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An agent-based approach to the problem of evil

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1. Introduction: The logical problem of evil

The problem of evil is a serious challenge to the belief that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God. In its potentially most devastating form the problem is that there seems to be an inconsistency between these attributes and the existence of evil. The inconsistency is not straightforward, but requires supplementation by additional premises, usually involving what an omnipotent being would be able to do and what a perfectly good being would be motivated to do. In addition to the logical form of the problem, there are other forms that challenge the religious believer in her ability to confront and handle evil in an effective and satisfying way. Solutions to the problem range from the purely formal demonstration that the propositions generating the dilemma are not logically inconsistent[1] to the generous use of substantive religious beliefs in an attempt to show that within a background of Christian theology we can shed light on the existence of evil and our ability to face it.[2] In this paper I will make a direct attack on one of the supplementary premises used to generate the logical problem of evil, namely, the premise that a good being is motivated to produce good and to prevent or eliminate evil.[3] This premise or a variation of it is virtually always used in the argument for the inconsistency of the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God and the existence of evil, and it is almost always taken for granted by all parties to the dispute.

The logical problem of evil can be stated as follows:

(1) A perfectly good being would be motivated to eliminate all the evil he can.
(2) An omnipotent being would be able to eliminate all the evil he knows about and knows how to eliminate.
(3) An omniscient being would know of the existence of any evil and how to eliminate it.
(4) So if there was a being who is perfectly good, omnipotent, and omniscient, this being would be motivated to eliminate evil, would know of its existence and how to eliminate it, and would be able to eliminate it.

(5) But if there was a being who was motivated to eliminate evil, knows of its existence, knows how to eliminate it, and is able to do so, evil would not exist.
(6) But evil does exist.
Therefore,
(7) There is no being who is perfectly good, omnipotent, and omniscient. The traditional Christian God does not exist.

The most common response to this argument on the part of theists is to claim that evil is worth accepting for the sake of some good. Theistic philosophers then go on to look for a reason why a God who has the attributes just described would permit evil for the sake of some good for which the evil is a logically necessary prerequisite. The way in which these responses are developed can be quite elaborate, but premise (1), which gives us the motivational requirement that a good God would want to produce good and to eliminate evil, is rarely if ever questioned.

The intuition behind premise (1) is an ethical one, but it is not self-evident. (1) assumes that what is good or evil is not made to be such by the motivations of good beings. So something would count as good or evil whether or not good beings were motivated in any particular way. In fact, part of what *makes* a being good, it is usually maintained, is that such a being is motivated to produce good and to prevent evil. That this intuition is not self-evident can be seen from the fact that Divine Command theories of morality deny no self-evident truths even if they are implausible. According to such theories what is right or good is *determined* by the will of God, so such theories deny (1) as it is intended in the generation of the dilemma. That is, they deny the claim that a perfectly good God is motivated to produce something good where good is understood to be independent of God's will. Divine Command theories accept (1) only in the trivial sense that since good just *is* what God wills, and since it is trivially true that God is motivated to will what he wills, then God is motivated to will good. But of course in this sense of (1) there is no dilemma.

Whether or not Divine Command theories are false, they cannot be accused of failing to comprehend some alleged universal understanding of the independent existence of good and evil. The problem of evil is built upon many assumptions, not only about what the attributes of perfect goodness, omnipotence, and omniscience mean and the psychology of what a being with these attributes would do, but it is also built upon significant ethical assumptions. To say that good and evil exist in a way that is independent of anybody's will or motivations is a substantive claim that needs defense. The commonality of its acceptance is admittedly a defense of sorts, but it has recently been challenged by a form of virtue ethics that is new in the West, but perhaps not new in Chinese ethics. This theory ought to be of

particular interest to Christian philosophers for at least two reasons: (1) it is the most natural way to interpret the metaphysical status of good and evil within traditional Christian theology, and (b) it permits a new and interesting approach to answering the problem of evil. In addition, this type of ethical theory can be defended purely within ethics as a rival to the leading ethical theories in contemporary Western philosophy, a claim traditional Divine Command theories cannot make.

2. Agent-based ethics

The type of theory I want to describe is a strong form of virtue ethics lately called 'agent-based virtue ethics'.[4] Like all virtue theories this theory focuses its analysis on the inner traits of person – their virtues and vices, and on the components of virtues and vices, particularly motivations. Virtue theories do not derive the concept of a virtue from the concept of a right act, either as a disposition to perform right acts, or by any other relation to right acts. Stronger and weaker forms of virtue theories can be identified by the way each theory relates the fundamental moral concepts of a virtue, the good, and a right act. Consider first the way a virtue theory relates the concept of virtue to the concept of a right act. A weak form of virtue ethics maintains that the rightness of an act is independent of the existence and operation of virtues, but that it is appropriate for theoretical ethics to focus attention on the virtue since the behavior of a virtuous person gives us the best *criterion* for the rightness of acts. A stronger form of virtue ethics maintains that the concept of a right act is strictly derivative from the concept of a virtue. The motivations or behavior of virtuous persons is what *makes* an act right. An act would not be right if it were not for its relation to virtue or virtuous motivation. Agent-based ethics makes the stronger claim on the relation between virtue and rightness.

Virtue theories can also be compared with respect to their stand on the relation between the concept of a virtue and the concept of the good or of a good life. Common teleological forms make the concept of a good life the fundamental ethical concept and a virtue is explicated in terms of its contribution to a good life, either as a means to it or as a constituent of it. Aristotle's ethics is arguably of this kind. A more radical, non-teleological form of virtue ethics makes the virtues or other internal properties of the agent ethically fundamental, and the good is treated as a derivative concept. This is what I am calling agent-based ethics. It is a theory that takes the stronger position on the relation between virtue and the good, as well as on the relation between virtue and the right. Virtues or other internal properties of the agent, such as the agent's motivations, are treated as the fundamental,

bottom-level moral concepts and all other moral concepts are treated derivatively. So, for example, in an agent-based theory the virtue of benevolence or the motive of benevolence would be treated as good in the primary sense, and not because of the connection between benevolence and the happiness or well-being of human beings or because of its connection with the good in some other sense, and not because of the connection between benevolence and the performance of right acts. Instances of agent-based ethics in the history of Western philosophy are hard to find, but there is arguably a form of it in Plato's *Republic*, possibly a form of it in Duns Scotus, and a clear form of it in the ethics of the nineteenth century philosopher James Martineau and in this century in Josiah Royce's philosophy of loyalty. The earliest occurrence of agent-based virtue ethics may be in Chinese philosophy in the work of Confucius and Mencius. Lately a few American philosophers have applied this type of virtue ethics to areas ranging from political theory to epistemology to environmental ethics.[5]

What are the reasons for preferring an agent-based ethical theory? Perhaps the most compelling reason in experiential. Many of us have had the experience of meeting persons whose goodness simply shines forth from the depths of their souls. If this can happen, it suggests that it is possible to know a person is good before we investigate her behavior or observe the outcome of her acts. She may simply exude inner peace or have a 'glow' of nobility or fineness of character. If we then attempt to figure out what it is *about* her that makes her so good, we may be able to identify that goodness as involving certain inner qualities, for example, feelings of compassion, an attitude of self-respect and respect for others, motives of benevolence, sympathy or love. In each case we need not determine that her love, compassion, or benevolence is good *because* of its relation to things independently identified as good. We simply see that these motivations, feelings, or attitudes are the traits whose goodness we see in her. Alternatively, we may focus our attention first on the motivation itself and see that it is good, and again, we may see this independently of any evaluative judgment about the acts or consequences to which this motivation gives rise. That is, we see that there is something intrinsically morally good about the motivation of love itself.

Agent-basing also is attractive from the point of view of theoretical ethics. One appealing aspect of this kind of theory is its ability to systematically unify ethical phenomena. Moral judgments about motives, virtues, acts, and the good life are derived from the primary concept of a virtue or its motivational constituent. This is an important consideration in a moral theory. Even classical act utilitarianism, a theory which goes far in the direction of unifying moral phenomena, has trouble handling the evaluation of moral motives.[6] Contemporary utilitarians judge the moral value of such

motives as benevolence, love, and caring solely in terms of the consequences of the motives, a view that conflicts with common sense idea that what is praiseworthy or blameworthy about motives is at least largely a matter of the condition of the heart. Deontological theories also have difficulty in explaining the importance of these motives in the moral life and either reject them entirely or make them subservient to the motive of duty. This has led to well-known objections to this class of theories.[7] Virtue theories in general are preferable to consequentialist and deontological theories in their ability to deal with the moral importance of motives.

In addition to the support for agent-based theories from our moral experience of persons and from theoretical ethics, this class of theories should be of particular interest to Christian philosophers since it is the most natural way to understand ethical concepts on the traditional Christian view of God's goodness. During the high era of Christian theology God was understood to be perfect goodness and the source of all goodness outside himself, and even now this position is the dominant one in Christian philosophical theology. But notice what this view on the metaphysics of goodness indicates for ethics. It implies that when the agent of whom we are speaking is God, goodness is not some external thing or property which is the object of his motivation. The medieval philosophers explained the link between the divine nature and the created world more in terms of the divine will than divine motivation and the claim in that period was that God's *will* is expressive of internal features of his nature within which perfect goodness resides. But since the challenge of the problem of evil *is* put in terms of motivation, it is useful to focus on the connection between God's motives and his goodness. God has motives which are purely expressive of his nature, these motives are good for reasons purely internal to God's nature, and the objects of these motives are good in a derivative sense. This means that at least as far as the ethics of *God's* behavior is concerned, the most natural way to understand it is agent-based. It is much harder to explain the connection between God's internally perfect goodness and the ethics of divine action in a consequentialist or a deontological fashion.

Furthermore, if all normative judgments ultimately derive from the goodness of God, this suggests that ultimately all normative judgments are not only agent-based but are based in one agent: God. This means that not only are judgments of goodness analyzed in a way that is based in the internal properties of God, but so are the moral laws and judgments about the rightness of acts. This leaves open the possibility of attaching a Divine Command theory to the agent base if desired, although there is nothing in the agent-based account I have given that forces us to do so. On such a theory what is right is what God wills or commands, given that God has the perfectly good inner motivations that he has. The laws of morality are those that express

these motivations or other inner states of God, but it is the inner states which are good in the primary sense of good.[8] In this way an agent-based ethics combined with a traditional philosophy of God's nature yields a theory which is like Divine Command theory except that it is focused on God's motivations rather than on his will.[9] The advantages of doing so are (a) it avoids the problems of arbitrariness which plague Divine Command theories. This is because a will is usually thought to require a reason to will what it wills in virtue of which it is good, whereas it is acceptable to think of certain motivations such as those of benevolence or love as intrinsically good; no external reason is required; (b) a theory of value based in divine motivation can be broadened into a general moral theory in which good is based on human motivations, whereas the analogous extension to basing human good on human will is implausible.

3. An agent-based approach to the problem of evil

If God is the source of all goodness outside himself this is because God is internally perfect and the goodness of the objects of his choice derives from the goodness of his own nature. Something is good if and because it is the object of choice of an innerly perfectly good being. This position can be generalized to produce the foundations of a full agent-based ethics and we could the say that something is good just because it is the object of choice of an innerly good being, whether that being is divine or human, but the inner goodness of human beings is itself derived from the inner goodness of God. I will not argue for this position here since my purpose is not to defend this particular kind of non-telelogical virtue ethics for all of the purposes of theoretical ethics. For the purposes of this paper I am making the more restricted claim that the ethics of God's behavior is best understood in an agent-based fashion.

On this approach we have to give up any idea that God aims to create in the world something he independently considers to be good. His motivation cannot be explained by saying that he does something *because* it is good. God does what he does because it is expressive of his nature. God's actions are like those of the artist who creates works of beauty, but hardly can be said to create these works because they are beautiful. He simply creates out of a desire to create, a desire which expresses the inner beauty or aesthetic value of his own inventive imagination. Similarly, God does not create because his creation is good. It is not as if God sees in thought that such a creation would be good and then goes about creating it. The created universe is good because it is the expression of the desire to create of a perfectly good being whose inventiveness is a component of his omniscience and omnipotence.[10]

On this account, how are we to understand the evil in the world? First of all, it should be clear from what has been said so far that God would not permit evil for the sake of some good – the good of free will, the good of God himself, or the good of the world or its creatures. There is no independent conception of good for the sake of which some independent conception of evils is to be permitted. To explicate this further, let us consider the analogy of the behavior of parents with their children. A good parent loves her child and wants him to develop into a full person. Gradually giving the child autonomy in necessary to that end, but the parent need not act this way because doing so makes the child morally better, or because the loving relationship she wants to have with her child is good. Still less need she do it because the overall amount of good in the world will increase if she does so.[11] It seems to me that the parent would want this for her child even if the child did not use his autonomy to do good or to be better off, and even if much less good were produced in the world overall. She acts this way because she loves her child and that is the way loving parents act. It is also true that her love is good. But she is not motivated to act this way *because* her love is good. Goodness does not figure in her motivation at all. She does not think to herself, 'I want my child to be happy because happiness is good', or 'I do not want my child to suffer because suffering is bad', much less does she think, 'I love my child and it is good that I love him and so it is good that I do what love prompts me to do'. To think in such a way is to have what Bernard Williams calls, 'one thought too many'.[12] It is true that she wants her child to be happy and not to suffer, but not because of the goodness of the one and the badness of the other. And it is also true that her love for her child leads her to do whatever contributes to the development of his personhood whether or not it leads to good. What parent would ever agree to turn her child into non-person or even less of a person because her child is bad or because her child is worse off for being a full person?

The fact that the parent is so motivated in no way detracts from her goodness. And it indicates that promoting good and preventing evil in not necessarily part of the motivational structure of a good being, even in the human case. Instead, I submit, it is possible, even probable, that a perfectly good being would be willing to permit any amount of evil, not for the sake of some good, but out of love of persons. To love a person logically requires permitting that person *to be* a person. To allow a person to be a person requires that he be allowed to contribute to the making of his own personhood, or what John Hick calls soul-making,[13] through his free will. This is justified not because the existence of free persons is good, nor because love is good, nor for the sake of good in any other way, but simply because loving persons is something good persons do and loving persons in such a radical way that any evil is permitted for the sake of their personhood is something a perfectly good being would do. Premise (1) of the argument for

an inconsistency between the existence of evil and the existence of God is therefore false.

This approach to the problem of evil utilizes the necessity of free will, but not in the usual way since the goodness of free will is not the issue. This approach depends instead on the fact that only a free person is a person, that loving a person entails permitting him to be a person, and the reason why one person loves another is independent of the goodness of the person loved and even of the goodness of the love itself.

In what I have just said I have attempted to lay out a plausible account of how God's love for human creatures works in a way that is analogous to parental love and have shown how this account rests on an agent-based ethical theory, a type of theory that I have indicated has independent support in experience and in ethics, as well as in natural theology. But notice that taking an agent-based approach to the problem of evil does not commit us to the particulars of the account I have just given. Given the standard Christian position that God is perfect goodness and the source of goodness as applied to everything else, and given an agent-based ethics, it follows immediately that whatever God is motivated to bring about is good and whatever God is motivated to do is right. If in addition we accept the traditional view of the creation according to which *everything* that occurs in the world is ultimately traceable to some motivation in God, it follows that ultimately everything that goes on in the world can be evaluatively justified because of its derivative connection with the motivations of a perfectly good being. It does not follow from this, of course, that ultimately everything that goes on is good, but only that on balance there is moral justification for the fact that everything that goes on is permitted by the motivational structure of a perfectly good being. We need not add an analysis of *what* that motivational structure is and how it can intuitively be seen to be good in itself, regardless of its consequences. But I have attempted to fill out the account by using the analogy of the motivation of parental love both because the problem of evil is such a serious problem for most of us that it helps considerably to have a model for thinking about it in our ordinary lives that is intuitively plausible, and because I want to show that agent-basing is not an *ad hoc* reaction to a theological problem, but is something that can and has been used to understand ethical problems in human life.

The existence of agent-based ethical theories undercuts the basis for using the existence of evil as grounds for rejecting the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God. A consideration of this kind of theory shows that we cannot simply say that the state of the world is a bad thing according to some non-agent-based theory of justice or the human good, and then conclude that we have evidence against the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God. To say so begs the question against an agent-based view of the nature of God and the status of the

concept of good.[14] To object fairly the objector to theism would have to look at the theory of God's justice or goodness that derives from agent-basing before claiming that he has a case against God's existence based on the existence of evil in the world. Alternatively, he can attack agent-basing itself, but that has not yet been done.

4. Problems and conjectures

An objector to theism who accepts an agent-based theory could still make the following objection: We have some idea of how persons with good inner traits behave, and no one with good inner traits, or at least, no one with perfectly good inner traits would have wanted to create a world like the one we have. Loving persons do not want to see people suffering, least of all do parents want to see their children suffer. Would they want a child crippled and unhappy as the price, if it were necessary, of their being full persons? The problem of evil can be reformulated in an agent-based fashion as the problem that a perfectly loving God simply would not permit such a world as ours, and the existence of evil is evidence against the claim that there is a God who has the motivations we have identified as good from an agent-based perspective.

To make this objection work the objector would have to make a persuasive case that the external manifestations of the good motives in question are unlike the ones we know to obtain in the world. If the motivation said to generate the problem is love, then the objector would have to be very clear on the way loving persons act towards those they love and it would have to be highly plausible that any sort of behaviour on the part of a person towards those she loves which results in or permits them to suffer counts against the fact that the person is motivated by love.[15] But in fact we do not always draw such a conclusion, even in the human case. To return to the parent-child analogy, loving parents do not always stop the suffering of their children when it is the consequence of the parental motivation to help their children become full persons. Of course, children often do not understand the parental motivation and become angry or hurt at the parent, and similarly, if there is a God with the attributes described in this paper, we would expect human creatures to be angry or hurt at the existence of human suffering because of a lack of understanding of the divine motivation. This answer, of course, does not do much to make us feel better about suffering, but it at least indicates that it is presumptuous of us to expect to understand the motivations of a loving God in any but the crudest fashion.

The problem of suffering is more difficult to handle than the problem of evil with which it is sometimes identified. But it is a theoretical advance to notice that when the problem is posed in terms of suffering rather than evil

the discussion shifts to a question that is largely empirical from one that is largely conceptual. One of the primary reasons the problem of evil has the appearance of great force is that premise (1) seems to be something close to a conceptual truth, whereas the analogous premise in the problem of suffering clearly is not. If premise (1) can be denied in the way I have described and replaced with a premise which claims that a perfectly good being would be motivated to eliminate suffering, the argument clearly shifts to a consideration of what good beings are motivated to do or to allow, and that can only be settled by a consideration of their actual behavior as suggested in the previous paragraph, not by conceptual analysis.

In spite of what has been said, there are problems of evil that cannot be addressed by analogy with the motivations of a loving parent: the suffering of newborn babies who die before ever getting the chance for development into full persons, the suffering of animals, the suffering of persons that at least appears to exceed that which a perfectly loving being would permit, even on the loosest interpretation of the motivation of love. In these cases my response is to fall back on the bare-bones agent-based answer to the problem of evil without the parental analogy. Under the assumption that there is a perfectly good God whose goodness is understood in an agent-based fashion as the source for all other attributions of goodness and rightness, and whose motivations are ultimately responsible for the world as it is, it follows that all things considered, the world is to be judged positively. The world contains some features that are astonishingly unexpected in a world produced by a perfect being. To observe these features is analogous to observing the radiantly good person described earlier permitting some surprising things, including severe suffering or indignity. It is quite possible that we could see such a person permitting these things *without her losing her radiant nobi-lity and evident goodness in our own eyes*. If this happened we would be puzzled, bewildered, frightened, even angry, but we would not necessarily be forced to retract our judgment of her motivations and her fundamental goodness. I am not denying that there are cases in which a person who appears good to us for a time changes in our eyes once her behavior begins to look seriously wrong to us. What happens in those cases is that wrongful behavior reflects back on the character of the person and we cease to see her as virtuous and see her as vicious instead. My point is that this need not happen. She may continue to exude the same goodness as before. Her motives and virtues may be as evident as before; the behavior is simply not what we would expect to see in such a person. What happens in these cases is that the inner goodness of the person is reflected forward onto her behavior and the aims of her motivations, and we may then reconsider our evaluative judgments on the things she does or permits. I am suggesting

that if we take agent-basing seriously as an ethical theory, this move can be appropriate, and furthermore, that it *is* appropriate when the agent is God.

A second problem that could be raised by an objector to theism who accepts an agent-based theory is that the account I have given has mistaken the motivation of love for some other motivation such as that of respect. Western ethics is very heavily influenced by the concept of respect for persons, the central concept in Kantian ethics, and the primary motivation behind the Western tradition of human rights. It might be claimed that the attempt of this paper to trace the state of the world to God's interest in the human autonomy necessary for being full persons and to ground that interest in God's motivation of love is mistaken because it is not love, but respect, that leads one person to care about the autonomy and full personhood of another. Loving persons are more concerned about the suffering of their loved ones than their autonomy. Respectful persons are more concerned for their autonomy than their suffering. In short, the problem of evil could be reformulated in an agent-based fashion as the problem that we could use a lot more love and a lot less respect from the deity.

This objection makes a couple of important but dubious assumptions which I will let pass. One is that to love a person is to care more for her suffering than for her autonomy. Another is that love is more important than respect. Neither of these assumptions is clearly true, but an attempt to refute them would take us well away from the focus of this paper on agent-based ethics. But it is worth remarking that there is an important concept in tradition Aristotelian virtue ethics that the agent-based ethicist can adopt to handle this problem, and that is the concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Even in the case of ordinary human choice we find that we often have to balance two good motivations which lead in different, even opposing, directions. So agents who are motivated by both fairness and compassion, for example, might not always do what people do who are motivated by fairness but not also by compassion, and conversely. Whether or not it actually requires a separate virtue like *phronesis* to handle these cases is not my point. Persons advanced in virtue *do* handle these cases in a way that adequately expresses their combined motivations and these cases are renowned for their importance in calling attention to the dangers of focusing the analysis of moral judgment on a single virtuous motivation to the exclusion of others that overlap the area of judgment in question. Presumably, then, the same point applies to the motivations of the divine agent. Even if God does not always do what he would have done if no other motivation were relevant than the motivation of love, this is not to deny either that he is motivated by love or that his judgment arises from motivations that are good.

In conclusion, the logical problem of evil rests on the assumption that good beings are motivated to eliminate evil and to produce good. I maintain that a version of virtue ethics which is new, at least in the West, denies this assumption for reasons that have nothing to do with the problem of evil or any theological considerations. There are grounds for accepting an agent-based ethics both in experience and in theoretical ethics. But in addition, I have suggested that the traditional position on the relation between God's nature and goodness and between God's goodness and the goodness of anything besides God makes agent-basing where God is the agent virtually required for theological reasons. Finally, I wish to propose that if an agent-based ethical theory is combined with the traditional Christian view of the nature of God, we get another advantage not yet mentioned. Recall that the first theoretical advantage of agent-based ethics mentioned in this paper is that it unifies ethical phenomena. The position for which I have argued here allows for an even more extensive unification since it permits a single theory of normativity to account for the ethics of both divine and human behavior and to do so in a way that is straightforwardly faithful to the traditional view on the nature of God. In addition, it has the significant advantage of giving us a new and interesting way out of the problem of evil.[16]

Notes

1. A well-known example is Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).
2. See, for example, papers by Marilyn Adams, such as 'Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil', in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, edited by Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), and 'Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers', *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 121–143.
3. Often only the second clause of the premise is used since it is the motivation to eliminate evil that does the primary work in generating the dilemma rather than the motivation to produce good.
4. See Michael Slote in 'Virtue Ethics and Democratic Values', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 24/2 (Fall 1993): 5–37, and 'Agent-based Virtue Ethics', forthcoming in *Moral Concepts*, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*. Others like Christine Swanton and Philip Pettit have adopted this usage. Julia Annas has used 'agent-centered' for something similar, but that terminology risks confusion with the usage by Samuel Scheffler in a totally different context.
5. See Slote, 'Virtue Ethics and Democratic Values', *op. cit.*, for an application in political philosophy. I am working on the application of agent-based ethics to a range of concepts in normative epistemology in *Virtues of the Mind*, in preparation. Louke Siker is working on the use of virtue theory, including agent-based virtue theory, in environmental ethics.
6. In a note that appeared in the second edition (1864) of *Utilitarianism*, John Stuart Mill makes the evaluation of the motive completely independent of the evaluation of the act.

This note was dropped in succeeding editions, but the implausibility of Mill's claims as well as his failure to give a unitary account of morality that can handle both the motive and the act is worth noting. The note ends as follows: 'The morality of the action depends entirely upon the intention – that is, upon what the agent *wills to do*. But the motive, that is, the feeling which makes him will so to do, if it makes no difference in the act, makes none in the morality: though it makes a great difference in our moral estimation of the agent, especially if it indicates a good or a bad habitual *disposition* – a bent of character from which useful, or from which hurtful actions are likely to arise' (Chap. II, n. 3)

7. See Michael Stocker, 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories', *Journal of Philosophy* 73/14 (12 August 1976): 453–466; Larry Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints', *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 419–439.
8. It is interesting to compare this theory with that of Robert Adams in 'Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (Spring 1979): 66–79, where he adds the stipulation that what is right is what would be commanded by a *loving* God.
9. Micheal Slote has suggested to me that we might see this as a theory based more on the New Testament, while traditional Divine Command theory is more naturally interpreted as having its basis in the Hebrew Scriptures. The human analogue of Divine Command theory is the idea that something is good for a child because the parent says so, and young children are expected to accept this as an explanation of morality adequate for their level of understanding. The human analogue of an agent-based theory says that something is good/acceptable for a child because a loving parent is motivated to command, accept, or tolerate it from the child. On this view will is treated as a derivative part of the psyche. Older children are expected to accept this in virtue of their trust in their parents, which is to say, they trust internal properties of their parents, particularly their understanding and motivation of love.
10. James Ross has another way of comparing the creativity of God to that of the artist. He likens God's creative acts to that of an improvising jazz musician who creates beauty out of his own nature without knowing in advance how it will turn out.
11. It could be argued that if any of these reasons were the parent's motivation she would be treating her child as a means to an end – the end of producing good. If so, premise (1) conflicts with the Kantian Categorical Imperative. I am not taking this approach myself, but it does suggest an alternative line of argument for rejecting premise (1) in the derivation of the alleged inconsistency between the existence of evil and the existence of God.
12. Bernard Williams, 'Persons, Character, and Morality', in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
13. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd edition (London: Macmillan; New York: Harper and Row, 1978).
14. I thank Michael Slote for this point.
15. This objection was made to me by John Hick.
16. I presented the general idea of the solution of section III in response to a paper by William Rowe at a conference in Claremont in 1989 on the work of John Hick. The exchange was subsequently published in *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Harold Hewitt, Jr. (London: Macmillan, 1991).

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