theological resemblanceism, God is the supreme standard of goodness. He is the exemplar or perfect paradigm of goodness. On this view, things are good just in case and because they relevantly resemble the ultimate standard of goodness, God. We can thus think of God as being somewhat analogous, on this view, to the standard meter stick that once served as the standard of meterness. As Alston writes:

> [W]hat makes a certain length a meter is its equality to a standard meter stick kept in Paris. What makes this table a meter in length is … its conformity to a certain existing individual. Similarly, on the present view, what ultimately makes an act of love a good thing is … its

> conformity to, or approximation to, God, Who is both the ultimate source of things and the supreme standard by reference to which they are to be assessed. (Alston 1990: 320)

William Lane Craig, another proponent of theological resemblanceism, makes a similar claim about the standard meter stick. He writes:

> On the account I suggest, the Good is determined paradigmatically by God's own character. Just as a meter was once defined paradigmatically as the length of an iridium bar housed in the Bureau des Poids et des Mesures in Paris, so moral values are determined by the paradigm of God's holy and loving character. (Craig 2009b: 169)

The meter stick analogy is not perfect, however, as Alston and Craig recognise. For while it is arbitrary which stick was chosen to serve as the standard of meterness, theological resemblanceists do not think it is arbitrary whether or not God serves as the standard of goodness. Moreover, theological resemblanceists do not think God is "chosen" to serve as the standard of goodness. On their view, God just is the standard of goodness in much the same way that the Platonic Form the Good just is the standard of goodness, on Platonism. In short, no one *made* God the standard of goodness. He just *is* the standard of goodness.

According to theological resemblanceism, then, *goodness* is explained in terms of relevantly resembling God. But what about *badness*? It is important to see that theological resemblanceists do not explain badness in the same way they explain goodness. That is to say, they do not explain badness in terms of relevantly resembling a supreme standard of badness. Rather, they explain badness in terms of *being against*, or *being opposed to*, the good. As Adams writes:

> The structure of evil is not similar enough to that of good to make it plausible to postulate a "supreme" Evil analogous to the supreme Good. Good and evil are not equally real poles of a single scale; rather, the bad must be understood in terms of the good. There is good and less good, but positive evil is worse than mere deficiency of the good. It is *enmity* toward the Good, being *against* the Good, destroying or violating what is good. (Adams 1999: 28)

Badness is thus explained in terms of being opposed to the good. So things are bad just in case and because they oppose something that is good, that is, something that relevantly resembles God. *Neutrality* is then explained in terms of being neither good nor bad, that is, in terms of neither relevantly resembling God nor being opposed to something that relevantly resembles God. The core of theological resemblanceism can thus be summarised as follows:

> **Goodness**: Things are good if and only if and because they relevantly resemble God.

Badness: Things are bad if and only if and because they oppose something that relevantly resembles God.

Neutrality: Things are neutral if and only if and because they neither relevantly resemble God nor oppose something that relevantly resembles God.

It is important to see that most theological resemblanceists hold that divine resemblances *immediately* explain axiological moral properties. That is to say, they hold that divine resemblances do not bring about axiological moral properties *only by* bringing about some distinct state of affairs which in turn brings about axiological moral properties. We can see that they hold this by noting that most theological resemblanceists specify further relations between axiological moral properties and divine resemblances that underwrite the immediate explanatory relation.

Consider Robert Adams' view. Adams holds that goodness is explained by divine resemblances. That is, that something is good just in case and because it relevantly resembles God. But Adams also holds that goodness is *constituted* by relevantly resembling God (see Adams 1999: 15–16). According to Adams, for X to be good just *is* for X to relevantly resemble God: the latter constitutes the former. It is thus clear that divine resemblances *immediately* explain goodness, on Adams' view. For divine resemblances do not bring about some distinct state of affairs which in turn brings about goodness. Rather, they directly bring about goodness by constituting it. Adams' view thus accepts immediacy with respect to explaining goodness.

Most theological resemblanceists accept Adams' constitutive view.[48] But theological resemblanceists could accept a non-constitutive view that *denies* that goodness is constituted by relevantly resembling God. According to one such view, goodness is *wholly distinct* from relevantly resembling God, yet things are nonetheless good only in virtue of relevantly resembling God. Philip Quinn might accept a view of this kind (see Quinn 2006: 76–8). Building on his *bringing about* account, Quinn might say that the relation between goodness and divine resemblances is one of *bringing about*. He might then stipulate that this bringing about relation is *immediate*, among other things.

Throughout this chapter, I take no stand on the issue of whether theological resemblanceists should accept Adams' constitutive view or Quinn's bringing about view. What I do take a stand on, however, is whether theological resemblanceists should accept *immediacy* with respect to explaining axiological moral properties. For I take theological resemblanceism to be the view that axiological

[48] See, for example, Alston (1990), Baggett and Walls (2011), Craig (2009b), Linville (2012), and, at least in part, Murphy (2011).

moral properties are *immediately* explained by divine resemblances. The view can thus be formulated as follows:

> **Theological Resemblanceism**: Axiological moral properties are all immediately explained by divine resemblances.

In this chapter, I argue that theological resemblanceism is implausible. In sections 4.2–3, I outline the most developed version of the view—Adams' view. In sections 4.4–6, I consider three objections to Adams' view. I argue that only the third objection shows that Adams' view is implausible. I conclude that theological resemblanceism is implausible and so conclude that axiological moral properties are not immediately explained by God.

4.2 Adams' Theory of Excellence

In *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Adams (1999) develops his theory of the nature of the good, which identifies God with the Good. For Adams, "The role that belongs to the form of the Good in Plato's thought is assigned to God, and the goodness of other things is understood in terms of their standing in some relation, usually conceived as a sort of resemblance, to God" (1999: 14). It is important to see that the kind of goodness that Adams has in mind "is not *usefulness*, or merely instrumental goodness … [nor] is it *wellbeing*, or what is good for a person" (1999: 13). Rather, it is "the goodness of that which is worthy of love or admiration" (1999: 13). Adams calls this kind of goodness "excellence." According to Adams, excellence encompasses moral goodness, but it also encompasses other kinds of goodness. As Adams writes, "[Excellence is] the type of goodness exemplified by the beauty of a sunset, a painting, or a mathematical proof, or by the greatness of a novel, the nobility of an unselfish deed, or the quality of an athletic or a philosophical performance" (1999: 83). Adams' theory is thus a theory of "non-moral as well as moral value" (1999: 14). For our purposes, we are only interested in Adams' theory of *moral value* or *moral goodness*. But in order to outline his theory of moral goodness, we need to outline his theory of excellence. In this section, then, I outline Adams' theory of excellence.

Adams' theory of excellence is a *constitutive* theory of *what it is to be* excellent. In other words, it is a theory of what being excellent consists in. According to Adams:

> [*B*]*eing excellent in the way that a finite thing can be consists in resembling God in a way that could serve God as a reason for loving the thing*. (Adams 1999: 36, emphasis in original)

On Adams' view, then, for a thing to be excellent just *is* for that thing to resemble God in such a way that the resemblance could give God a reason to love the thing. Thus, according to Adams, excellence consists in the conjunction of two features. "There are [(1)] features by virtue of which things resemble God, and [(2)] features that could serve as reasons for God's love. It is features that have both qualifications that will constitute excellence" (1999: 36). In other words, not just any resemblance to God will constitute an excellence, on Adams' view. The resemblance has to be such that it could give God a reason to love the thing that resembles God.

Adams' theory is complex, but we can get a better grasp on it by considering why Adams rejects the simpler theory that excellence consists *simply* in resembling God. Call this theory the *mere resemblance theory*. Adams rejects the mere resemblance theory because he thinks that resembling God is insufficient for excellence. Adams considers two sets of counterexamples to the mere resemblance theory. The first set of counterexamples has to do with the idea of *sharing properties with God*. Adams writes:

> God is powerful. God assents, no doubt, to a self-ascription of deity. According to Christian orthodoxy God is three-in-one. Possessing these properties in the way that God possesses them is not only good but truly wonderful. But it seems that creatures could possess them without being good thereby. Was political power an excellence in Hitler or Stalin? I doubt it. If I thought I was God, would that be an excellence in me? Surely not. And consider clovers. There seems to be a sense in which a three-leafed clover (or some part of it) shares with a triune God the property of three-in-oneness. But it is not very plausible to suppose that a three-leafed clover is therefore better in this respect than a four-leafed clover (nor to suppose that poison ivy should be valued for the three-in-oneness of its leaf structure). (Adams 1999: 31–2)

Adams is ultimately unmoved by these counterexamples. Adams agrees that these things *share properties with God*, but he denies that they thereby *resemble God*. In other words, Adams denies that sharing properties constitutes a resemblance. According to Adams, resemblance is more holistic than this: there is more to resemblance than sharing properties. Adams illustrates the holism of resemblance with the following examples:

> Suppose that there is a squirrel that has the same number of hairs on its body that I have on mine. We would not ordinarily say that this rodent "resembles" me in that respect, nor that it is thereby more like me than its twin that has twenty-seven more hairs. Similarly, I would not become more God-like by coming to believe that I was God, even though this is a property I would thereby come to share with God. And even Trinitarian Christians may think it is

> stretching things to say that a three-leafed clover is "more like God" than a four-leafed clover. (Adams 1999: 32)

According to Adams, not every sharing of a property constitutes a resemblance. For Adams, resemblance depends not only on the sharing of properties, but also on the *importance* of the shared property. As Adams writes, "The shared mathematical properties grounded in leaf structures and hair counts are not *important* enough to make the clover or the poison ivy resemble God, or the squirrel resemble me" (1999: 32). Thus, even though these things *share properties with God*, they do not *resemble God*, because the shared properties are not *important* enough to constitute a resemblance. The first set of counterexamples thus fails, according to Adams.[49]

The second set of counterexamples is "more decisive" for Adams, because it involves things that genuinely resemble God rather than things that merely share properties with God. This set of counterexamples has to do with the idea of *parody and caricature*. Adams writes:

> Parodies and caricatures do resemble, but do not in general share the excellences of their original or object. The caricatures of a great cartoonist may of course have an excellence of their own, but that is a different matter. It is not clear that anything can be good in such a way that it cannot be parodied, caricatured, or at any rate resembled by something that is not thereby good. Even something so abstract and free of superfluous properties as a beautiful piece of music can be parodied; and the parody will resemble the original but will not thereby share its virtues. Perhaps one could plausibly maintain that the divine goodness, uniquely, is such that it cannot be parodied or caricatured. But I would not know how to argue for that, and there seem to be counterinstances. It is natural enough to say that Hitler's power is a "caricature of the divine power"—more natural, I suspect, than to deny flatly that his power resembles God's in any way. (Adams 1999: 33)

According to Adams, the counterexamples of parody and caricature show that resembling God is insufficient for excellence. For Adams, it is not enough that things merely resemble or image God, they need to *faithfully* resemble or image God. As Adams writes, "The excellence of other things besides God will consist, then, in the *faithfulness* of their imaging God" (1999: 33). But what resemblances faithfully image God? In other words, what resemblances constitute excellence? According to Adams, the resemblances that faithfully image God are the ones that give God reasons for loving. Adams motivates this idea by noting that there is a close connection between excellence and God's love. He writes:

[49] For Adams' account of importance, see Adams (1999: 32–4).

> There is certainly a close connection between excellence and God's love. I have claimed that it is excellent to value the excellent. Indeed, I believe it is analytic, or close to analytic, that if x is excellent, it is excellent to value x. Together with the Godlikeness thesis [the thesis that excellence consists in resembling God], this seems to imply that if x is excellent, then it is Godlike to value x, which seems to imply that if x is excellent, God values x. And some sort of Eros [or love] seems the most appropriate sort of valuing here. (Adams 1999: 35)

One might wonder why Adams doesn't accept a divine love theory of excellence according to which being excellent *simply* consists in being loved by God. Adams rejects this theory because it implies that things are not excellent in their own "nature or conditions." He writes:

> [E]xcellence must consist, not in God's attitude toward them, but in something in them that grounds God's attitude, or provides God with a reason for it. For excellence should have grounds in the nature or conditions of the excellent thing. Resemblance to God indicates such grounds, and the divine love theory, without further elaboration, does not. This is a reason for retaining an essential reference to Godlikeness in our explanation of the nature of excellence. (Adams 1999: 35)

Adams thus rejects the divine love theory of excellence because according to him, excellence must have its grounds in the nature or properties of excellence things, and the divine love theory fails to ensure that this is so. Since the resemblance theory *does* ensure that this is so—that excellence has its grounds in the nature or properties of excellence things[50]—Adams says that we should retain an essential reference to Godlikeness when explaining the nature of excellence.

Adams then goes on to say that it is not only "good to value the excellent," but that the excellent "provides a reason for admiring or loving it" (1999: 35). Moreover, he says that it is "good to admire or love the excellent *for* that reason" (1999: 35). According to Adams, this suggests that the excellence of things provides God with a reason for loving excellent things. He writes:

> This suggests that the excellence of x should provide God with a reason for loving x, and that God should love x for that reason, which will presumably be grounded in whatever it is in x that grounds x's excellence. These grounds, I have thus far suggested, are constituted by x's resemblances to God, or by whatever it is in x by virtue of which x resembles God. On this account it seems to be x's excellence (or its grounds in x) that explains (or helps explain) God's love for x. (Adams 1999: 35–6)

[50] I explain this further in section 4.6.

Adams takes these considerations to show that we should accept a complex theory of excellence that combines resembling God with providing God with reasons to love. Thus, Adams writes:

> [*B*]*eing excellent in the way that a finite thing can be consists in resembling God in a way that could serve God as a reason for loving the thing*. (Adams 1999: 36, emphasis in original)

On Adams' view, then, for a thing to be excellent just is for that thing to resemble God in such a way that the resemblance could give God a reason to love the thing. According to Adams, excellence consists in the combination of two features. "There are [(1)] features by virtue of which things resemble God, and [(2)] features that could serve as reasons for God's love. It is features that have both qualifications that will constitute excellence" (1999: 36).

In the following section, I outline Adams' theory of *moral goodness*.

4.3 Adams' Theory of Moral Goodness

Adams never says how we get from excellence to moral goodness. But we can make an educated guess. Adams' theory of moral goodness is that moral goodness consists in resembling God's *moral character* in such a way as to give God a reason to love it. That is to say, it consists in resembling God's *love*, *generosity*, *justice*, *faithfulness*, *kindness*, and so on. That this is the right way to characterise Adams' theory of moral goodness is supported by the fact that other theological resemblanceists characterise their Adams-inspired views along these lines. For example, William Lane Craig writes:

> On the theistic view, objective moral values are rooted in God. He is the locus and source of moral value. His holy and loving nature supplies the absolute standard against which all actions are to be measured. He is by nature loving, generous, just faithful, kind, and so forth. (Craig 2009a: 30)

And elsewhere, Craig writes:

> On the account I suggest, the Good is determined paradigmatically by God's own character. Just as a meter was once defined paradigmatically as the length of an iridium bar housed in the Bureau des Poids et des Mesures in Paris, so moral values are determined by the paradigm of God's holy and loving character. God's character is not malleable, as is a metal bar; indeed, on classical theism it is essential to Him. Moreover, since according to classical theism, God exists necessarily, His nature can serve to ground necessary moral truths. (Craig 2009b: 169–70)

Wes Morriston—a critic of theological resemblanceism—also agrees that this is the best way to characterise Adams' view when it comes to moral goodness. He writes:

> For this idea to have content or plausibility, it must be spelled out in terms of the characteristics that are included in God's moral nature. Perhaps the following formulation would get the job done: To the degree that anyone resembles God with respect to God's love, generosity, justice, faithfulness, kindness, and so forth, that person is morally good. (Morriston 2012: 21)

Since this seems to be the best way to characterise Adams' theory of moral goodness, I'll take Adams' theory to be that moral goodness consists in *resembling God's moral character in such a way as to give God a reason to love it*. From here on, then, I'll have this version of theological resemblanceism in mind when evaluating the view.

There are three objections to theological resemblanceism that are worth considering: the *God doesn't have this property objection*, the *revised Euthyphro objection*, and the *intrinsic goodness objection*. In what follows, I argue that only the third intrinsic goodness objection shows that theological resemblanceism is implausible. Let's consider these objections in turn.

4.4 The God Doesn't Have This Property Objection

The first objection is the *God doesn't have this property objection*. According to this objection, theological resemblanceism is implausible because it implies that properties that God doesn't have can't be good to have because one can't resemble God by having those properties. This implication is implausible because intuitively, there are many properties that are good to have that God doesn't have. Dean A. Kowalski offers the example of the property of *being courageous*. Kowalski writes:

> [Theological resemblanceism] entails that if God doesn't exemplify a property, it cannot be good to possess or to approximate. This entailment becomes problematic with respect to moral properties which God cannot exemplify, most notably (perhaps) being courageous. Courage is, or at least can be, a moral virtue for human persons. However, being courageous requires (roughly) focused effort in the face of adversity when the resulting outcome is uncertain, it is very difficult to see how the omnipotent, omniscient, and existentially secure Creator could be courageous. God's omnipotence entails that all activity is effortless, and God's omniscience entails that no outcome is uncertain to Him … It thus follows … that being courageous cannot be a good property for us to possess or approximate. But this is simply

> implausible, and proves to be a serious counter-example to [theological resemblanceism]. (Kowalski 2011: 280)

The objection here is thus that theological resemblanceism is implausible because it implies that properties that God doesn't have can't be good to have, because one can't resemble God by having those properties. What should theological resemblanceists make of this objection? If the counterexample of being courageous were a mere anomaly, then perhaps the objection could be brushed aside. But it doesn't appear to be a mere anomaly. As Kowalski writes:

> Others [counterexamples] quickly come to mind, including expressing gratitude to benefactors and experiencing Aristotelian friendship. God has no benefactors and so He cannot express gratitude; God has no peers in terms of virtue/excellence and so He cannot participate in Aristotle's highest form of friendship. On [theological resemblanceism], then, it therefore follows that neither courage, gratitude, nor Aristotelian friendship can be (morally) good. (Kowalski 2011: 280)

The God doesn't have this property objection is thus an important objection to theological resemblanceism that resemblanceists must address. But how should they respond to it? The best response, I think, is to deny that if God doesn't have a property, then one can't resemble God by having that property. In other words, it is to claim that one *can* resemble God by having properties that God doesn't have. Consider Adams' following remarks:

> Can excellence in cooking, for example, be analysed as resembling God with respect to one's cooking? I think it can, but this does not mean that God is a cook. Saying that A resembles B in respect of A's φ-ing does not entail that φ-ing is a property that A and B share, or that B φ's too. It is enough that A's φ-ing manifests a resemblance to some aspect of B. In this case one's cooking might manifest a resemblance to the divine creativity. (Adams 1999: 30)

According to Adams, one can resemble God by having the property of being a cook, even though God is not a cook. For Adams, it is enough for resemblance that the property resembles *some* aspect of God. For example, His creativity. If this is right, then theological resemblanceists can respond to the objection by arguing that the property of being courageous *does* resemble God, even though God is *not* courageous, because the property resembles *some other* aspect of God. For example, perhaps it resembles His fearlessness, His determination, His resolve, or even His lovingness, His other-regardedness, or His kindness. Theological resemblanceists can thus respond to the objection by arguing that properties like being courageous *do* resemble God, even though God doesn't have them, because these properties resemble *some other* aspect of God. Of course, *which* aspects of

God these properties resemble is controversial, but I see no in principle reason why these properties couldn't resemble *some other* aspect of God. It thus seems that theological resemblanceists can plausibly respond to the objection at hand. The objection can thus, I think, be dismissed, at least until reasons are offered for thinking that these properties can't resemble *some other* aspect of God.[51]

4.5 The Revised Euthyphro Objection

The second objection is the *revised Euthyphro objection*. This objection poses the following Euthyphro-like question to theological resemblanceists: "Is God good because He is loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so on, or are these traits good because God has them?" This question is supposed to be a dilemma for theological resemblanceists on account of the unacceptable consequences that follow from accepting either horn. Let's consider these horns in turn.

The first horn states that God is good *because* He is loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so on. In other words, it states that God is good *in virtue of* having these traits—that these traits *make* God good. This horn is thought to be unacceptable for theological resemblanceists because theological resemblanceism holds that the explanation runs the other way around. In other words, it holds that these traits are good *because* God has them—that God's having these traits *explains* why they are good. If this is right, then theological resemblanceists can't accept the dilemma's first horn. They must therefore accept the dilemma's second horn instead—that these traits are good *because* God has them. But this horn is also thought to be unacceptable because it reverses the intuitive order of explanation concerning God's goodness and His traits. For intuitively, God is good *because* He is loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so on. If this is right, then theological resemblanceists can't accept the dilemma's second horn either. Theological resemblanceism is thus implausible, or so the objection goes.[52]

[51] One might object that this reply opens up the possibility that vicious properties, like being greedy, are good because they might resemble *some other* aspect of God's character. For example, greed might resemble God's determination in some way. But theological resemblanceists can respond to this by noting that whether greed is good depends *not only* on whether it resembles some other aspect of God's moral character, but *also* on whether it resembles an aspect of God's moral character in such a way as to give God a reason to love it. This, I think, is doubtful for vicious properties like being greedy.

[52] There are other reasons for thinking that the second horn is unacceptable. For example, the second horn seems to imply that *false* counterfactuals like "If God were cruel, then cruelty would be good" are *true*. I won't discuss these issues here because I've already discussed them in relation to theological stateism. For discussion of these issues in relation to theological resemblanceism, see Craig (2020a: 198–9), Huemer (2020: 154), Kowalski (2011: 273–5), and Milliken (2009: 158).

The main reply to this objection is to claim that theological resemblanceists can and should accept both horns of the dilemma—that God is good *because* He is loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so on, *and* that these traits good *because* God has them. This is Alston's reply. Alston writes:

> Note that on this view we are not debarred from saying what is supremely good about God. It is not that God is good *qua* bare particular or undifferentiated thisness. God is good by virtue of being loving, just, merciful, etc. Where this view differs from its alternative is in the answer to the question, "By virtue of what are these features of God good-making features?" The answer given by this view is: "By virtue of being features of God." (Alston 1990: 320)

According to this reply, theological resemblanceists can and should accept both horns of the dilemma. If this is right, then theological resemblanceists can accept their view *and* avoid the unacceptable consequence of reversing the intuitive order of explanation concerning God's goodness and His traits.

Jeremy Koons has recently argued against this reply. He argues that theological resemblanceists can't accept both horns of the dilemma. Koons writes:

> Alston cannot consistently maintain that "God is good by virtue of being loving, just, merciful and so on" and be a [theological resemblanceist]. If he wants to be a [theological resemblanceist], the order of explanation can only go in one direction: the character traits like being loving, just and merciful are virtues—are good—just because they are possessed by God. (Koons 2012: 186)

Koons' argument concerns the meter stick analogy. Koons asks us to consider an object that is a particular length, L. This length, L, he says, is the same length as the Paris meter bar. L is thus 1 meter. Koons then asks us to consider which of the following claims is true:

> (1) This particular length, L, is 1 meter because the Paris meter bar is this particular length.
>
> (2) The Paris meter bar is 1 meter because it is this particular length, L.

Koons argues that if the Paris meter bar is the standard of meterness, then (1) is true and (2) is false. Koons then asks us to consider which of the following claims is true:

> (3) These particular traits (lovingness, mercy, etc.) are good because God has these particular traits.
>
> (4) God is good because He has these particular traits (lovingness, mercy, etc.)

Koons argues that (3) and (4) are "precisely parallel" to (1) and (2). He then argues that if God is the standard of goodness, then just as (1) is true and (2) is false, (3) is true and (4) is false. He concludes that theological resemblanceists can't accept both horns of the dilemma. If traits are good because God has them, then God can't be good because He has those traits.

Let's consider Koons' argument. Koons thinks that (1) and (2) are incompatible:

> (1) This particular length, L, is 1 meter because the Paris meter bar is this particular length.
>
> (2) The Paris meter bar is 1 meter because it is this particular length, L.

Let's grant the truth of (1). Why think that (2) is false? Koons thinks that if the Paris meter bar is the standard of meterness, then what *makes* the Paris meter bar 1 meter is *not* its equality to the particular length, L. But this, I think, is wrong. For if the Paris meter bar is the standard of meterness, then everything, *including the Paris meter bar itself*, is 1 meter because it is equal to the particular length, L. For L is the length of the Paris meter bar. In other words, if the Paris meter bar is the standard of meterness, then what makes everything, *including the Paris meter bar itself*, 1 meter is its equality to the length of the Paris meter bar. So, the Paris meter bar *is* 1 meter because it is the particular length, L. For L is the length of the Paris meter bar. *Pace* Koons, then, (1) and (2) seem to be compatible.

Koons might reply to this by saying something along the following lines:

> The standard meter in Paris is one meter long. But we do not determine that it is one meter long by measuring it against itself (whereas, at least in theory, we determine the lengths of all other things by measuring them against it). Rather, we stipulate that the standard meter in Paris is one meter long, at least at specified temperature, pressure and so forth. (Oppy 2014: 294)

According to this reply, what *makes* the Paris meter bar 1 meter long is *not* its equality to the particular length, L. Rather, it is that we *stipulate* that the Paris meter bar is 1 meter long. But even if this is right, it doesn't help Koons. For while we stipulate that the Paris meter bar is 1 meter long, theological resemblanceists do not stipulate that God is the standard of goodness. Theological resemblanceists can thus respond to this reply by arguing that it undermines the claim that (1) and (2) are "precisely parallel" to (3) and (4). For while stipulation is what *makes* the Paris meter bar 1 meter long, it is *not* what makes God the standard of goodness. This reply thus fails. Koons' argument that (3) and (4) are incompatible can thus be rejected.

But why should we think that theological resemblanceists *can* accept both horns of the dilemma? In other words, why should we think that (3) and (4) are compatible?

> (3) These particular traits (lovingness, mercy, etc.) are good because God has these particular traits.
>
> (4) God is good because He has these particular traits (lovingness, mercy, etc.)

The answer, I take it, is that if theological resemblanceism is true and God is the standard of goodness, then everything, *including God*, is good because it resembles God. As Adams says:

> Let X be the Good itself; and suppose that excellence therefore consists in a sort of resemblance to X. No being could be more like X than X itself is. So if excellence consists in a sort of resemblance to X, no being could be more excellent than X is. (Adams 1999: 45)

The thought here is that if theological resemblanceism is true, then God is good because He resembles himself. Trivially, however, every trait that God has resembles God. Since God is loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so on, it follows that God resembles himself in virtue of having these traits. Given the transitivity of the 'in virtue of' relation, it follows that God is good in virtue of having these traits. The argument can thus be formulated as follows:

> (5) God is good in virtue of resembling himself.[53]
>
> (6) God resembles himself in virtue of being loving, generous, and so on.
>
> (7) Therefore, God is good in virtue of being loving, generous, and so on.

If this argument is successful, which I think it is, then theological resemblanceists can accept both horns of the revised Euthyphro dilemma—that God is good *because* He is loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so on, *and* that these traits are good *because* God has them. Consequently, we can conclude that (3) and (4) are compatible. The revised Euthyphro objection to theological resemblanceism can thus be rejected.[54]

[53] I leave out the 'in such a way as to give Him reasons to love' qualification for presentation. Similarly for the next premise.

[54] It is worth noting that some philosophers *deny* that God is good in virtue of having other properties. See, for example, Davis and Franks (2015: 15) and Oppy (2014: 290–6). According to these philosophers, God's goodness is a basic property—a property that God has, but not in virtue of having other properties. This doesn't seem plausible to me. For value properties seem to be properties that things have *only* in virtue of having other properties.

4.6 The Intrinsic Goodness Objection

The third and final objection is the *intrinsic goodness objection*. According to this objection, theological resemblanceism is implausible because it implies that nothing distinct from God is *intrinsically good*, or good in and of itself. Erik Wielenberg puts the objection as follows:

> Adams' theory implies that no finite thing is intrinsically good (or evil) since, on Adams' view, the goodness (and badness) of all finite things is partly determined by how they are related to God. Consequently, Adams' view entails that nothing distinct from God is intrinsically good. Murphy also holds that the goodness of things distinct from God consists in their standing in a certain relationship to God; their goodness is thus extrinsic rather than intrinsic because it is explained not merely by their intrinsic properties but also by certain properties of God. I think that this is an area where the views of Murphy and Adams are at odds with moral common sense. I suggest that among our common sense moral beliefs is the belief that some things distinct from God are intrinsically good: for example, the pleasure of an innocent backrub, or the love between parent and child. These things, it seems to me, are good in and of themselves. What makes them good, what explains their goodness, lies entirely within their intrinsic nature. If there are such intrinsic goods, then it appears that neither Murphy's nor Adams' theory can account for them, and this is a strike against both theories. (Wielenberg 2014: 83–4)

Wielenberg defines *intrinsic* and *extrinsic goodness* as follows:

> [T]he intrinsic value of a given thing is the value it has, if any, solely in virtue of its intrinsic properties. The extrinsic value of a given thing, by contrast, is the value it has in virtue of how it is related to things distinct from itself. (Wielenberg 2014: 2)

Wielenberg's objection is thus that theological resemblanceism is implausible because it implies that nothing distinct from God is *intrinsically good*, that is, that nothing distinct from God is good *solely* in virtue of its intrinsic properties. This implication is implausible, according to Wielenberg, because it is moral common sense that some things distinct from God *are* intrinsically good. For example, innocent pleasures and loving relationships. Thus, Wielenberg concludes, theological resemblanceism is implausible because it is at odds with moral common sense.

What should we make of this objection? We should start by noting that Wielenberg is right to say that theological resemblanceism implies that nothing distinct from God is intrinsically good. For the view denies that things distinct from God are good *solely* in virtue of their intrinsic properties.

According to theological resemblanceism, the goodness of things distinct from God is explained at least in part by their resembling God. Their goodness is thus *extrinsic* rather than intrinsic, because their goodness is at least partly explained by their standing in a certain relationship to God.

One might reply that this is mistaken because Adams affirms that things distinct from God are good in virtue of their natural and thus intrinsic properties. Adams writes:

> There is wide agreement that the values of natural things (including our own lives) depend in some way on their natural properties. This is often put by saying that values "supervene" on natural properties, where that is understood to mean that any things with the same natural properties would *necessarily* have the same values. Not all metaethicists would accept this thesis about necessity … The less precise thesis, however, that natural things have their values *by virtue of* their natural properties is relatively uncontroversial. It is a thesis that I accept, inasmuch as natural things that resemble God do so, in general, by virtue of their natural properties. (Adams 1999: 61)

Adams thus endorses the following argument:

> (1) X is good in virtue of resembling God.
>
> (2) X resembles God in virtue of having natural properties.
>
> (3) Therefore, X is good in virtue of having natural properties.

But while this argument shows that Adams can affirm that things distinct from God are good in virtue of their natural or intrinsic properties, it does *not* undermine the intrinsic goodness objection. For the intrinsic goodness objection is *not* that theological resemblanceism is implausible because it implies that nothing distinct from God is good in virtue of its natural or intrinsic properties. Rather, it is that theological resemblanceism is implausible because it implies that nothing distinct from God is good *solely* in virtue of its natural or intrinsic properties. The objection thus allows for the possibility that things distinct from God are good in virtue of their natural or intrinsic properties.

How should theological resemblanceists respond to the intrinsic goodness objection? The most promising response, I think, is to deny that things distinct from God are intrinsically good. This is Murphy's response. Murphy writes:

> Wielenberg appeals to *someone's enjoying an innocent pleasure* and *a parent's and a child's loving each other*. I don't think that these have intrinsic value, and if common sense thinks so, then common sense is wrong. (Murphy 2018: 351)

Following Korsgaard (1983), Murphy distinguishes between *final value* (a thing's having value for its own sake, as opposed to its having value for the sake of some further end) and *intrinsic value* (a thing's having value independently of its relations to other things). He thinks that innocent pleasures and loving relationships have final value (and so ought to be valued for their own sake) but he denies that they have intrinsic value. Murphy writes:

> What makes an innocent pleasure valuable and the love between parent and child valuable is first and foremost the way these are for the good for the persons involved. Any other value that these states of affairs seem to have is explanatorily downstream from that. … But this is an essential appeal to relational value in the explanation, and any appeal to such relational value will make the value nonintrinsic. (Murphy 2018: 352)

Murphy's point about innocent pleasures and loving relationships is well taken. But while it might be plausible to suppose that these things lack intrinsic value, it is not plausible to suppose that *creatures* or *persons* lack intrinsic value. For creatures seem to be valuable independently of the relations they stand in. In other words, they seem to be valuable in and of themselves, even when considered in absolute isolation from everything else. And, as Wielenberg points out, "Any value that a thing would have if it existed in complete isolation is … intrinsic value" (2014: 3). It thus seems plausible to suppose that creatures have intrinsic value.[55]

Wielenberg agrees that creatures have intrinsic value, and he thinks that this is a matter of common sense. Murphy, by contrast, thinks that theists should deny that creatures have intrinsic value. He also denies that creaturely intrinsic value is matter of common sense. Murphy writes:

> Wielenberg thinks that common sense affirms the view that creatures have intrinsic value as well. The position I affirm above is that theism rules out creaturely intrinsic value. So if Wielenberg is right, and I am right, then this is a commitment of theism that is contrary to common sense. I am not all *that* embarrassed if common sense speaks against theism. Common sense is an ass in lots of ways. But I just don't see how common sense—even good, enlightened, reflective common sense—has *any* view about [the] intrinsic value of creatures. (Murphy 2018: 352)

[55] I am alluding to Moore's isolation test for intrinsic value here, in which one considers "what value we should attach to [something], if it existed in absolute isolation, stripped of all its usual accompaniments" (Moore 1903: 79). Wielenberg endorses Moore's isolation test for intrinsic value, as well as Davison's (2012) annihilation test for intrinsic value.

Murphy goes on to outline what *common sense* has to say about creaturely value. He claims that common sense only says that the value of creatures is *objective*, *universal*, *reason-giving*, and *final*. According to Murphy:

> Everything in our common sense patterns of believing, desiring, and acting that needs capturing is captured by the universality, objectivity, reason-givingness, and finality of the sorts of creaturely value that Wielenberg invokes. (Murphy 2018: 353)

But Murphy misses the point here. For even if it isn't strictly part of *common sense* that creatures have intrinsic value, it is nonetheless still *plausible* to suppose that they have intrinsic value. And so theological resemblanceism, while not contrary to *common sense*, is still *implausible*, because it implies that creatures don't have intrinsic value. Murphy seems to acknowledge this and replies that the most Wielenberg can do to support his claim that creatures have intrinsic value is to offer thoughts experiments which aim to show that creatures have intrinsic value. Murphy then argues that we should be sceptical of such thought experiments because they involve states of affairs that are not just counterfactual but counterpossible. He writes:

> The most that Wielenberg can do is to offer certain thought-experiments about states of affairs that are not just counterfactual but counterpossible: whether such-and-such being would be valuable were there no God and thus the relevant relation fails to hold. But look. Here is a very crude picture of how to think about counterfactual thinking. You start with the way the world actually is, and then you ask what would be the case if the world were as close as possible to how it actually is, but differs in just a certain respect. But what you think about such counterfactual questions will of course differ based on what you think is actual. If you are an atheist, and you ask "what value would creatures have without God?," the "nearest" world is the one we live in. So just ask: what value do they have? If you are a theist, by contrast, the "nearest" world in which there is no God is outrageously remote. It is an impossible world, a deeply, deeply impossible world. It is the essence of every possible creaturely substance that it is a creature. It is of the essence of God that all things distinct from God depend on God. When I try to carry out this thought experiment seriously, as a theist, I go blank. And I think that theists should go blank on this. If they nevertheless want to defend creaturely intrinsic value, it should not be on the basis of the results of their thought-experiments about what things would be like if there were no God. (Murphy 2018: 353–4)

There are two points to make in response to this. The first is that Murphy appears to concede that *atheists* should think that creatures have intrinsic value. This is a striking concession because it means that atheists should find theological resemblanceism implausible, regardless of their belief in

the non-existence of God. The second point is that it's not clear to me why Murphy thinks that *theists* should "go blank" when considering impossible thought experiments, such as whether creatures would have value without God, or whether creatures would have value in complete or absolute isolation. For thought experiments can reveal important moral intuitions, even if they are metaphysically impossible. For example, thought experiments involving role reversal where we consider how we would feel if we were someone else are metaphysically impossible, yet presumably, we shouldn't "go blank" when considering such scenarios, nor should we think that such scenarios are incapable of revealing important moral intuitions. Murphy's scepticism about impossible thoughts experiments thus seems unwarranted. Consequently, we can conclude, I think, that atheists and theists *can* trust thought experiments which aim to show that creatures have intrinsic value. Since such thought experiments *do* show that creatures have intrinsic value, we can conclude that theological resemblanceism is implausible because it implies that creatures *lack* intrinsic value. We can thus conclude that the intrinsic goodness objection shows that theological resemblanceism is implausible.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined theological resemblanceism and considered three objections to it. I argued that at least one objection shows that theological resemblanceism is implausible—the *intrinsic goodness objection*. I thus conclude that theological resemblanceism is implausible, and so conclude that axiological moral properties are not immediately explained by God.

4.8 Conclusion

This completes the first part of this thesis. We are now in a position to conclude that theists are committed to *anti-realism* about moral properties. To summarise, in chapter 2, we argued that considerations of divine sovereignty commit theists to the claim that:

(1) If there are moral properties, then these properties are immediately explained by God.

We then argued in chapters 3 and 4 that the following claim is true:

(2) Deontic and axiological moral properties are *not* immediately explained by God.

These claims jointly entail that theists are committed to the claim that there are no deontic or axiological moral properties. In other words, they jointly entail that theists are committed to anti-realism about deontic and axiological moral properties. The conclusion of the first part of this thesis

is thus that theists should accept anti-realism, at least with respect to deontic and axiological moral properties.

The second part of this thesis now considers the kind of anti-realism that theists should accept. They can either accept *cognitivist anti-realism* (moral error theory) or *non-cognitivist anti-realism* (expressivism). In chapter 5, I argue that theists shouldn't accept moral error theory. And in chapter 6, I argue that theists should accept expressivism.

Chapter 5 Moral Error Theory

This chapter argues that theists shouldn't accept moral error theory. In section 5.1, I outline moral error theory and consider objections to its formulation. In section 5.2, I consider the claim that theists shouldn't accept moral error theory because theism and moral error theory are incompatible. I reject this claim and argue that these views are compatible. In section 5.3, I argue that even though theism and moral error theory are compatible, there are still good reasons for theists not to accept moral error theory. I conclude that theists shouldn't accept moral error theory. They should thus search for an alternative anti-realist theory instead.

5.1 Moral Error Theory

Moral error theory, on my taxonomy, is the combination of *cognitivism* and *anti-realism*. According to this view, all moral judgements are false because they represent the world as being a certain way, and the world is not that way. More precisely, they represent moral properties, but there are no such properties. Moral judgements are thus systematically erroneous or false, on this view. Moral error theory thus consists of the following views:

Anti-Realism: There are no moral properties.

Cognitivism: Moral judgements are beliefs that represent moral properties.[56]

Anti-realism, recall, is a metaphysical view about the non-existence of moral properties. This view holds that there are *no* such properties, that properties like being wrong and being bad are *not* instantiated in the world. *Cognitivism*, by contrast, is a psychological view about the nature of moral judgements. This view holds that moral judgements are *beliefs* that represent moral properties. For example, the moral judgement that X is wrong is the belief that X is wrong, and this belief represents X as having the moral property of being wrong. These views combine together to make moral error theory. According to this view, moral judgements are beliefs that represent moral properties, but there are no such properties, so all moral judgements are false.[57]

[56] I formulate cognitivism here in terms of *beliefs* rather than *belief-like states* for ease of presentation. Nothing I say in this chapter hangs on this way of presenting things.

[57] Note that other views might qualify as versions of moral error theory. For example, the view that moral judgements are beliefs that represent *objective* moral properties, but only *subjective* moral properties exist, might qualify as a version of error theory. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I am only interested in the version of moral error theory that combines cognitivism and anti-realism. For discussion of other versions of moral error theory, see Olson (2014: 8–11).

In what follows, I consider three objections to this formulation of moral error theory *as the view that all moral judgements are false*. These objections are worth considering because they serve to clarify the claims of moral error theory.

The first objection states that *pace* this formulation, moral error theorists think that some moral judgements are *true* because they think that negative moral beliefs are true. For example, they think that the belief that X is not wrong is true. But this objection is based on a confusion, because negative moral beliefs are *not* moral judgements, according to this formulation of moral error theory, because this formulation holds that moral judgements are beliefs that represent moral properties, yet negative moral beliefs do *not* represent moral properties. Thus, the belief that X is not wrong is not a moral judgement, according to this formulation of moral error theory, because this belief does not represent X as having any moral property; it merely represents X as *lacking* the moral property of being wrong (Streumer 2017: 108). According to this formulation, then, only beliefs such as the following are moral judgements because they represent moral properties:

Belief$_1$: X is wrong

Belief$_2$: Y is obligatory

Belief$_3$: Z is permissible

The first belief represents X as having the moral property of being wrong. The second belief represents Y as having the moral property of being obligatory. And the third belief represents Z as having the moral property of being permissible. By contrast, the following beliefs are *not* moral judgements, according to this formulation, because they do not represent moral properties:

Belief$_4$: X is not wrong

Belief$_5$: Y is not obligatory

Belief$_6$: Z is not permissible

These beliefs merely represent their objects as *lacking* moral properties. These beliefs are not therefore moral judgements, according to this formulation of moral error theory.[58]

The second objection states that it is *impossible* for all moral judgements to be false. Consider the moral judgement that X is wrong. According to this objection, if this judgement is false, then the

[58] Why might these negative moral beliefs nonetheless seem like moral judgements? The answer is that they conversationally implicate them. For example, the negative moral belief that X is not wrong conversationally implicates the moral judgement that X is permissible (Streumer 2017: 108). I discuss this issue directly below.

belief that X is not wrong is true. But if this belief is true, then the belief that X is permissible is true, because 'not wrong' conceptually entails 'is permissible'. But if this is right, then it is impossible for all moral judgements to be false, because if the moral judgement that X is wrong is *false*, then the moral judgement that X is permissible is *true*.[59]

This objection fails, however, because 'not wrong' does not conceptually entail 'is permissible'. The former only conversationally implicates the latter. This is clear because we can cancel the implication by saying that things are neither wrong nor permissible. As Jonas Olson explains:

> A better [response] is to deny that the implications from 'not wrong' to 'permissible' … are conceptual and maintain instead that they are instances of generalised conversational implicature. To illustrate, 'not wrong' conversationally implicates 'permissible' because normally when we claim that something is not wrong we speak from within a system of moral norms, or moral standard for short. According to most moral standards, any action that is not wrong according to that standard is permissible according to that standard … But the implicature from 'not wrong' to 'permissible' is cancellable. The error theorist can declare that torture is not wrong and go on to signal that she is not speaking from within a moral standard. She might say something like the following: 'Torture is not wrong. But neither is it permissible. There are no moral properties and facts and consequently no action has moral status.' This would cancel the implicature from 'not wrong' to 'permissible'. (Olson 2014: 14)

The third and final objection states that moral error theory should be formulated as the view that moral judgements are *neither true nor false*. Consider the belief that the present king of France is bald. According to Strawson (1950), this belief presupposes that there is a present king of France in the sense that this belief is *true or false* only if there is a present king of France. Since there is no present king of France, this belief is *neither true nor false*. According to this objection, however, moral judgements also presuppose that there are moral properties, and so are similarly *neither true nor false* if moral error theory is true and there are no moral properties.[60]

But this objection is unconvincing, because the reason why beliefs about the present king of France are neither true nor false is that they represent a *non-existent object* (the present king of France) as having properties. Since such beliefs *fail* to pick out an object that has or lacks properties, such beliefs are neither true nor false. But the same is not true of moral judgements. For moral judgements represent *existent objects* as having moral properties, and so *succeed* in picking out

[59] For discussion of this objection, see Olson (2014: 11–15), Pigden (2007: 450–4), Sinnott-Armstrong (2006: 32–7), and Streumer (2017: 124–6).
[60] For discussion of this objection, see Joyce (2001: 6–9) and especially Streumer (2017: 123–4).

objects that have or lack moral properties. More precisely, they succeed in picking out objects that *lack* moral properties, according to moral error theory. Moral judgements are thus plain *false* if moral error theory is true. As Bart Streumer explains:

> If I believe that the desk at which I wrote this book is both red and blue all over, my belief [represents my desk as having] a non-existent property ... But this belief is clearly false, since my desk is in fact not both red and blue all over. More generally, if a belief [represents] a non-existent object [as having a property], it fails to pick out an object that has or lacks this property. Strawson may be right that such beliefs are neither true nor false. But if a belief [represents an existent object as having a non-existent property], it *does* pick out an object that has or lacks this property. More precisely, it picks out an object that lacks this property, since this property does not exist. We should therefore treat such beliefs the way we treat other beliefs that [represent existent objects as having properties that they lack]: we should take such beliefs to be false. (Streumer 2017: 123–4)

Of course, moral judgements can represent *non-existent objects* as having moral properties. For example, the moral judgement that the present king of France is good represents a non-existent object as having a moral property. Such moral judgements are then neither true nor false, if Strawson is right. But for all other moral judgements that represent *existent objects* as having moral properties, such judgements are just plain false, according to moral error theory, because they represent existent objects as having properties that they simply don't have.

Now that we have outlined and clarified moral error theory, we can move on to consider whether theists should accept moral error theory. In what follows, I consider the claim that theists shouldn't accept moral error theory because theism and moral error theory are *incompatible*. In other words, I consider whether these two views are *compatible*. Two things to note before proceeding. First, I take two views to be 'compatible' if one can coherently accept both of them, and 'incompatible' otherwise. Thus, in considering whether theism and moral error theory are compatible, I am considering whether one can *coherently accept* both views. Second, because the compatibility of these views has not yet been discussed in the literature, and it is important for our purposes to see whether moral error theory is a live, anti-realist option for theists, I consider this issue in detail. In the following section, I outline the best argument for thinking that these views are incompatible.

5.2 Is Theism Compatible with Moral Error Theory?

Why think that theism and moral error theory are incompatible? I take the best argument to be the *divine goodness argument*. According to this argument, these views are incompatible because theism entails that God is morally good, and moral error theory entails that God is not. The divine goodness argument can be formulated as the following *reductio argument*:

(P1) Theism is true. (For reductio)

(P2) Moral error theory is true. (For reductio)

(P3) If theism is true, then God is morally good.

(P4) If moral error theory is true, then God is not morally good.

(C1) Therefore, God is morally good and God is not morally good.

The divine goodness argument purports to show that theism and moral error theory are incompatible by showing that a contradiction arises if one accepts both views (P1 and P2). If the divine goodness argument is successful, then theism and moral error theory are incompatible: one can't coherently accept both views. Let's consider the argument's two substantial premises (P3 and P4) in reverse order.

According to (P4), moral error theory entails that God is not morally good. This premise is true because it is entailed by cognitivism and anti-realism. Cognitivism entails that God is morally good just in case God instantiates the moral property of being good, and anti-realism entails that God does not instantiate the moral property of being good. These views thus entail that God is not morally good. But what about (P3)? This is the problematic premise of the divine goodness argument. According to it, theism entails that God is morally good. Let's call this the 'theism-entails-goodness premise'.

In what follows, I argue that moral error theorists should reject the theism-entails-goodness premise because the two best arguments for it either fail or fail if moral error theory is true. The *conceptual argument* claims that the theism-entails-goodness premise is true because it is a conceptual truth that God is morally good, while the *argument from perfect being theology* claims that the premise is true because God is the greatest possible being, and the greatest possible being would be morally good. In section 5.2.1, I argue that the conceptual argument *fails* because it is not a conceptual truth that God is morally good. In section 5.2.2, I argue that the argument from perfect being theology

fails if moral error theory is true, because if moral error theory is true, then it's not the case that the greatest possible being would be morally good.

The upshot of this, I argue, is that moral error theorists should reject the theism-entails-goodness premise. They should therefore reject the divine goodness argument. In section 5.2.3, I argue that it follows from this that the divine goodness argument *fails* to show that theism and moral error theory are incompatible. I then argue that since the divine goodness argument is the best argument for thinking that these views are incompatible, we should think that they are compatible. Let's begin by considering the conceptual argument.

5.2.1 The Conceptual Argument

The conceptual argument claims that the theism-entails-goodness premise is true because it is a conceptual truth that God is *morally good*. What should we make of this claim? It is noteworthy that many philosophers endorse the related claim that it is a conceptual truth that God is *perfectly good*. James Rachels writes, for example, that:

> To bear the title 'God' … a being must have certain qualifications. He must, for example, be all-powerful and *perfectly good* in addition to being perfectly wise. (Rachels 1971: 333, emphasis added)

Richard Swinburne makes a similar claim, saying:

> I take the proposition 'God exists' ... to be logically equivalent to 'there exists a person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who is eternal, is perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, *perfectly good*, and the creator all things. (Swinburne 1979: 8, emphasis added)

Proponents of the conceptual argument might attempt to argue that it is a conceptual truth that God is morally good *by* arguing that it is a conceptual truth that God is perfectly good, because perfect goodness entails moral goodness. But this attempt fails because it is *not* a conceptual truth that God is perfectly good. Consider Oppy's remarks on Swinburne's view:

> I do not think that one ought to say that 'God exists' is logically equivalent to 'there exists a person without a body …etc'. For, in saying this, one is committed to the view that if, for example, (i) there exists a person without a body who is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, very (but not quite perfectly) good, and the creator of all things; but (ii) there is no person without a body who is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things, then God does not exist. This seems to be an odd view to take; in

> the circumstances described, it seems to me that it would be more natural to say that God does exist, but that He is not quite as we imagined Him to be. (Oppy 1992: 468)

Oppy's remarks reveal that we would count a being who is not perfectly good as God—the being who is very (but not quite perfectly) good. This suggests that it is not a conceptual truth that God is perfectly good. For if it were, then plausibly we would not count a being who is not perfectly good as God: our concept of God would rule out the possibility of such a being qualifying as God. The attempt to argue that it is a conceptual truth that God is morally good *by* arguing that it is a conceptual truth that God is perfectly good thus fails, because it is plausibly *not* a conceptual truth that God is perfectly good.

But proponents of the conceptual argument need not make the *bold* claim that it is a conceptual truth that God is *perfectly* good. They need only make the more *modest* claim that it is a conceptual truth that God is *morally* good. But is this more modest claim true? To see whether it is, we need to see whether we would count a being who is not morally good as God. We can do this by considering the following scenario:

> There is a necessarily existing incorporeal being who is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, and who created the universe and everything in it. This being sustains the universe from moment to moment. Moreover, this being is the object of religious worship, answers prayers, and occasionally performs miracles. This being also loves all created beings, is deeply concerned for their well-being, always tries to promote their well-being to the best of his ability, and so on.

Almost everyone, I take it, would say that if this scenario is actual, then God exists. In other words, almost everyone would count this being as God.

Now, let us add one further qualification to the scenario. Let us suppose that the world in which this being exists is one in which moral error theory is true. That is, let us suppose that *this being is not morally good*—despite the fact that he loves all created beings, is deeply concerned for their well-being, always tries to promote their well-being to the best of his ability, and so on—*because the world in which this being exists is one in which cognitivism is true and there are no moral properties*. We can add this qualification to the scenario as follows:

> There is a necessarily existing incorporeal being who is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, and who created the universe and everything in it. This being sustains the universe from moment to moment. Moreover, this being is the object of religious worship, answers prayers, and occasionally performs miracles. This being also loves all created beings,

> is deeply concerned for their well-being, always tries to promote their well-being to the best of his ability, and so on. *But, because moral error theory is true, this being is not morally good*.

(Note that in saying that this being is not morally good, I am *not* saying that this being is morally bad or morally neutral. For moral badness and moral neutrality are moral properties, and we are to imagine this being existing in a world in which moral error theory is true—a world in which there are no moral properties. Note also that I am not claiming that this scenario is *metaphysically possible*, but only that it is *conceptually possible*.)

Does the fact that this being is not morally good change our intuition that this being is God? No, I don't think so. Almost everyone, I take it, would still say that if this scenario is actual, then God exists. In other words, almost everyone would still count this being as God. For this being just seems to be God in a world in which moral error theory is true.[61] This suggests that it is not a conceptual truth that God is morally good. For if it were, then plausibly we would not count a being who is not morally good as God: our concept of God would rule out the possibility of such a being qualifying as God. The conceptual argument thus *fails*, because it is plausibly *not* a conceptual truth that God is morally good.[62]

Let's consider the next argument for the theism-entails-goodness premise.

5.2.2 The Argument From Perfect Being Theology

The argument from perfect being theology employs the method of perfect being theology—the method that uses the claim that God is the greatest possible being to work out what properties God would have. This argument claims that the theism-entails-goodness premise is true because God is the greatest possible being, and the greatest possible being would instantiate the moral property of being good.

---

[61] The intuition that this being is God receives further support when we reflect on our response to a hypothetical speaker who claims to believe that this being exists, but also claims to believe that God does not exist. We are inclined, I submit, to treat the speaker as using 'God' is some non-standard way. This is evidence that the being described in the scenario is God.

[62] One might object that this being is not God because it is a conceptual truth that God is worthy of worship, and only morally good beings are worthy of worship (Craig 2003: 173). But I deny that only morally good beings are worthy of worship. It seems to me that the being described in this scenario is worthy of worship, so we have a clear counterexample to the claim that only morally good beings are worthy of worship. One might reply that this being can't be worthy of worship, because being worthy of worship is a moral property and this being exists in a world in which there are no moral properties. But I retort that although being worthy of worship is a normative property, it is not a moral one. So this being *can* be worthy of worship, because this being exists in a world in which *moral* rather than *normative* error theory is true.

The claim I will take issue with here is that the greatest possible being would instantiate the moral property of being good. This claim is tantamount to the claim that perfect being theology entails that God instantiates the moral property of being good. It is noteworthy that many philosophers endorse this claim. Thomas Morris writes, for example, that:

> Standardly employed, perfect being theology issues in a conception of God as a necessarily existent being who has such properties as omnipotence, omniscience, *perfect goodness*, eternity, and aseity as essential properties. (Morris 1987: 25, emphasis added)

William Rowe makes a similar remark, saying:

> God is thought of as *the greatest possible being*, the being than which none greater exists … Quite naturally, then, God is taken to be a being whose *goodness*, knowledge, and power is such that it is … logically impossible for any being, including God himself, to have a greater degree of goodness, knowledge, and power. (Rowe 2004: 1, second emphasis added)

But whether the greatest possible being would be morally good depends on whether moral goodness is an *impossible property*, because if moral goodness is an impossible property, then not even the greatest possible being would be morally good, for possible beings can't instantiate impossible properties.[63]

The argument from perfect being theology thus fails if moral properties are impossible, because if they are, then the greatest possible being would not be morally good. In what follows, I argue that moral error theory implies that moral properties are impossible. I thus argue that the argument from perfect being theology *fails if moral error theory is true*.

[63] There is an objection to the claim that God is the greatest possible being that should be mentioned again. The objection is this. Suppose that we have radically overestimated how great beings can be, and that Michael Jordan is, in fact, the greatest possible being—it's metaphysically impossible for any being to be greater than Michael Jordan. Clearly, the objection goes, we should not conclude that Michael Jordan is God. We should conclude instead that God does not exist. What this objection shows, as Jeff Speaks notes, is that "the claim that God is the greatest possible being does not capture our core concept of God. At best, it can capture our conception of God only when combined with certain theses about modal space" (Speaks 2017: 593). Why do I mention this objection again? Because one might raise a similar objection here. One might object that if moral goodness is an impossible property, then modal space is too cramped for the claim that God is the greatest possible being to capture our concept of God. But this is not true. The reason why Michael Jordan does not count as God, even if he is the greatest possible being, is that our concept of God rules out finite beings like Michael Jordan from qualifying as God. But, as I have already argued, our concept of God does not rule out beings who are not morally good from qualifying as God. So even if moral goodness is an impossible property, the greatest possible being could still qualify as God, because *not being morally good* is conceptually compatible with *being God*.

The consensus view among contemporary moral error theorists is that moral error theory implies that moral properties are impossible. As Jonas Olson writes:

> Most moral error theorists maintain that moral properties are necessarily uninstantiated [because] they are simply too queer to be instantiated in any possible world. A more theoretically motivated reason for this view is that moral facts, e.g., that inflicting pain is pro tanto morally wrong, would be necessary facts. But since there are no such facts in the actual world, there is no possible world in which there are moral facts. Correlatively, there is no possible world in which moral properties are instantiated. (Olson 2014: 12–13 n.17)

Call this the *modal argument* for the claim that *if* moral error theory is true, *then* moral properties are impossible. The modal argument can be formulated as follows:

> (P5) If moral error theory is true, then there are no moral truths in the actual world.
>
> (P6) If there are no moral truths in the actual world, then there are no moral truths in any possible world.
>
> (P7) If there are no moral truths in any possible world, then there are no moral properties in any possible world.
>
> (C2) Therefore, if moral error theory is true, then there are no moral properties in any possible world—that is, moral properties are impossible.

Let's consider the modal argument's premises.

According to (P5), if moral error theory is true, then there are no moral truths in the actual world. This claim is true because if moral error theory is true, then all moral judgements are false in the actual world, and so there are no moral truths in the actual world.[64]

According to (P6), if there are no moral truths in the actual world, then there are no moral truths in any possible world. This claim is true because moral truths are putative necessary truths. In other words, they are such that if they obtain in one possible world, they obtain in all possible worlds, and if they don't obtain in one possible world, they don't obtain in any possible world. It follows from this that if there are no moral truths in the actual world, there are no moral truths in any possible world.

[64] By 'moral truths' here, I mean *atomic* or *simple* moral truths, such as that inflicting pain is morally wrong, that helping others is morally good, and that being kind is morally permissible.

According to (P7), if there are no moral truths in any possible world, then there are no moral properties in any possible world. This premise is true because moral properties entail moral truths. In other words, any world in which there is an instantiated moral property is a world in which there is at least one moral truth—for any instantiated moral property in world *w*, there is at least one moral truth in *w* about that instantiated moral property. Consequently, if there are no moral truths in any possible world, then there are no moral properties in any possible world.

There are two objections that might be raised in response to the modal argument. The first objection states that it's not the case that all moral truths are necessary truths, because some moral truths are contingent truths. This objection seeks to undermine the following premise:

> (P6) If there are no moral truths in the actual world, then there are no moral truths in any possible world.

This objection states that we should reject (P6) because the inference from the claim that there are no moral truths in the actual world to the claim that there are no moral truths in any possible world is licenced only if *all* moral truths are necessary truths—that is, only if all moral truths are such that if they don't obtain in one possible world, they don't obtain in any possible world. Given that some moral truths are contingent truths, (P6) should be rejected.

That some moral truths are contingent truths is undeniable. Consider the moral truth that I'm obligated to look after my pet cat. This moral truth is a contingent truth because I might not have had this obligation. I might not have had a cat. In that case, I would not have had the obligation to look after my pet cat, and so it is only contingently true that I have this obligation.

The best response to this first objection is, I think, to deny that the inference in question is licenced only if all moral truths are necessary truths. For one can point out that if there can be contingent moral truths only if there are necessary moral truths, then the inference from the claim that there are no moral truths in the actual world to the claim there are no moral truths in any possible world is licenced. For if there are no moral truths in the actual world—and so there are no necessary moral truths—and there can be contingent moral truths only if there are necessary moral truths, then it follows that there are no necessary or contingent moral truths in any possible world.

The claim that there can be contingent moral truths only if there are necessary moral truths is plausible. As Erik Wielenberg writes:

> Suppose that I promise to meet you for lunch on a certain occasion. Also suppose that on the occasion in question I have no sufficiently weighty reason not to keep my promise. It follows

> that I am obligated to meet you for lunch. This is an ethical truth, yet it is a contingent truth. … It seems to me that contingent ethical truths like these are always partly grounded in some necessary ethical truth (or truths). In this case, the relevant truth is something like, "It is morally wrong to fail to keep a promise unless you have some sufficiently weighty reason for doing so." (Wielenberg 2005: 52)

If Wielenberg is right and contingent moral truths are always partly grounded in necessary moral truths, then there can be contingent moral truths only if there are necessary moral truths. But why think that contingent moral truths are always partly grounded in necessary moral truths? One plausible reason is this: If contingent moral truths aren't always grounded in necessary moral truths, then it is inexplicable why contingent moral truths obtain. Take Wielenberg's example. Suppose I promise to meet you for lunch, and I have no sufficiently weighty reason not to keep my promise. Suppose then that the contingent moral truth "I'm obligated to meet you for lunch" obtains. What explains why this contingent moral truth obtains? Clearly, the necessary moral truth "It is morally wrong to fail to keep a promise unless you have some sufficiently weighty reason for doing so" would explain why this contingent moral truth obtains. But what if this contingent moral truth isn't grounded in any necessary moral truth? What then would explain why it obtains? It seems that nothing would explain why it obtains. It would simply be a brute contingent moral truth that the combination of my promising to meet you for lunch and my having no sufficiently weighty reason not to keep my promise makes it the case that I'm obligated to meet you for lunch.[65] Since a commitment to brute contingent moral truths counts significantly against a view, we should accept the claim that contingent moral truths are always partly grounded in necessary moral truths, and so accept that there can be contingent moral truths only if there are necessary moral truths. The first objection to the modal argument can thus be resisted.

The second objection to the modal argument states that *theists* should reject (P6) because God is omnipotent, and so even if there are no moral truths in the actual world, it doesn't follow that there are no moral truths in any possible world, because God qua omnipotent being could make moral truths obtain.

[65] One might object that if the moral truth "It is morally wrong to fail to keep a promise unless you have some sufficiently weighty reason for doing so" were a contingent moral truth, then we would have an explanation of why the contingent moral truth "I'm obligated to meet you for lunch" obtains that isn't grounded in any necessary moral truth. But it seems implausible to suppose that moral principles like "It is morally wrong to fail to keep a promise unless you have some sufficiently weighty reason for doing so" are contingent moral truths. Most moral philosophers take moral principles to be necessary moral truths. Rosen (2020) has recently challenged this orthodox view, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the issues he raises. For discussion, see Dreier (2019) and Väyrynen (2017).

There are two related reasons why we should resist this line of thought. First, it implies that no moral truths are necessary truths. For if there are no moral truths in the actual world, but God exists and could make any moral truth obtain, then it follows that no moral truths are necessary truths—that is, no moral truths are such that if they obtain in one possible world, they obtain in all possible worlds, and if they don't obtain in one possible world, they don't obtain in any possible world. This implication seems implausible to most moral philosophers.

Second, it implies that God has objectionable control over morality. For if there are no moral truths in the actual world, but God exists and could make any moral truth obtain, then God has the power to make moral error theory false when it is true. But if this is right, then it presumably follows that God has the power to make moral error theory true when it is false. This would mean that God has the power to make any true moral judgement false. Most philosophers, theist and non-theist alike, think that not even an omnipotent being would have this sort of power (Wielenberg 2005: 41–2). So we should resist the second objection to the modal argument.[66]

The modal argument thus withstands the two objections that might be raised in response to it. We can thus conclude that if moral error theory is true, then moral properties are impossible. Moral error theorists should thus reject the argument from perfect being theology, because if moral error theory is true, then moral properties are impossible, and if moral properties are impossible, then the greatest possible being would not be morally good.

In the next section, I argue that theism and moral error theory are compatible because moral error theorists should reject the divine goodness argument.

5.2.3 Theism and Moral Error Theory are Compatible

To recap the argument so far, moral error theorists should reject the divine goodness argument because the two best arguments for the theism-entails-goodness premise either fail or fail if moral error theory is true. The conceptual argument *fails* because it is not a conceptual truth that God is morally good. And the argument from perfect being theology *fails if moral error theory is true*,

[66] Note that I am not claiming that omnipotence entails the power to make any moral truth obtain. For I am claiming that theists should reject this claim. Note also that while some philosophers, like divine command theorists, think that God could make some moral truths obtain even if they do not obtain in the actual world, these philosophers typically think that God can only do this if there are already moral truths in the actual world. For example, if there are moral truths like "It is morally obligatory to obey God's commands" or "To be morally obligatory just is to be divinely commanded" in the actual world. Since the issue at stake is whether God could make moral truths obtain if there are *no* moral truths in the actual world, it is not clear to me that appealing to divine command theory would help proponents of the second objection support their claim that God could make such truths obtain if there are *no* moral truths in the actual world.

because if moral error theory is true, then the greatest possible being would not be morally good. Moral error theorists should thus reject the theism-entails-goodness premise. They should therefore reject the divine goodness argument.

The upshot of this is that the divine goodness argument fails to show that theism and moral error theory are incompatible—it fails to show that it is incoherent to accept both views. We can see this by considering the following case. Suppose that A accepts both theism and moral error theory, and that B tries to show that A is being incoherent. B presents the divine goodness argument to show that A is being incoherent. But A can reject the divine goodness argument because A can reject the theism-entails-goodness premise. B has thus failed to show that A is being incoherent. The divine goodness argument thus fails to show that theism and moral error theory are incompatible.

If the divine goodness argument is the best argument for thinking that theism and moral error theory are incompatible, then we should think that these views are compatible. For if the best argument for thinking that two views are incompatible fails, then we shouldn't think that those two views are incompatible. We should think instead that they are compatible. In what follows, I argue that the divine goodness argument is the best argument for thinking that these views are incompatible. I argue for this by eliminating alternatives.

As far as I can see, there are only three alternative arguments for thinking that theism and moral error theory are incompatible. The first argument is the argument that theism and moral error theory are incompatible because theism entails that God instantiates some moral property other than goodness.

But this argument is no better than the divine goodness argument, because substituting moral goodness with some other moral property does not result in any kind of improvement. For the two best arguments for the *theism-entails-some-other-moral-property premise* are modified versions of the conceptual argument and the argument from perfect being theology, and these arguments are subject to the same problems as the original conceptual argument and argument from perfect being theology. This argument thus fails to undermine the divine goodness argument's claim to be the best argument.

The second argument is the argument that theism and moral error theory are incompatible because the *motivation* for these views is incompatible: arguments for moral error theory are arguments against theism, and vice versa.

But this argument fails to show that these views are incompatible, because even if the motivation for these views were incompatible, that would not show that theism and moral error theory are

incompatible. It would only show that *one shouldn't accept one view if one accepts arguments for the other*. And this is a far cry from showing that the views *themselves* are incompatible, *that one can't coherently accept both views*. This argument thus fails to undermine the divine goodness argument's claim to be the best argument.[67]

The third and final argument is the argument that theism and moral error theory are incompatible because moral properties are identical with, or constituted by, divine properties. One formulation of divine command theory holds that moral obligations are constituted by divine commands. If this theory is true and God issues some commands, the argument goes, then theism and moral error theory are incompatible: one can't coherently accept both views.

But this argument fails to show that theism and moral error theory are incompatible, because divine command theory has no bearing on whether one can coherently accept theism and moral error theory. Of course, if divine command theory is true and God issues some commands, then moral obligations obtain, and so moral error theory is false. But that doesn't show that one can't coherently accept *theism* and *moral error theory*. It only shows that one can't coherently accept *theism, divine command theory, the claim that God issues some commands,* and *moral error theory*. Clearly, if one couldn't coherently accept theism without also accepting divine command theory and the claim that God issues some commands, then theism and moral error theory would be incompatible. But that is not the case: one can coherently accept theism without accepting divine command theory and the claim that God issues some commands. This argument thus fails to show that *theism* and *moral error theory themselves* are incompatible. It thus fails to undermine the divine goodness argument's claim to be the best argument.[68]

Consequently, we can conclude that the divine goodness argument is the *best* argument for thinking that theism and moral error theory are incompatible. We can thus conclude that we should think that theism and moral error theory are compatible.

---

[67] Note that while I don't think the motivation for moral error theory shows that theism and moral error theory are incompatible, I do think the motivation for moral error theory gives theists reason not to accept moral error theory. I discuss this issue in the next section.

[68] Note that even if divine command theory and the claim that God issues some commands were *necessarily* true—true in all metaphysically possible worlds—that would not undermine my argument. For I haven't argued for the bold claim that there is a *metaphysically possible world* in which both theism and moral error theory are true. I have only argued for the more modest claim that one can *coherently accept* both views. It should be noted, however, that if conceptual divine command theory were true and the concept of *being obligatory* were identical to that of *being commanded by God*, then these views would, I think, be incompatible in the sense of its not being coherent to accept both views. But conceptual divine command theory is not plausible, and no contemporary divine command theorist that I know of currently argues for it. For discussion, see Adams (1973, 1979), Baggett and Walls (2011: 111–19), and Murphy (2002: 77–82).

To summarise, we articulated the best argument for thinking that theism and moral error theory are incompatible—the divine goodness argument. We then argued that the divine goodness argument fails to show that theism and moral error theory are incompatible and that we should, as a result, think that these views are compatible. We can thus reject the claim that theists shouldn't accept moral error theory because these views are incompatible. For these views *are* compatible, or so I have argued. Moral error theory is thus a live, anti-realist option for theists.

In the next section, I argue that even though theism and moral error theory are compatible, there are still good reasons for theists not to accept moral error theory.

5.3 Why Theists Shouldn't Accept Moral Error Theory

As far as I can see, there are two reasons why theists shouldn't accept moral error theory. The first is that moral error theory implies that all moral judgements are false. The second is that moral error theory undermines perfect being theism. Let's consider these reasons in turn.

The first reason why theists shouldn't accept moral error theory is that moral error theory implies that all moral judgements are false. Since most theists want to claim that some moral judgements are true—for example, that the moral judgement that God is good is true—it seems to me that most theists shouldn't accept moral error theory, at least insofar as they want to accept the claim that some moral judgements are true. So even though theism and moral error theory are compatible, there is still, I think, good reason for most theists not to accept moral error theory.

The second reason why theists shouldn't accept moral error theory is that moral error theory undermines perfect being theism. This is clear because perfect being theism holds that *greatness properties* exist, and moral error theory holds that *moral properties* do not exist, but it seems that any motivation for moral error theory would extend to greatness properties. For moral properties and greatness properties are both normative properties, and there don't seem to be any differences between them that would justify *moral error theory* but not *greatness error theory*. In other words, there don't seem to be any considerations that would justify the non-existence of *moral properties*, but not the non-existence of *greatness properties*. For both properties seem to *supervene* on descriptive properties, they both seem to entail *categorical reasons* (*to act* in the moral case, and *to admire* in the greatness case), and they both seem to be knowable *a priori*. Thus, unless some relevant differences between these properties are found, it seems to me that theists shouldn't

accept moral error theory, at least insofar as they don't want to accept a view that undermines their perfect being theism.[69]

If I am right here, then theists shouldn't accept moral error theory because there are good reasons for them not to do so. They should thus search for an alternative anti-realist theory that improves upon moral error theory. In particular, they should search for an anti-realist theory that doesn't imply that all moral judgements are false and that doesn't undermine perfect being theism. This is where expressivism comes in. In the next chapter, I argue that theists should accept expressivism over moral error theory.[70]

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined moral error theory and considered three objections to its formulation. I then considered the claim that theists shouldn't accept moral error theory because theism and moral error theory are incompatible. I rejected this claim and argued that these views are compatible. I then argued that even though theism and moral error theory are compatible, there are still good reasons for theists not to accept moral error theory. I concluded that theists shouldn't accept moral error theory. They should thus search for an alternative anti-realist theory that improves upon moral error theory. In the next chapter, I argue that theists should accept expressivism over moral error theory.

[69] One might argue that one relevant difference between moral properties and greatness properties is that greatness properties, but not moral properties, are *reducible* to descriptive properties. This argument would parallel the recent argument made by some theorists who have attempted to show that there is a relevant difference between moral properties and epistemic properties that justifies moral error theory, but not epistemic error theory. See, for example, Heathwood (2009) and Olson (2018). Whether this argument is plausible will, of course, depend on whether it is plausible to claim that greatness properties are reducible to descriptive properties. I take no stand on this issue in this thesis.

[70] Note that I haven't argued that theists have *decisive reasons* not to accept moral error theory. I have only argued that they have *good reasons* not to do so. I leave it open to the reader to decide whether the reasons I have stated here are decisive or not.

Chapter 6 Expressivism

This chapter argues that theists should accept expressivism. In section 6.1, I outline expressivism. In section 6.2, I consider the claim that theists shouldn't accept expressivism because expressivism is theologically unacceptable. I reject this claim and argue that expressivism is theologically acceptable. In section 6.3, I consider whether the reasons that theists have not to accept moral error theory extend to expressivism. I argue that they don't and conclude that theists should accept expressivism over moral error theory. In section 6.4, I draw the thesis to a close and make some clarifying remarks about its conclusion.

6.1 Expressivism

Expressivism, on my taxonomy, is the combination of *anti-realism* and *non-cognitivism*. According to this view, there are no ontologically committing moral properties, and moral judgements are not belief-like states that represent such properties. They are desire-like states that motivate us to act or respond in certain ways. Expressivism thus consists of the following views:

> **Anti-Realism**: There are no ontologically committing moral properties.
>
> **Non-Cognitivism**: Moral judgements are not belief-like states that represent ontologically committing moral properties. They are desire-like states that motivate us to act or otherwise respond.

Each of these views requires some comment.[71]

Anti-realism, recall, is a metaphysical view about the non-existence of moral properties, where moral properties are ontologically committing or metaphysically heavy moral features of things. This view holds that there are *no* such properties, that ontologically committing moral properties are *not* instantiated in the world. (The *ontologically committing* qualifier is important now, so I will start to explicitly state it when talking about moral properties. Recall that I've only been talking about ontologically committing moral properties up till now. The ontologically committing qualifier has been implicitly assumed since chapter 1.)

[71] I do not take my use of 'expressivism' to be idiosyncratic. Cuneo (2007), Enoch (2011), and Shafer-Landau (2003), for example, all use 'expressivism' to refer to the combination of non-cognitivism and anti-realism.

Non-cognitivism, by contrast, is a psychological view about the nature of moral judgements or moral thoughts.[72] This view denies that moral thoughts are belief-like states that represent ontologically committing moral properties. According to non-cognitivism, moral thoughts are desire-like states that motivate us to act, or respond, in certain ways. Take the thought that lying is wrong. According to non-cognitivism, this thought is not one that represents lying as being a certain way, or as having a certain ontological property, but one that motivates us not to lie, or to blame those who do. Non-cognitivism thus holds that moral thoughts are desire-like, motivational states, rather than belief-like states that represent ontologically committing moral properties. In other words, it holds that moral thoughts are states like approvals, desires, plans, preferences, norm-acceptances, and so on.

Expressivism can be contrasted with *cognitivist moral realism*, which holds that moral thoughts are belief-like states that represent ontologically committing moral properties. Take the thought that lying is wrong. According to cognitivist moral realism, this thought represents lying as having the ontologically committing moral property of being wrong. If lying instantiates this property, then this thought accurately represents the world. Importantly, cognitivist moral realism also holds that moral properties are instantiated in the world. It thus holds that at least some moral thoughts accurately represent the world. In contrast to this, expressivism denies that ontologically committing moral properties are instantiated in the world, and that moral thoughts represent such properties. According to expressivism, to think that lying is wrong is not to represent lying as having some ontologically committing moral property, but rather to be against lying. It is perhaps to disapprove of lying, or to plan not to lie, or to accept some norm that prohibits lying.

For our purposes, it is important to note that while expressivism denies that ontologically committing moral properties are instantiated in the world, it does *not* thereby deny that things are morally good, bad, obligatory, or wrong. This is because expressivism rejects the cognitivist claim that things are morally good, bad, obligatory, or wrong, if and only if they instantiate *ontologically committing* moral properties. Take the thought that lying is wrong. According to cognitivism, this thought represents lying as having the ontologically committing moral property of being wrong. Cognitivism thus holds that lying is wrong if and only if lying instantiates this ontologically committing moral property. Since expressivism rejects cognitivism, expressivism rejects the cognitivist claim that lying is wrong if and only if lying instantiates this ontologically committing moral property. Importantly, expressivism does not say whether lying is wrong, because

[72] Note that I use the terms 'moral judgement' and 'moral thought' interchangeably throughout this chapter to refer to the mental state expressed by the sincere utterance of a simple moral sentence. Thus, on my terminology, the moral thought that lying is wrong is the mental state (whatever it may be) that is expressed by the sincere utterance of the sentence 'lying is wrong'.

expressivism is not a view about what things *are* wrong. It is only a view about what it is to *think* that something is wrong (more on this later). But expressivism does nonetheless reject the cognitivist claim that ontologically committing moral properties are required in order for things to be morally good, bad, obligatory, or wrong.[73]

Expressivism, I should note, is also a view about—or at least a view that has implications for—moral language. It holds that moral sentences *express* desire-like states. For example, that 'lying is wrong' expresses disapproval of lying. Importantly, expressivism is distinct from *speaker subjectivism*, the view that moral sentences *report* desire-like states. According to speaker subjectivism, in saying that lying is wrong, I report disapproval of lying. That is, I claim that I disapprove of lying. But expressivism is not speaker subjectivism. For expressivism denies that moral sentences are in the business of reporting or describing psychological states. According to expressivism, in saying that lying is wrong, I do not report disapproval of lying, I express disapproval of lying. So 'lying is wrong' means something like 'Boo lying!', on expressivism. It does not mean 'I disapprove of lying'.

Now that we have outlined expressivism, we can move on to consider whether theists should accept expressivism. In the following section, I consider the claim that theists shouldn't accept expressivism because expressivism is *theologically unacceptable*. Two things to note before proceeding. First, I take a view to be theologically unacceptable if it has unacceptable theological implications. Thus, in considering whether expressivism is theologically acceptable, I am considering whether expressivism has unacceptable theological implications. Second, because the theological acceptability of expressivism has not yet been discussed in the literature, and it is important for our purposes to see whether expressivism is a live, anti-realist option for theists—that is, to see whether theists can accept expressivism—I consider this issue in detail. In the following section, I outline four reasons for thinking that expressivism is theologically unacceptable.

6.2 Is Expressivism Theologically Unacceptable?

As far as I can see, there are four unacceptable theological implications that expressivism might have. They are that expressivism implies that:

(1) God's goodness depends on our desire-like states.

[73] Note that I'm *not* saying that cognitivists are committed to the claim that ontologically committing moral properties are what *make* things wrong. I'm only saying that cognitivists are committed to the claim that ontologically committing moral properties are required in order for things to *be* wrong. For cognitivists are committed to such claims as 'If there were no ontologically committing moral properties, then nothing would be morally good, bad, obligatory, or wrong'. For further discussion, see Chappell (2019) and Enoch (2021).

(2) God's goodness is not a real property.

(3) It is not true that God is good.

(4) God's moral thoughts have no explanation.

In what follows, I argue that expressivism has no such implications: the following four sections rebut the above claims in turn. Since expressivism has no unacceptable theological implications, I conclude that expressivism is theologically acceptable. If I am right, then expressivism is a live, anti-realist option for theists.

Two preliminary comments before we proceed. First, it is important to note that I'm not going to argue that expressivism is *true*. I'm only going to argue that expressivism is *theologically acceptable*. This distinction is important to grasp because it might be that expressivism is *false*, even if expressivism is *theologically acceptable*. After all, the Frege-Geach problem might show that expressivism is false because it can't account for the meaning of moral sentences in embedded contexts, in which case theists should reject the view, even if it is theologically acceptable. Since I'm not going to argue that expressivism is *true*, however, I'm not going to discuss the Frege-Geach problem or any other non-theological problem facing the view. I will simply assume, for the sake of argument, that expressivism can solve the non-theological problems facing the view. (I will discuss what the *falsity* of expressivism would mean for this thesis later in section 6.4.)

Second, because there is no consensus among expressivists as to what desire-like states moral thoughts are, I will stipulatively call the moral thought that X is good, *approval of X*. In so doing, I do not intend to imply that this is what the thought really is. I am simply using 'approval' as a placeholder for the desire-like state (whatever it may be) that thinking that X is good is, on expressivism. Thus, on my terminology, to think that X is good is to approve of X, and so the sentence 'X is good' expresses approval of X. With these comments out of the way, we can move on to consider the first claim.

6.2.1 Expressivism and Mind-Dependence

According to the first claim, expressivism implies that God's goodness depends on our approvals. If this is true, then expressivism has unacceptable theological implications because no theist will want to say that God is good *because* we approve of Him. For God's goodness does not in any way depend on us—were we not to approve of God, God would still be good. Fortunately, expressivism does not imply that God's goodness depends on our approvals. We can see this by making two points about expressivism.

The first is that expressivism is not a view about what it is for something to *be* good. It is only a view about what it is to *think* that something is good (Blackburn 1998: 50, Gibbard 1990: 8). In other words, expressivism is not the view that X *is* good just in case and because one approves of X. Rather, it is the view that one *thinks* that X is good just in case and because one approves of X—to *think* that X is good just *is*, or *consists in*, approving of X. So expressivism does not imply that were we not to approve of X, X would not *be* good. It only implies that were we not to approve of X, we would not *think* that X is good.

The second point is that the expression relation ensures that expressivism does not imply that goodness depends on our approvals. The expression relation, we can note, is a stipulative relation within expressivism. It is that semantically significant relation between 'snow is white' and the belief that snow is white—'snow is white' is said to *express* the belief that snow is white (Schroeder 2010: 73). Expressivism thus holds that the relation between 'X is good' and approval of X is *exactly the same as* the relation between 'snow is white' and the belief that snow is white, for 'X is good' is said to *express* approval of X. This ensures that expressivism does not imply that goodness is mind-dependent. For by saying that 'X is good' is related to approval of X *in exactly the same way* that 'snow is white' is related to the belief that snow is white, expressivism ensures that goodness no more depends on our approvals than whiteness depends on our beliefs. In other words, since 'snow is white' and the belief that snow is white are related in such a way that whiteness does not depend on our beliefs, and expressivism says that 'X is good' and approval of X are related *in exactly the same way*, the view is guaranteed not to imply that goodness depends on our approvals.[74]

The first claim is thus false. Expressivism does not imply that God's goodness depends on our approvals. It only implies that were we not to approve of God, we would not *think* that God is good. If expressivism has unacceptable theological implications, it must be because it implies something else. This brings us on to the second claim.[75]

[74] For further discussion of this point, see Schroeder (2010: 162–4, 2014).

[75] But what does goodness depend on, according to expressivism? It is important to see that expressivism does not answer this question. Just as it does not say what things are good, it does not say what things goodness depends on. Expressivism does say, however, what things one *thinks* goodness depends on. According to expressivism, what one *thinks* goodness depends on is determined by one's reasons for approving. For example, if one approves of X because X promotes happiness, then one will *think* that X's goodness depends on its promoting happiness. Similarly, if one approves of X because X is commanded by God, then one will *think* that X's goodness depends on its being commanded by God. The issue of what goodness depends on is thus a first-order moral issue, on expressivism—it is the issue of what to approve of and why. Because of this, expressivism can make sense of various moral theories that theists might accept, such as divine command theory. For according to expressivism, if one approves of things because God commands them, then one will *think* that God's commands are what *make* things good. In other words, one will *think* that divine command theory about goodness is true. The issue of whether divine command theory is true is thus a first-order moral issue, on expressivism. Consequently, whether one *thinks* that divine command theory is true will depend on

6.2.2 Expressivism and Properties

According to the second claim, expressivism implies that God's goodness is not a *real* property—a property that God *really* has. If this is true, then expressivism has unacceptable theological implications because all theists will want to say that God *really* is good. Fortunately, expressivism does not imply anything that conflicts with this.

We should start by considering what moral property-talk might amount to on expressivism. A natural view for expressivists to endorse is minimalism about properties, according to which to say that X has the property of being F is just to say that X is F. According to minimalism, there is nothing more to saying that X has the property of being good than to saying that X is good. If this is right, then moral property-talk is nothing more than first-order moral-talk, on expressivism. For to say that X has the property of being good is just to say that X is good, which in turn is just to express approval of God. Consequently, if expressivism is true, then one who says that X has the property of being good incurs no ontological commitment in doing so. For in saying that X has the property of being good, one expresses approval of X in just the same way one does when one says that X is good.

Let's grant for the sake of argument that minimalism is true. Why think that the second claim is true—that expressivism implies that God's goodness is not a *real* property? The thought here is that expressivism implies this because only ontologically committing properties are *real*, and moral properties are not ontologically committing on expressivism, since one incurs no ontological commitment in saying that X has the property of being good. If this is right, then expressivism implies that God's goodness is not a *real* property.[76]

Expressivists should respond to this by denying that only ontologically committing properties are *real*. They should argue that moral properties are *real* despite not being ontologically committing. They should argue as follows. To say that a property is *real* is just to say that it is one that an object *really* has. But expressivists can affirm that objects *really* have the property of being good. For to say that X *really* has the property of being good is just to say that X *really* is good, and expressivists can

one's own first-order moral views. For further discussion, see Berker (2020) and Sinclair (2008, 2020: 62–4, 67–8, 2021: 191–202). But what about claims of moral mind-independence, such as 'God would be good whether or not we approve of Him'? Expressivism can make sense of such claims by treating them as expressions of attitude. According to expressivism, if one approves of God *even when one considers worlds in which no one approves of Him*, then one will *think* that God is good whether or not we approve of Him. According to expressivism, it is this categorical approval of God that is expressed when we say 'God would be good whether or not we approve of Him' (cf. Golub 2017: 1388). For further discussion, see Blackburn (1984: 217–19, 1993: 152–3, 172–4, 1998: 74, 296, 311–12) and Gibbard (1990: 164–6).

[76] Recall that I take ontologically committing properties to be metaphysically heavy properties. For discussion of metaphysical weight in metaethics, see Böddeling (2020).

affirm this first-order moral claim. Expressivists can thus affirm that God's goodness is a *real* property, because on expressivism, there is nothing more to saying that God's goodness is a *real* property than to saying that God *really* is good, and expressivists can affirm this first-order moral claim.

One might wonder whether the claim that God *really* is good is a first-order moral claim on expressivism. But clearly it is. For the claim is most naturally read as an emphatic first-order moral claim to the effect that God is good on expressivism—the word 'really' just adds an emphatic element to the first-order moral claim (cf. Blackburn 1993: 157). One who emphatically approves of God thus affirms all that is properly meant by the claim that God *really* is good. Consequently, expressivists can affirm that God's goodness is a *real* property, even though it is not an ontologically committing one.[77]

Thus, if minimalism about properties is true, expressivists can affirm that God's goodness is a *real* property. But what if minimalism is false? In that case, expressivists should deny that there are moral properties, and so deny that God's goodness is a property. Expressivists should insist, however, that this is unproblematic. For they can point out that even if God's goodness is not a property, they can still affirm that God *really* is good. For they can do this by emphatically approving of God. Moreover, they can point out that since *God's goodness* is what is central to theism, and it can still be affirmed on expressivism, their view should not be considered theologically problematic, even if it happens to rule out moral property-talk. So expressivism is theologically acceptable, even if minimalism is false.

Expressivism is thus theologically acceptable either way. If expressivism has unacceptable theological implications, it must be because it implies something else. This brings us on to the third claim.[78]

[77] Some philosophers might use the term 'real' to mean 'ontologically committing'. Expressivists should deny that God's goodness is a *real* property in this stipulative sense of the term.

[78] It is worth noting that the doctrine of divine simplicity might be incompatible with expressivism. For, according to that doctrine, God is identical with His nature or properties, including His goodness. This doctrine thus implies that God's goodness exists in the same ontologically committing or metaphysically heavy way that God exists, for God just *is* God's goodness. This implication seems to be at odds with expressivism, because expressivists take God's goodness to exist in only a non-ontologically committing or metaphysically light way. To be clear, this does *not* mean that expressivists can't take *goodness to be part of God's nature*. For they can claim that it is a conceptual truth that God is good, and so can claim that part of what it is to be God is to be good. According to expressivism, if it is a conceptual truth that God is good, then competent users of 'God' will only count a being as God if they think that being is good, that is, if they approve of that being.

6.2.3 Expressivism and Truth

According to the third claim, expressivism implies that 'God is good' is not true. If this is right, then expressivism has unacceptable theological implications because all theists will want to say that it is *true* that God is good. Fortunately, expressivists can affirm that 'God is good' is true, for they can do this by going deflationist about truth.

Deflationary theories of truth come in different forms, but the main idea is that to say that 'P' is true is not to ascribe some substantive or robust property of truth to 'P' (like correspondence). Rather, it's really just to say the underlying sentence. So, saying that 'P' is true really just amounts to saying that P on such views. If deflationism is right, then expressivists can affirm that moral sentences, like 'God is good', are true. For moral truth-talk turns out to be nothing more than first-order moral talk on expressivism: to say that 'God is good' is true is just to say that God is good, which in turn is just to express approval of God. The third claim is thus false. Expressivism does not imply that 'God is good' is not true. For expressivists can affirm that 'God is good' is true by going deflationist about truth.[79]

At this point, one might worry that the theological plausibility of expressivism is hostage to the plausibility of deflationism. For if deflationism is false, then expressivists can't affirm that 'God is good' is true. There are two points to make in response to this worry.

The first is that deflationism is prima facie plausible. It is one of the main contemporary theories of truth around and it is widely respected. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to properly motivate and defend deflationism by discussing the merits and demerits of rival theories, but suffice it to say that the theory promises to explain a lot with very little. It promises to deflate the philosophical problem of truth, to explain the transparency of truth—the fact that we can move freely between 'P' and 'It is true that P'—to explain the usefulness of the term 'true', and to do all this without resorting to any kind of inflated metaphysics. So deflationism, while not a platitude, has a lot going for it.

The second is that even if deflationism is false and expressivists can't affirm that 'God is good' is true, expressivism *might* still be theologically acceptable. This is because expressivists can still affirm that God is good, even if deflationism is false. For they can do this by expressing their approval of

[79] What about more interesting uses of 'true', such as 'Everything God thinks is true'? Expressivists can understand these uses of 'true' in terms of the commitments they express (Ridge 2014: 200–3). According to this proposal, in saying that everything God thinks is true, I commit myself to accepting everything God thinks. So, if God thinks that X is good, I commit myself to accepting that X is good, that is, to approving of X. For further discussion, see Blackburn (1998: 75–9, 318–9), Ridge (2014: 193–224), and Schroeder (2010: 151–62).

God. That they can't say that 'God is good' is *true* is less problematic than it sounds, I submit, because it says more about the term 'true' than it does about God's goodness. It says that 'true' does not apply to 'God is good' perhaps because the sentence does not represent or robustly correspond with reality. But it does not say that God is *not* good, or that God is *not really* good. Because of this, I think that expressivism *might* still be theologically acceptable, even if deflationism is false. For expressivists can still affirm that God is good, and that God *really* is good, even if deflationism is false.

The third claim is thus false. So, if expressivism has unacceptable theological implications, it must be because it implies something else. This brings us on to the fourth and final claim.

6.2.4 Expressivism and Explanation

According to the fourth and final claim, expressivism implies that there is no explanation why God has the moral thoughts that God does—why God has *this* set of moral thoughts, rather than some *other* set. If this is true, then one might think that expressivism has unacceptable theological implications because it implies that God's moral thoughts are mysteriously brute. Fortunately, expressivism does not imply this.

We should start by asking why we should take God to have moral thoughts, on expressivism. The answer, I take it, is that moral thoughts are practical or motivational thoughts, on expressivism. They are thoughts about what to do, what to allow, how to react, what to praise, what to blame, and so on (Blackburn 1998: 1, 312). If God lacked these thoughts, then God would be undecided about moral matters. That is to say, He would be undecided about whether X is to be done, whether Y is to be allowed, whether Z is to be praised or blamed, and so on. Since undecidedness is incompatible with being divine, we can conclude that God would have moral thoughts, even on expressivism.

But why does God have the moral thoughts that God does have, if expressivism is true? We can answer this question by considering Robert Adams' remarks on the divine nature. Adams writes:

> What I would suppose follows in the first instance from the divine nature is a certain general character of God's disposition and life, from which, to be sure, God's actions spring. Certain features of God's desires and aversions, likes and dislikes are determined in this way. We may suppose it is part of the divine nature, for instance, that God is generally disposed to rejoice in the joys, and dislike the suffering of any actual being, and would not want or will eternal misery for the innocent. (Adams 1999: 47)

According to Adams, it is part of the divine nature that God has desire-like states. For example, that God dislikes the suffering of actual beings. If this is true—which it may well be—then expressivists can claim that it is part of the divine nature that God has moral thoughts. For example, that God thinks the suffering of actual beings is morally bad. For moral thoughts just *are* desire-like states, on expressivism. Consequently, expressivists can claim that just as it is part of the divine nature that God has desire-like states, it is part of the divine nature that God has moral thoughts. They can thus claim that the divine nature explains God's moral thoughts. That is, they can claim that God has the moral thoughts that God does because it is part of the divine nature that God has them.

One might object that even if the divine nature explains God's moral thoughts, expressivists are still left with a mysterious brute fact—that it is part of the divine nature that God has *these* moral thoughts. But if this is a problem, it is a general problem for theists, insofar as many theists wish to leave facts about the divine nature unexplained. For example, the fact that God is omnipotent, the fact that God is omniscient, and the fact that God is necessary. Moreover, it is not at all clear that theists should find unexplained facts about the divine nature theologically problematic. For if every fact about the divine nature were explained, that would seem to imply that there is something prior to God that explains His nature, which is theologically problematic. Expressivists should thus claim, I think, that God's moral thoughts are a brute part of the divine nature. Yes, this brute fact might be mysterious, but it is no more mysterious than other brute facts theists already accept.

The fourth claim is thus false. Expressivism does not imply that God's moral thoughts have no explanation, for expressivists can appeal to God's nature to explain God's moral thoughts. Expressivism thus has no unacceptable theological implications, or so I have argued.

To summarise, we considered whether expressivism has unacceptable theological implications. In particular, we considered whether expressivism implies (1) that God's goodness depends on our desire-like states, (2) that God's goodness is not a real property, (3), that it is not true that God is good, and (4) that God's moral thoughts have no explanation. We argued that expressivism has no such implications and so conclude that expressivism is theologically acceptable. The claim that theists shouldn't accept expressivism because expressivism is theologically unacceptable can thus be rejected. For the view *is* theologically acceptable. Expressivism is thus a live, anti-realist option for theists.

In the next section, I consider whether the reasons that theists have not to accept moral error theory extend to expressivism.

6.3 Do The Reasons That Theists Have Not To Accept Moral Error Theory Extend To Expressivism?

In chapter 5, I argued that there were two reasons why theists shouldn't accept moral error theory. The first reason was that moral error theory implies that all moral judgements are false. The second reason was that moral error theory undermines perfect being theism. In this section, I argue that theists should accept expressivism over moral error theory because the reasons that theists have not to accept moral error theory do not extend to expressivism. Let's consider these reasons in turn.

6.3.1 The First Reason: Implying That All Moral Judgements Are False

The first reason was that moral error theory implies that all moral judgements are false. This reason doesn't extend to expressivism because expressivism has no first-order moral implications about the truth or falsity of moral judgements. Expressivism is a purely metaethical view about the nature of moral judgements. It is *not* a first-order view about which moral judgements are true or false. Expressivism only implies that if someone has moral judgements, then they will *think* that some moral judgements are true (at least given deflationism about truth). For example, expressivism implies that if someone *thinks* that X is good—that is, if they approve of X—then they will *think* that the judgement that X is good is true. Expressivism is thus neutral about the truth or falsity of moral judgements. The first reason thus doesn't extend to expressivism.[80]

6.3.2 The Second Reason: Undermining Perfect Being Theism

The second reason was that moral error theory undermines perfect being theism. But why think that this reason extends to expressivism? In other words, why think that expressivism undermines perfect being theism? The main answer, I take it, is that expressivism seems to be committed to *non-cognitivism about greatness judgements* and non-cognitivism about greatness judgements seems to undermine perfect being theism. Let's consider this issue in detail.

Expressivists can either be *cognitivists* or *non-cognitivists* about greatness judgements. In other words, they can either think that greatness judgements are *belief-like states* that represent

[80] One might object that expressivism implies that no moral judgements are true because expressivism doesn't imply that any moral judgements are true. But this objection is confused. *Not implying that* any moral judgements are true is not the same as *implying that no* moral judgements are true. One might also object that expressivism implies that moral judgements are only *true-for-those-who-think-them*. But this objection is also confused. Expressivism only implies that if someone *thinks* that X is good—that is, if they approve of X—then they will *think* that the judgement that X is good is *true*. It doesn't imply that the judgement that X is good is only *true-for-those-who-think-that-X-is-good*.

ontologically committing greatness properties, or they can think that greatness judgements are *desire-like states* that do not represent such properties. If, on the one hand, expressivists are *cognitivists* about greatness judgements, then they must explain why greatness judgements are belief-like states when moral judgements are desire-like states. In particular, they must cite some relevant differences between morality and greatness that explains this psychological difference. If, on the other hand, expressivists are *non-cognitivists* about greatness judgements, then they needn't explain this psychological difference. But they will instead need to defend the idea that greatness judgements are desire-like states.[81]

Throughout this chapter, I take no stand on the issue of whether expressivists should accept cognitivism or non-cognitivism about greatness judgements. What I do take a stand on, however, is whether *non-cognitivism about greatness judgements* undermines perfect being theism. For non-cognitivism seems to be the more natural view for expressivists to endorse, at least by my lights. For the remainder of this section, then, I will consider whether non-cognitivism about greatness judgements undermines perfect being theism. I will argue that it *doesn't* undermine it.

As far as I can see, there are six reasons why one might think that non-cognitivism about greatness judgements undermines perfect being theism. The first four are ones we have already considered. They are that non-cognitivism implies that:

(1) God's greatness depends on our desire-like states.

(2) God's greatness is not a real property.

(3) It is not true that God is great.

(4) God's thoughts about greatness have no explanation.

I would give the same responses to (1)–(4) that I have already given above, so I won't say any more about them here. But there are two further claims that I have not considered that are worth considering. They are that non-cognitivism implies that:

(5) Nothing makes God great.

(6) Facts about greatness play no role in explaining facts about God.

Let's consider these claims in turn.

[81] Note that it is not unheard of for expressivists to be cognitivists about domains that seem normative. For example, Michael Ridge (2014) is an expressivist about morality but a cognitivist about rationality.

6.3.2.1 Non-Cognitivism and Great-Making Properties

According to the fifth claim, non-cognitivism implies that nothing makes God great. The thought here is that non-cognitivism implies this because *making* is a metaphysical relation, and non-cognitivism eschews any kind of metaphysics when it comes to greatness. If this is true and non-cognitivism implies that nothing makes God great, then non-cognitivism undermines perfect being theism because perfect being theism is committed to the idea that certain properties make God great. For example, it is committed to the idea that God's power makes God great. Fortunately, non-cognitivism *doesn't* imply that nothing makes God great. We can see this by making two points about non-cognitivism.

The first is that non-cognitivism is not a view about what it is for something to *be* great. It is only a view about what it is to *think* that something is great. (Let's stipulatively call the desire-like state that X is great, *admiration of X*. So, to *think* that X is great is to *admire X*, on non-cognitivism.) The second point to note is that even though non-cognitivism doesn't say which properties make things great, it does say which properties one will *think* make things great. According to non-cognitivism, which properties one will *think* make things great depends on one's reasons for admiring. For example, if one admires X because X is powerful, then one will *think* that X's power is what makes X great. Similarly, if one admires X because X is knowledgeable, then one will *think* that X's knowledge is what makes X great. According to non-cognitivism, the issue of what properties make things great is a first-order greatness issue: it is the issue of what to admire and why. The upshot of this is that non-cognitivists can vindicate the idea that certain properties make God great. For to say that God's power and knowledge make God great is just to express a first-order standard of greatness, on non-cognitivism. In other words, it is just *to highlight the features in virtue of which one admires God, and the features in virtue of which one thinks others should admire God, too*.[82] There is thus no reason to think that non-cognitivism implies that nothing makes God great. For making-talk isn't metaphysical-talk that non-cognitivism must eschew. It is instead ordinary first-order-talk that non-cognitivism can vindicate. (Of course, non-cognitivism doesn't say *which* properties make God great. For non-cognitivism is not a first-order view about greatness. To address that issue, one must engage in first-order greatness theorising.)

One might wonder, however, whether non-cognitivism can vindicate the idea that it is an *objective* or *mind-independent* truth that certain properties make God great. Fortunately, it can. For objectivity or mind-independence-talk also receives a first-order treatment on non-cognitivism.

[82] For discussion and defence of this non-cognitivist account of making-talk, see Sinclair (2020: 62–4, 67–8, 2021: 191–202).

According to non-cognitivism, if one admires God *even when one considers worlds in which no one admires Him*, then one will *think* that God is great whether or not we admire Him. That is to say, one will *think* that it is an objective truth that God is great. Similarly, if one admires God because He is powerful *even when one considers worlds in which no one admires Him because He is powerful*, then one will *think* that God's power makes God great whether or not we admire Him for His power. In other words, one will *think* that it is an objective truth that God's power makes God great. According to non-cognitivism, it is this categorical admiration of God that is expressed when we say 'It is an objective truth that God's power makes God great' or 'God's power makes God great whether or not we admire Him for His power'. Non-cognitivism can thus vindicate the idea that it is an objective or mind-independent truth that certain properties make God great. There is thus no reason to think that non-cognitivism has unacceptable implications regarding God's great-making properties. The fifth claim can thus be rejected.[83]

6.3.2.2 Non-Cognitivism and Perfect Being Theology

According to the sixth claim, non-cognitivism implies that facts about greatness play no role in explaining facts about God. That is to say, they play no role in explaining why God is the way He is, or why God has the properties He does. The thought here is that non-cognitivism implies this because only ontologically committing facts can explain facts about God, and non-cognitivism denies that facts about greatness are ontologically committing. If this is right, then one might think that non-cognitivism undermines perfect being theology, because perfect being theology is committed to the idea that facts about greatness explain facts about God. For example, it is committed to the idea that the fact that power is a great-making property explains why God is powerful. But this is mistaken. Perfect being theology is not committed to this idea. We can see this by noting the following about perfect being theology.

Recall that perfect being theology is the method that uses the claim that God is the greatest possible being to work out what properties God would have. According to this method, we can work out what properties God would have by identifying God as the greatest possible being and working out what properties the greatest possible being would have. It is important to see that it is no part of perfect being theology to explain *why* God has the properties He does. For perfect being theology only purports to tell us *what* properties God would have, given the claim that God is the greatest possible being and given various value judgements about greatness. It does *not* purport to tell us *why* God has, or would have, certain properties. Perfect being theology is silent on this topic. To be

[83] I make similar points about expressivism and morality in footnote 75. For further discussion, see the references in that footnote.

clear, most perfect being theologians will want to say that it is a brute fact that God has the properties He does because if there were something prior to God that explained His properties, that would seem to undermine His sovereignty and independence. There is thus no need for non-cognitivists to worry about perfect being theology being committed to the idea that facts about greatness explain facts about God. For perfect being theology is not committed to this idea. Non-cognitivists can thus claim (with most other perfect being theologians) that it is simply a brute fact that God has the properties He does. The sixth claim can thus be rejected.

But how does perfect being theology work, on non-cognitivism? The answer is: *the same as usual*. For perfect being theology is the method that attempts to tell us what properties God would have given various claims, *and non-cognitivism does not upset this ordinary way of thinking about perfect being theology*. Think of things this way. Perfect being theology is the method that attempts to tell us what properties God would have, given the claim that God is the greatest possible being and given various value judgements about greatness. Perfect being theology thus tells us what our commitments are regarding God's properties. For example, it tells us that if we think that power is a great-making property—that is, if we admire power—then we are committed to thinking that, *prima facie*, God is powerful. Similarly, it tells us that if we think that power is among the greatest possible array of great-making properties—that is, if power is among the set of possible properties that we find most admirable—then we are committed to thinking that, *ultima facie*, God is powerful. There is thus no reason to think that non-cognitivism upsets the ordinary way of thinking about perfect being theology. For non-cognitivism respects the idea that perfect being theology tells us what our commitments are regarding God's properties.

But how should non-cognitivists understand the claim that God is the greatest possible being? Non-cognitivists can understand this claim in terms of the commitments one incurs in accepting it. According to non-cognitivism, in accepting the claim that God is the greatest possible being, one commits oneself to counting a being as God only if one admires that being more than one admires any other possible being. That is, only if one finds that being the most admirable possible being. Note that this doesn't mean that whether a being counts as God is a *subjective* or *mind-dependent* notion, on non-cognitivism. For non-cognitivism doesn't say that whether a being counts as God depends on whether one admires that being more than any other possible being. Rather, it says that those who accept the claim that God is the greatest possible being are committed to counting a being as God only if they admire that being more than they admire any other possible being. That is, only if they find that being the most admirable possible being. Non-cognitivism can thus, I believe, make sense of the claim that God is greatest possible being. There is thus no reason to believe that

non-cognitivism undermines perfect being theology. The second reason thus doesn't extend to expressivism, for expressivism doesn't undermine perfect being theism/theology.

Consequently, we can conclude that the reasons that theists have not to accept moral error theory don't extend to expressivism. For expressivism doesn't imply that all moral judgements are false, and it doesn't undermine perfect being theism. Theists should thus accept expressivism over moral error theory, or so I have argued.

6.4 Conclusion and Clarifications

This completes the second part of this thesis, and the thesis as a whole. We are now in a position to conclude that *theists should accept expressivism*. To summarise, in chapter 2, we argued that theists are committed to the claim that:

> (1) If there are ontologically committing moral properties, then these properties are immediately explained by God.

We then argued in chapters 3 and 4 that the following claim is true:

> (2) Ontologically committing deontic and axiological moral properties are *not* immediately explained by God.

These claims jointly entail that theists are committed to the claim that there are no ontologically committing deontic or axiological moral properties. In other words, they jointly entail that theists are committed to *anti-realism* with respect to deontic and axiological moral properties. The second part of this thesis then considered the kind of anti-realism that theists should accept. They can either accept *cognitivist anti-realism* (moral error theory) or *non-cognitivist anti-realism* (expressivism). In chapter 5, I argued that theists shouldn't accept moral error theory (or at least that there are good reasons for them not to do so). And in chapter 6, I argued that theists should accept expressivism (at least over moral error theory). The conclusion of the second part of this thesis, and the thesis as a whole, is thus that theists should accept expressivism. Theists should thus be expressivists.

There are three clarificatory comments I want to make. The first has to do with expressivism and moral properties. One might think that if expressivists accept that there are moral properties, then the doctrine of divine sovereignty will extend to these properties, and so theistic expressivists will also be committed to saying that if there are moral properties, then these properties are immediately explained by God. I deny that this is true. For expressivists only accept that there are moral properties in a minimalist or non-ontologically committing sense, and it is doubtful that the

doctrine of divine sovereignty will extend to these properties. For expressivist moral properties do not exist in any robust sense—to say that X has the property of being good is just to express approval of X—and so it's hard to see why the doctrine of divine sovereignty would extend to these properties, especially since the doctrine only has to do with robust or ontological notions of existence and dependence. Thus, while the doctrine of divine sovereignty plausibly extends to realist or ontologically committing moral properties, it does not, I think, extend to expressivist or minimalist moral properties. Theistic expressivists are thus not committed to saying that if there are moral properties, then these properties are immediately explained by God.[84]

The second clarificatory comment I want to make has to do with what this thesis shows. In particular, whether it shows that *theists* shouldn't accept moral realism. I deny that it shows this. For this thesis shows only that *perfect being theists* shouldn't accept realism. It doesn't show that *other sorts of theists* shouldn't accept realism. For this thesis leaves open the possibility that other sorts of theists should accept realism, since this thesis has had nothing to say about other conceptions of God. That said, while I don't think this thesis shows that *theists simpliciter* shouldn't accept realism, I do think it shows that most *contemporary analytic theists* shouldn't accept realism, since most contemporary theists are perfect being theists (at least by my count). This thesis' conclusion is thus relevant for most contemporary analytic theists.

The third and final clarificatory remark I want to make has to do with what the falsity of expressivism would mean for this thesis. I take it that *if expressivism is false*, *then this thesis is a reductio of perfect being theism*. For this thesis shows that perfect being theists should accept expressivism, but expressivism is false. One might object that this thesis is *not* a reductio of perfect being theism, because perfect being theists should accept moral error theory instead, if expressivism is false. But whether this is right will depend on whether moral error theory is true. For if moral error theory is also false, then this thesis is, indeed, a reductio of perfect being theism. For this thesis shows that perfect being theists are committed to anti-realism, but both anti-realist options are false. Whether this thesis is a reductio of perfect being theism, then, will depend on whether anti-realism, moral error theory, and or expressivism are true. Note, however, that this thesis takes no stand on the truth or falsity of these views. For this thesis is only interested in the *metaethical implications of*

[84] Note that theistic expressivists could accept first-order versions of theological stateism and theological resemblanceism. For example, they could approve of things only because they resemble God, and so accept a first-order version of theological resemblanceism. But I don't think that expressivists *should* accept such views, for the reasons I gave in chapters 3 and 4. I thus take those chapters to show not only that *ontologically committing* deontic and axiological moral properties are not immediately explained by God, but also that *non-ontologically committing* deontic and axiological moral properties are not immediately explained by God.

perfect being theism. It is not interested the *truth or falsity of these metaethical views*. This thesis thus leaves it open to the reader to decide whether this thesis is a reductio of perfect being theism.[85]

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined expressivism. I then considered the claim that theists shouldn't accept expressivism because expressivism is theologically unacceptable. I rejected this claim and argued that expressivism is theologically acceptable. I then considered whether the reasons that theists have not to accept moral error theory extend to expressivism. I argued that they don't and concluded that theists should accept expressivism over moral error theory. I then drew the thesis to a close and made some clarifying remarks about its conclusion. In the appendix, I consider two objections to the thesis concerning minimalism and quietism.

[85] For what it's worth, I think that expressivism is probably true. So I don't think this thesis is a reductio of perfect being theism. For discussion and defence of expressivism, see Blackburn (1984, 1993, 1998, 2010), Gibbard (1990, 2003), Horgan and Timmons (2006), Ridge (2014), Schroeder (2008), and Sinclair (2021).

Appendix A Minimalism and Quietism

This appendix considers two objections to the thesis. The first has to do with minimalism. The second has to do with quietism. I'll consider these objections in turn.

A.1 Minimalism

The first objection is the *minimalist objection*. According to this objection, it is impossible to make *distinctively* metaethical claims—metaethical claims that are distinct from first-order moral claims—because metaethical claims are really just first-order claims in disguise. If this is right, then this thesis is in trouble because it is supposed to be an investigation into the *metaethics* of theism, not the *ethics* of theism. In other words, it is supposed to consider the metaethical implications of theism, not the first-order implications of theism. Consequently, if this objection is right and there are no metaethical claims that are distinct from first-order claims, then this thesis' aim is impossible. We can't consider the metaethical implications of theism because there are no metaethical claims to consider at all.

Consider claims using the term 'moral property'. This objection states that we can't make distinctively metaethical claims using the term 'moral property' because the *ordinary meaning* of 'property' does not provide us with the resources to make such claims. It only provides us with the resources to make first-order claims. This is because *minimalism* about the ordinary meaning of 'property' is true. According to minimalism, to say that X has the property of being F is just to say that X is F; so, the ordinary meaning of 'X has the property of being F' is really just equivalent to the meaning of 'X is F'. If this is right, then we can't make distinctively metaethical claims using the term 'moral property', because the ordinary meaning of claims like 'X has the moral property of being wrong' are really just equivalent to the meaning of ordinary first-order claims like 'X is wrong'. Consequently, metaethical claims about moral properties are really just first-order claims in disguise and so this thesis' aim of considering the metaethics of theism is, in fact, impossible.

How should we respond to the minimalist objection? Clearly, it assumes that minimalism is true. So, if minimalism is *false*, then the objection fails. But even if minimalism is *true*, the objection fails, because it fails to show that we can't use the term 'moral property' to make distinctively metaethical claims. It only shows that we can't use the term 'moral property' *in its ordinary sense* to make distinctively metaethical claims. It doesn't show that we can't use the term 'moral property' *in a more philosophical*, *stipulative sense that goes beyond its ordinary meaning* to make distinctively

metaethical claims. For even if minimalism is true, we can still distinguish between 'moral property' in the ordinary, first-order sense, and 'MORAL PROPERTY' in the more philosophical, metaethical—that is, metaphysically heavy—sense. By doing this, we can use 'MORAL PROPERTY' to make distinctively metaethical claims. We can even distinguish between first-order moral claims like 'There are moral properties' and metaethical claims like 'There are MORAL PROPERTIES'.

One might worry, however, that this is problematic. As Kremm and Schafer write:

> If the opponent of [the minimalist objection] gives up on the idea that metaethical [claims] are concerned with moral [properties] in the ordinary sense, and insists that such [claims] are instead invoking a "more philosophical" sense of ['property'], then she needs to explain why those [claims] are interesting or significant in the ways that metaethical [claims] are generally assumed to be. (Kremm and Schafer 2017: 647)

The challenge here is thus to explain why metaethical claims using the term 'moral property' are interesting if these claims use the term in a more philosophical, stipulative—that is, metaphysically heavy—sense that outstrips its ordinary meaning. The answer, I take it, is that such claims are interesting because claims about the metaphysics of morality are interesting. We want to know whether there are MORAL PROPERTIES. We want to know whether morality has metaphysically heavy implications. This explains, I take it, why metaethical claims using the term 'moral property' are interesting, even if such claims use the term in a more philosophical, stipulative sense that goes beyond its ordinary meaning.[86]

To summarise, the minimalist objection fails. For if minimalism is *false*, the objection fails. And if minimalism is *true*, the objection fails. For we can still make distinctively metaethical claims using the term 'moral property', even if minimalism is true. We simply have to use the term in a way that outstrips its ordinary meaning. The minimalist objection can thus, I think, be dismissed.[87]

A.2 Quietism

The second objection is the *quietist objection*. According to this objection, quietism is an anti-realist view on my taxonomy, because it denies that ontologically committing or metaphysically heavy

[86] One might object that this assumes that we can make sense of the metaphysically heavy notion of moral properties if the ordinary notion is the minimal one. But I find this assumption plausible. Moreover, it's worth noting that quietists like Parfit (2011) and Scanlon (2014) think we can make sense of the metaphysically heavy notion of moral properties, even though they think it is not the ordinary one.

[87] For further discussion of the minimalist objection, see Enoch (2011: 129–33) and Kremm and Schafer (2017: 646–7).

moral properties exist. It holds instead that only non-ontologically committing or metaphysically light moral properties exist. It thus accepts the following:

> **Metaphysically Light Realism**: There are non-ontologically committing moral properties.

In addition to this, quietism also accepts that moral judgements are beliefs that represent non-ontologically committing moral properties. It thus accepts the following as well:

> **Metaphysically Light Cognitivism**: Moral judgements are beliefs that represent non-ontologically committing moral properties.

Since quietism is an anti-realist view, the second objection states that theists should consider quietism alongside moral error theory and expressivism, because it is another anti-realist view that theists could accept. More to the point, this objection states that it is incumbent upon me to explain why I have not said more about quietism in this thesis.

There are two points I want to make in response here. The first is that it's not at all clear to me that quietism is a *distinctive* anti-realist view. This is because it's not clear to me that quietism is distinct from expressivist views that accept minimalism about properties, beliefs, and representation. To clarify, the relevant minimalisms say the following:

> **Minimalism about Properties**: To say that X has the property of being F is just to say that X is F.
>
> **Minimalism about Beliefs**: To say that S believes that P is just to say that S is in the mental state expressed by 'P'.
>
> **Minimalism about Representation**: To say that belief B represents X as having the property of being F is just to say that B represents X as being F, which in turn is just to say that B is the belief that X is F.

Given minimalism about properties, beliefs, and representation, it seems to me that expressivists can accept that there are non-ontologically committing moral properties *and* that moral judgements are beliefs that represent such properties. For expressivists who think that X is good—that is, who approve of X—can say that X has the non-ontologically committing moral property of being good. And expressivists who are in the mental state expressed by 'X is good'—that is, who approve of X—can say that they believe that X is good, and that this belief represents X as having the non-ontologically committing moral property of being good. It's thus not at all clear to me that quietism

is really a *distinctive* anti-realist view. For expressivists who accept the above minimalisms can accept everything that quietists accept.

One might reply that quietists can distinguish themselves from expressivists by *denying* things that expressivists say. For example, they can deny that moral judgements are desire-like states, or they can deny that they accept minimalism. The problem with this, however, is that unless quietists actually tell us what they do accept, it's hard to see what their view amounts to and why they can even accept it. To clarify, it's easy to see why expressivists can accept that there are non-ontologically committing moral properties, given minimalism about properties. For to say that X has the property of being good is just to say that X is good, on minimalism, which in turn is just to express approval of X, on expressivism. Since one incurs no ontological commitment in expressing approval of X, it's easy to see why expressivists can accept that there are non-ontologically committing moral properties. By contrast, it's *not* easy to see why quietists can accept that there are non-ontologically committing moral properties, since they can't appeal to desire-like states or minimalism to explain this (at least if they want to keep themselves distinct from expressivism). So, unless quietists actually tell us more about their view, it's not only hard to see what their view amounts to, but it's hard to see why they can even accept their view. Unfortunately, quietists are often "quiet" about the details of their view, merely denying that morality has metaphysical or ontological implications. This is unfortunate because it makes it hard to assess whether quietism is really a distinctive anti-realist view.[88]

The second point I want to make is that even if I am wrong and quietism is a distinctive metaethical view, this fact has no impact on the argument of this thesis. For this thesis argues (i) *that theists are committed to anti-realism* and (ii) *that theists should accept expressivism over moral error theory*. These claims, I take it, are still true, even if quietism is a distinctive anti-realist view. Of course, if quietism is a distinctive anti-realist view, then theists should consider the merits of quietism alongside those of moral error theory and expressivism. But I'm not convinced that quietism is a distinctive anti-realist view. (At the very least, I don't know how to plausibly distinguish it from minimalist expressivism.) Because of this, I've decided not to discuss quietism further in this thesis.

[88] For an excellent paper which argues that quietists can't distinguish themselves from minimalist expressivists without abandoning their metaphysically light ontology, see Böddeling (2020).

Bibliography

Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1973. "A Modified Divine Command Theory Of Ethical Wrongness." In *Religion and Morality*, edited by Gene Outka and John Reeder, 318–347. New York: Anchor.

———. 1979. "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (1):66–79.

———. 1999. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2002. "Responses." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64 (2):475–490.

Alston, William. 1990. "Some Suggestions For Divine Command Theorists." In *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, edited by M. Beaty, 303–326. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Antony, Louise. 2009. "Atheism as Perfect Piety." In *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?*, edited by Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King, 67–84. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Audi, Robert. 1973. "Intending." *Journal of Philosophy* 70 (13):387–403.

Baggett, David. 2020. "Psychopathy and Supererogation." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 131–148. New York: Routledge.

Baggett, David, and Jerry L. Walls. 2011. *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2016. *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baier, Annette. 1997. "Doing Things With Others: The Mental Commons." In *Commonality and Particularity in Ethics*, edited by Lilli Alanen, Sara Heinämaa and Thomas Wallgren. St. Martin's Press.

Berker, Selim. 2020. "Quasi-Dependence." In *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Volume 15*, edited by Russ Shafer-Landau, 195–218. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blackburn, Simon. 1984. *Speading the Word*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 1993. *Essays in Quasi-Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 1998. *Ruling Passions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2010. *Practical Tortoise Raising: And Other Philosophical Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Böddeling, Annika. 2020. "Cognitivism and Metaphysical Weight: A Dilemma for Relaxed Realism." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 98 (3):546–559.

Bratman, Michael. 1987. *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Brink, David Owen. 1989. *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brody, Baruch. 1981. "Morality and Religion Reconsidered." In *Divine Commands and Morality*, edited by Paul Helm, 141–153. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chappell, Richard. 2019. "Why Care About Non-Natural Reasons?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 56 (2):125–134.

Choo, Frederick. 2019. "The Prior Obligations Objection to Theological Stateism." *Faith and Philosophy* 36 (3):372–384.

Copan, Paul, and Matthew Flannagan. 2014. *Did God Really Command Genocide?* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books.

Craig, William Lane. 2003. "A Reply to Objections." In *Does God Exist? The Craig-Flew Debate*, edited by Stan W. Wallace, 155–188. Aldershot: Ashgate.

———. 2008. *Reasonable Faith*. Wheaton: Crossway.

———. 2009a. "The Kurtz/Craig Debate: Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?" In *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?*, edited by Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King, 25–46. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

———. 2009b. "This Most Gruesome of Guests." In *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?*, edited by Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King, 167–188. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

———. 2016. *God Over All*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2020a. "William Lane Craig's Final Remarks." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 187–203. New York: Routledge.

———. 2020b. "William Lane Craig's First Rebuttal." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 48–55. New York: Routledge.

———. 2020c. "William Lane Craig's Opening Speech." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 31–38. New York: Routledge.

———. 2020d. "William Lane Craig's Second Rebuttal." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 62–68. New York: Routledge.

Cudworth, Ralph. 1976 [1731]. *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*. New York: Garland.

Cuneo, Terence. 2007. *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Danaher, John. 2019. "In Defence of the Epistemological Objection to Divine Command Theory." *Sophia* 58 (3):381–400.

Davis, Richard Brian, and W. Paul Franks. 2015. "Counterpossibles and the 'Terrible' Divine Command Deity." *Religious Studies* 51 (1):1–19.

Davis, Wayne A. 1984. "A Causal Theory of Intending." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1):43–54.

Davison, Scott A. 2012. *On the Intrinsic Value of Everything*. New York: Continuum.

Descartes, René. 1960 [1641]. *Discourse on Method and Meditations*. Translated by Laurence J. Leafleur. New York: Macmillan.

Dreier, James. 2019. "Is there a supervenience problem for robust moral realism?" *Philosophical Studies* 176:1391–1408.

Dworkin, Ronald. 1996. "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 25:87–139.

Enoch, David. 2011. *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2021. "Thanks, We're good: why moral realism is not really morally objectionable." *Philosophical Studies* 178:1689–1699.

Evans, C. Stephen. 2013. *God and Moral Obligation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Flannagan, Matthew. 2017. "Robust Ethics and the Autonomy Thesis: A Reply to Erik Wielenberg." *Philosophia Christi* 19 (2):345–362.

Gert, Joshua. 2004. *Brute Rationality: Normativity and Human Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gibbard, Allan. 1990. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2003. *Thinking How To Live*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Golub, Camil. 2017. "Expressivism and Realist Explanations." *Philosophical Studies* 174 (6):1385–1409.

Hare, John. 2001. *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.

———. 2015. *God's Command*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hare, R. M. 1952. *The Language of Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harman, Gilbert. 1976. "Practical Reasoning." *The Review of Metaphysics* 29 (3):431–463.

Harrison, Gerald. 2018. *Normative Reasons and Theism*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Heathwood, Chris. 2009. "Moral and Epistemic Open-Question Arguments." *Philosophical Books* 50 (2):83–98.

Hooker, Brad. 2001. "Cudworth and Quinn." *Analysis* 61 (4):333–335.

Horgan, Terry, and Mark Timmons. 2006. "Cognitivist Expressivism." In *Metaethics After Moore*, edited by Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, 255–298. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Huemer, Michael. 2020. "Groundless Morals." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 149–165. New York: Routledge.

Jackson, Frank. 1998. *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jordan, Matthew Carey. 2013. "Divine Commands or Divine Attitudes?" *Faith and Philosophy* 30 (2):159–70.

Joyce, Richard. 2001. *The Myth of Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Koons, Jeremy. 2012. "Can God's Goodness Save the Divine Command Theory From Euthyphro." *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4 (1):177–195.

Korsgaard, Christine. 1983. "Two Distinctions in Goodness." *The Philosophical Review* 92 (2):169–195.

Kowalski, Dean A. 2011. "Remembering Alston's 'evaluative particularism'." *Religious Studies* 47:265–284.

Kremm, Douglas, and Karl Schafer. 2017. "Metaethical Quietism." In *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, edited by Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett, 643–658. New York: Routledge.

Leftow, Brian. 2011. "Why Perfect Being Theology?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69 (2):103–118.

———. 2012. *God and Necessity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, David. 1973. *Counterfactuals*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Linville, Mark D. 2012. "Moral Particularism." In *God & Morality: Four Views*, edited by R. Keith Loftin, 135–158. Downers Grove, Illinois: IPV Academic.

Mann, William E. 2005. "Theism and the foundations of ethics." In *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by William Mann, 283–304. Oxford: Blackwell.

Mawson, Tim. 2002. "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection are Compatible: a Reply to Morriston." *Religious Studies* 38:215–223.

———. 2005. *Belief in God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2019. *The Divine Attributes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Miller, Christian. 2009a. "Divine Desire Theory and Obligation." In *New Waves in Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Yujin Nagasawa and Erik J. Wielenberg, 105–124. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

———. 2009b. "Divine Will Theory: Desires or Intentions?" In *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion, Volume 2*, edited by Jonathan Kvanvig, 185–207. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2018. "The Naturalistic Fallacy and Theological Ethics." In *The Naturalistic Fallacy*, edited by Neil Sinclair. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Milliken, John. 2009. "Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right." *Philosophia Christi* 11 (1):149–159.

Moore, G. E. 1903. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Morris, Thomas. 1984. "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm." *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (2):177–187.

———. 1986. "Perfection and Power." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 20:165–168.

———. 1987. "Perfect Being Theology." *Noûs* 21 (1):19–30.

———. 1991. *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press.

Morriston, Wes. 2001. "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are they Compatible?" *Religious Studies* 37:143–160.

———. 2009a. "The Moral Obligations of Reasonable Non-Believers." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 65 (1):1–10.

———. 2009b. "What If God Commanded Something Terrible? A Worry For Divine-Command Meta-Ethics." *Religious Studies* 45 (3):249–267.

———. 2012. "God and the ontological foundation of morality." *Religious Studies* 48 (1):15–34.

Mulgan, Tim. 2015. *Purpose in the Universe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Murphy, Mark C. 1998. "Divine Command, Divine Will, and Moral Obligation." *Faith and Philosophy* 15 (1):3–27.

———. 2002. *An Essay on Divine Authority*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.

———. 2011. *God and Moral Law: On the Theistic Explanation of Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2012. "Restricted Theological Voluntarism." *Philosophy Compass* 7 (10):679–690.

———. 2014. "Theological Voluntarism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, 1–46. URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/voluntarism-theological/

———. 2017. *God's Own Ethics: Norms of Divine Agency and the Argument from Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2018. "No Creaturely Intrinsic Value." *Philosophia Christi* 20 (2):347–355.

Murray, Michael J., and Michael C. Rea. 2008. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nagasawa, Yujin. 2017. *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Olson, Jonas. 2014. *Moral Error Theory: History, Critique, Defence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2018. "Moral and Epistemic Error Theory: The Parity Premise Reconsidered." In *Metaepistemology*, edited by Conor McHugh, Jonathan Way and Daniel Whiting, 107–121. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oppy, Graham. 1992. "Is God Good by Definition?" *Religious Studies* 28 (4):467–474.

———. 2014. *Describing Gods: An Investigation of Divine Attributes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parfit, Derek. 2011. *On What Matters: Volume 2*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pigden, Charles R. 2007. "Nihilism, Nietzsche and the Doppelganger Problem." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 10:441–456.

Pruss, Alexander R. 2009. "Another Step in Divine Command Dialectics." *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (4):432–439.

Quinn, Philip L. 1978. *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

———. 1990. "An Argument for Divine Command Ethics." In *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, edited by Michael D. Beaty, 289–302. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

———. 2000. "Divine Command Theory." In *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, edited by Hugh LaFolette, 53–73. Oxford: Blackwell.

———. 2002. "Obligation, Divine Commands and Abraham's Dilemma." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64 (2):459–466.

———. 2006. "Theological Voluntarism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, edited by David Copp, 63–90. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rachels, James. 1971. "God and Human Attitudes." *Religious Studies* 7 (4):325–337.

Ridge, Michael. 2014. *Impassioned Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rogers, Katherin. 1993. "The Medieval Approach to Aardvarks, Escalators, and God." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 27:63–68.

Rosen, Gideon. 2020. "What is Normative Necessity?" In *Metaphysics, Meaning, and Modality: Themes from Kit Fine*, edited by Mircea Dumitru, 205–233. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rowe, William L. 2004. *Can God Be Free?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scanlon, T. M. 2014. *Being Realistic about Reasons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schroeder, Mark. 2008. *Being For: Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2010. *Noncognitivism in Ethics*. London: Routledge.

———. 2014. "Does Expressivism Have Subjectivist Consequences?" *Philosophical Perspectives* 28:278–290.

Shafer-Landau, Russ. 2003. *Moral Realism: A Defence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2013. *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Sinclair, Neil. 2008. "Free Thinking for Expressivists." *Philosophical Papers* 37 (2):263–287.

———. 2020. *Ethical Subjectivism and Expressivism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2021. *Practical Expressivism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. 2006. *Moral Skepticisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2009a. *Morality Without God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2009b. "Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adaquate Foundation for Morality." In *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?*, edited by Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King, 101–115. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Speaks, Jeff. 2017. "Permissible Tinkering with the Concept of God." *Topoi* 36:587–597.

———. 2018. *The Greatest Possible Being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stalnaker, Robert C. 1968. "A Theory of Conditionals." In *Studies in Logical Theory*, edited by Nicholas Rescher, 98–112. Oxford: Blackwell.

Strawson, P. F. 1950. "On Referring." *Mind* 59 (235):320–344.

Streumer, Bart. 2017. *Unbelievable Errors: An Error Theory About All Normative Judgements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sullivan, Stephen J. 1993. "Arbitrariness, Divine Commands, and Morality." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 33 (1):33–45.

———. 1994. "Why Adams Needs to Modify His Divine Command Theory One More Time." *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1):72–81.

Swinburne, Richard. 1979. *The Existence of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tappolet, Christine. 2013. "Evaluative vs. Deontic Concepts." In *The Blackwell International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, edited by Hugh LaFolette, 1791–1799. Oxford: Blackwell.

Timmons, Mark. 2012. *Moral Theory: An Introduction*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

van Inwagen, Peter. 2006. *The Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Väyrynen, Pekka. 2017. "The Supervenience Challenge to Non-Naturalism." In *The Routledge Handbook to Metaethics*, edited by Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett, 170–184. New York: Routledge.

Velleman, David. 1989. *Practical Reflection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

———. 2000. *The Possibility of Practical Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wainwright, William J. 2005. *Religion and morality*. London: Ashgate.

———. 2009. "Two (or Maybe One and a Half) Cheers for Perfect Being Theology." *Philo* 12 (2):228–251.

Wielenberg, Erik J. 2000. "Omnipotence Again." *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (1):26–47.

———. 2005. *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe*. Cambridge: Cambrdige University Press.

———. 2014. *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2020a. "Erik J. Wielenberg's Final Remarks." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 204–220. New York: Routledge.

———. 2020b. "Erik J. Wielenberg's First Rebuttal." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 56–61. New York: Routledge.

———. 2020c. "Erik J. Wielenberg's Opening Speech." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 39–47. New York: Routledge.

———. 2020d. "Erik J. Wielenberg's Second Rebuttal." In *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, edited by Adam Lloyd Johnson, 69–72. New York: Routledge.

Wierenga, Edward. 1983. "A Defensible Divine Command Theory." *Noûs* 17 (3):387–407.

———. 1989. *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.

Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. 2004. *Divine Motivation Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.