MIND & NUMEN

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to come to a better understanding of the nature of philosophical problems, what it means to solve a philosophical problem, and how we ought to approach seemingly unsolvable philosophical problems, especially if we seek to make philosophical progress.

It is shown that some philosophical problems can be solved if they are reduced to formal problems with formal solutions. However, some philosophical problems are intractable and elude a formal solution, perhaps even in principle as is the case with paradoxes. It is proposed that it is the unsolvable nature of such problems that makes them truly philosophical.

It is also proposed that philosophical progress is made by engaging with philosophical problems in a philosophically satisfying manner: doing one's due diligence by not abandoning seemingly intractable problems nor biting the bullet too readily on solutions that do not engage with the notions that motivated the problem in the first instance.

One such approach is to grapple with the pre-formalised notions that give rise to a problem in the first place. By engaging with the dynamic interplay between the pre-formalised notions and their formal representations that inform the relevant problem, and by considering as many of the pre-formalised intentions of the premises as one can, the scope of initial pre-formal notions about the problem under consideration can be expanded.

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One way to account for many of the pre-formalised notions that give rise to a given philosophical problem is by being receptive to the truth of these pre-formalised notions. Hence, informed by an analysis of philosophical problems and progress, this dissertation proposes an approach to philosophical problems called *receptivism*. Receptivism stands in opposition to methodologies that reject pre-formalised notions out-of-hand, because to deny the relevant pre-formalised notions is to avoid philosophically engaging with the given problem. Instead, the receptivist approach suggests striving to account for the relevant pre-formalised notions that inform a given problem, even if this means entertaining philosophical positions that one might normally overlook or reject, perhaps because they appear to fail to fit with some wider philosophical programme.

The efficacy of this method will be demonstrated by applying it to current philosophical problems in the study of the human mind and the divine mind: *mind* and *numen*. The thesis engages with three specific philosophical problems: the *problem of consciousness for physicalism*, the *problem of religious beliefs*, and the *problem of evil*. Part I shows that the philosophical view known as physicalism faces serious challenges, and ought to be reconsidered; specifically, physical inscrutabilism, the genus of physicalism which posits inscrutable properties. Inscrutable properties are properties that are the grounds of mentality but which are not revealed through physical enquiry yet that allegedly do not violate physicalism. The analysis reveals that inscrutables fail to help the physicalist account for mentality. Part II considers what it means to believe something. It is argued that religious beliefs are not only archetypal cases of belief that provide insight into the nature and meaning of belief, but that they are rational kinds of beliefs. Lastly, one of philosophy's most famous paradoxes, the problem of evil, is addressed. The argument is made that because the created world exists and God can-

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not be arbitrary, that therefore, nothing will be precluded from existence by God due to the presence of a kind and level of property that already exists in creation, in this case, evil. By this process, the receptivist approach is tested on problems in philosophy of mind, metaphysics, and religion, and in turn, genuine progress is made in these debates.

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For my parents.

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The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.

Alfred North Whitehead (Whitehead 1978, p. 39)

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Introduction: No Philosopher So Far Has Ever Been Proved Right

1.1 What Is a Philosophical Problem?

Philosophy is, by one measure, the art of approaching *philosophical problems*. Yet what exactly is a philosophical problem? Philosophical problems inform what counts as philosophy, and in turn, philosophy and philosophers inform what counts as a philosophical problem. Therefore, one might first try to answer that a philosophical problem is just any problem with which a philosopher is concerned. Historically, philosophical problems arose when philosophers who were aiming for a formal and clear understanding of the world baulked at issues that left them uncertain because they defied resolution. Such problems required further engagement because they could not be formally solved.

For now, take a philosophical problem to be any puzzle, issue, question, intuition, and so on, that presents a stumbling block common between various (often opposing) views on a given conceptual issue. An example of a philosophical problem is the *problem of perception*; the concern that the way a person experiences the world, through perception, could be disconnected from how the world actually is, independent of the perceiver. The idea is that the difficulty in coming to a definitive conceptual understanding of what perception is, how it

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occurs and functions, and how it relates to mental content and consciousness, gives philosophers reason to pause.

Philosophical problems play an important role in how philosophical progress is made, because although they can make one stumble, they focus the dialectic by revealing the obstacles upon which one keeps tripping over. Thus, a philosophical problem concentrates the debate and helps one understand what is at stake in the dialectic and why. For instance, the problem of perception presents a common challenge to competing theories such as direct perception theories and representationalism, or physicalism and idealism. This, in turn, prompts philosophers to investigate the distinction between personal experience and external objects and properties, and to analyse what qualifies as good justification for knowledge of these external objects and properties. One can appreciate, therefore, that one reason why one engages with philosophical problems is because how one responds to them informs their understanding of the given dialectic. Only once one understands the problem can one make progress.

The purpose of this dissertation is to come to a greater understanding of what a philosophical problem is, what a solution to a philosophical problem is, and, informed by this, how philosophical progress is made. The idea behind this investigation is that, through understanding what makes a problem a truly philosophical problem, it will help one understand what it means to address and solve philosophical problems and what it means to make philosophical progress. It is proposed that it is the unsolvable nature of such problems that makes them truly philosophical. It is also proposed that philosophical progress is made by engaging with philosophical problems in a philosophically satisfying manner: neither abandoning unsolvable philosophical problems nor reducing all philosophical problems to formal problems.

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Given the scope of this monumental task, this dissertation will specifically present one novel approach to engaging with philosophical problems called *receptivism*. Before introducing receptivism and discussing the philosophical problems to which it shall be applied, the core issues of what a truly philosophical problem is, what a solution to a philosophical problem is, and how progress is made in philosophy, must first be addressed.

1.2 What Is a Solution to a Philosophical Problem?

What does it mean to solve a philosophical problem? Let us answer this question by way of a case study. According to the classical view of knowledge, a person knows something if it is true, they believe it, and they have justification for believing it. This is called a 'justified true belief' (*JTB*). Edmund Gettier (Gettier 1963) famously proposes that there can be situations where the conditions for *JTB* are met, yet they are insufficient for knowledge. For example, imagine a person reads '1:00' on a clock and so believes it is 1:00 but unbeknownst to them the clock is broken, however, coincidentally it is, in fact, 1:00. In these Gettier-type counter-examples a person can have a true belief that is also justified, but the belief is true by coincidence or luck, not *because of* justification. Therefore, Gettier argues that either *JTB* is not sufficient for knowledge, in which case an additional component is required for knowledge, or else the notion of justification must be re-conceived to make it sufficient for knowledge (Zagzebski 1994, p. 65). This challenge that *JTB* is insufficient for knowledge is called the *Gettier problem*. The Gettier problem is an interesting example of a philosophical problem. It presents a stumbling block for theories of knowledge, and hence, any philosopher engaged in epistemology is compelled to address it. If they did not, then they would be remiss in their philosophical duties because they would be willfully ignoring a significant

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challenge to understanding knowledge.

What is the solution to the Gettier problem? The trouble with the Gettier problem is that there appears to be *no* solution. Why is this so? According to *JTB* accounts of knowledge, truth *T* and justification *J* are logically separate and require empirical coordination to deliver knowledge of a proposition *p* (Floridi 2004, p. 69). Yet Gettier-type counter-examples show that *J* does not guarantee *T*, so there is a disconnect between *T* and *J*, and therefore, they cannot be coordinated in such a way that will always avoid epistemic luck (Zagzebski 1994, p. 65). As Linda Zagzebski (Zagzebski 1994, p. 69) puts it in her analysis of the problem: as long as the concept of knowledge closely connects the *J* component and the *T* component, but permits some degree of independence between them, *JTB* will *never* be sufficient for knowledge.

Luciano Floridi (Floridi 2004) concurs with Zagzebski that Gettier-style counter-examples are inevitable in principle, and therefore, concludes that the Gettier problem is logically unsolvable. According to Floridi, this is because the issue of coordinating *T* and *J* is logically equivalent to the *coordinated attack problem*. The coordinated attack problem (related to the *Byzantine generals problem*) involves two or more agents trying to coordinate an attack based on messages sent between them, where they cannot be certain that their messages have been received. The problem is this: in a situation where successful coordination is a prerequisite for guaranteeing a successful move, but common information is a prerequisite for guaranteeing successful coordination, and common information is unattainable in any distributed system in which there is any possible doubt about message delivery time, then doubt is inevitable, provided that the agents are logically independent and must interact through empirical protocols. So it is with *T* and *J*; they cannot coordinate in a way that will always avoid

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luck. If there is any chance that the *JTB* definition of knowledge can ever become adequate, it must somehow be possible to avoid or overcome every Gettier-type counter-example. Due to the element of luck in coordinating *T* and *J*, however, Gettier-type counter-examples will always be available. Hence why Floridi concludes that the Gettier problem is unsolvable in principle (Floridi 2004).

What can we learn about solving philosophical problems from the Gettier problem? Three lessons present themselves. The first lesson is that when one is confronted with a philosophical problem, there is often a temptation to definitively solve it. The second lesson learned is that truly philosophical problems cannot be solved. The third lesson learned is that we can generalise an approach to philosophical problems beyond specific cases. Let us consider each of these lessons in further detail.

Beginning with the first lesson, it can be asked: what exactly does it mean to *solve* a philosophical problem? Solving a problem means conclusively showing that the problem does not obtain. This might mean something like demonstrating that a philosophical problem is actually reducible to a formal or mathematical problem, and then solving the problem formally or mathematically. For instance, if one adopts *modus ponens* as a rule of inference, then if one holds that *X* is true, and *X* implies *Y*, then *Y* is also true. Yet if philosophy is about reducing philosophical problems to formal problems with formal solutions, in this case to logic, then philosophy becomes simply the method of working through formal methods towards formal solutions. That is, substituting *X* and *Y* with the given propositions under consideration and determining if one follows from the other. Ergo, philosophical problems that can be definitively answered are thereby stripped of their philosophical nature, because turning a philosophical problem into a purely scientific, mathematical or logical problem and then

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solving it, strips the problem of its philosophical value.

For example, in the case of the Gettier problem, solving it would mean conclusively demonstrating that there is a circumstance in which no Gettier-style counter-example is available. In one sense, *if* there were a circumstance under which no Gettier-style counter-example is possible, then this would reveal that there never really was a formal Gettier problem in the first place, but rather that one suffered from a lack of relevant information before the solution was found. There is a benefit to revealing a formal solution to a philosophical problem, and that is that it no longer impedes the dialectic; ergo, no more tripping and resultant skinned knees. We can thereby progress on the given dialectic, for instance, by determining that the issue under consideration is solved and moving on to the next problem.

As for the second lesson, we saw that solving a philosophical problem means showing that the problem does not obtain; in other words, solving a philosophical problem is identical to revealing that there *never was* a philosophical problem in the first instance! If one reduces a philosophical problem to a formal problem and then solves the formal problem—such as by applying *modus ponens*—then there was only ever a formal problem to be solved. For instance, if hypothetically the coordinated attack problem had a formal solution—which it does not (Lamport, Shostak, and Pease 1982; Castro and Liskov 1999)—and the Gettier problem were reducible to it, then one could demonstrate that the Gettier problem is a formal problem with a formal solution. Yet in what way then was the problem ever really philosophical? It seems that a problem is not truly a philosophical problem once it is reducible to a formal problem and then solved, for it is thereby demonstrated that there never was a philosophical problem in the first place, only a formal problem. It is embedded into the nature of a philosophical problem that one can only realise when a problem is *not* philosophical. This

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means that a problem is only *truly* philosophical if it is never solved. Yet one cannot prove that something is unsolvable without perfect knowledge!

This reveals that philosophical problems are historical by nature, not because of their historical origin, but because of the historical contingency of when they are philosophical and when they no longer remain so. Consider how the alchemical question about the structure of gold was once considered a philosophical problem. Let us call this the *number of protons in gold problem*. Today it is empirically known that Au79 has 79 protons in its nucleus. Of course, the number of protons in gold problem was eventually solved through scientific enquiry. If the philosophical problem is reduced to an empirical problem and then solved via observation, as with the number of protons in gold problem, then we should be reluctant to call the problem properly philosophical anymore. This is because, as Peter Hacker (Hacker 2006, p. 1) points out, the problems of philosophy are conceptual, not factual, so the process of solving a philosophical problem is not about increasing one's store of knowledge about the world. In this case, the number of protons in gold problem was a philosophical problem at time $T1$ but not following the scientific solution at time $T2$. This means that philosophical problems are fundamentally historical from the human epistemic point of view.

And philosophical problems are not only historical but locative. This means, for instance, that the same problem might be philosophical for Martians and Earthlings, but once Earthlings have solved the problem it is no longer philosophical for them but remains so for the Martians. The number of protons in gold problem might no longer be a philosophical problem on Earth, yet remain one on Mars; it might not have been a problem at some point in England but remained one in Japan. Take a current example: some philosophers hold that physical properties and mental properties are distinct because they are ultimately grounded in

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different fundamental properties. However, perhaps we may yet discover that what appears to be two different properties or laws are actually explicable as the same kind of property or law. Indeed, there is an analogue in the distinction between the sublunar and superlunar realms in Aristotelian physics. The sublunary sphere was a region below the moon that was subject to change and the powers of physics. From the moon upward, everything else was considered permanent and unchanging, and not subject to physics. Why there was a distinction between these two different kinds of properties or laws was a philosophical question. Call it the *lunar problem*.

Tycho Brahe observed The Great Comet through a telescope from November 1577 to January 1578, and concluded that the comet was superlunary. Yet The Great Comet changed, and this revealed that the sublunar/superlunar distinction was no longer tenable. It was slowly revealed that what appeared to be two different properties or laws in nature were later explicable as the same kind of property or law, and the lunar problem was solved. More generally, it was determined that a dualist conception should be correctly characterised as a monism. Perhaps the same may occur for the mind-body distinction, and it will be revealed that there is no long a philosophical problem, only a scientific problem that can be solved.

To reiterate, there is still value in demonstrating that a seemingly philosophical problem is reducible to a formal problem. With the *number of protons in gold problem*, it might have required a philosophical approach to understand what natural science or method was the correct domain by which to solve the problem. Hence, even when philosophy reveals a problem to be solvable and no longer philosophical, it is still philosophy that reveals the way forward. This is evidence of philosophy's value. Understanding when there is no remaining philosophical problem is one way to make progress in a dialectic.

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Does this mean that there have been philosophical problems that were successfully left behind? Thales famously held that everything in physical existence was ultimately and categorically grounded in water. He may have held this view to explain fundamentality metaphorically, but if he meant it literally, he has since been proven wrong. We might, therefore, be tempted to say that the philosophical problem regarding whether everything in existence is ultimately and categorically grounded in water has been left behind. Yet even the smallest crack in a solution can expose subtleties that reinvigorate a problem. A problem can always return in a manner reminiscent of Kripkenstein (Kripke 1982) or Goodman's *new riddle of induction* (Goodman 1955): a problem may be 'solved' at $T1$ but then at $T2$ conditions change, and so the problem returns or a new problem develops. In the case of Thales, questions about the nature of the fundamental level of reality are once more alive and well.

It is important to note that this does not imply subjectivism about philosophical problems, only historical and locative contingency. Indeed, according to Sextus Empiricus (Empiricus 2000), for God there is no logic because all solutions and statements are immediately apparent to him. Likewise, for God, who knows all solutions to all problems, there are no philosophical problems. It follows then that perhaps the set of truly philosophical problems is empty. This means that working through logical problems only makes sense to humans, and working through philosophical problems only makes sense to humans too.

It can appreciated that the history of the Gettier problem has shown that there is a temptation to solve philosophical problems, and that philosophy can reveal which problems can be reduced to formal problems and solutions. Yet it also reveals that true philosophical problems are unsolvable because they can never be reduced to formal problems and solutions, from the human epistemic point of view. As Bertrand Russell put it: "the answers suggested

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by philosophy are none of them demonstrably true" (Russell 1912).

What then is to be done with those problems that can never be definitively shown not to obtain because counter-examples are always possible? The answer lies in the third lesson from the Gettier problem: that one can generalise the role of philosophical problems beyond specific cases. The Gettier problem allegedly cannot be solved unless one gives up on the relevant notions that gave rise to the problem, for instance, that justification is somehow sufficient for knowledge. Hence, the broader moral that can be gleaned from Zagzebski's analysis of the Gettier problem is that it is representative of a larger, general issue of what to do with seemingly unsolvable philosophical problems. Howsoever one responds to the Gettier problem should be how one responds to related problems. For instance, if one chooses to give up on the Gettier problem then perhaps one ought to quit on other equally frustrating problems, but if one decides one ought to adopt a new perspective or a new methodological approach to try and make progress on the Gettier problem, then perhaps one ought to do likewise for a host of other intractable problems.

1.3 What Is Philosophical Satisfaction?

True philosophical problems are by their nature not solvable, for if they were, they would not be philosophical problems. Rather, they would be something like a formal problem that can be answered from definitions and formal reasoning. If true philosophical problems are those problems which are *unsolvable*, what then are we to make of them? Why do we engage with them? And how can we make philosophical progress if true philosophical problems cannot be definitively solved? Is the lesson from the analysis of the Gettier problem that true philosophical problems should be abandoned or that one ought to continue to grapple with

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them?

Consider two responses to the above questions. First, if true philosophical problems are unsolvable then one could adopt an attitude captured by Emil du Bois-Reymond's maxim: *ignoramus et ignorabimus*, we do not know and will not know (Bois-Reymond 1912). This could suggest giving up on seemingly unsolvable problems—perhaps even philosophy altogether. Alternatively, one might reject the idea that true philosophical problems are unsolvable, perhaps because they think that all problems are in principle reducible to non-philosophical problems with solutions, and so one must provide a formal solution to any philosophical problem to make progress. This perspective is captured by mathematician David Hilbert (J. T. Smith n.d.), who on 8 September 1930, in an address to the Society of German Scientists and Physicians in Königsberg, declared that:

> We must not believe those, who today with philosophical bearing and a tone of superiority prophesy the downfall of culture and accept the *ignorabimus*. For us there is no *ignorabimus*, and in my opinion even none whatever in natural science. In place of the foolish *ignorabimus* let stand our slogan:
> We must know,
> We will know.

Neither of the above approaches is philosophically satisfying. Yet a good approach to a philosophical problem should satisfy a philosopher interested in doing their due investigative diligence, for instance, by sufficiently addressing the reasons they had for posing the problem in the first place. Therefore, giving up on a problem because it is seemingly unsolvable is not an optimal approach to philosophical problems. Consider how conceding that the Gettier problem is unsolvable *and* then abandoning the investigation of the relationship between

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JTB and knowledge as a consequence, ignores the value of posing and analysing the problem in the first place. How one responds to problems like the Gettier problem matters because it teaches one something about how one ought to approach intractable philosophical problems in general. Hence why abandoning a philosophical problem because one suspects that the problem has an as-of-yet-undetermined formal solution, or no solution at all, are sub-optimal approaches. This is because they will not satisfy a philosopher who was moved to engage with the problem in the first instance.

This dissertation suggests a kind of Goldilocks approach that acknowledges that true philosophical problems are unsolvable, yet also, that by engaging with them, philosophical progress can be made. The approach is revealed by our third lesson from the Gettier problem: we can generalise the role of, and approach to, philosophical problems beyond specific cases. Hence, if one cannot solve a philosophical problem, then one should not abandon it but instead seek a more satisfying path by adopting a fresh perspective on how to approach it, and this lesson can be applied to other intractable problems.

The proposed measure of a successful, generalised approach to philosophical problems is *philosophical satisfaction*. To properly understand philosophical satisfaction, the concept of *pre-formalised notions* must first be explained. We can distinguish between what we shall call the formalised and pre-formalised articulations of any given problem, which are captured by two different kinds of statements: formalised notions and pre-formalised notions (Freire and Ryan 2023):

> *Formalised notion*: a proposition rigidly interpreted and subject to logical scrutiny.

> *Pre-formalised notion*: a proposition that is loosely interpreted.

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A formalised notion is a proposition that is rigidly interpreted and subject to logical scrutiny, for instance, a premise in an argument or a contradiction. A pre-formalised notion is a proposition that is loosely interpreted, in simple language, uncommitted to only a particular formalisation, that has a truth-priority over the formalised notion: a pre-formalised statement ϕ is either literally true or it requires from the formalisation a reason for why it seems literally true but is only indirectly true. Note that in the philosophical tradition, to be indirectly true means something has to be perceived as true, even though it is not in fact true. Consider an example. Advocates for a *B* theory of time defend the idea that past, present, and future, all exist at once. According to them, there is no literal flow of time from the past through the present to the future. Yet philosophers in this tradition have always considered it crucial that we explain why we perceive the flow of time. It can be said that they are committed to accounting for the pre-formalised statement 'We observe the flow of time'. Indeed, these philosophers would be remiss in their philosophical duties if they ignored this pre-formalised notion, such as by outright denying that time seems to flow.

When philosophers encounter philosophical problems they often implicitly appeal to such pre-formalised notions. And this makes sense, for if one wishes to satisfy the philosophical community, to say nothing of one's own sense of rationality, then the way one adopts premises must be coherent, and so it must be connected in some way to the notions behind the original premise. For instance, if one tries to approach a problem by changing a premise to something ludicrous or uncompelling then one will remain philosophically *unsatisfied*.[1] To 'satisfy' something in mathematics or logic means to meet the conditions required by a par-

[1] 'Unsatisfied' is used rather than 'dissatisfied' as the prior is found in Wittgenstein 1922, p. 6.53 from which inspiration is drawn for the term, and the term ought to be distinguished from the non-philosophical meanings and connotations of the latter.

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ticular statement, equation, formula, or set of axioms. For example, in classical propositional logic, the assignment of $P = \textit{true}$ and $Q = \textit{false}$ satisfies the formula $P \vee Q$, because it results in a true statement under the considered semantics. If one fails to engage with pre-formalised notions when formalising the premises in a philosophical problem then any solution to the problem will not be satisfying, because the relevant pre-formalised notions will not be assigned and, therefore, will not be under consideration. Again, this would occur if say a *B* theorist ignored the pre-formalised notion that time seems to flow. However, if one modifies a premise or adds a new premise that is somehow connected to the pre-formalised notion that gave rise to the original premise, then one will not encounter this 'unsatisfaction'.

This criteria of satisfaction can be better appreciated by reference to the story of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who in his earlier years said that one can decline to engage with particular philosophical problems, for instance, if they involve metaphysical or religious content. Wittgenstein had in mind the rejection of subject matter that was not propositionally analysable. It might be said that he accepted the *ignorabimus* maxim and declined to engage with unsolvable philosophical problems. He admits that (Wittgenstein 1922, p. 6.53):

> This method would be **unsatisfying** [emphasis added] to the other—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—but it would be the only strictly correct method.

This dissertation suggests that philosophical satisfaction is the measure of the strictly correct method; philosophical satisfaction and unsatisfaction ought to be taken as guides to philosophical adjustment. Someone should feel that we are teaching them philosophy and that our methods are satisfying. Further, it is suggested that this satisfaction will not be found by merely declaring that all philosophical problems have as-of-yet-undetermined formal so-

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lutions, nor by disengagement with any philosophical problem that cannot be reduced to a formal problem and solved, as Wittgenstein concedes. Rather, satisfaction results from engagement with the pre-formalised notions when formalising the premises of a philosophical problem to come to a deeper understanding of the problem.

1.4 What Is Philosophical Progress?

We can now appreciate what a philosophical problem is, how philosophers approach these problems, and how philosophical satisfaction is a measure by which one can judge better or worse approaches. What of philosophical progress? How does philosophy make progress?

First, recall that even when philosophy shows that a problem is solvable, by say being reducible to a formal problem solvable by formal methods, it was philosophy that guided one toward applying the correct mode of analysis. By revealing which aspects of a problem are solvable and which are not, philosophy thereby aids the other sciences because it shows how these problems relate to their respective methodologies. In such cases philosophy does not abandon the problem, rather, it clarifies what aspects of the problem are appropriate for formal analysis. This is one way in which philosophical progress is made by engaging with philosophical problems. This sentiment is echoed by Russell who suggests that philosophy lays down the various approaches to problems (but does not make genuine progress beyond this).[2] He says:

> Yet, however slight may be the hope of discovering an answer, it is part of the business of philosophy to continue the consideration of such questions, to make

[2]He also declares: ''Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true" (Russell 1912).

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> us aware of their importance, to examine all the approaches to them, and to keep alive that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining ourselves to definitely ascertainable knowledge (Russell 1912).

Russell sees philosophy as a therapy against dogmatism and the 'tyranny of custom', and as a means for guiding one to understanding when a problem has a formal solution, but he does not expect philosophical progress beyond this. What then would genuine philosophical progress beyond merely laying down these approaches look like?

How is philosophical progress made on truly philosophical, unsolvable problems? Unsolvability is a fact of philosophical problems, yet as discussed, disengagement with a problem will not yield progress because it is unsatisfying. By engaging with a problem and showing why it appears unsolvable one learns something. One learns that there is a permanent task of justifying one's justifications. For instance, from grappling with the Gettier problem one learns more about what pre-formalised notions are to be added, which are to be given up, and which are to be improved upon. In the case of the Gettier problem, engagement reveals the fallibility of justification, however, the issue is not that one's justification is wrong but that one might be mistaken when one thinks that one is justified. So by addressing the problem, one can continue striving to determine under what circumstances one is justified. This is the point of philosophy: engaging with seemingly unsolvable problems by grappling with the pre-formal notions that inform them. And this is because engagement is more philosophically satisfying than disengagement.

This is precisely why the third lesson from the Gettier problem is so important: that one can generalise the lessons from a particular problem to other unsolvable philosophical problems. By engaging with the Gettier problem, Zagzebski (Zagzebski 1994) realised that the

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form of this seemingly unsolvable philosophical problem is general and so philosophers need to develop new, general ways by which to approach other such problems. This is something Gettier missed when he did not generalise the initial problem. Although Zagzebski did not solve the Gettier problem, by engaging with it, and in particular with the pre-formalised notions that gave rise to it, she learned something new about generalisation in philosophy. In this manner, she made philosophical progress!

Let us return to Wittgenstein to illustrate how addressing the pre-formalised notions that inform a problem can further philosophical progress. Wittgenstein famously quit philosophy only to return to the subject later in life. Hence, his thought is sometimes divided into the 'early Wittgenstein' of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein 1922) and the 'late Wittgenstein' whose work was posthumously epitomised in the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 2001). Wittgenstein began his philosophical journey as an adherent of logicism, and he believed that language, meaning, and reality could be ultimately and categorically grounded in analysable logical propositions. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, he argued that the world consists of facts and that these facts can be described by propositions that correspond to states of affairs in the world. As mentioned earlier, he famously determined that many areas of traditional philosophy—such as metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology—were not philosophically analysable because they are not facts that can be described by propositions that correspond to states of affairs in the world: they failed to satisfy the above criteria. Wittgenstein thus boldly declared that "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein 1922), which captures his idea that many philosophical problems result from misunderstandings about the limits of language.

Early Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy divides philosophical problems into those

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that are: (1) solvable by non-philosophical means: such as by the natural sciences, mathematics, or logic; (2) the result of linguistic confusion and hence are linguistic problems but not philosophical problems; or (3) genuine problems seemingly outside the purview of natural sciences, mathematics, logic, and language, and therefore unanalysable and unsolvable, and thus ought to be left alone. The parallels with the lessons from the Gettier problem are striking: we see a temptation to solve philosophical problems, then the idea that there is a division between problems reducible to formal solutions and unsolvable problems, and a generalisation from the problem that informs how one ought to philosophise.

Early Wittgenstein generalised from his concerns that the correct course of action is to abandon philosophy. Yet he later reconnected with philosophy. The so-called late Wittgenstein argued that meaning is not (only) something that corresponds to a logical structure but is rooted in the social use of language. He held that many philosophical problems arise when we misuse language by treating it as if it corresponds to a fixed reality when, in fact, language is a dynamic, context-dependent tool for communication. In other words, Wittgenstein conceded that there was a purpose to, and value in, engaging with seemingly unsolvable philosophical problems. He was *unsatisfied* by his previous approach to unsolvable philosophical problems and returned to try and make philosophical progress.

In summary, the early Wittgenstein concludes that either philosophical problems have non-philosophical solutions and thus are not truly philosophical, or that they are truly philosophical but unsolvable, in which case we cannot progress on them, so they (and philosophy) ought to be abandoned. What is the moral of this tale? That this is a sub-optimal way to philosophise because it diminishes the role of philosophy in contributing to non-philosophical problems, for instance, by revealing that these problems have non-philosophical

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solutions and why this is the case. It also abandons seemingly unsolvable philosophical problems. Wittgenstein was right to return to philosophy because he was unsatisfied. He was right to heed his compulsion to address the pre-formalised notions that gave rise to supposedly unsolvable philosophical problems. In this way, he made philosophical progress.

1.5 What Is Receptivism?

It is hoped that we have come to a better understanding of what a solution to a philosophical problem is, and informed by this, how philosophical progress is made. Truly philosophical problems are unsolvable, and philosophical progress is made by engaging with them in a satisfying manner, which means striving to account for the pre-formalised notions that inform the relevant problem and generalising to related problems.

We have outlined a metaphilosophical position that cuts to the very heart of philosophy. This view is embryonic and will continue to mature. This is not yet the end of the story, however, for to satisfy those interested in this thesis, some application of the lessons is required. A famous test for judgdement is (*Douay-Rheims Bible* 2011, Mark 7:16): "By their fruits you shall know them." It seems that this dissertation ought to present some good fruit. Hence, the next step is to consider but one way in which the above lessons are fruitful.

Thus, the locus of this dissertation is more modest: it is an investigation of but one proposed general approach to accounting for the relevant pre-formalised notions under consideration in a given problem, called *receptivism* (Ryan 2024a; Ryan 2024b). This is the idea that to do one's due diligence as a philosopher, and to make progress on certain philosophical dialectics, one must account for as many of the pre-formalised notions that give rise to a given philosophical problem as one can. Unless one has every pre-formalised notion accounted

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for, one cannot formalise a correct account of a given problem, and if one cannot do that then one will fail to progress on the problem. One way to do this is by being *receptive* to the truth of these pre-formalised notions. Receptivism seeks the kind of philosophical satisfaction discussed. It cautions that a philosopher should shy away from methodologies that reject pre-formalised notions out-of-hand because to deny the relevant pre-formalised notions is to avoid philosophically engaging with the given problem. Sometimes this means entertaining philosophical positions that one might normally overlook or instinctively reject, for instance, because they *appear* to clash with other philosophical beliefs and presuppositions that one holds.

First consider a non-philosophical example. There is a pre-formalised notion that some people have blue eyes, yet there is strong evidence that no blue pigment is found in mammals. Should one deny that a person standing before one has blue eyes because it causes friction with one's established views on pigmentation? No. One must address how such people somehow have blue eyes and reconcile it with one's understanding of mammalian biology. The blue of the human eye is, in fact, caused by the way light reflects off the eye. Humans see blue because there is blue, even though it is not caused by blue pigment. In this case, one should be receptive to alternative formalisations of the pre-formal notions motivating the problem, for instance, that 'Some people have blue eyes'. The problem may not be definitely solved, for instance, if one later encounters other eye colours that must be accounted for, yet by being receptive one still made progress on the initial problem and advanced the dialectic.

The value of receptivism becomes even clearer when we realize that there are two main avenues of advancement in philosophy: (1) analytic advancement that produces a synthesis from a dialectic; and (2) advancement made by articulating intuitions that should be cap-

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tured by philosophical theory through examples. Philosophers can err by leaning too much toward either (1) or (2). Rather, what they ought to do is strive for equilibrium. Receptivism seeks equilibrium and generality by being open to all of the relevant pre-formalised notions that give rise to a given problem, to come to a greater understanding of what is involved, and thereby philosophically improve the pre-formalised environment from which one formalises philosophical problems. For instance, one might do this by changing the definitions employed in the premises of a problem's premise set. Of course, if one wishes to satisfy the philosophical community, to say nothing of one's own sense of rationality, then the way one changes the premises must be coherent. The change must be connected, in some manner, to the notions behind the original premise set. If one changes a premise by assigning it an unrelated meaning or by disconnecting it from the aetiology of the problem, then one will remain unsatisfied. However, if one modifies premises or adds a new premise that is somehow connected to the instinct that gave rise to the original problem, then one does not encounter this unsatisfaction.

In a nutshell, receptivism is the idea that one ought to appeal to explanatory useful, pre-formalised notions, and the interplay between possible ways of formalising them, even if such notions clash with one's current formalised commitments. The most effective approaches to philosophical problems are those that maintain the integrity of the accumulated pre-formalised notions, while less effective ones either confront the problem head-on or disregard it entirely.

Now consider a philosophical example. On the day after Christmas, 1951, at a meeting of the American Mathematical Society at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, in 'Some basic theorems on the foundations of mathematics and their implications', Kurt Gödel said (Gödel 1995):

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> Either [⋯] the human mind [⋯] infinitely surpasses the powers of any finite machine, or else there exist absolutely unsolvable diophantine problems.

What does Gödel mean by this? He is a platonist, so when he says these problems are unsolvable, he means that they are formally unsolvable but still of philosophical value. This statement suggests that mathematicians and philosophers ought to take a different perspective and understand why a finite machine cannot solve diophantine problems but humans can.[3] This moral can be generalised: to approach apparently unsolvable problems, one needs must adopt a different philosophical perspective. For instance, if an anti-metaphysics ontology fails to account for what is needed to make sense of reality, then one ought to be receptive to doing metaphysics (Putnam 1971, p. 57).

Imagine a detective discovers a body with some concrete evidence indicating suicide. Yet this veteran sleuth has a hunch that foul play was involved. Ought this detective dismiss her hunch? Of course not, she should investigate it. A bad detective ignores a hunch and pursues one theory to the exclusion of others; trying to fit the evidence to the theory and disregarding evidence or interpretations that cause issues. A good detective starts by laying out all the theories and then eliminates them when appropriate, based on the evidence available.

[3]Consider igo champion Lee Sedol's (이세돌) victory in Game 4 of the DeepMind Challenge Match in 2016 against the 'artificial intelligence' program AlphaGo. At move 78, Lee placed a stone which led to his ultimate victory, despite his being in a weaker position until that moment in the game. The AlphaGo program assigned a probability of 0.007% to this move being played by any player in Lee's position and estimated that only approximately 1 in 10, 000 players would play it. Yet Lee described the move as the 'only move' available (Kohs 2017). It was Lee's receptivity to a new perspective, and his ability to look beyond the usual formal solution, that allowed him to play a move that was beyond the ken of a finite machine.

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Receptivism is the theory that good philosophy should be like good detective work. For example, in the philosophy of mind, many philosophers consider it important to account for why consciousness seems distinct from other physically explicable things. Any purely physicalist explanation for consciousness will be insufficient if it ignores the pre-formalised notion that 'consciousness seems somehow distinct from physical things'. The correct way to make progress on this dialectic is not to reject this notion, but instead to explore the different ways in which it can be formalised. Any good physicalist explanation should account for the apparent uniqueness of consciousness and incorporate this into a physicalist framework, rather than simply ignoring the notion altogether. Likewise, dualists ought to account for mentality in a way that accounts for the pre-formalised notion that mentality appears to be strongly intertwined with a world full of physical properties.

What if one rejects receptivism? Then that philosopher may struggle to make philosophical progress. Friedrich Nietzsche poetically cautions about such an over-commitment to an established 'truth' or perspective on a philosophical problem (Nietzsche 2002, p. 26):

> Stand tall, you philosophers and friends of knowledge, and beware of martyrdom! Of suffering "for the sake of truth"! Even of defending yourselves! You will ruin the innocence and fine objectivity of your conscience, you will be stubborn towards objections and red rags, you will become stupid, brutish, bullish if, while fighting against danger, viciousness, suspicion, ostracism, and even nastier consequences of animosity, you also have to pose as the worldwide defenders of truth. As if "the Truth" were such a harmless and bungling little thing that she needed defenders! [⋯] In the end, you know very well that it does not matter whether you, of all people, are proved right, and furthermore, that **no**

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philosopher so far has ever been proved right [emphasis added].

Perhaps no philosopher so far has ever been proved right because no truly philosophical problem can be solved. Thus, by clinging to the safety of established formalisations or ways of philosophising, one might find themselves drifting closer to dogmatism than philosophy while coming no closer to solving the philosophical problems at hand.

Here is one more example to make the case for receptivism. Gödel's incompleteness theorems are powerful examples that capture the two stated ways of making philosophical progress: either by revealing that a problem is reducible to a formal problem and solvable, or by showing it is not reducible to a formal problem and solvable, and therefore, confirming that it is a truly philosophical problem. Consider specifically Gödel's *second incompleteness theorem* (Gödel 1932) which states that a formal system, if it is consistent, cannot prove its own consistency.

In classical logic, *inconsistency* is taken to mean that any proposition can be proved. This is formalized in the principle that from a contradiction anything can be proved: known as *ex falso quodlibet* or the principle of explosion. The idea is that if a contradiction, such as $A \wedge \neg A$ (both A and not A), is allowed in a logical system, then any arbitrary proposition can be derived from it, no matter how absurd or unrelated it may seem. For instance, if a system permits contradictions, one could logically 'prove' statements like "If $2 + 2 = 5$, then I am the pope," as famously noted by Russell. This illustrates the absurdity of allowing contradictions within a logical system, because if contradictions are possible, the distinction between true and false propositions breaks down entirely, leading to triviality.

To avoid this, logical systems seek consistency. For instance, classical logical systems try to ensure that contradictions cannot be derived within the system. A consistent system guaran-

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tees that not every proposition can be proved, meaning that there are some propositions that cannot be derived, such as false statements like "$2 + 2 = 5$". However, it is important to clarify that consistency itself does not imply that specific propositions (such as "$2 + 2 = 5$") cannot be proved; rather, it means that no contradictions can be derived within the system. This prevents the system from collapsing into triviality, where anything can be 'proved' as a consequence of allowing contradictions.

If one demonstrates that a system cannot prove something, such as $2+2 = 5$, this provides evidence that the system is consistent, because a consistent system does not allow contradictions to be proved. However, Gödel's second incompleteness theorem shows that a formal system powerful enough to express arithmetic cannot prove its own consistency. In other words, proving that the system is consistent would require the system to prove something about itself that it cannot prove. The issue is that if the system were able to prove its own consistency, it would be incomplete, because there would still be true statements within the system that it cannot prove. This means that there are things that are provably unprovable within the system, which illustrates the system's incompleteness.

The conclusion of Gödel's second incompleteness theorem is that a system that is consistent cannot prove its own consistency from within itself. This does not mean that the system is inconsistent; it simply means that the system's consistency cannot be proved using only the resources of the system itself.

Gödel's second incompleteness theorem is significant because it exposes a gap between what is true and what is provable, because some truths are beyond provability within any given system, even if that system is consistent. The second incompleteness theorem suggests that truths about the world may not always be accessible through purely formal, logical, or

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scientific methods (Gödel 1995). Gödel understood this to open the door to metaphysical inquiry. One needs metaphysics to make sense of certain problems, just as Hilary Putnam learned that one cannot do science without metaphysics (Putnam 1971). In other words, the unsolvability of this philosophical problem reveals not that we ought to dismiss the problem nor that the problem is purely formal, but that we ought to be receptive to new philosophical approaches! There is no stopping point to metaphysic: we cannot rely on it up until this point, to say ground mathematics, and then abandon it from that point onward. There might be truths about reality, such as consciousness, existence, or time, that require some imaginative detective work.

1.6 From Whence Comes Receptivism?

Receptivism is essentially Platonic in its approach. Towards the end of Plato's dialogues, Socrates and his companions often become stuck in their analysis of the definition of something like 'knowledge', 'courage', 'justice', or 'wisdom' (Plato 1961). Socrates then declares they have reached a state of *aporia*: an impasse, a sense that the path forward is petering out. This is evidenced in the Greek: the prefix '*a*', α, negates the meaning of the root word '*poros*', πόρος, which means a path or passage. Thus, ἀπορῐ́ᾱ means 'there is no path'. One ought not to take this negatively, rather, one should appreciate that *aporia* captures an essence of Platonic philosophical methodology: grappling with definitions to advance a dialectic.

Socrates employs this methodology all the time. He begins with a definition of a concept, then he questions if the definition captures the pre-formalised intentions that motivated the concept. Thus, the measure of success is that all the intentions motivating the concept are accounted for *and* the definitions avoid contradiction or incoherence. A notable example is

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Socrates' consideration of 'virtue' in the *Meno* (Plato 1981). Ultimately, Socrates never does accept a definition that accounts for all the implicit intentions motivating the concept. Yet this is not a failure on Socrates' part because by grappling with the definitions he can come to a new understanding; he can discard bad definitions and develop good ones, and in this manner, advance the dialectic. This is why Socrates is in a better position at the end of a dialogue than at the beginning, even if all he has learned is how little he knows. Socrates does not always end up where he expected or hoped to be: sometimes the path ends or becomes obstructed, but this *aporia* helps him to hew a new path that proceeds in a better direction.

This is connected to Plato's theory of recollection, also known as the theory of *anamnesis*, ἀνάμνησις, which is found in several dialogues, including the *Meno* and the *Phaedro* (Plato 1961). The theory holds that knowledge is innate and a kind of *anamnesis*, meaning recollection or reminiscence, of knowledge that the soul already possessed in its previous existence. According to Plato, the soul is immortal, but before being physically embodied it existed in the realm of the Forms where it had direct knowledge of eternal truths. During the process of becoming embodied, this knowledge was buried, and thus, recollection of it is limited. Yet people can strive to recall what is forgotten by engaging in dialectics or the Socratic method. Through the Socratic method, they can strive to remember the relevant pre-formalised notions.

Moving forward to the 20th century, echoes of this Platonic approach can be found in the works of Rudolf Carnap. Carnap distinguishes between *observational language* and *theoretical language* (see Carnap 1967; Carnap 1975). Observational language ought to be simple and taken as more concretely true, while theoretical language deals with representations that fit observational language. Carnap appeals to this distinction to introduce the idea of *expli-*

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cation, which is (Carnap 1950, p. 3):

> [⋯] the transformation of an inexact, prescientific concept, the *explicandum*, into a new exact concept, the *explicatum*.

This is part of the inspiration for the distinction between formalised and pre-formalised notions, although instead of talking about replacing the *explicandum* with the *explicatum*, instead the formalised notions reveal the relevant pre-formalised notions (P. F. Strawson 1963, p. 506). One might wish to formalise the pre-formalised notions so that one can eliminate all the inappropriate meanings and capture the correct meaning of a concept. In this way, the pre-formalised notions can be accumulated in one's background investigation like that of observation of nature, which adds to scientific investigation. One should seek to account for all the pre-formalised notions so that the formalised notion is sufficiently expansive. This is why one ought to be receptive to them.

Indeed, being receptive to these pre-formalised notions has proven historically successful. In addition to the earlier lessons from Gödel, one can appreciate how Saul Kripke's work in modality (Kripke 1980) was receptive to new notions of necessity, and what followed was a metaphysical renaissance. Such was the case too with Wittgenstein's rediscovered receptiveness to ideas and content that had been heretofore rejected because they were non-propositionally analysable, according to his Tractarian prescriptions.

1.7 Whither Receptivism?

It is said that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Therefore, this dissertation shall employ this experimental theory of receptivism to engage with some current problems in

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metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of religion. Specifically, it investigates the following three philosophical problems:

1. The *problem of consciousness for physicalism*: the concern that physicalism—the view that the only fundamental properties in the universe are physical, and all other properties are ultimately and categorically grounded in them—cannot account for consciousness.

2. The *problem of religious beliefs*: whether or not religious beliefs are distinct from non-religious beliefs in any philosophically important manner, and how our understanding of religious belief should inform our concept of 'belief'.

3. The *problem of evil*: the alleged inconsistency of the existence of evil with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God.

Regarding (1), it is argued that consciousness is not ultimately and categorically grounded in physical properties. Regarding (2), it is shown that religious beliefs are not exceptionally distinct from other kinds of beliefs, and why this supports a revision of a strict demarcation between religious and non-religious beliefs. As for (3), the case is made that because the created world exists and God cannot be arbitrary, that therefore, nothing will be precluded from existence by God due to the presence of a kind and level of property that already exists in creation. Concerning evil, because every existing thing apart from God is equally evil with respect to His perfection, then one cannot appeal to how evil something is as a reason to block its existence.

This analysis is divided into two parts: *Mind* and *Numen*. Part I, *Mind*, addresses some challenges to physicalism and concludes that it ought to be reconsidered. Motivated by this

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scepticism toward physicalism, the case is made for adopting a more liberal metaphysical perspective that permits the actual existence of a broader range of kinds of properties, including consciousness that is not fully grounded in physical properties. Following this reconsideration of physicalism and consciousness, in Part II, *Numen*, it is contended that religious beliefs are archetypal cases of belief that provide insight into the nature and meaning of belief. It follows that debates in the philosophy of religion can be re-examined with renewed vigour. Thus, it is shown how the receptivist approach allows one to make philosophical progress, by applying it to one of philosophy's most famous paradoxes: the problem of evil.

Admittedly, this dissertation makes for some rather controversial philosophy. In a sense, it appeals to philosophical work from the famously anti-metaphysical *Wiener Kreis*, or Vienna Circle (Hahn, Neurath, and Carnap 1929, p. 10), to argue in favour of the reality of fundamental consciousness, the importance of religious belief for understanding belief, and God's goodness. It also argues against the plausibility of physicalism, metaphysical conservatism, naturalistic beliefs as exclusively rationalistic, and the persuasiveness of the problem of evil. The irony of this project is not lost on us. Regardless, by the above process, the efficacy of receptivism is demonstrated by testing it in the fires of some of the more difficult debates in philosophy of mind, metaphysics, and religion, to show how one can make genuine progress on the problems under consideration. Given the Platonic inspiration, in the end, this work might be best summarised by the humbling proposition that it is but another footnote to Plato (Whitehead 1978, p. 39). If this label is verily earned, then it is received as a badge of the highest honour.

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Part I

Mind

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There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know.

Donald Rumsfeld (Rumsfeld 2002)

2

Going Mental: Why Physicalism Should Not Posit Inscrutable Properties

Keywords: Inscrutables; Kantian inscrutabilism; Physicalism; Physical inscrutabilism; Non-fundamental physicalism; Extrinsic necessity physicalism; Descriptive universalism; Panpsychism.

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Some philosophers argue that mental properties are ontologically distinct from physical properties and that, therefore, physicalism ought to be rejected. There are philosophers who feel the force of this challenge but who wish to maintain their physicalism. They suggest that mentality is grounded in inscrutable properties or 'incrutables': properties that are not revealed through physical enquiry but that do not violate physicalism. Our analysis reveals that appealing to inscrutables is not a successful strategy for these physicalists, for the following reasons: first, inscrutables likely do violate the conditions of physicalism; second, inscrutables lend greater support to panpsychism than physicalism; third, there is good reason to be agnostic as to whether or not inscrutables count as physical properties. Each of these reasons undermines the physicalist's purpose in positing inscrutables. If one wishes to remain a physicalist, they ought to direct their philosophical analysis and energies toward revisiting and defeasing the arguments that purport to show that mental properties are ontologically distinct from physical properties.

2.1 Introduction

Physicalism is the thesis that all fundamental properties in the universe are physical, and all other kinds of properties ultimately and categorically depend on these fundamental physical properties. Conversely, call the thesis that there exists at least one kind of thing—such as a category of properties—that is non-physical, non-physicalism. In response to certain challenges to physicalism (e.g. conceiv-

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ability, knowledge, and explanatory gap arguments), *some* physicalist philosophers posit the existence of a category of properties called 'inscrutable properties': properties whose intrinsic nature cannot be 'scruted' (D. M. Armstrong 1961; C. D. Brown 2017a; C. D. Brown 2021; Chalmers 2012; D. Lewis 2009), which in this context means to be categorically revealed and understood, in principle, by means of the physical sciences. These physicalists hold that inscrutables are definitively physical, but some non-physicalists argue that (if inscurtables exist) then they are not. The purpose of our analysis is to show that these supposed inscrutable properties likely do not count as physical things, and therefore, physicalists should reconsider positing their existence.

We begin at section 2.2 with some conceptual analysis of the key notions concerned. Then, at section 2.3, there will be further clarification of what inscrutables are supposed to be, and why postulating inscrutables matters for physicalism. In section 2.4, it is shown why inscrutables present a problem for physicalism. At section 2.5, we shall consider a form of physicalism dubbed *non-fundamental physicalism* that potentially supports the existence of physicalism-friendly inscrutables in a world with no fundamental level. It is determined that this view raises more problems for physicalism than it solves. Then, at section 2.6, it is argued that the existence of inscrutables abductively supports panpsychism; typically understood as the thesis that all fundamental properties have both physical and mental aspects. Finally, in section 2.7, we acknowledge the appeal of mysterianism or permanent agnosticism as to whether or not inscrutables count as physical properties; a position labelled *Kantian inscrutabilism*. This also undermines the physicalist claim that appealing to inscrutables supports physicalism.

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2.2 Known Unknowns

To begin, some detailed but necessary conceptual housekeeping is in order. First, take physicalism to be an ontological thesis about how the world is and what properties are, not just how we epistemically know about the world. Yet what exactly is a 'physical property'? There is no apparent ontological definition, save for the circular definition that physical properties are properties that are categorically physical. One common definition of a physical property is that it is a property (an attribute of an entity) capable of being understood through scientific study and observation or is fully comprehensible through the physical sciences. Problematically, this is an epistemically-based definition of an entity in support of an ontological theory. This foreshadows one of the challenges present in this dialectic; that many of the problems arise from philosophers trying to draw ontological conclusions from epistemic insights. However, given that conceptually and historically the notion of the physical is grounded in the empirical methods of the physical sciences, this will have to be our working definition of a physical property.

There are also differing views regarding the exact commitments of physicalism. Some formulations include: the thesis that everything is physical; the thesis that everything depends upon a fundamental physical level (Loewer 2001); the thesis that no non-physical categories are needed to describe the world as a whole (Fodor 1981b); a complete, purely physical description of reality that leaves nothing out (Mørch 2017); the thesis that "all facts obtain in virtue of the distribution of the fundamental [physical] properties" (Loewer 2001, p. 2), and so on.

Two popular accounts are *theory-based physicalism* and *via negativa physicalism*. The

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prior account says that a physical thing is something that is a posit of physics, or else ultimately depends on said posits of physics, and thus physicalism is true if all existing things are, or depend on, fundamental physical properties (G. Hellman and F. Thompson 1975; Melnyk 1997; Melnyk 2002; Poland 1994; J. Smart 1978; Stoljar 2001; Stoljar 2010). The latter account says that physicalism is true so long as no fundamental properties are mental (C. D. Brown 2022; Montero 2005; Montero and Papineau 2005; Papineau and Spurrett 1999; Wilson 2006). This is captured by Jessica Wilson's 'no fundamental mentality constraint', *NFM* (Wilson 2006, p. 61).[1] What is precisely meant by mentality will be discussed shortly. Of course, the existence of any non-physical property, mental or otherwise, that falls within the purview of the physicalist claim—perhaps excluding things like mathematical objects or moral laws, for instance—would falsify physicalism, including a *via negativa* physicalism that does not define itself only in relation to one kind of non-physical thing, as will be understood in the course of our analysis. Wilson's position can be broadened so as to adopt a more general principle, a 'no fundamental non-physical entity' constraint, or to put it in the positive, an 'only fundamental physicality' constraint. Call this constraint *OFP*. Hence, why one should not define *via negativa* physicalism as only being in opposi-

[1]See Wilson 2006, p. 91. Wilson's position is that *NFM* physicalism preserves the historical meaning of physicalism and its status as the descendent of materialism. She also thinks that the constraint avoids two horns of what is called Hempel's dilemma (Hempel 1969; Hempel 1980). The dilemma says that, firstly, one should not characterise the physical by reference to current physics because current physics is likely incomplete and partly inaccurate; and secondly, that a physicalism based on a future, ideal physics, has indeterminate content since we cannot yet know what a future ideal physics will look like (Geoffrey Hellman 1985, p. 609, Hempel 1969; Hempel 1980, Wilson 2006, p. 67).

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tion to mentality, lest it beg the question in favour of physicalism. Correctly understood, *via negativa* is a methodology, borrowed from apophatic philosophy and theology, which approaches problems by understanding concepts through negation. So, Wilsonian-style accounts will not have a monopoly on *via negativa* characterisations of physicalism. We will classify *via negativa* physicalism, for our purposes, as the thesis that physicalism is true so long as no fundamental properties are non-physical, where non-physical properties are taken to be any property that cannot be understood only by the physical sciences. The shared idea behind both theory-based physicalism and *via negativa* physicalism is: (a) that *all fundamental* properties are physical; and (b) that every non-fundamental property is physical or ultimately and categorically *depends* on fundamental physical properties.

Our conceptual housekeeping now brings us to another room: let us clarify what is meant by 'fundamental' and 'depend'. In Latin *fundamentum* means the bottom, foundation, groundwork, or beginning. Thus, by 'fundamental', it is meant that there is a grounding relationship between levels of analysis of reality (Schaffer 2012), where higher levels are dependent upon the lower levels, excepting the fundamental level, which is not dependent upon anything further because it is the final, lowest level of reality, at the base of the chain of dependence (Schaffer 2010, p. 1). The word 'depend' comes from Latin *dependere* and means 'to hang from'. 'Depend' is here a neutral word that can capture a number of metaphysical relations between properties. Talk of dependence can mean that a property is fully constituted by *x*, reducible to *x*, inherited by *x*, supervenes on *x*, is determined by *x*, is grounded in *x*, and so on. The general idea is that higher level properties hang from the lower level properties. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, 'depend' will mean that a non-fundamental

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property is *grounded in* a fundamental property.[2] Now the meaning of 'grounded in' must be clarified. According to Jonathan Schaffer (Schaffer 2017), the world is 'layered' in the sense that some entities are more fundamental than others, and 'grounding' is a distinctively metaphysical, non-causal determination relation, where the grounds metaphysically explain the grounded.[3] When applied to physicalism, take something to be grounded in physical properties if and only if the grounded is categorically explained by the physical properties that form the fundamental grounds.

When 'fundamental', 'depend', and 'ground' are taken together, there is a clearer picture of what physicalism claims: the only fundamental properties in the universe are physical, and all other properties depend on physical properties because they are ultimately and categorically grounded in them. For instance, chemical properties depend on atomic properties of chemical-constituting atoms, which depend on subatomic properties of atom-constituting subatomic properties. If the subatomic properties cannot be decomposed into smaller parts, then subatomic properties are fundamental, and the other properties are grounded in them. What is common between the above physicalist accounts is that the point of the theory is to explain *every* entity in terms of the physical sciences. One might consider this universalist account a stronger form of physicalism, in contrast to weaker forms which hold that physics need only partly explain every entity. This distinction will be considered at section 2.4. Opposed to physicalism is non-physicalism, the view that there exist properties or kinds of prop-

[2]Readers are welcome to substitute a different understanding of dependence, for instance, they might substitute 'explanation' or 'in virtue of' as accounts.

[3]For an alternative account of grounding see Goff 2015, who says:

> Fact X grounds fact Y iff Y obtains in virtue of X obtaining. (p. 3)

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erties that are not ultimately and categorically grounded in fundamental physical properties, and that this will remain the case no matter how sophisticated the physicalist account becomes.

One reason one might be sceptical of physicalism is if it cannot account for the first-person, phenomenal character of consciousness. This phenomenal character is sometimes expressed as the 'what-it-is-like' aspect of consciousness (Nagel 1974), such as is experienced in seeing a red tomato or tasting a sour lemon. This purported what-it-is-like aspect of consciousness is also called the 'mental' or 'mentality'. One popular way of understanding mentality is that it is an ineffable property, exemplified by Ned Block's (Block 1978, p. 281) claim, expressed in a quote from musician Louis Armstrong: "if you got to ask, you ain't never gonna get to know". Mentality is that which we know directly via the first-person-perspective that *seems* non-physical. The existence of mentality motivates scepticism about physicalism for some philosophers because they think it is a kind of property that is not physical and may not be categorically grounded in any fundamental physical properties. Non-physicalism is true so long as there is at least one kind of property that is non-physical. If mental properties are not categorically grounded in fundamental physical properties, then physicalism is probably false.

Of course, not everyone accepts that the mental is something distinct from the physical, for instance, David Rosenthal (Rosenthal 2010) argues that such things like colours, tastes, and so forth, only seem non-physical if one holds a specific theory of the world or accepts a particular intuition. However, the same reasoning holds for non-physicalism: non-physical things like mentality only seem physical if one holds a specific theory of the world or accepts a particular intuition. Regardless, most philosophers involved in the physicalism/non-physicalism

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debate agree that there is something sufficiently interesting about mentality, such that one ought to address the notion that 'mentality seems distinct from physical properties'. This proposition may or may not be true, but any philosopher engaged in the dialectic would be remiss to neglect its philosophical importance. A diligent physicalist should explain how mentality is grounded in the physical *and* why 'mentality seems distinct from physical properties', or else they would be ignoring a notion that prima facie appears to capture something about the way reality is. Likewise, a diligent non-physicalist ought to address the notion that 'mentality appears to be strongly intertwined with a world full of physical properties'. This proposition also may or may not be true, but it would be neglectful to ignore it when arguing for non-physicalist theories. The point is that we ought to be receptive to these philosophically important notions if we wish to account for how reality is. Thus, for the purposes of our analysis, we take it that for physicalism to be a persuasive theory of reality, it must explain how mentality is grounded in the physical.

A number of arguments have purported to show that mentality is *inscrutable* to physical enquiry. These are the conceivability argument (Chalmers 1996; Chalmers 2010; Kirk 1974), knowledge arguments (Jackson 1982; Jackson 1986; Renero 2023; Robinson 1982) and the explanatory gap argument (Levine 1983). The notion of 'scrutability' is related to David Chalmers' *scrutability theses*, which say that all truths can be determined—'scried' is his term—from a relatively spartan class of truths (Chalmers 2012, p. 30).[4] Physicalists

[4]There are different ways of characterising scrutability, and much of this has to do with the interplay between physical things and laws of entailment and identification. In the literature on physicalism and mentality, the general idea is that if the grounding relations between mental properties and physical properties are covered by laws then there are some laws which, together with the physical properties and some identifications, ground the mental properties. There is

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who talk about inscrutables usually take scrutability to mean that something can be fully revealed and understood, in principle, by means of the physical sciences. As a reaction to the claim that mental properties are inscrutable, some philosophers conclude that mentality is not grounded in fundamental physical properties and is, therefore, non-physical. Interestingly, some physicalists also feel the force of the above arguments in favour of inscrutability, yet rather than disavowing physicalism, they instead appeal to inscrutables to ground mentality in a way that accommodates the challenge presented by the inscrutability of the mental (C. D. Brown 2017a; C. D. Brown 2021; Montero 2015). Physicalists who posit inscrutables allege that these things stand as fundamental properties that ground less fundamental properties, such as mental properties, and thereby account for the apparent distinctiveness of phenomenal character. At the same time, these properties allegedly do not violate the conditions of physicalism, because they themselves are inferentially physical (D. M. Armstrong 1961; Chalmers 2012; D. Lewis 2009).

Our analysis reveals that appealing to inscrutables is not a successful strategy for these physicalists. First, physicalist accounts that posit inscrutables to explain mentality are not compelling because they do violate the conditions of physicalism. Second, if one does postulate inscrutables, then by inference to the best explanation, inscrutables lend greater support to panpsychism than physicalism. Third, there is good reason to be agnostic as to whether or not

debate as to whether or not the laws themselves ought to be scrutable from physical truths, but for our purposes we will adopt something akin to what Chalmers (Chalmers 2012) calls 'weak scrutability': all phenomenal properties are grounded in some physical properties together with some laws. This means we will remain agnostic about the scrutability of laws. For discussion of various notions of 'scrutability', see (Balog 2012; Block and Stalnaker 1999; Chalmers 2012; Loar 1990; and Tye 1999).

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inscrutables count as physical properties, which supports *Kantian inscrutabilism*. From this analysis two responses present themselves to these physicalists. First, if one accepts arguments that purport to show that mentality is inscrutable to physical enquiry, then one ought to reject physicalism in favour of panpsychism or Kantian inscrutabilism. Second, if one wishes to remain a physicalist, one ought to direct their philosophical analysis and energies toward revisiting and defeasing the arguments that purport to show that mentality is inscrutable to physical enquiry. Either way, one can appreciate that appealing to inscrutables provides no benefit for physicalism. One might also reconsider how the physicalism/non-physicalism debate is framed by revisiting the value of entertaining the debate at the fundamental level, which is far-removed from the human-level mentality that engendered the concerns in the first instance.

2.3 Why Inscrutables Matter

The conceivability argument, knowledge arguments, and the explanatory gap argument, support what is known as the mind–body problem and the hard problem of consciousness (Chalmers 1995). These are, respectively, the difficulty of explaining the exact relationship between mentality and the physical body, and the problem of accounting for mentality in a way that is consistent with the seemingly completely physical universe in which we find ourselves. These two problems motivate scepticism about physicalism because physicalism denies the existence of fundamental mental properties, yet these two problems are sometimes taken to support the view that mentality is not physical nor dependent upon the physical. Non-physicalism accepts that there might be fundamentally non-physical properties, hence why most non-physicalists take mentality as the non-physically explicable property *par ex-*

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cellence. Non-physicalists include, but are not limited to, idealists, substance and property dualists, and panpsychists.

What is at stake here is where one ought to direct one's philosophical attention, and how one can best approach making sense of reality. On the one hand, physicalists encourage continuous pursuit of physicalist explanations to unanswered questions, because they suspect that the correct ontology is one that fits into a physicalist framework. A non-physicalist thinks that we need to be open to non-physicalist frameworks in response to challenges to the physicalist picture. Some physicalists, such as Barbara Montero (Montero 2010; Montero 2015), and C. D. Brown (C. D. Brown 2017a; C. D. Brown 2020; C. D. Brown 2021), appeal to inscrutables to characterise a physicalism that allows one to maintain their commitment to the proposition that 'mentality seems distinct from physical properties', thus satisfying non-physicalist concerns, while still firmly denying the existence of non-physically dependent mental properties, because the inscrutables are the grounds of mental properties.[5] They suggest that inscrutables are properties that are not revealed through physical enquiry but may still stand as the fundamental base for everything else (C. D. Brown 2021; Montero 2015). Brown (C. D. Brown 2017a; C. D. Brown 2021) suggests that the best way to understand inscrutables is as a class of properties that ground dispositional properties but that are not themselves physical. The obverse of inscrutables are, therefore, 'scrutables', which are the dispositional, structural, and relational properties posited, and in principle knowable, by physics. For these physicalists, the above arguments undermine versions of physicalism that invoke dispositional, relational, and/or structural properties as being the fundamental properties of the universe.[6] Notably, these properties are all cashed out in terms of measurable

[5]Brown prefers to refer to these properties as 'categorical properties'.

[6]The dispositional versus categorical distinction was introduced by Gilbert Ryle (Ryle 1949,

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behaviours and/or spatio-temporal relations. Some philosophers, like Daniel Stoljar, think that inscrutables are neither dispositional, relational, or structural, *but* they still might form the physical base for all other properties, and therefore, are not undermined by the above arguments. The idea then is that physics refers to inscrutables indirectly, such as how one might refer to "the dark figure in the alley", even if one does not know any of the other properties of said figure. In this case, one is referring indirectly to particular properties of the person, for instance that they are a person, by referencing other features, such as that they are a dark figure (Stoljar 2001). So, while the nature of inscrutables is not known, one can allegedly make indirect inferences about them.

Here is a working definition of an inscrutable:

> *x* is an inscrutable if it is a property posited by a theory to explain or ground, in whole or in part, other properties, objects, or events; this property is incapable of being categorically understood or revealed through physical study and observation; or being comprehensible by the physical sciences.

On this definition, an inscrutable might ground mentality without this being any indication whether the inscrutable is or is not itself mental. Hence, the definition does not automatically lend support to either physicalism nor non-physicalism.

Why do some people posit inscrutables, let alone care about them? Physicalists who feel the force of the conceivability argument, knowledge arguments, and explanatory gap argument—and consequently the mind–body problem and the hard problem of consciousness —are allegedly confronted by two inconsistent claims (C. D. Brown 2021):

p. 117) for the purposes of distinguishing certain types of statements.

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Physicalism: the only fundamental properties in the universe are physical, and all other properties depend upon, and are grounded in, physical properties.

Inscrutability: mental properties appear not to be physical properties, nor grounded in fundamental physical properties.

On the one hand, physicalism is attractive as it can in principle account for all non-mental properties, and this is a great deal of known properties in existence. It also addresses the proposition that 'mentality appears to be strongly intertwined with a world full of physical properties'. For instance, David Papineau (Papineau 2001) argues that physicalism is supported by the causal closure argument that concludes that all physical effects (including human behaviour) have only physical causes. In summary, the force of physicalism lays in the parsimony and simplicity of positing only one kind of fundamental property; the physical properties with which we are already well-acquainted.

On the other hand, the arguments presented earlier purport to show that mentality is inscrutable to physical enquiry. For instance, the conceivability argument says that if one can conceive of a minimal physical duplicate of our world, including all and only our world's fundamental physical properties and whatever properties they metaphysically necessitate, but that has different mental properties than our world, then such a world is possible (Chalmers 1996; Chalmers 2010). If a minimal physical duplicate of our world with different mental properties is possible, then physicalism is false. Such a world is conceivable, therefore possible, so physicalism is false. According to this argument, it is the very fact that mental properties are inscrutable to scientific enquiry that renders physicalism false. Thus, any property that

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is inscrutable to scientific enquiry, be it mental or otherwise, appears to undermine physicalism. At first pass, it appears that *inscrutability* and *physicalism* cannot both be true.

Non-physicalists resolve the tension by rejecting *physicalism*. Some physicalists deny *inscrutability*, perhaps because they feel no compulsion to posit inscrutables, or if they do, no compulsion to explain what they intrinsically are, why they are not mental, and how they ground the mental. Lewis (D. Lewis 2009) and Armstrong (D. M. Armstrong 1961) adopt this position, which is called the *scientific categorical ignorance thesis* (Chan 2021). Both kinds of responses are certainly available to the interested philosopher. Yet whether or not inscrutables exist, and if they can explain mentality, is integral to the physicalism/non-physicalism debate. The problem is that if these properties cannot be revealed by physical enquiry then (a) how do we know that they are themselves physical? And (b) how do we know that they ground the mental? The appeal to inscrutables is inadvisable for physicalists because they cannot satisfactorily address the above two challenges. Here are three reasons why. First, positing properties that are incapable of being understood through study and observation or being comprehensible by physical science, violates the spirit, and more importantly the conditions, of physicalism. It even violates the conditions of *via negativa* physicalism, because by holding that there can be no non-physical properties, there remains a positive account of what a physical property is. Second, even if the existence of inscrutables somehow does not contradict physicalism, inscrutables still do not explain how mentality depends on, or is grounded in, physical properties.[7] Thus, positing inscrutables does not advance the physicalist/non-physicalist dialectic, rather, it places it on hold by suggesting that perhaps there is a

[7]This concern may not be applicable to Lewis' quiddities because they are not supposed to solve the problem of the existence of mentality; that is done by functionalism. The quiddities are there to constitute the relata for the causal relations. Armstrong holds a similar view.

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solution, but one that cannot be explained because the relation is mysterious. Third, mental properties appear distinct to physical properties; even these particular physicalists must grant us this, as this is why they are engaging in the debate. If mental properties are grounded in inscrutables *and* seem distinct to physical properties, then abductively the case is stronger that inscrutables are mental or non-physical kinds of properties. After all, our only evidence for inscrutables is our phenomenal character.

In support of the case against the value of inscrutables to physicalism, four distinct responses to the conjunction of *inscrutability* and *physicalism* will be assessed:

Physical inscrutabilism: Maintain *physicalism* and *inscrutability*: inscrutables count as physical properties.

Non-Fundamental Physicalism: Maintain *physicalism* and *inscrutability*: inscrutables are either physical properties or not fundamentally non-physical properties in a world with no fundamental level. Call this view *non-fundamental physicalism* (C. D. Brown 2017b; C. D. Brown 2020).

Panpsychism: Reject *physicalism* and maintain *inscrutability*: inscrutables are not purely physical properties and likely mental. This view is popular with panpsychists, so call it *panpsychism*. Note that it might also support dualism or, with additional argumentation, idealism.

Kantian inscrutabilism: Adopt agnosticism about either or both *physicalism* and *inscrutability*: inscrutables may be physical, non-physical, mental, etc., but are epistemically inaccessible. This view is similar to that held by Immanuel Kant (Kant 1999), so call it *Kantian inscrutabilism*.

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First, we will argue against physical inscrutabilism. Then we will consider non-fundamental physicalism as an alternative formulation of physicalism that might reconcile physicalism with the real existence of inscrutables. This view holds that infinite, non-fundamental, non-physical properties count as physical in a world with infinite, non-fundamental, physical properties: such a world is one with no fundamental level. This solution fails because it cannot explain the grounding relation between mentality and inscrutables, and a world with no fundamental level renders physicalism compatible with non-physicalist views like panpsychism, which dilutes physicalism by reducing it to a view about how to carve up conceptual space, instead of a view making ontological claims. Therefore, non-fundamental physicalism will be rejected. We will then show that if one posits inscrutables, abductively there is a stronger case for panpsychism than physicalism. However, inscrutables also lend support to Kantian inscrutabilism, given that the nature of inscrutables cannot be definitively shown to be mental.

2.4 Physical Inscrutabilism

According to physical inscrutablism, the mental properties that motivate *inscrutability* are grounded in inscrutables, and although the nature of inscrutables cannot be revealed by physical enquiry, the mental properties themselves are not fundamental and thus do not count against physicalism (Montero 2010; Stoljar 2001). Brown (C. D. Brown 2017a) says that if one were to duplicate both the scrutable and the inscrutable fundamental properties, in a manner analogous to the thought experiments involved in conceivability arguments, then it is not necessarily conceivable that phenomenal properties would fail to be realized as well. It could be the case, he argues, that although physical inscrutables are properly physical and

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not 'infected' by some special relationship to mentality, the mental properties might yet still be grounded in them. In this manner, appealing to inscrutables could undermine the anti-physicalist interpretation of the conceivability argument if the inscrutables are the underlying role-fillers of the properties revealed through physics that ground mentality. Brown says that this characterisation of inscrutables is compatible with a specific kind of physicalism called *Russellian monism*—the view that a single kind of property grounds both the mental and physical—for although the nature of the inscrutables is not positively known, one can infer that they are probably physical (Alter and Nagasawa 2012, pp. 70–1; C. D. Brown 2017a; Chalmers 2015, p. 43; Russell 1900; Russell 1912, p. 274). According to Brown, we do not need to say what the inscrutables are in order to get a physicalism that explains mentality, because if we duplicate both scrutables and inscrutables, then we see that inscrutables are not mental, and we thereby get a workable physicalism.

It can be appreciated that there are two reasons why physicalists appeal to inscrutables: (a) the ontological reason: physical inscrutabilism holds that ontologically mental properties are grounded in fundamental physical properties; and (b) the explanatory reason: physical inscrutabilism can explain mentality on a physicalist picture by grounding mentality in fundamental physical properties. Note that if (a) fails as a strategy, then (b) also likely fails, as its explanatory value is connected to (a). Below are two arguments that show that the real existence of inscrutables implies that physical inscrutabilism is false. The *incompatibility argument* shows that (a) is not a convincing reason because inscrutables violate the condition of physicalism that there are no non-physical fundamental properties. The *non-explanatory argument* shows that (a) and (b) are not convincing because inscrutables do not help ontologically ground mentality in fundamental physical properties, and thus physicalism cannot

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explain mentality.

2.4.1 The Incompatibility Argument

Is the concept of an inscrutable even compatible with physicalism? The fact one can talk about inscrutables indicates that they are conceptually coherent, yet there appears to be a gap between the concept and its physical credentials. The notion of an 'inscrutable' is developed in response to the inability of physics to reveal the grounds of certain kinds of properties, thus if something is inscrutable, it is by definition *physically inscrutable*. This entails that the intrinsic nature of the inscrutable property lies outside the purview of the physical sciences, *in principle*. If physics could in principle reveal these properties, they would be inscrutables-for-now. Inscrutables-for-now are like the dark figure in the alley, in that they can eventually step forward into the light and reveal themselves. However, the lesson usually taken from the conceivability argument, knowledge arguments, and explanatory gap argument, is not that mentality cannot *for now* be shown to be grounded in physical facts, but that mentality is a distinct kind of fundamental property that can never be fully grounded in the physical: hence why the mind–body problem and the hard problem of consciousness follow. Thus, an inscrutable-for-now is not the kind of inscrutable under discussion in the literature. Inscrutables are fundamental properties that are not revealed through physical enquiry: they cannot step forward into the light. So, if inscrutables are existing ontological entities, then their existence renders physicalism false.

A response to this line of objection is that one should not discount physicalism because a minuscule fraction of properties in one's ontology cannot be physically revealed. For example, Chan (Chan 2021) says that the existence of far-fetched, non-physical things, "distant

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from the standard concerns of physicalism" should not discredit the view:

> Recall the scientific categorical ignorance thesis—a component of Russellian monism—according to which categorical properties are not knowable by the natural sciences. Not only do Russellian monists accept this thesis, often for reasons independent of the philosophy of mind (see e.g. Stoljar 2001, pp. 258–259; Montero 2015, p. 217, but so do many respected physicalists such as Armstrong (1961), Jackson (1998), and Lewis (2009). In fact, this thesis is widely accepted in contemporary metaphysics, though it is accepted for different reasons[···]While it is possible to count, as Foster (1993) and Langton (1998) do, every person who accepts both the existence of categorical properties and the scientific categorical ignorance thesis as a non-physicalist, this is certainly a radical move. For we should be reluctant to put the metaphysical frameworks of all the leading physicalists and Russellian physicalists mentioned above in the anti-physicalist camp if the only reason is one that is very much distant from the standard concerns of physicalism: namely, debates such as whether there are disembodied minds or whether God exists. As Stoljar remarks, 'there seems no reason not to count [unknowable categorical properties] as physical in some sense or other' (Stoljar 2015); and, as Montero remarks, '[unknowable categorical properties] are not uniquely important to the mental and so a world with them should be perfectly acceptable to a physicalist' (Montero 2015, p. 217). Such reluctance leads theorists such as Stoljar (2001a, 2001b) and Montero (2010, 2015) to favour a more moderate, revisionary move, can be understood as follows: if our conception of physicalism is mistaken because of some reason

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> distant from the classical discussions of the doctrine, we should simply say that the conception is mistaken, not that the doctrine is mistaken. (pp. 2045-2046)

This hand-waving away non-physical properties is unconvincing, just as unconvincing as Chan's (Chan 2021, p. 2046) claim that the existence of God is a distant concern for metaphysicians and physicalists.[8] No concern is too distant for physicalism, for the whole point of physicalism is to employ the universal quantifier: no fundamental properties are non-physical, which is equivalent to claiming that all fundamental properties are physical. It is precisely the existence of non-physical properties, mental or not, that is a concern for physicalism; there is no such thing as far-fetched, non-physical things "distant from the standard concerns of physicalism", according to physicalism itself. If physicalism is the claim that everything is physical, then the existence of even one non-physically dependent property is sufficient to render the theory false, unless philosophers beg the question by stating that physicalism is the claim that everything in reality is physical. And this is an ontological not an epistemic claim; that such things are posited but cannot be definitively known means they might intrinsically be non-physical. We ought, therefore, to conclude that to dismiss the importance of inscrutables that are unknowable by physics is to commit a *petitio principii*.

Chan might have in mind what we called a weaker kind of physicalism, one which holds that physics need only partly explain every entity, and hence reject the premise that inscruta-

[8] Chan has pointed out via correspondence that the reference to debates about disembodied minds and God is anaphoric on the shorter clause "[...] the standard concerns of physicalism [...]" rather than the longer "[...] reason[s] [...] very much distant from the standard concerns of physicalism". Regardless, the point regarding attitudes to inconvenient seemingly non-physical properties holds in relation to the remarks by Stoljar and Montero, and Chan's larger symapthies with this position.

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bles are outside the purview of the physical sciences, in principle, because they are only so for now. For instance, Chalmers (Chalmers 1996) distinguishes between three kinds of physicalism in response to the mind–body problem and the hard problem of consciousness: a type-A materialist denies that there is the relevant sort of epistemic gap between the mental and physical; a type-B materialist accepts that there is an unclosable epistemic gap yet denies an ontological gap, and a type-C materialist concedes that there is an epistemic gap yet thinks that it can in principle be closed. Take 'materialist' here to be synonymous with 'physicalist'. So, a type-C materialist will reject the premise that inscrutables are in principle inscrutable to physical enquiry. Here is an example. According to Russellian monism, 'protophenomenal properties' are alleged properties that ground mentality without themselves being mental, because they are the underlying role-fillers of the dispositional and other properties revealed through physics that explain consciousness. Russellian monists hold that mentality is an aspect of fundamental properties, but that it is grounded in the these inscrutable 'protophenomenal' properties (Alter and Nagasawa 2012, pp. 70–71). Although the Russellian monist cannot close the epistemic gap between the mental and physical, they think that with complete knowledge of inscrutables, it would be revealed that they would count as fundamentally physical properties. We are interested in a stronger kind of physicalism, one that commits to the traditional understanding of physicalism as claiming that everything is categorically grounded in the physical. If something is only partly grounded in the physical, and partly grounded in something else, say mental properties, this clearly violates the claim that physicalists make when they say everything is physical. This almost sounds like a kind of dualism.

If inscrutables are non-physical then they present a concern for physicalism, but problem-

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atically, there is no persuasive reason to infer that inscrutables are physical. Morris (Morris 2016) suggests that an exact duplicate of our world in every physical respect, excepting that it lacks inscrutable properties that ground the mental, would both be physical in an identical way to our own world, and yet would be lacking in mentality. He concludes that "[inscrutables] probably do not have a place in physicalist metaphysics" (Morris 2016, p. 6). It seems then that the inscrutables that ground mentality should be inferred to be at least partly non-physical, and this puts mentality into the fundamental level. Thus, Russellian monism faces a dilemma: either inscrutables are at least partly mental which entails that Russellian monism surrender its physicalist credentials, or inscrutables are not mental at all, but then Morris' thought experiment shows that mentality is grounded in some further, fundamental property, because it is not accounted for by the originally postulated inscrutable properties. Positing physical inscrutables simply increases the distance between human mentality and the fundamental level which grounds it, but it does not resolve the problem in a physicalist-friendly manner. A Russellian monist might deny that inscrutables are protophenomenal and assert that they are only physical, but then they again run into the problem of showing why this kind of property is both physical and categorically grounds the kind of mentality that follows from the conceivability argument. By explaining away the tension between *inscrutability* and *physicalism*, the Russellian monist is only explaining away inscrutables or physicalism, but not mentality.

Morris' thought experiment shows that inscrutables are not merely epistemically distinct, but ontologically so, and thus one cannot resolve the problem by appealing to type-C materialism and rejecting the premise that inscrutables are only epistemically but not ontologically outside the purview of the physical sciences. Indeed, as Howard Robinson (Robinson 2016)

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argues, positing properties hidden to physics that still interfere in the physical world leads to a contradiction:

> Our scientific knowledge seems to be adequate for fine tuning the operations of matter to a remarkable degree[···]There is a paradox here. If the hidden property did 'interfere' with the operations that science seemed to predict, then it would no longer be hidden. But if it does not, then in what sense is it a physical property? (p. 206)

If inscrutables are a kind of mental property, then physicalism fails. If they are categorically physical, then they do not ground mentality. Calling them 'protophenomenal' physical properties is a misleading title for 'inscrutable-for-now physical properties', and any physicalism making an ontological claim fails. The conclusion to be drawn from all this, is that 'inscrutable physical properties' appears to be a contradiction, and thus physicalism cannot account for inscrutables without changing the necessary conditions of physicalism.

2.4.2 The Non-Explanatory Argument

The incompatibility argument shows that the existence of inscrutables is incompatible with the requirements of physicalism, but there is a further conditional argument available: were inscrutables not to violate the conditions of physicalism, appealing to inscrutables still does not afford physicalism a way to explain the existence of seemingly non-physically dependent mentality, because inscrutables do not show how mentality is grounded in fundamental physical properties. In other words, appealing to inscrutables does not explain phenomenal character in a physicalism-friendly manner, which is the motivation for positing them in the first instance.

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Consider two commons ways in which physicalists articulate the relationship between mental properties and inscrutable properties: constitution and grounding. Brown and Chalmers both say that inscrutables could *constitute* the mental because if a minimal physical duplicate of our world with different mental properties is possible, then mental properties are not fully constituted by physical properties, but rather by inscrutable properties. Here is a definition of 'constitution' provided by Goff (Goff 2015):

> Truth X constitutes truth Y iff (i) X is a fundamental truth and Y is a non-fundamental truth, (ii) the fundamental reality specified by X satisfies the metaphysical truth condition of Y.

Take 'constitutes' to mean 'fully-constitutes', which means that X is a fundamental property that is not constituted by any further properties. Yet because one can conceive of a world wherein all physical facts exist sans mentality per the conceivability argument, then inscrutables must be the property that partly or fully constitutes the mental. Thus, the mental is not fully constituted by the physical.

The same reasoning applies to physicalism that substitutes 'constitutes' for our preferred concept of 'grounding'. The problem is identical: mentality is grounded in inscrutable properties and, therefore, not fully grounded in fundamental physical properties. If mentality were fully grounded in fundamental physical properties, then there would be no need to posit inscrutables in the first instance. It follows that physical properties are not the grounds of mentality. Physicalism thus does not give us an explanatory account of how mentality is fundamentally physical, nor what mentality is, unless it can definitively show that inscrutables are physical.

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The purpose of positing inscrutables is to explain mentality.[9] If positing inscrutables explains mentality, but inscrutables cannot be shown to be fundamentally physical, then physicalism is in trouble. Why posit inscrutables that count as physical, if they thereby do not categorically explain the mental? As physicalism cannot show that inscrutables are physical nor how they thereby fully explain the mental, it must be concluded that physical inscrutabilism fails. Of course, this conditional non-explanatory argument is secondary to the stronger incompatibility argument, which shows that inscrutables violate the conditions of physicalism.

2.5 Non-Fundamental Physicalism

Is there a way to rescue physical inscrutabilism? It has been acknowledged by Alter and Nagasawa (Alter and Nagasawa 2012), Brown and Ladyman (R. Brown and Ladyman 2009), Montero (Montero 2006), and Schaffer (Schaffer 2003), that the existence of inscrutables that are not definitively physical properties renders physicalism false in worlds that have a fundamental level. However, if one gets a bit ontologically creative, one might be able to come up with a kind of world in which physical inscrutabilism is true. Brown (C. D. Brown 2017b) argues that one can maintain *physicalism* and *inscrutability* in a world with *no* fundamental level. This is because there could be an infinite descent of ever-lower-level mental properties which are all nonetheless dependent on ever-lower-level physical properties (C. D. Brown 2017b). Call the view that physical inscrutabilism is true in a world with no fundamental level *non-fundamental physicalism*.

Here, in brief, is the case for non-fundamental physicalism. Brown and Ladyman (R.

[9] Again, excepting Lewis' account.

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Brown and Ladyman 2009), Montero (Montero 2006), and Schaffer (Schaffer 2017) have proposed a divide in the world between a subvening set of non-mental bottom levels, and a supervening set of mental top levels. Now imagine that there is a world that has no fundamental level, such that every top level subvenes on a bottom level, which then subvenes on yet a lower level. For example, presume that fermions and bosons (which current physicists take to be fundamental) are themselves composed of lower-level things, which are composed of lower-level things, and so on, *ad infinitum*. In such a world it seems that it is not a necessary condition for physicalism that that every fundamental property is physical, for where there is no fundamental level, there are also no fundamental non-physical properties. Yet what if in a world with an infinite descent of physical properties there is also an infinite descent of mental properties? One might expect this to render physicalism false. Brown (C. D. Brown 2017b) says that an infinite descent of mentality is possible in a physical world, provided there is also an infinite descent of the physical. Brown describes a possible world that is infinitely both all-physical and all-mental "all the way down", which he calls *MPW*.

In *MPW* there are no fundamental properties. Additionally, each level has compositional complexity; any property at any level n has many constituent parts at the next lowest level, $n-1$. How many parts n decomposes into is irrelevant, only that each property is composed of however many parts are required for the given complexity. Thus, if there is a highest-level system, A, such as phenomenal character, then A is mental in virtue of the relations between the Bs that compose A, and the Bs are mental in virtue of the relations between the Cs, and Cs the Ds, *ad infinitum*. In *MPW* mentality is generated at every level through the dynamic compositional structure of lower-level properties. In essence, says Brown, he is just positing many quasi-brains, all the way down. In this possible world, there is an infinite descent of

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mental levels, yet physicalism is allegedly still true, because these mental levels are grounded in an ever-lower mental and physical level. Thus, one can reject any 'no-infinite-descent-of-mentality' criterion for physicalism.

Brown addresses three counter-arguments to his conjecture. First, one response is to suggest that physicalism implies eliminativism about mental properties, which would trivially mean that no way of arranging only physical things could ground mentality. However, given that most physicalists are not eliminativists, Brown rejects eliminativism about the mental for physicalism to argue that *MPW* contains physicalism-friendly mentality.

A second critique of the argument is to say that nothing in *MPW* is genuinely mental, perhaps because no mental thing can have another mental thing as a part. This would render Block's (Block 1978) Chinese nation or Searle's (Searle 1980) Chinese room not genuinely mental. One response to this objection comes from cognitive science: arguably the human brain is composed of mental sub-systems, and this is especially evident if any modularity thesis is true (Fodor 1983). Brown's second response is to appeal to an argument from Eric Schwitzgebel (Schwitzgebel 2015) that there are nomically possible alien creatures who could be constructed out of undeniably mental parts and who would count as mental, and that it would be chauvinistic for humans to deny that such beings—some of which might resemble incredibly sophisticated ant colonies—could be mental.

The third critique is that any plausible revision of physicalism which allows it to be true in a world without a fundamental level will have panpsychism come out true in *MPW*. For instance, if panpsychism is revised into the thesis that mental and physical properties are ubiquitous at every level of nature below some level n, then panpsychism so conceived is true in *MPW*. It is peculiar if in *MPW* both panpsychism and physicalism come out as true because

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panpsychism is usually considered incompatible with physicalism. Brown suggests that one way to resolve this tension is to bite the bullet and give up the idea that panpsychism and physicalism are inconsistent with one another. This is undoubtedly controversial, yet Stoljar (Stoljar 2001) claims that while panpsychism posits more and stranger mental properties than we typically suppose exist, the quantity and location of mentality alone is not enough to make physicalism false. Of course, this would violate any physicalism with an *OFP* or *NFM* constraint (Wilson 2006). In response, Brown suggests that if *NFM* is dropped as a condition of physicalism, then there is no apparent tension, and presumably, he might recommend *OFP* is dropped as a condition too.

Although a creative way to rescue physicalism, non-fundamental physicalism is unsatisfactory in relation to physical inscrutabilism. First, let us consider the ontological issues. If at each respective level what grounds mentality are composite physical properties, but all these properties are physically scrutable, then they will still fall afoul of the conceivability argument. Alternatively, if inscrutable properties play a role in the grounding relation, then it is they, and not physical composition alone, that account for mentality at each level. And so, mentality is not categorically grounded in physical properties. Although in *MPW* inscrutables are also explained by lower-level physical things, so too are physical things explained by lower-level inscrutables. Thus, the grounding relation of the mental is infinitely passed downwards. In one sense, non-fundamental physicalism fails as a physicalism, because it never ultimately grounds mentality in physical properties, or indeed anything, because there are no ultimate grounds.

If we are charitable and dispose of our definitions of physicalism in favour of something more nebulous—how such a physicalism should be characterised eludes us—then perhaps

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non-fundamental physicalism is true in a world (nomically improbable) where there is an infinite descent of physical and mental levels. Yet this is hardly a victory for physical inscrutabilism, for aside from side-stepping the primary challenge in the physicalism-non-physicalism debate—whether there are fundamental non-physical properties—by denying fundamentality, it also provides little comfort to a this-world physicalist who accepts fundamentality.

Second, we come to the epistemic concerns. It is not clear that *MPW* actually explains phenomenal character. In *MPW*, whatever gives rise to human-level mentality can be iterated ad infinitum to smaller and smaller degrees, but at no point does it actually explain how such a mechanism gives rise to mentality. It appeals to compositionality, but as is known from the conceivability and knowledge arguments, compositionality leaves many philosophers dissatisfied with how mentality arises at the human level, let alone how it infinitely arises. For all we know, *MPW* necessarily requires emergentism, parallelism, or entails an explanatory gap, iterated infinitely many times (presuming the story is identical at each level, which is not guaranteed). Thus, Brown's solution still does not account for the mental, even at each respective level. Consider Agrippa's trilemma about explanations. The trilemma is the proposition that the attempt to justify any philosophical belief can only end in one of three ways: a circular argument; an infinite chain of explanation; or a foundational assumption that can no longer be questioned. To account for mentality, Brown has fallen upon the second horn and presented us with an infinite chain of explanation. And no matter how far down the chain one descend, one is no clearer about the connection between physical properties and mentality than one is when one asks how the many interacting components of Alex's brain gives rise to his mentality. Brown never explains how Alex's mentality is grounded, so his story does not dispel the hard problem or mind–body problem which motivated non-

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physicalism in the first instance.

In other words, non-fundamental physicalism has taken our initial problem, the hard problem of consciousness and the mind–body problem, and infinitely reiterated it. We are as much in the dark after accepting Brown's infinite mentality in a non-fundamental physical world, as we were before. Perhaps we are now infinitely further from explaining human consciousness! *MPW*, therefore, fails to explain the explanandum, human mentality. We have now come a long way from explaining human mentality, the problem that sent physicalists down the path of positing inscrutables in the first place. If a physicalist is positing an infinite descent of inscrutable, alien-structured mentality, in a possible world without a fundamental level, to explain the human mind in this world, they might wonder how parsimonious physicalism is, and why they are willing to sacrifice so much to defend it.

Non-fundamental physicalism purports to save physicalism, but does so by sacrificing the definition of physicalism, because it concedes that there are no fundamental physical properties or explanations. If theory-based physicalism fails to capture some aspects of reality, (such as fundamental mentality), then it fails to quantify over all of reality, and thus is false. If *via negativa* physicalism fails to capture some aspects of reality (such as fundamental mentality), then it fails to quantify over all of reality, and thus is false. If non-fundamental physicalism fails to account for some aspects of reality (like non-physically-grounded mentality), then it too fails to quantify over all of reality, and thus fails as a kind of physicalism. If there is no fundamental level, then non-fundamental physicalism infinitely reiterates the hard problem and the mind-body problem.

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Non-fundamental physicalism risks reducing itself to a metaphysical position we call *descriptive universalism*:

> Theory *X* (e.g. call it 'physicalism') is the notion that all *f*s (properties in reality) can be quantified over by *P* (a descriptor for all properties in reality).

In this instance, non-fundamental physicalism says that 'physicalism is the notion that all properties in existence (i.e. everything), mental or physical, can be quantified over by the

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term 'physical". This reduces the physicalism/non-physicalism debate to an epistemic disagreement about how to carve up conceptual spaces. What we call 'mental' or 'physical' are terms for classifying different-seeming stuff, without a commitment to their fundamental properties, constitutions, powers, nature, and so on. Yet because the seeming distinction between these properties, physical and mental, is what generated the trouble in making sense of reality in the first instance, reverting to an epistemic or linguistic debate about how to characterise the distinction is tantamount to admitting that no progress can be made on the problem. We are left with no explanation for the apparent uniqueness of human mentality and the notion that 'mentality seems distinct from physical properties'. Of course, we do want to make sense of reality and account for the above notion, and so we ought to resist adopting descriptive universalism, and persist in making sense of the real distinctions that exist in the world.

2.6 Quis Separabit? A Panpsychist Account of Inscrutables

It has been shown that physical inscrutabilism cannot make *inscrutability* and *physicalism* compatible in a satisfactory manner. We now come to the third response to the conjunction of inscrutability and physicalism: maintain *inscrutability* but reject *physicalism*. This view implies that inscrutables must be non-physical. Given the earlier appeal to the conceivability argument, this means that for our purposes, if inscrutables are non-physical, take them to be mental.

The only way inscrutables are recognizably present to us is by their grounding mentality. One may know inscrutables indirectly just like 'the dark figure in the alley', but that indirect reference is a necessarily mental-based connection. On the physicalist view something is miss-

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ing, something intrinsic, and it is a kind of thing onto which the language of physics cannot attach. Perhaps it is a *tertium quid* property that explains consciousness, but as Robinson asks, why is this property and its influence not felt elsewhere (Robinson 2022)? If inscrutables only reveal themselves as mentality, should not parsimony, Grice's (Grice 1989, p. 47) 'Modified Occam's Razor', and abductive reasoning, lead us to conclude that they are mental?[10] For the fact that the only way inscrutables are recognizably present to us is by their grounding consciousness, is a reason to infer that inscrutables are mental. This can be reinforced this with two arguments in support of the view that that which reveals itself only via mentality is itself mental: the *no emergentism argument*, and the *grounding argument against physicalism*, to explain why panpsychism is more compelling than physical inscrutabilism.

2.6.1 No Emergentism Argument

Let's begin with Galen Strawson's case for panpsychism. Interestingly enough, Strawson (G. Strawson 2006a) calls his panpsychist position 'real materialism', because he takes it to be the case that there is such a physicalism that asserts the irreducible reality of phenomenal character. Strawson holds that any concrete object that occupies space–time is physical, and this includes conscious creatures such as ourselves. This is allegedly a kind of physicalism according to Strawson, because he purports that all the properties of concrete objects, including conscious states of objects, are categorically explained by an object's physical nature but are still not reducible to the physical properties of the object. Strawson thinks physicalism, even without an *OFP* constraint, is true.

[10] Grice's 'Modified Occam's Razor' tells us: "Senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity" (Grice 1989, p. 47).

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Strawson (G. Strawson 2006a, p. 60) also holds that if there can be no reductionism about phenomenal character and if physicalism is true, then "physical stuff is, in itself, in its fundamental nature, something wholly and utterly non-experiential". From whence comes mentality on this picture?

A physicalist might appeal to 'emergence' of the mental. Strawson says that (G. Strawson 2006a):

> For any feature *Y* of anything that is correctly considered to be emergent from *X*, there must be something about *X* and *X* alone in virtue of which *Y* emerges, and which is sufficient for *Y*. (p. 18)

The problem is that if physical properties are utterly non-mental, then for the mental to be grounded in them, the emergence of the mental is actually what Strawson calls 'brute emergence'. According to Strawson (G. Strawson 2006b, p. 65), brute emergence is the idea that "there is absolutely nothing about *X*, the emerged-from, in virtue of which *Y*, the emerger, emerges from it". In other words, brute emergence happens when a new kind of property appears, independently and inexplicably, from other existing kinds of properties.

And yet, Strawson says that emergence cannot be brute, because the very idea is incoherent. Why is brute emergence incoherent? The main reason is because there is simply nothing in common at all between something like physical and mental properties, so any reduction or emergence of one into, or from, the other would be without any rational support. Strawson argues that what are considered usual cases of emergence, for instance with liquidity arising from atoms that are not themselves liquid, are not cases of *brute* emergence. The liquid is coherently grounded in the atoms in a way that the mental is not coherently grounded in physical properties. Once one understands how the atoms behave, they are in a position to see

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that the macro phenomena cannot fail to be liquid. In other words, there is no 'explanatory gap' in the liquidity scenario. Brute emergence specifically means that there is a new, distinct, kind of property. In the case of the emergence of mentality, there is a gap, for one is no longer appealing to a new level of reference only—like with the chemical or biological—but a new kind of property altogether. Hence why it is brute. While it is possible that mentality always emerges from physical properties and structures, there is nothing here that amounts to an explanation as to why and how. At best we would have a correlative account, but this is not a good enough reason to say that brute emergence is likely and that physical properties ground mental properties.

Brute emergentism implies the hard problem and mind–body problem again, because the physical and the mental can and do come apart. As Strawson is a physicalist, and because he rejects reductionism of the mental and brute emergence, he concludes that physical properties must not be utterly non-mental at the fundamental level. This is why he is a panpsychist. Strawson thinks his panpsychism is compatible with physicalism because, he argues, the mental and the scientific conception of the physical fit easily together, while a dualistic picture offends against Occam's razor. While Strawson's position for non-reductionism of the mental is agreeable, and his argument against brute emergentism compelling, for the reasons outlined earlier, the notion that physicalism is compatible with fundamental mentality must be rejected. Further, as helpful as Occam's razor may be as a methodological aid, it is of no use if it does not lead one to the correct answer, as it does not appear to do in this case. Sometimes only a more complex explanation will do. For example, to explain how King Charles III was crowned King of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Commonwealth Realms, involves a complex explanation steeped in Norman law, Anglo-Saxon

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custom, theology, and history: by no means a simple explanation. And yet, only the complex account explains the event. That the separability of the mental and the physical might require a complex explanation is not alone a sufficient reason to presume that physicalism is compatible with fundamental mentality. At least some additional support is required.

Thus, a physical inscrutabilism that cannot appeal to brute emergence fails to account for the mental. In this case, one ought to infer that inscrutables are possibly fundamental properties with both physical and mental aspects, and this lends support to panpsychism.

2.6.2 The Grounding Argument Against Physicalism

Here is a modified form of an explanatory gap argument from Goff (C. D. Brown 2017a; Goff 2019, p. 12) to support the claim that panpsychism is not a kind of physicalism. Let us call it the *grounding argument against physicalism*:

1. Physicalism is true only if the fundamental physical properties fully ground the existence of all macro-level (human level) properties.

2. If it is not the case that the fundamental physical properties fully ground the existence of a macro-level property, then physicalism is false.

3. It is not the case that the fundamental physical properties fully ground the existence of a macro-level property.

4. Therefore, physicalism is false.

Physicalism is true only if the fundamental physical properties ground the existence of all the macro-level properties. This includes phenomenal character. Yet if phenomenal character is

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grounded in inscrutables, not fundamental physical properties, then the grounding follows from the inscrutables (Goff 2015, Goff 2019, p. 12). This is why Goff takes P2 to be true in his own version of the argument.[11] This follows even in the *MPW* of non-fundamental physicalism: the things that gives rise to the mental at each physical level—such as Alex's mind—are inscrutables, or else it is grounded in instances of brute emergence connected to compositionality.

On the basis of the earlier presented arguments then these inscrutables cannot be wholly physical, and so physicalism fails to fully ground mentality. If inscrutables are actually 'inscrutables-for-now', then one can still conclude that physicalism fails to ground mentality, for now. If they are not 'inscrutables-for-now' but inscrutables in principle—which physicalism should be committed to—then they might also be fundamentally mental properties, or fundamental properties with mental aspects. Per the grounding argument, we have no reason to think that there is anything physical about inscrutables that ground phenomenal character. We do, however, have reason to think that physical properties do not ground mentality per the inconceivability argument. Thus, physicalism and panpsychism come apart on this account because one can ground the mental while the other cannot, and hence, panpsychism should not be considered a kind of physicalism (Stoljar 2001). Given the seeming existence of mentality, abductively one ought to drop physicalism in favour of panpsychism, at least when it comes to explaining what inscrutables are.

[11] Goff talks about entailment but talk of grounding is preferable.

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2.6.3 Panpsychic inscrutabilism

Just because inscrutables are non-physical, it does not follow that they necessarily must be mental. There may, therefore, be another scrutability problem: if inscrutables are mental, then they should be scrutable to us 'mentally'. And while there may be something it is like for one to taste a sour lemon, one is unable to employ the same methods of inferring what-it-is-likeness (for example introspection) to the qualitative nature of a quark, or whatever is fundamental. Perhaps that is for the quark to do. Yet the fact remains, that the panpsychist faces a similar epistemic problem to the physicalist: they cannot scrute what inscrutables are. This is not an argument against panpsychism being ontologically compatible with inscrutables, but it is an interesting epistemic puzzle, and one which may give one pause before committing to a panpsychist explanation for human phenomenal character.

2.7 Kantian Inscrutabilism

A physicalist might suggest that just because one cannot show that inscrutables are physical, this does not imply that they are non-physical. Perhaps some future breakthrough in the scientific method, that one cannot comprehend, will reveal the nature of inscrutables in a way that seems impossible today. If the physicalists cannot make the positive case that inscrutables are themselves physical or grounded in physical properties, but still hold that these properties can be conceptually counted as physical, then they can maintain an agnosticism about how exactly they are physical, yet ground mentality.[12] Of course, if this is the case, then once again, we are no longer discussing inscrutables but rather inscrutables-for-now.

[12] See Robinson (Robinson 2016; Robinson 2022) for a discussion of this.

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This approach is reminiscent of Colin McGinn's (McGinn 1989) proposal for mysterianism about the nature of consciousness at the human level, due to his scepticism of the mind's capability of ever unravelling the mystery of consciousness. The view is well captured by a quote attributed to Thomas Aquinas: "All the efforts of the human mind cannot exhaust the essence of a single fly". Physicalists who continue to advocate for inscrutables-for-now, seem to be similarly committed to a mysterianism about the fundamental level. All the efforts of the human mind cannot exhaust the essence of a single fundamental entity.

A related position is agnosticism about the nature of inscrutables and how they ground mentality. This is perhaps the most intuitive perspective on the matter at hand. After all, we are talking about inscrutables, things that are not scrutable, in other words, things of which we do not know, and perhaps cannot know, even in principle. Kantian inscrutabilism is the position that we are trying to characterise, and appeal to, the unknowable: at worst unknowable in principle, and at best, unknowable at present. This is not the view that inscrutables do not exist. It is the view that the shadowy figure in the alley's mentality-grounding properties are mysterious because "we see now through a glass in a dark manner" (*Douay-Rheims Bible* 2011, 1 Corinthians 13:12). Perhaps inscrutables are fundamentally physical, perhaps they are fundamentally mental, perhaps triism is plausible (three distinct properties: physical, mental, *tertium quid*: whatever inscrutables intrinsically are).

Call this position Kantian inscrutabilism, as it is reminiscent of aspects of Immanuel Kant's philosophy. In *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1999), Kant argues that human beings experience only the appearances of things, but not things-in-themselves, as they intrinsically are. Space and time, says Kant, are only subjective forms of human intuition, and therefore, dependent upon humans. This thesis is called transcendental idealism. In Kant's (Kant

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1999):

> The things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be [⋯] What may be the case with objects in themselves and abstracted from all this receptivity of our sensibility remains entirely unknown to us. We are acquainted with nothing except our way of perceiving them, which is peculiar to us, and which therefore does not necessarily pertain to every being, though to be sure it pertains to every human being. (p. 42).

Scholars disagree on how exactly to interpret these claims. Our focus is not Kant scholarship, so we will outline only two standard interpretations of transcendental idealism, as they pertain to our analysis of inscrutables. These two interpretations are 'two-object', and 'two-aspect'. According to the two-object interpretation, transcendental idealism is a metaphysical thesis that distinguishes between two classes of objects. Those classes are 'appearances' and 'things-in-themselves'. According to the two-aspect interpretation, Kant does not distinguish between two classes of objects but two aspects of the same class of objects: an aspect that appears to humans and an aspect that does not.

For our purposes, we can appreciate how both might inspire agnosticism about inscrutables. That which grounds the mental may be a distinct property that coincides with fundamental physical properties; a kind of fundamental-level dualism, or inscrutables may be a distinct aspect of fundamental (physical) properties. The latter is compatible with panpsychism or Russellian monism. On both interpretations, there is something that appears to us—a property or aspect—and something that is inscrutable—another property or aspect. Both the two-object and two-aspect views suggest agnosticism about inscrutables. Of course, that is not to say that the distinction is unimportant. Both interpretations of transcenden-

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tal idealism imply that some properties or aspects are inscrutable in principle and will always elude human understanding. This arguably makes the view incompatible with physicalism, as physicalism requires that inscrutables can be scruted in principle. On the Kantian view, ontologically speaking, inscrutables may forever remain, well, inscrutable.

Not only could the nature of inscrutables remain mysterious, but how their properties ground mentality and how these properties relate to fundamental physical properties also remains mysterious. The general idea is that the inscrutable is responsible for the powers and dispositional properties of the object, such as phenomenal character, but the 'how' is mysterious. Robinson (Robinson 2022) points out that this is a problem facing all 'qualitative core' theories: whether or not they are deployed, as in neutral monism, to solve the mind–body problem. It seems then that we are left with no explanatory connection between the inscrutable properties, and the scrutable ones; a kind of fundamental-level explanatory gap. And we do not how both kinds of properties can be fundamental without being identical kinds.

There is even an issue as to whether the inscrutable 'core' properties, as Robinson calls them, are themselves necessary properties or not. Robinson (Robinson 2016) says:

> On one picture, the cores could be swapped around, like an inverted colour spectrum, and it would make no difference to the causal powers. On the other, the nature of the core explains what the causal powers are: it is because electrons have the core they do that they have a negative charge. (p. 207)

The upshot is that it remains a mystery if 'core' or inscrutable properties play any explanatory role. Therefore, Kantian inscrutabilism is additionally the epistemic position that one ought to be agnostic about what explanatory role, if any, inscrutables play when it comes to the

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physical and mental. Recall that although physicalism is making ontological claims, it must couch those claims in the epistemic nature of physical enquiry.

Throughout the literature, inscrutables are taken to be the categorical grounds of dispositions or pre-dispositional properties or aspects, that interact with physical, scrutable properties. Yet need we limit ourselves to only this option? If one cannot say whether an inscrutable is a property, power, aspect, disposition, and so on, how can one be confident that they are mental or physical things? In Western metaphysics, fundamental properties are often supposed to be objects with properties. However, there is no reason to restrict ourselves to this account. By way of contrast, other philosophical traditions propose different views about the nature of what is fundamental. For instance, according to philosopher James Maffie (Maffie 2014a), in Aztec or Nahua philosophy the fundamental entity known as *teotl* is a process, event, power, or grounds for dispositions, that is always in flux. Hence why he concludes that Aztec philosophy involves a *process metaphysics*, where everything is always in motion and reality is ultimately a process. Might physical inscrutabilism avail itself of this metaphysics? On the one hand, this makes the physicalist position less tenable: not only do they not know how inscrutables ground and explain the mental within a physicalist framework, they do not even know whether inscrutables are powers, potencies, dispositions, aspects, properties, and so on (see Foster 2008). The precise nature of what kind of thing we are trying to scrute will undoubtedly influence the plausibility of physicalism. On the other hand, a broader metaphysical perspective on the nature of inscrutables may provide the physicalist with alternative ways to account for mentality. For example, Lewis (D. Lewis 1997, p. 149, D. Lewis 1999) argues that what manifests a disposition is not the occurrence of a type of event, but the causing of the event by some intrinsic property of the object *in conjunction with* an appropriate, extrinsic

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'stimulus condition'. Fragility, for instance, is manifested by an external cause together with the intrinsic properties of the object. Ferenc Houranszki (Huoranszki 2022, p. 212) similarly argues that intrinsic inscrutables, be they dispositions, potencies, powers, abilities—'one-off', maximally specific, dispositions (Huoranszki 2022, p. 13)—and so on, may be necessarily dependent on extrinsic properties. The general idea is that inscrutables could be co-dependent on scrutable, extrinsic, physical properties. Call this a kind of *extrinsic necessity metaphysics* or specifically *extrinsic necessity physicalism*. This account would make inscrutables at least partly physically explicable, which may fit the weaker reading of physicalism whereby physical properties must only partly ground mentality, not fully. While extrinsic necessity physicalism presents an interesting avenue for further investigation, for now, we are still unable to speak on the nature of the inscrutables themselves. This lends support to a rejection of physical inscrutabilism in favour of alternative views, including Kantian Inscrutabilism.

2.8 Unknown Unknowns?

Physicalism says that all properties in the universe are physical or ultimately depend on, or are grounded in, fundamental physical properties. Yet the conceivability argument (Chalmers 1996; Chalmers 2010), knowledge arguments (Jackson 1982; Jackson 1986; Kripke 1980/1972; Renero 2023; Robinson 1982), and explanatory gap argument (Levine 1983) show that there can be no adequate account of mentality in physicalist terms. Hence, why physical inscrutabilists appeal to inscrutables to ground mentality. Yet the existence of inscrutables as non-physically scrutable properties violates the conditions of physicalism. Per the incompatibility and non-explanatory arguments, these properties are likely non-physical if they really do ground and/or explain phenomenal character. In response, non-fundamental

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physicalism proposes that the existence of infinite, non-fundamental, non-physical properties does not violate physicalism in a world with equally infinite, non-fundamental, physical properties. Non-fundamental physicalism is unsatisfactory because it does not categorically ground mentality in fundamental physical properties, it renders both physicalism and non-physicalism true which undermines the purpose of physicalism, it commits a physical inscrutabilist to a nomological view which they may not wish to subscribe to, and it risks rendering the physicalist/non-physicalist debate redundant by collapsing physicalism into descriptive universalism. Were brute emergence possible, then inscrutables might not violate physicalism. However, we have good reason to reject brute emergence according to the no emergentism argument. If one posits inscrutables then panpyschism appears to be the more reasonable position because it accepts that inscrutable properties ground mentality by being mental themselves. This was supported by the grounding argument. Alternatively, a physicalist might explore extrinsic necessity physicalism in support of weak physicalism. Mysterianism or Kantian inscrutabilism are also tenable options.

Our analysis reveals two paths forward. First, if one accepts arguments that purport to show that mentality is inscrutable to physical enquiry, then one probably ought to reject physical inscrutabilism in favour of panpsychism or Kantian inscrutabilism. As this undermines the purpose of appealing to inscrutables for the physicalist, then second, if one wishes to remain a physicalist, one ought to direct their philosophical analysis and energies toward revisiting and defeasing the arguments that purport to show that mentality is inscrutable to physical enquiry. Both options indicate that we should reconsider the value of engaging in the physicalist/non-physicalist debate at the fundamental level and return to investigating the human-level mentality that engendered the debate. If not, we may perennially debate the

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nature of something that is unknown.

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Part II

Numen

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Before we continue with Part II, let us take stock of what we have covered thus far. In the introduction we discussed what a philosophical problem is, what it means to solve a philosophical problem, and how we ought to approach seemingly unsolvable philosophical problems, especially if we seek to make philosophical progress. We then presented receptivism as a new approach to tackle these seemingly unsolvable problems and thereby make progress on certain philosophical dialectics. In short, receptivism says that we ought to account for as many *pre-formalised notions* that give rise to certain philosophical problems as we can. To do this, we must be *receptive* to the possibility and plausibility of the content of these pre-formalised notions.

In Part I, we began by analysing the problem of the seeming distinctiveness of consciousness, or mentality, for physicalism. Specifically, in Chapter 2, we critiqued physical inscrutabilism: the genus of physicalism which posits inscrutable properties as the ultimate grounds for mentality, yet which are not revealed through physical enquiry. Our analysis revealed that inscrutables fail to help the physicalist account for mentality. The physicalist thus encounters the following choices: deny physicalism, adopt Kantian inscrutabilism, or revisit the original arguments that motivate physical inscrutabilism. The weight of the argumentation would indicate that physicalists ought to be more receptive to non-physicalism, particularly in light of the possibility of non-physically grounded mentality.

That was *Mind*. Now we turn to *Numen*. We begin Part II at the point where the two themes overlap: beliefs about the numinous. The numinous refers to the alleged sacred or non-natural aspects of existence. We start by analysing the meaning of 'belief', arguing that religious beliefs are archetypal cases of belief; ones that provide insight into the nature and meaning of belief. We also claim that religious beliefs can be rational kinds of beliefs. This

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is opposed by views that take religious beliefs as essentially irrational and, therefore, alien to other kinds of beliefs, like so-called naturalist (physicalism-friendly) beliefs.

Equipped with a healthy scepticism of physicalism, and informed with the knowledge that religious beliefs and some non-naturalist beliefs are rational, we are free to be receptive to philosophical ideas that go beyond the narrow scope proscribed by physicalism and engage with more metaphysically ambitious subjects. Specifically, we engage with one of the oldest and most intractable philosophical problems: the problem of evil. In this sense, like the Biblical Jacob, we will grapple with *numen*, with the divine, and in particular with the divine mind. This is a daunting task, nonetheless, we will show how by appealing to receptivism we can better approach the paradox of the problem of evil, and thereby make progress on the dialectic.

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We are, I know not how, double in ourselves, so that what we believe we disbelieve, and cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn.

Michel de Montaigne (Montaigne 1877, p. 289)

3

Credo in unam Credentiam: Religious Beliefs are Standard Beliefs

Keywords: Belief; Theological realism; Disparatism; Ordinary beliefs; Standard beliefs; Religious belief; Aiming at truth; Credence; Faith; Metaphor.

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Does religious belief differ in any interesting way from other kinds of belief? For now, take 'belief' to mean how one takes the world to be, on the basis of which they act. Call beliefs like this 'ordinary beliefs'. There are also more complicated, or abstract, beliefs. Call such beliefs 'non-ordinary beliefs'. Are religious beliefs different in any significant or interesting way from what we call 'standard belief'? Our analysis shows that they are not. Although the content of religious belief is different, and sometimes so is the function, religious beliefs are still mental, dispositional attitudes that aim to provide a correct representation of the world. Therefore, religious beliefs are best understood as a sub-category of standard beliefs, alongside ordinary and non-ordinary beliefs. This account of religious belief provides further insight into the meaning of belief and supports a revision of a strict demarcation between standard and non-standard beliefs.

3.1 On Belief

Does religious belief differ in any interesting way from other kinds of belief? For now, take 'belief' to mean how one takes the world to be, on the basis of which they act (Crane 2013, p. 3). For instance, if one has the mental state 'I believe it is raining' then they are committed to the truth that it is in fact raining and are likely to take actions informed by this information, such as carrying an umbrella. Drawing upon Willard Van Orman Quine, we will call beliefs like this 'ordinary beliefs' (Quine 1995, p. 49). There are also more complicated or abstract beliefs, for instance, beliefs about universal instantiation or Platonism about mathematical entities. Call such beliefs 'non-ordinary beliefs'. How do ordinary and non-ordinary beliefs, both of which are a kind of what we can call 'standard beliefs', differ from

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religious beliefs? Are religious beliefs different in any significant or interesting way? Perhaps they are a kind of standard belief? Most of the literature on the matter says that religious beliefs are very distinct from standard beliefs. They are not, for although the content of religious belief is different (as the content of any two distinct beliefs is different), and sometimes so too is the function, religious beliefs are still mental, dispositional attitudes, that aim to provide a correct representation of the world. Therefore, religious beliefs are best understood as a sub-category of standard beliefs, alongside ordinary and non-ordinary beliefs.

The case for religious beliefs as standard beliefs will be made as follows. In section 3.2, we will explain in further detail what belief is. This will include a more detailed explication of standard beliefs and the distinction between ordinary and non-ordinary beliefs, and then at 3.3 a definition of 'religious'. At section 3.4, we will present the case for religious beliefs being very different from standard beliefs, a position we dub *hard disparatism*. At section 3.5, we analyse arguments for *soft disparatism*, the view that religious beliefs are moderately different from standard beliefs. In section 3.6, we make the case for *non-disparatism*, the view that religious beliefs are a kind of standard belief. Lastly, at section 3.7, we will analyse the concept of faith and consider whether or not it is a unique aspect of religious belief that excludes it from standard beliefs, and conclude that it does not sufficiently differentiate religious beliefs to the extent that they can be excluded from standard beliefs. By this analysis we can achieve two additional objectives. First, we can show that an appropriate understanding of belief ought to quantify over a broad range of kinds of beliefs, including religious beliefs, rather than concerning itself with only a narrow scope of kinds of beliefs that exclude non-standard cases. Second, we can push back against a dogmatic view in philosophy that holds that there is a stark and stable division between rational, naturalistic, standard beliefs on the one hand,

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and irrational, non-naturalistic, non-standard beliefs on the other.

3.2 What is Belief?

According to Tim Crane, beliefs are mental, dispositional attitudes that aim to provide true or correct representations of the world (Crane 2013, p. 3). Drawing upon Bernard Williams (Williams 1973), Crane takes beliefs to be a way of guiding an agent through the world, like a kind of map (Crane and Farkas 2022).

This is a foundation, yet we can say a few more things about beliefs. First, beliefs are often taken to be credences because we believe certain things more strongly than others. After all, humans have doubts, convictions, speculations, hypotheses, and so on. We can talk about a degree of confidence in one's belief about a proposition *P* (Papineau 2012, pp. 89–90), therefore, we can measure the correctness or accuracy of a belief, at least in principle, when we say that it aims at truth. Second, beliefs are manifested in actions that express preferences among various outcomes. Generally, the greater degree of belief an agent attaches to *P*, the more inclined said agent will be to act in such a way as if *P* were true (Papineau 2012, pp. 89–90; Tenenbaum et al. 2011, p. 1280). These probabilistic calculations are usually taken to be inaccessible to conscious reasoning processes at the intentional level (Block 2002; Dennett 1978, pp. 304–5).

On this description, beliefs are dispositional attitudes, so for a belief to cause action it must be connected to other mental states, such as desires. This means that, third, to act on a belief one must have a motivating desire. This account is a kind of functionalism about belief and entails that not all beliefs are conscious, although they can be brought to consciousness in episodes of conscious thinking. Here 'conscious thinking' refers to when the

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unconscious mental state, the belief, gives rise to phenomenally conscious events. This unconscious representation of the world serves an adaptive function: to model an agent's environment so as to allow them to make optimal predictions and accordingly take action (D. M. Armstrong 1973, p. 3; Crane 2017b, p. 9; Ramsey 1931, p. 238; Theriault, Young, and L. F. Barrett 2021, pp. 103–4). On this account beliefs are unconscious (Crane 2017b), functional (Pietraszewski and Wertz 2021), and occur at a sub-personal level. Thus, fourth, beliefs themselves are never conscious, but are brought to consciousness as thoughts expressed by assertions (Hawthorne, Rothschild, and Speculative 2016); the belief itself is an unconscious disposition to act. In this sense, belief is largely an involuntary, unconscious, and non-linguistic phenomenon. The account of belief we have just outlined is referred to as *dispositionalism*.

Another popular position is *representationalism* about belief. Representationalists describe central cases of belief as the state of having in one's mind or head a representation with the same propositional content as the belief (Schwitzgebel 2023). What this means is that beliefs are about and/or somehow depend upon propositional content that is determined by representations; information about the world, such as a map or language, that presents the world to an individual; hence *re-presenting*. As these beliefs can be accessed even when the aspect of the world that was represented is not present, it is understood that the propositional content determined by a representation is stored in memory. This characterization of belief has been challenged by some philosophers, but it is probably fair to say that the majority of contemporary philosophers of mind accept the bulk of this picture, which embodies the core ideas of the representational approach to belief, according to which central cases of belief involve someone's having in their head or mind a representation with the same propositional content as the belief.

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Proponents of representationalism about belief include Burge 2010; Cummins 1996; Dretske 1988; Fodor 1968; Fodor 1975; Fodor 1981a; Fodor 1987; Fodor 1990; Millikan 1984; Quilty-Dunn and Mandelbaum 2018; Mandelbaum and Porot 2023; and Zimmerman 2018. Representationalists have raised concerns with dispositionalist accounts of belief. For example, Jake Quilty-Dunn and Eric Mandelbaum argue that a dispositionalist about belief must adopt a functionalist account to accommodate the complexity of psychological states—as discussed above—yet there is a concern that functionalism undermines the explanatory power of dispositionalism (Quilty-Dunn and Mandelbaum 2018). Much of this has to do with the multiple-realisability of behaviours.

It is not our objective to resolve the dispositionalist-representationalist dispute here. The dispositionalist account is adopted for its explanatory power, and due to the following two concerns: (i) on representationalism there is a commitment to all beliefs being stored in memory, but this means one can never assent to a belief without having previously assented to it, however, we sometimes do have beliefs about propositions we have never before considered and which are thus not yet stored in memory; and (ii) representationalism commits one to storing an implausibly high number of beliefs in memory to explain beliefs that might have never been brought to assent before, or perhaps only once per lifetime (Crane 2017b, p. 4). Having said this, as much of the debate centres around how and where beliefs are stored in the mind or head, and how they are brought to consciousness, and because this debate does not provide specific insight into the nature of religious belief, it ought not be our focus. For reasons of parsimony and preference, we will address a dispositionalist account, unless stated otherwise, however, the analysis is also applicable to a representationalist account because both representationalists and functionalists agree that beliefs influence how one takes the

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world to be, upon which they base their actions.

To maintain a focused and manageable analysis, let's proceed with a dispositionalist account: take 'belief' to mean 'how one takes the world to be, on the basis of which they act' (Crane 2013). On this account, the beliefs themselves are not dispositions, but attitudes that dispose one to act in conjunction with desires. Recall our earlier example about rain as an illustration: if one has the mental state 'I believe it is raining' then they are committed to the truth that it is in fact raining and are likely to take actions informed by this information, such as carrying an umbrella. Call this example *umbrella*. *Umbrella* is a paradigm example of how belief informs action.

Let us make some further things clear about our account of belief. For our purposes, we can point to three particularly interesting aspects of belief: (a) content; (b) function; and (c) truth-aim. A belief has content C that in conjunction with desires D gives rise to a function ϕ, the objective of which is to provide a true representation of the world to guide action. In *umbrella*, the content of the belief is something like <It is raining>,[1] and the function is to guide behaviour so as to avoid getting wet. The belief helps the believer achieve this objective by aiming at a true representation of the world: the fact that water is actually falling from the sky, and that by holding an umbrella over one's head, one will thereby remain dry.

When it is said that one *kind* of belief is different from other kinds of beliefs, it appears what is meant by this is that there is a difference in (a) content, (b) function, and (c) truth-aim, or any combination of these three. These three categories are not equal when it comes

[1]There is a debate about whether there can be non-conceptual experiences or whether all experience is conceptually structured. Thus, the way we understand 'concept' will inform how we understand content (Rosch 1999, p. 75).

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to distinguishing kinds of belief. Almost every belief will have different content: one's belief that it is raining is different from one's belief that it is sunny outside, so a difference in content is hardly grounds for claiming that something like religious belief is very different from other kinds of beliefs. Function, on the other hand, is less clear. In a scenario, *heaven or hell*, one can have a belief that heaven exists and one's actions will determine whether they will one day go there, likewise for hell, or they might be agnostic about the existence of one or both. If the function in *umbrella* is to keep one dry, and the function in *heaven or hell* is to determine if there is a heaven or hell and get (presumably) to heaven, they may not be comparable because one is 'this-worldly' and immediate, and the other is 'other-worldly' and less immediate (one hopes) (Nietzsche 2006, p. 6). On the other hand, both might have a function to 'keep one safe' by ensuring one takes the correct course of action. The status of different function is less clear than the status of different content, as regards delineating kinds of beliefs. Finally, truth-aim is the most promising way to distinguish beliefs. Truth-aim is the intended action that follows from a belief, what a belief in conjunction with a desire directs one to do. Perhaps the truth-aim of *umbrella* is to determine if it is in fact raining and avoid becoming wet, while *heaven or hell* has no truth-aim: it is a musing about the theoretical notion of an afterlife, not a commitment to how reality is, to thereby guide action. Of course, as we will discuss, *heaven or hell* might in fact be aiming at belonging to a community or aiming at the truth like *umbrella* to direct the believer to heaven.

Equipped with these three aspects of belief, we can distinguish between two different kinds of beliefs. It is not a sharp division but a spectral delineation. Nor is it the only possible subdivision of kinds of beliefs. On the one hand, there are beliefs like *umbrella*. Such beliefs comprise the majority of beliefs one has. For this reason, drawing upon Quine, we call such

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beliefs *ordinary beliefs* (Quine 1995, p. 49). On the other hand, there are beliefs that are less quotidian, often with more abstract content and/or *prima facie* less evident functional implications. For example, metaphysical beliefs, such as a belief in universal instantiation or Platonism about mathematical entities. By way of contrast, we call these kinds of beliefs *non-ordinary beliefs*. Although the content of these two kinds of belief differ, neither is what we might think of as kinds of specifically religious beliefs. As we are considering if religious beliefs differ in interesting ways, we call all non-religious beliefs—ordinary or non-ordinary —*standard beliefs*. Religious beliefs, therefore, are what we can also call *non-standard beliefs*.

Now we should consider if this distinction is justifiable. To determine this, we must answer the following question: do religious beliefs differ in any interesting way from standard beliefs?

Naturally, one might wonder why it matters which beliefs are standard or non-standard, ordinary or non-ordinary? Why do we need such definitions to understand belief? There are two philosophically important reasons to analyse belief in such a way.

The first reason is that if we wish to better understand what beliefs are, as many philosophers seem to, then there are two plausible approaches; the first is to start with a narrow class of beliefs and get clear on what they are and how they work, and then expand from there. For instance one could analyse cases like *umbrella* and extrapolate from this to understand less ordinary cases like *heaven or hell*. The second approach is to take all different kinds of beliefs and analyse them together because neither historically nor conceptually precedes the other. For example, perhaps *umbrella* and *heaven or hell* cannot be understood in isolation, and neither is more representative of belief than the other because we have all kinds of different

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beliefs. The first approach is common in the literature on belief, the latter less so. The first approach can be characterised as a Procrustean bed method: one first gets clear on representative cases of belief and then cuts outlying kinds of beliefs down to size to fit the representative cases, or else discards them. We suggest this approach misunderstands belief because it fails to properly account for all kinds of beliefs, including some of our most deeply held, informative, and meaningful beliefs. Indeed, if non-standard beliefs do not fit the agreed account of belief then one may accede to the odd conclusion that these things are not beliefs at all.[2] We are going to need a bigger bed. Hence why we ought to employ the latter approach because, to better understand what belief is, we have to understand how people use the word, without prejudice. We can gain greater insight into the nature of belief by engaging with all types of beliefs, including religious beliefs.

The second reason is to put to rest the implacable spectre of one aspect of logical positivism that still lingers as an implicit, anti-metaphysical attitude in philosophy. There is, at times, a distaste in philosophy for things which are not verifiable on a naturalist stance. In particular, all things religious, metaphysical, or thus far physically inexplicable, are often pushed into their own category because they are deemed peculiar, incredulous, or even irrational. Yet if the last century of analytic philosophy has taught us anything, it is that such a stark division has not held. As we shall see, there are few good reasons to claim that beliefs about cricket are rational but beliefs about Buddha are not or that beliefs about the opening of British parliament have nothing in common with beliefs about attending a funeral. Therefore, by showing the division does not hold in the case of belief—between standard and non-standard—we can

[2]See Crane 2023; Sebastian 2023; and Schmidt 2023 for recent discussions pertaining to this issue.

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shake off a dogmatic approach to belief and thereby make progress in our understanding of what belief is. The lesson might even be expanded to inform a general philosophical perspective, that we ought to challenge philosophical dogmatism in all its forms, and be receptive to alternative philosophical approaches. For when our conclusions ignore the motivating concepts, problems, and data that generated the initial philosophical puzzle, then we have done the dialectic under consideration a disservice.

3.3 What is Religious Belief?

We ought now to say something about religion. 'Religion' is a slippery term; William James put it best in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* when he said that religion has no single principle or essence (James 1902). It is difficult to demonstrate commonalities between Abrahamic faiths, religions such as Daoism, and folk religions like the worldview of the Batak (J. Z. Smith 1982, p. xi). The Oxford dictionary provides the general "belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power⋯" and "A pursuit or interest followed with great devotion". Problematically, the God of Abraham, the fatalism of the Norse, and the telos of the arc of Whiggish history are all superhuman, controlling powers, and the entailed moral claims are pursued with equal devotion. Additionally, this definition of 'religion' might apply to ideologies, even explicitly atheistic ideologies. Indeed, this accusation is often levelled at totalitarian politics or political philosophies, for example *juche sasang* (주체사상) (see Goodrick-Clarke 1985; Ling 1980; McCarraher 2019; and Omer and Springs 2013).

Friedrich Nietzsche famously said that only that which has no history can be defined (Nietzsche 1999).[3] Religion has a long and complex history that ought not be simplified, for

[3] This helpful Nietzschean reference is found in Crane 2017a.

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when one presents complex history as simple one does not thereby show history to be simple and oneself complex, rather, history remains complex but one shows oneself to be simple. Given this complexity and the polysemous nature of the term 'religion', an airtight definition may elude us (Griffiths 2000, p. 30). Yet it is difficult to deny that there is what Ludwig Wittgenstein called a *Familienähnlichkeit*, or family resemblance, between the many things we call 'religious' (Wittgenstein 2001).[4]

Let us try to be a little more specific about what is allegedly being resembled. We begin with sociologist Émile Durkheim (Durkheim 1995, p. 35) who says that:

> Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden.

Now we must unpack what the 'sacred' is. Rudolf Otto's (Otto 1923) proposal of the concept of the 'numinous' captures the notion of the sacred. 'Numinous' is a derivative of the Latin '*numen*', meaning 'spirit'. '*Numen*' is etymologically derived from the concept of divine will and represented by a 'nodding' of the head; a kind of intentional aspect to the sacred that appears lacking in a purely mechanistic view of the universe. We will take '*numinous*' as akin, but different to, '*numinal*', because while they share an etymology, the latter implies a strong sense of intentionality; something suggesting a divine will as, for example, is apparent in theism.[5] Otto says that what the numinous refers to evades precise formulation in words and that it is more similar to the beauty of a musical composition, and thus must be discussed in symbolic terms (Otto 1923). This being said, here is C. S. Lewis' articulation of the numinous (C. Lewis 2009, pp. 5–6):

[4] See also Williamson 1994, p. 86 on 'the dynamic quality of family resemblance concepts'.

[5] Neither term should be confused with the Greek νοῦς (nous).

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> You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking—a sense of inadequacy to cope with such a visitant and of prostration before it—an emotion which might be expressed in Shakespeare's words "Under it my genius is rebuked." This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which excites it as the Numinous.

Thus, as a starting point, we can say that religion is about the sacred or numinous (or numinal). We can add further criteria to make the definition more robust. Important classifications have been presented by Edward Herbert, Edward Burnett Tylor, William James, Rodney Needham, Martin Southwold, Rem Edwards, and J. Z. Smith, to name a few. Here are Tim Crane's (Crane 2017a, p. 7) requirements for religion:

> Religion[···]is a systematic and practical attempt by human beings to find meaning in the world and their place in it, in terms of their relationship to something transcendent. This description has four essential elements: first, religion is systematic; second, it is practical; third, it is an attempt to find meaning; and fourth, it appeals to the transcendent.

Crane systematises these into the following criteria for religious belief (Crane 2017a, pp. 7–9). Religion is:

1. Systematic: it essentially involves a collection of ideas and practices that are designed to fit together.

2. Practical: it involves believing in certain propositions or doctrines, knowing certain stories, but also acting in a certain way.

3. Meaningful: it attempts to find the meaning of life as a whole, what Karen Armstrong

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(K. Armstrong 2014, p. 3) has called the "investment of everything with ultimate meaning".

4. Transcendent: religious belief includes an awareness of the transcendent, and it is in the transcendent that the search for religious meaning ends.

Note that there is an important distinction between spirituality and religion, which we analyse at section 3.5. For now, take 'spirituality' to refer to kinds of beliefs with content about the numinous but with no, or weak, commitment to a community. Of course, as we will discuss, many spiritual people might contend that spirituality has a strong connection to community, and likewise religious people might contend that their beliefs have little to do with their community, but we must find a delineation between spirituality and religion, and this seems the most plausible, albeit we acknowledge that there is not a sharp divide.[6] Crane's criteria appear to capture the notion of religion *noscitur a sociis*, whether theistic or no. Therefore, we will continue with our investigation by employing this holistic account, acknowledging that we are engaging in a bounded polythetic approach to the concept (Laurence and Margolis 1999; Schilbrack 2022).

3.4 Religious Belief is Very Different: Hard Disparatism

Do religious beliefs differ in content, function, or truth-aim, in any interesting way from standard beliefs? The first view answers with an emphatic 'yes'. Obviously, religious beliefs differ in content: they are about religious things. *Umbrella* is not about God, unless one worships the rain. Yet it might also be the case that religious beliefs differ in function and/

[6] Alfred North Whitehead gives an account of the non-communal aspect of religion: '[religion] is what a person does with their solitariness' (Whitehead 1926, p. 3).

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or truth-aim. Call the view that religious belief is very different from standard belief *hard disparatism*: 'disparate' because these theorists take religious belief to be different in kind to standard beliefs, 'hard' because they take religious belief to be very different. What is indicated by the adverb 'very' is that religious beliefs do not sufficiently overlap with standard beliefs according to the criteria of function and truth-aim, and additionally, they violate the spirit of naturalism. The logical positivists of the *Wiener Kreis*, or Vienna Circle, capture the alleged chasm that divides standard beliefs, in this case ordinary beliefs, from religious beliefs (Hahn, Neurath, and Carnap 1929, p. 10):

> The metaphysician and the theologian believe, thereby misunderstanding themselves, that their statements say something, or that they denote a state of affairs. Analysis, however, shows that these statements say nothing but merely express a certain mood and spirit. To express such feelings for life can be a significant task. But the proper medium for doing so is art, for instance lyric poetry or music. It is dangerous to choose the linguistic garb of a theory instead: a theoretical content is simulated where none exists. If a metaphysician or theologian wants to retain the usual medium of language, then he must himself realise and bring out clearly that he is giving not description but expression, not theory or communication of knowledge, but poetry or myth. If a mystic asserts that he has experiences that lie above and beyond all concepts, one cannot deny this. But the mystic cannot talk about it, for talking implies capture by concepts and reduction to scientifically classifiable states of affairs.

Note that they also include non-ordinary standard beliefs (metaphysical beliefs) in this category, which we will address at section 3.6. Philosopher and logical positivist sympathiser A.J.

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Ayer in *Language, Truth, and Logic* even went so far as to argue that religious claims (and their denial) are without cognitive content (Ayer 1936). This hard disparatist attitude to religious belief is still prevalent. Consider a case of two contemporary philosophers that advocate for what we are calling hard disparatism, Neil Van Leeuwen and Tania Lombrozo, who are pluralists about belief (Leeuwen and Lombrozo 2023). According to pluralism, there are importantly different ways to "believe" an idea. For instance, they claim that most standard beliefs help serve the function of tracking the likely state of the world, but other kinds of beliefs, such as religious beliefs, serve interpersonal functions like generating signals of group membership (Cruz 2020; Kahan 2015), and intrapersonal functions, such as finding a sense of peace (Luhrmann 2020).

The literature on why religious beliefs allegedly differ dramatically from standard beliefs is vast. Here are thirteen additional proposals that capture many of the claims of the hard disparatists. Religious beliefs are, allegedly:

1. Distinct in ritual, material, doctrinal and philosophical, experiential and emotional, social and institutional, narrative, and mythic, matters (Geertz 2016; N. Smart 2000).

2. Symbolic, not literal (Evans-Pritchard 1976).

3. Group beliefs that can contradict individual beliefs (Astuti and Harris 2008).

4. Contextual (Astuti 2015; J. Barrett and Kiel 1996).

5. Characterised by conviction, often involving an initiatory declaration of orthodoxy (Ruel 1982, p. 109).

6. Opaque: they remain mysteries, and rely on ritual deference (Crane 2017a).

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7. Half-understood ideas (Naumescu 2011).

8. Unreflectively held without attention to reasons to believe (Sperber 1997).

9. Minimally counter-intuitive: they violate our intuitive naturalist ontology (Boyer 2001). They are 'superempirical': things that are not the product of empirical things nor need be understood empirically (Schilbrack 2013).

10. '[A]ll explicit and implicit notions and ideas, accepted as true, which relate to a reality which cannot be verified empirically' (Wiegers and Platvoet 2002).

11. Irrational (Kunin 2003) or 'irrational' imitation (Naumescu 2011): the property alleged to cause an individual's behaviour is empirically unsupported.

12. Often can be contradictory (Astuti and Harris 2008, p. 144).

13. A set of required actions (C. Smith 2017; Vásquez 2011).

What exactly binds all these descriptions together? Our tripartite division into content, function, and truth-aim best explains this. (1)-(5) are distinguishing religious belief based on function; they are saying that the function of religious belief is not to navigate the world but to foster social cohesion. (1)-(13) appeal to the truth-aim to explain that the aim is not to get the world right on a naturalistic perspective but to aim at fostering social cohesion (1)-(5), or to contemplate a concept (6)-(7). (9)-(13) suggest that religious beliefs either do not aim at truth in the same way as standard beliefs, or if they do, they fail due to irrationality or contradiction.

These criteria also imply that religious beliefs violate naturalism. What these theorists mean by naturalism is not clear. We take them to be talking about a worldview that puts

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stock in empiricism, the natural sciences, consistent nomological laws, and a general kind of physicalism: the thesis that the only fundamental properties in the universe are physical, and that all other properties are derived from physical properties. This talk of naturalism is important, as although hard disparatists might agree that all standard beliefs are naturalist beliefs, others might think that beliefs about logic, or Platonic forms, are not naturalistic, but still standard.

In summary, hard disparatists claim that the functional implication of a religious belief is not always about naturalistically navigating the world, and religious believers sometimes have no interest in the truth-aim of their beliefs or are ambivalent or agnostic about said aim. Sometimes it is even claimed that there is no truth-aim present at all, as aptly captured by Gareth Moore (Moore 1988, p. 287):

> We may say: People do not discover religious truths, they make them.

Let's return to Neil van Leeuwen who is representative of the thinking of hard disparatists that religious belief is alien to standard beliefs (Van Leeuwen 2014; Van Leeuwen 2017a; Van Leeuwen 2023). Van Leeuwen argues that many religious and supernatural "beliefs" are not factual beliefs, but a kind of 'secondary attitude', similar to imaginings, hypotheses, or assumptions for the sake of argument: one might hypothesize that *P*, imagine that *P*, assume that *P*, and so on. He explains that factual beliefs (Van Leeuwen 2014, p. 1):

> (i) are practical setting independent, (ii) cognitively govern other attitudes, and (iii) are evidentially vulnerable. By way of contrast, religious credences (a) have perceived normative orientation, (b) are susceptible to free elaboration, and (c) are vulnerable to special authority.

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Van Leeuwen provides the example of the Maya-speaking Itza claim that humans sometimes transform into animals, yet they also do not worry that meat-eating is potentially cannibalistic (Atran 2002, pp. 84–86). This example does not really work, however, as the Itza position is logically and naturalistically consistent; if these people are no longer human animals, then eating them is not cannibalism. Van Leeuwen also argues that 'factual' belief is not the same as religious belief because despite employing the same words, one's attitudes toward the given propositions differ (Van Leeuwen 2014). Further, Van Leeuwen thinks religious beliefs are somehow incorrigible in a way that standard beliefs are not (Van Leeuwen 2014, p. 707). He provides an example: at the end of the twentieth century many feared an event called *Y2K*. It was alleged that due to the way data about dates was handled by digital computers, said systems would crash on January 1, 2000. This event did not manifest, and consequently most people discarded their belief in *Y2K*. According to Van Leeuwen, *Y2K* is a different kind of belief to religious belief because if a religious cult predicted a global catastrophe on January 1, 2000, and it failed to materialize, then there would not be a rejection of the belief. This is because the standard belief was held factually, and the religious belief is (somehow) immune to evidence. Van Leeuwen (Van Leeuwen 2014; Van Leeuwen 2017a; Van Leeuwen 2023) concludes that religious beliefs are credences, but not factual beliefs.

Van Leeuwen even goes so far as to say that religious beliefs often fail to respond to evidence (Van Leeuwen 2017a, p. 20). He posits that:

> Most religious people just don't seem to care about evidence for their credences.
>
> The Evidence Game is played mostly by intellectuals and apologists.

Van Leuwen argues that for religious beliefs, everything is potentially relevant, and thus they are immunized from falsification. Thus, only the cleverest religious folk engage in rational

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thinking and the rest employ a permissive, non-evidentiary system, immune from falsification. He even equates religious belief with children's make-believe and refers to such beliefs as the 'Playground' (Van Leeuwen 2017b, p. 8; Van Leeuwen 2023). He argues that because religious belief is make-believe, or what he calls a 'fictional imagining', it does not guide action. This captures the hard disparate position well: religious beliefs inform function differently because they are not about the world, and they do not aim at truth.

We will make the positive case for non-disparatism at section 3.6 and will refute Van Leeuwen's position, but we would be remiss not to immediately point out that Van Leeuwen's terminology does a disservice to the dialectic. Not only is the term 'playground' an *ad hominem*, but it also commits a *petitio principii* because Van Leeuwen argues that religious belief is a 'fictional imagining' precisely because it allegedly does not conform to naturalism (Van Leeuwen 2017b, p. 8). In other words, he begs the question in favour of standard beliefs as necessarily naturalistic, and states that necessarily religious beliefs cannot be naturalistic, and what is not naturalistic is not rational. He begins with the division between standard and religious beliefs already cemented. Of course, on this reasoning, this would rule out non-ordinary standard beliefs, including some beliefs about universality or metaphysics generally, as the logical positivists pointed out. For instance, on Van Leeuwen's position, ontological beliefs about nominalism or Platonism come out as being unconcerned with evidence on the grounds that the 'evidence' here quantifies over entities with an ontological net larger than naturalism. One is compelled to ask: is the ontology from which Van Leeuwen derives his own epistemological judgements and naturalistic commitments thereby also unconcerned with evidence? In other words, Van Leeuwen begs the question against religious beliefs by claiming that only *their* world-view is too broad to be unrevisable, while a naturalist-physicalist worldview should

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not be revised, although both kinds of beliefs quantify over the same domain.

Note also that in section 3.2 we discussed how many beliefs, standard or religious, can come in degrees. Therefore, religious beliefs as credences does not distinguish them in any manner from standard beliefs. We investigate this further at section 3.6, where we also counter Van Leeuwen's notion that standard beliefs are factual and religious beliefs are not.

The upshot of Van Leeuwen's position is that due to the allegedly non-naturalist, non-factive, and incorrigible nature of religious beliefs, they are distinct in both function and truth-aim from standard beliefs. Both *umbrella* and *Y2K* involve a function to successfully navigate a scenario, and aim at truth to manifest success. Conversely, Van Leeuwen might suggest that *heaven or hell* involves a function to contemplate an idea not to guide behaviour, and it aims more at imagination or contemplation than a commitment to truth and successful navigation of the world.

Keeping in mind Crane's definition, the thirteen listed criteria, Van Leeuwen's arguments, and the logical positivist-informed naturalist stance, we can see that hard disparatists take religious belief to be very distinct from standard beliefs. Hard disparatists are not arealists about religious belief: they still think there are psychological states and propositions with religious content. What they do think, however, is that there is something 'off' with the function following from religious beliefs, and the way they aim at truth. In other words, the function is not always connected with the content, and religious believers sometimes have no interest in the truth-aim of their beliefs or are ambivalent or agnostic about said aim. Sometimes it is even claimed that there is no truth-aim present at all.

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3.5 Religious Belief is Somewhat Different: Soft Disparatism

One might accept some of the above characterisations of religious belief but not commit to hard disparatism. Soft disparatists agree that the function served by religious belief is different, however, they usually think that religious beliefs aim at truth, albeit in a different way.

Here are two ways religious beliefs may aim at truth differently from standard beliefs:

> i. *Praxis* (πρᾶξις): religious beliefs aim at helping one connect with a community, satisfying a religious impulse, or according one's behaviour with religious practices. The aim is not about determining if a proposition is correct in its characterization of the world.

> ii. *Theoria* (θεωρία) or *contemplation*: religious beliefs aim at helping a believer to contemplate the propositional content under consideration, not to definitively determine if the proposition is correct in its characterization of the world. Hence, when a notion or idea is contemplated, there is no commitment as to whether or not the proposition is true or false because the aim of the belief is to intellectually investigate the meaning of the proposition and not to definitively commit to whether or not the content accurately maps the world (Phillips 1976, p. 181; Phillips 1999). Soft disparatists might acknowledge that there are some religious beliefs where the aim is directed at what the content of a proposition is about, like standard beliefs, but they will consider these a small fraction of cases.

Karen Armstrong (K. Armstrong 2010) argues that there is a modern preoccupation for reli-

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gion to provide answers in the same way that naturalism does. What she, and others we deem 'soft disparatists' like Fiona Ellis (Ellis 2017), mean by naturalism is not clear, just as it was not with the hard disparatists. Therefore, we also take them to be talking about a worldview that puts stock in empiricism, the natural sciences, consistent nomological laws, and a general kind of physicalism. Armstrong's position is that religion does not aim at truth in the same way as naturalism, but that this does not entail that it does not aim at truth at all. We can enhance our understanding of this by reference to Crane's idea in 'The Unity of Unconsciousness' that belief is a 'world-view' (Crane 2017a, p. 9). On this perspective, individual ascriptions of belief (e.g. via propositions) model aspects of this worldview. The worldview is the means by which an agent navigates their environment. A worldview that aims at truth will be more apt for navigating the environment, thus, an agent that seeks to successfully navigate their environment will put stock in aiming at truth.

For Armstrong, the religious worldview is about praxis: the object and content of religious thought is about relating to religious content in practical instead of theoretical terms (Ellis 2017). Religious beliefs functionally help one to connect with one's communities and to inculcate a sense of belonging (Tillich 1957). Indeed, some philosophers, such as Philip Goff, even go so far as to say that this sense of belonging and providing meaning is the only objective of religious belief. Goff refers to this as 'religious fictionalism' (Goff 2022). Crane takes a similar line when he talks of one aim of religious belief being to aid a believer in belonging to a community, and another about satisfying the religious impulse (Crane 2017a, p. 97). On this understanding, religious beliefs give rise to a function, and one can be more or less successful at implementing this function, depending on the accuracy of the truth-aim. For instance, if the aim of one's belief is to belong to a safe, prosperous, and accepting com-

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munity in eighth-century Norway then one's belief in the importance of the rituals of say Scandinavian Heathenism, and one's commitment to the worship of Thor, will likely help one navigate the world. This is more than mere 'make-believe' as Van Leeuwen puts it, because it has a factual goal: survival, belonging, cultivation of mental fortitude, and so on. Hence, this lends support to soft disparatism because there is still some kind of aim and a rational function.

The praxis-oriented account maps well theories of religion in the Wittgensteinian and pragmatist traditions. Wittgenstein noted that the meaning of language is not found in referential fidelity but in its use; what he called the 'forms of life' (Wittgenstein 2001). Wittgenstein-inspired philosophers such as D. Z. Phillips (Phillips 1966; Phillips 1976), B. R. Tilghman (Tilghman 1994), and Howard Wettstein (Wettstein 2012) employ their interpretation of this Wittgensteinian insight to religion.[7] Much of their analysis appears to support a kind of soft disparatism, for while they deny that religious belief is irrational or has any kind of truth-aim, they contend that the function of religious belief and language is to help an agent navigate social circumstances. Talk about God, prayer, the soul, and so on, has the function of achieving solidarity with, influence over, or connection to, other speakers. Howard Robinson summarises this interpretation of Wittgenstein (the 'Swansea school') thus (Robinson 2003, p. 354):

> Because of the acceptance of Hume and Kant's critique of metaphysics, no religious statements can be accepted as descriptively true, on a par with descriptions of the physical world and the statements of science. Rather they have an entirely

[7] See Robinson 2003, p. 354 on the alleged two approaches or 'grades of involvement in Wittgenstein'.

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> different function, being, roughly, expressions of value and attitude towards the world.

On such a Wittgensteinian account, the hard disparatist assertion that religious belief is irrational somewhat misses the mark because religious speakers are playing a language game, and to judge them by the standards of scientific or metaphysical frameworks is to misunderstand their function (Phillips 1992), for a function they retain (Robinson 2003, p. 356):

> A positivist treats metaphysics as a form of discourse which is meant to be literally true but is in fact meaningless. The Wittgensteinian thinks it was never meant to be factual.

This is a clear example of a praxis-focused approach to religious belief. Of course, an alternative reading of this so-called 'Wittgensteinian Fideist' tradition could take the position that the 'form of life' of religious language is so distinct from standard beliefs that very little criteria is common between them. In a similar vein, pragmatic theories of truth propose that truth be defined in terms of utility and are connected with the works of C. S. Peirce and William James. As regards religion, pragmatists reject the 'metaphysical monster' (James 1902, p. 447) that is theological attempts at explaining religion as something that aims at truth based on evidence. The utility or function of religious belief could be construed as praxis: navigating social roles and aiming at belonging. Again, one might debate whether the aim is so distinct as to exclude religious beliefs from standard beliefs. However, both Wittgensteinians and pragmatists are ascribing this-worldly functions to religious beliefs that conforms well with praxis.

One might suggest that the communal or praxis aspect of religious belief is sufficient but not necessary, as the contemplative aspect is also sufficient. For instance, one's belief in the

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importance of committing to a ritualistic personal hobby practiced alone on a mountaintop, will likely not help one navigate the social world nor satisfy their religious impulse and desire to belong to a community. This raises a question, how important is the aim at communal belonging for religion? Is not an Anglo-Saxon Christian, lost and alone in eighth-century Norway—as prisoner, missionary, or shipwreck survivor— religious? Crane would likely answer that the Christian missionary is still engaged in a communal practice, but it so happens that his community is on the other side of the North Sea. Also, the Anglo-Saxon perhaps wants to bring pagan Norwegians into *his* community. Yet then consider the case of the desert hermits and stylites (Doran 1992) who sought solitude precisely to enhance their religious experience. In German these people are called *einsidelære* (colonies of one); people who establish themselves in isolation whether that be geographically, socially, or mentally. They seek to be both religious and yet completely isolated from community, at least any community more tangible than an apostolic church.

This raises an important distinction between religion and spirituality. Both concern the numinous and numinal, but Crane contends that while the function of religion is related to community, the function of spirituality is not. An example of spirituality might be *ietsism*, uncommitted beliefs in an undetermined transcendent reality without community. 'Religion' captures those beliefs and practices that (largely) involve some communal aspect while 'spirituality' refers to beliefs and practices that are (largely) individual. Thus, even though both sorts of beliefs may have transcendental content or content about the numinous, soft disparatists contend that they come apart in terms of function.[8] We might say the Norwe-

[8]Some psychologists also distinguish between different categories of religious beliefs: extrinsic, intrinsic, and quest. 'Quest' is an open-ended attempt to resolve existential questions without resorting to simple or dogmatic answers (C. D. Batson and P. A. Schoenrade 1991; C. Batson,

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gian pagan is religious, but the desert hermit is spiritual. Alternatively, we might say that the Norwegian pagan is praxis-religious, and the hermit is theoria-religious.

We have just considered religious belief as having a functional aspect described as praxis, but as the hermit case shows, religious belief may also be distinct in that it does not aim at truth but rather is a form of theoria. So, another way soft disparatists divide religious belief from standard belief is by claiming that religious believers do not always seek to determine the truth or falsity of a religious proposition. Again, this is different from hard disparatists who hold that religious belief is simply wrong, contradictory, or not able to aim at truth. Religious belief, on the theoria view, is a contemplation of a notion or impulse, rather than a theory to be proved. Crane says that the content of religious belief might importantly be about an indeterminate thing—about something that people cannot fully understand. Perhaps it is even essential that one does not fully understand it (Crane 2017a). For example, people sometimes go through rituals even if they do not understand them. Religious belief on this view may be characterised as a kind of 'alief' (Gendler 2008). Tamar Gendler (Gendler 2008) provides examples of many such cases where we say we believe x but refuse to ϕ in accordance with that belief. For instance, one might affirm that they believe that a glass walkway overlooking the Grand Canyon is safe, and yet still fear to walk on it. Likewise, one might make a sign of the cross sans a belief that it will protect them, but they perform it regardless, just in case.

The theoria account is different from the praxis account because the aim is not a practical navigation of the world predicated on truth-aim, but a theoretical function. Soft disparatists still contend that religious belief serves a function, but the function is a contemplative one. According to this account, naturalism does not have a monopoly on reality and

P. Schoenrade, and Ventis 1993).

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explanation, and the objective of religious belief is not to understand the world in the same way as natural science (Cottingham 2014). Ellis suggests that divine properties are in their own sub-category, and just because naturalism does not analyse the content of religious belief, that does not mean that religious beliefs are completely different. This deftly avoids Van Leeuwen's *petitio principii*. This is also suggestive of Quine's (Quine 1964, p. 43) claim that we can distinguish between observational statements and theoretical statements.[9] A soft disparatist might say that religious beliefs are theoretical but standard beliefs are observational, yet both aim at truth in their respective ways. In this manner, religious beliefs come out as somewhat different to standard beliefs because although there is a function and truth-aim present, the aim is divergent.

We can appreciate this distinction with Wittgenstein's example of ordering five apples, when he explains language games (Wittgenstein 2001, PI, 1.1). Imagine, he says, that one goes into a store and orders 'five red apples'. It is obvious that the referents of 'red' and 'apples' are clear. One might ask: but what of the meaning of the word 'five'? Wittgenstein says that this is not the proper question, what is important is only how the word 'five' is used in the context (Wittgenstein 2001, PI, 1.1):

> And one has to say this in many cases where the question arises "Is this an appropriate description or not?" The answer is: "Yes, it is appropriate, but only for this narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe."

Maybe talk of numbers aims at truth in a different way to talk of apples? Maybe religious talk is like number talk? As Ellis puts it, religious belief is a certain mode or manner of un-

[9] See also Carnap 1967.

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derstanding the world, and it has both a practical and theoretical component (Ellis 2017).[10] Practically speaking, religious belief satisfies one's religious impulses and fosters a sense of community, and theoretically it seeks to explain value and the numinous through contemplation.

The case for praxis and theoria separating religious beliefs from standard beliefs has some force. Yet there are two reasons not to adopt a soft disparatist position. The first is that on a dispositionalist account one does not contemplate a belief; one contemplates a theory or idea, but not a belief. Indeed, Williams (Williams 1973) says that we do not decide if a belief is true, we simply believe the world is a certain way and act accordingly. There is nothing voluntary about this: we do not determine that it is raining, navigate the world in response to this, and then decide that we believe that it is raining. The belief is the disposition that it is raining in conjunction with our desire to remain dry that directs us to grab an umbrella. Of course, once one becomes sceptical of one's beliefs then one can contemplate the idea and perhaps decide to give up the belief, but contemplation is not itself a belief. Thus, when dispositionalists talk about the content of a belief, it is a tool to ascribe a mental state to someone else so as to make sense of the messy mental reality that informs how that person is navigating the world. This lends support to the idea that a good theory of belief will include religious

[10]For example, Buddhist philosophers generally argue that our everyday experience of the world is conceptually constructed. They claim that what appear to us to be stable, enduring entities, possessing properties and belonging to kinds, are fictions created by the imposition of concepts onto the incessant flux of momentary events; the way one understands the world is determined by the mode or manner of the imposed concepts (Chadha 2021; Olivelle 1996; E. Thompson 2022).

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beliefs in the picture because one cannot make sense of someone's mental reality to predict and makes sense of their behaviour if the theory of belief does not make room for the correct, behaviour-guiding role of religious belief. Hence, a belief is a commitment that comes before the content, and this is not what is happening with contemplation.

The second reason not to adopt soft disparatism is that one can contemplate standard ideas that interact with one's beliefs as well. Van Leeuwen says that we hypothesize that *P*, imagine that *P*, assume that *P*, and to this we can add contemplate *P*, entertain that *P*, strive to understand *P*, and so on. There is nothing uniquely religious about these functions. Thus, while praxis and theoria are relevant for some religious beliefs, they are not relevant to all religious beliefs nor only to religious beliefs.

We have shown that there are different ways of understanding *soft disparatism*: one can think that that the function served by religious belief is to belong to a community, praxis, or to contemplate ideas, theoria. This is the line Armstrong and Crane take. Ellis thinks that religious belief aims at truth in a contemplative manner, but not in a naturalist way. What these people share in common is a commitment to religious belief being different from standard beliefs, but not so very alien to standard beliefs as the *hard disparatists* suggest.

3.6 Religious Belief is Not Different: Non-Disparatism

We have seen that the praxis-theoria divide lends some support to *soft disparatism*, however, the preferable view is *non-disparatism*: religious beliefs serve a similar function, and aim at truth in the same way as many standard beliefs, therefore, they do not differ from standard beliefs in any interesting way. We will present two lines of argument for non-disparatism. Firstly, we will argue for *theological realism*: the idea that the things that religious beliefs are

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about can exist independently of human beings (where appropriate), can be known, and can be spoken about truthfully. Secondly, we will argue that standard beliefs meet many of the criteria the hard-disparatists proposed as definitive of religious belief, and thereby dissolve the strict distinction.

The first line of argument is that many religious believers are theological realists. Theological realism is the view that the things that religious beliefs are about are entities, objects and properties outside of the mind, be they things like social properties and relations, physical objects, or non-physical laws or powers (excluding obvious mind-dependent cases). According to realism, the content of religious beliefs are dependent on the way the world is externally (Stenmark 2015; Wynn 2020). This means that religious sentences have truth-conditions that determine their propositional content just like ordinary sentences.

Consider three theological traditions that are all realist: *evidentialism*, *natural theology*, and *reformed epistemology*. Reference to the kind of claims made by religious philosophers quickly shows that many of them take religious beliefs to have propositional content, the correctness or accuracy of which can be measured, that aim at truth.

Evidentialism is a view that for a person to be justified in some belief, that person must have some awareness of the total evidence available for the belief. The confidence a believer has in the given belief will correspond to the evidence (Taliaferro, Harrison, and Goetz 2012). Evidentialism implies that religious beliefs are justified only if there is conclusive evidence for the content of the beliefs (Forrest 1997). Of course, there are different kinds of evidence, such as evidence of the senses, what is self-evident, introspective evidence, moral evidence, or recollected evidence from memory. Some might even count religious experience as evidence. Putting aside whether or not evidentialism is a correct thesis about justification for belief,

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it is the case that it is committed to a truth-aim that is descriptively about how reality is *and* there are theist evidentialists, such as theist evidentialist philosopher Richard Swinburne. Although many argue against theist evidentialism, or against evidentialism altogether, this does not detract from the fact that many religious believers, including philosophers of religion, take religious beliefs to be aiming at a committed truth about how reality descriptively is.

Natural theology is a philosophical approach that seeks to demonstrate God's existence (Aquinas 1265-74; Braine 1988; Craig 1979; B. Miller 1991). To show that a belief in God's existence is justifiable, according to natural theology, it is sufficient to have a deductively valid argument with justifiable premises (with objections considered and defeated). Deductively valid arguments from justifiable premises are also taken as support for standard beliefs. Additionally, probabilistic arguments are also employed (Swinburne 1979). Despite different approaches, all natural theology appeals to evidence and logical reasoning to conclude the truth of how the world is, and thereby determine whether or not a belief is justifiable. Even apophatic accounts of the numinous take themselves to be aiming at truth in that they take the things that they are talking about to be descriptively true or false.[11]

A third example of theological realism is found in reformed epistemology, a philosophical position that commits itself to the view that belief in God may be as properly basic as one's ordinary beliefs about other persons (Plantinga and Bergmann 2016). Thus, beliefs about God are warranted provided they are grounded—in whatever is taken to be the appropriate grounds—and defended against known objections. Indeed, reformed epistemologist Alvin Plantinga even argues that religion is more natural than secular naturalism (Plantinga 2011, p. 60; Plantinga 1993).

[11] One example is found in Grammatical Thomism, see (Hewitt 2021).

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Sebastian Gäb (Sebastian 2014) proposes two theses in support of a particular kind of theological realism: (1) metaphors are irreducible in religious language; (2) their meaning is based on certain experiences. According to (1), metaphorical sentences are not true in a different way to literal sentences. This is because we usually do not regard utterances as devoid of meaning just because there is no way to explicate their content other than by repeating them. Here are two examples (Sebastian 2014):

1. His voice sounds like Sinatra.

2. This fruit tastes like lemon.

How does one grasp the proposition expressed in these two sentences? According to the causal theory of reference, some experiential context is relevant for fixing the reference of terms like 'water' and not a set of descriptions (Devitt 1981, p. 66). Likewise, the reference of (1) and (2) can be traced back to some experience, even though the metaphor is irreducible. Thus, although some content is metaphorical, it still refers to an experiential context that fixes the reference: in the case of (1) Ol' Blue Eyes and (2) a lemon.

The same reasoning is applicable to much religious language. According to Gäb, religious experience is the starting point for understanding a lot of religious language and the same reasoning—that metaphors are irreducible in religious language and their meaning is based on certain experiences—is applicable. Religious language is replete with such irreducible metaphors, for example when Christ says, 'I am the door' (*Douay-Rheims Bible* 2011, John 10:9) or 'I am the true vine' (*Douay-Rheims Bible* 2011, John 15:1), and these metaphors are intended to convey something true about the world. 'By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved' (*Douay-Rheims Bible* 2011, John 10:9); what could be more real than a claim about the elimination or salvation of one's soul; one's personal identity?

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Consider the case of the testimony of Dr. José Maria de Almeida Garrett who was present at a notable religious event at Fatima, Portugal on October 13, 1917 (Martins 1984):

> The sun, whirling wildly, seemed all at once to loosen itself from the firmament and, blood red, advance threateningly upon the earth as if to crush us with its huge and fiery weight. The sensation during those moments was truly terrible.

The people present that day took this strange occurrence to be a religious experience, hence, their beliefs about the phenomena were religious beliefs. Dr Garrett adds (Martins 1984):

> All the phenomena which I have described were observed by me in a calm and serene state of mind without any emotional disturbance. It is for others to interpret and explain them. Finally, I must declare that never, before or after October 13 [1917], have I observed similar atmospheric or solar phenomena.

We can appreciate that Dr Garrett's beliefs about the events of October 13, 1917, are religious but also about the truth of the world; how to make sense of it and navigate it. His beliefs are about an external event and object, the operations of the sun, *and* about the religious aspect of the event and object, even if the meaning of the truth-conditions that determine their propositional content is only reducible to the events at Fatima.

Gäb holds that metaphors can be irreducible in religious language and their meaning is based on certain religious experiences. Therefore, theological realism postulates the existence of objective truths about religious entities, but not that we necessarily have linguistic access to them. This is the strongest case for non-disparatism: that religious beliefs aim at truth, even if many of those truths are complex or abstract in such a way that the language is metaphorical, unverifiable, or imprecise. Certainly, God, Vishnu, Allah, and Buddha, are all real entities

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to which many religious believers intend to refer to when they talk about them, even if they appreciate the limits of language to describe concepts outside of space–time or that perhaps elude human cognitive capabilities. The same is true of less precise terms such as 'heaven' or '*saṃsāra*' (संसार). This means that religious beliefs are in fact corrigible. If one pushes a harder line and thinks all metaphorical language is suspect or incorrigible, then as we shall see, this applies to language about standard beliefs, hence, even if this argument holds, it prevents a clean delineation between standard and non-standard beliefs. It also leaves us laying in the narrowest of procrustean beds.

The second line of argument is that standard beliefs and religious beliefs satisfy many of the same criteria and are not definitively distinct. Recall criteria (1)-(13) for the definition of religious belief provided by the hard disparatists, in section three:

1. Distinct in ritual, material, doctrinal and philosophical, experiential and emotional, social and institutional, narrative, and mythic, matters (Geertz 2016; N. Smart 2000).
2. Symbolic, not literal (Evans-Pritchard 1976).
3. Group beliefs that can contradict individual beliefs (Astuti and Harris 2008).
4. Contextual (Astuti 2015; J. Barrett and Kiel 1996).
5. Characterised by conviction, often involving an initiatory declaration of orthodoxy (Ruel 1982, p. 109).
6. Opaque: they remain mysteries and rely on ritual deference (Crane 2017a).
7. Half-understood ideas (Naumescu 2011).

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8. Unreflectively held without attention to reasons to believe (Sperber 1997).

9. Minimally counter-intuitive: they violate our intuitive naturalist ontology (Boyer 2001). They are 'superempirical': things that are not the product of empirical things nor need be understood empirically (Schilbrack 2013).

10. '[A]ll explicit and implicit notions and ideas, accepted as true, which relate to a reality which cannot be verified empirically' (Wiegers and Platvoet 2002).

11. Irrational (Kunin 2003) or 'irrational' imitation (Naumescu 2011): the property alleged to cause an individual's behaviour is empirically unsupported.

12. Often can be contradictory (Astuti and Harris 2008, p. 144).

13. A set of required actions (C. Smith 2017; Vásquez 2011).

Note that not all these criteria cohere with one another, so a religious belief should satisfy only one or more, but not all of them. This conforms with our polythetic approach. Upon consideration it becomes apparent that there are applicable standard belief cases for each, hence the above features fail to delineate religious beliefs from standard beliefs in an interesting way. Distinctions (1), (2), (3), (5), (10), (11), are all applicable to archetypical cases of non-religious beliefs. Beliefs that align with (1) apply as readily to standard beliefs about government as they do to religion, as anyone who has attended a citizenship-awarding ceremony can attest. Standards beliefs can also be characterised by conviction and declaration of orthodoxy, say to a shared jurisprudential justification for a legal system or 'our democracy', per (5). As for (2), (10), (11), and (12), standard beliefs can hold even if unsupported. One example is the current debates about the so-called adoption problem in logic which is worth exploring.

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Saul Kripke concludes from Lewis Carroll's paper, *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles* (Carroll 1895) that certain basic principles of valid inference, such as universal instantiation and *modus ponens* could not possibly guide our inferential practices, because if one already infers in accordance with them, then no adoption is needed, but if one does not infer in accordance with them, then no adoption is possible (Boyd 2022; Devitt and Roberts 2024; Padro 2015, p. 42). Unlike Quine, who holds that logical beliefs can be empirically supported, Kripke is claiming that logical beliefs—non-ordinary standard beliefs—are held *a priori* and are not empirically supported. Unsupported standard beliefs would also include contradictory beliefs, for instance a belief about the liar paradox (Pleitz 2018). Even if one has religious beliefs without understanding them, as Crane suggests, this is not unique. For instance, standard beliefs such as obsessive compulsive disorder-informed beliefs may also be irrational or believed even if the subject does not fully understand why. Concerning (2), (4), (6), and (10), many standard beliefs only appear rational in their context (Spiro 1966, p. 98), such as a coronation or the rules of cricket. Regarding (8) and (9), it is unclear why a belief conforming with global intuitions makes it more correct: firstly, intuitions are not always reliable (consider folk intuitions about gravity), and religious beliefs are no less minimally counter-intuitive than say Platonist beliefs about mathematical entities or fundamental metaphysical laws; secondly, even if conformation with intuitions is evidence for correctness, religious intuitions, such as a belief in a kind of 'higher power', are historically and statistically near-universal and conform more with intuitions than many standard beliefs—including naturalist beliefs —do. Further, intuitions are also not consistent across cultures, even for standard beliefs. Notably, Machery, Mallon, Nichols and Stich (Machery et al. 2004) presented a story modeled on the *Gödel* case from *Naming and Necessity* in a study of undergraduates' intuitions,

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and proposed that their respondents' answers showed that Westerners are prone to rely on intuitions that match the causal-historical picture of proper names, proposed by Donnellan and Kripke, while East Asians appear to be guided more by classical descriptivism. Finally, (13) aptly applies to moral, legal, and social beliefs.

One might counter that while there are non-religious beliefs that meet some of the above criteria, it is only religious beliefs that meet a critical cluster of them. For example, consider the religious belief 'Jesus is the son of God'; it could be argued that relative to a given believer, all or nearly all thirteen criteria for distinguishing religious beliefs could be met by this belief. Yet there are examples of unambiguously non-religious beliefs that meet just as many of the criteria as stereotypical religious beliefs. The best cases are found in politics, such as opening sessions of Commonwealth parliaments, pseudo-scientific theories like Lysenkoism, or aspects of totalitarian ideologies such as *juche sasang* (주체사상). If religious beliefs do not have a monopoly on a particular cluster of these criteria, then they do not differ in any significant manner from standard beliefs. In the case of *juche sasang* which is an explicitly atheist worldview, one might interestingly have beliefs which count as religious even if the believer vehemently denies any religious content! There are also non-religious moral and metaethical beliefs, and these also meet Crane's criteria at the beginning of investing life with ultimate meaning (C. D. Brown 2024).

Another counter could be Van Leeuwen's hard-line position that religious beliefs are essentially irrational. Yet as we have discussed, many religions are explicitly concerned with factual, corrigible, beliefs that functionally serve to aim at truth. One example is from Aztec, or Nahuatl, religion. James Maffie (Maffie 2014b) characterises the chief problematic of Nahuatl religion as the following question: how can humans maintain their balance on the slippery

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earth? For the Nahua, earthly life is filled with pain because we live upon *tlalticpac*, the 'point or summit of the earth' (Burkhart 1989, p. 58). The Nahuatl proverb, '*Tlaalahui, tlapetzcahui in tlalticpac*,' 'It is slippery, it is slick on the earth,' demonstrates how morally, epistemologically, and aesthetically, human behaviour is defined in terms of maintaining harmony in a world in flux. This captures a functional desire to maintain a truth-dependent balance. Thus, the function and aim of Aztec philosophy's guiding question is not irrational, but thoroughly pragmatic and 'this-worldly'.

A second problem for Van Leeuwen is that his arguments apply to standard beliefs. According to Eric Mandelbaum and Nicholas Porot (Mandelbaum and Porot 2023, p. 77), a Van Leeuwen-style account encounters the issue that factual beliefs also seem to have problems updating (Anderson 1983; Mandelbaum 2019), hence, the argument that religious beliefs are incorrigible and standard beliefs are not, falters. Take Van Leeuwen's own example. People who denounced their belief in the apocalyptic consequences of *Y2K* did not also denounce their belief in the power of computer programming and perceived societal dependence on digital technology, they simply updated their belief about the fine-grained causal relationship between computers and digital calendars post Jan 1, 2000. Likewise, a religious group can update specific unrealised eschatological predictions—beliefs not applicable to all religions—without changing their beliefs regarding the power of God to end the world, or a sacred text to be generally prophetic. Neither standard nor religious beliefs are completely incorrigible nor corrigible; political predictions regularly go awry without swaying many peoples' political loyalties, likewise, the point of no return for action on climate change has been adjusted since the early 1970s without scientific consensus disavowing climate science as a discipline. Standard beliefs appear as corrigible or incorrigible as religious beliefs.

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We also return to our earlier problem, that per (7)-(10), hard disparatists claim that the only way to have a non-contradictory, rational, and intuitive belief is if one's foundational theory of truth is a kind of empirico-naturalism. This ironic faith in empirico-naturalism begs the question by carving religious and standard beliefs at an arbitrary joint, a joint that applies to other standard beliefs about *a priori* subjects. The difficulty justifying religious beliefs mirrors the difficulty justifying standard, metaphysical beliefs, as seen with the adoption problem (Geertz 2016, p. 98). As we discussed, this was admitted by the hard disparatists *par excellence*, the logical positivists (Hahn, Neurath, and Carnap 1929, p. 10):

> The metaphysician and the theologian believe, thereby misunderstanding themselves, that their statements say something, or that they denote a state of affairs. Analysis, however, shows that these statements say nothing but merely express a certain mood and spirit.

A final argument against ejecting religious beliefs from the standard belief camp, is that they both can employ identical reasoning but be classified differently due to context (Taliaferro 2017). A Hindu might be a convinced physicalist who takes a physically-closed universe to be the most powerful, entity: Brahman (God) (Ram-Prasad 2001). Likewise, an anti-theist might take the whole physically-closed universe to be the most powerful possible entity, but they don't like using the G-word. In this case, the Hindu and non-Hindu follow the same reasoning and hold near identical beliefs—perhaps even with the same teleological commitments about fine-tuning and initial conditions—but one is religious and the other is not. Undoubtedly, this distinction is important, but both beliefs serve the same function and truth-aim, and both equally fall under the barrel of (1)-(13).

We are not disputing the distinctions people like Van Leeuwen make between religious and

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non-religious belief; there is distinct content, and praxis and theoria might be more or less present in one of these categories. Rather, what we are doing is pointing out that whichever way hard disparatists cut beliefs, standard beliefs can also be carved along these same lines. So let us carve along the grain, that is the superior line of division between ordinary and non-ordinary. Of course, we are not denying their reading of empirical data, nor their analysis of different kinds of beliefs. Yet as standard beliefs can operate in functionally identical ways and can also aim at truth in the same manner as religious beliefs, the only way to neatly separate religious belief into its own category is by committing a *petitio principii*. There is also an additional moral here: it is important to listen to how religious people characterise their beliefs, rather than approaching the issue with a presupposition that these beliefs are incompatible with naturalism, and that naturalism is true. The latter approach is reminiscent of the famous event at the Battle of Copenhagen when Admiral Horatio Nelson held up a telescope to his blind eye and declared: "I really do not see the signal". In fact, there are very many signals for those with eyes to see; there are instances where religious people and philosophies are explicit about their realist claims. If we are to properly grasp what religious beliefs are, let us look upon them with an unjaded and seeing eye. In this way, we can come to a more accurate understanding of belief generally, by informing the concept with all cases and kinds of beliefs. In this manner, we thereby also challenge the hangover from logical positivism that non-naturalist beliefs are irrational or strongly distinguishable from naturalistic beliefs.

3.7 On Faith

Is the term 'belief' homonymous or polysemous? *Homonymous* expressions are words with no relation beyond identical phonology, e.g. a 'Pole' refers to a Polish person, and sounds

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identical to a 'pole' which flies a flag, but there is no shared etymology or meaning. *Polysemous* expressions are single words with multiple meanings, e.g. a 'mouth' can belong to a person, or a cave, but both uses share the same etymology: the latter originated from conventional use associated with the former (Devitt 2004; Amaral 2008). On the one hand, 'belief' could be homonymous: for example when a Muslim says they believe 'There is no deity but God' they mean something completely different from someone who says, 'I believe that exercise is good for my health'. Similarly, when person *A* says 'The bank is wet' they mean a riverbank, but when person *B* says 'The bank is wet' they mean the floor of a building. On the other hand, 'belief' might be polysemous: when a Hindu says they believe that Lord Krishna appeared to Arjuna (Vyasa 2000) they are using the same word in a slightly different way than when they say, 'I believe that it is raining'. The homonymous view lends support to disparatism: religious beliefs are non-standard beliefs because the use of the word 'belief' has almost nothing in common with standard beliefs. The polysemous view can support soft disparatism: religious beliefs may be non-standard beliefs because the word 'belief' has a different meaning in religious contexts. Yet the polysemous view can also support the position that religious beliefs are non-ordinary standard beliefs. For example, someone might spend their whole life up to time $t1$ believing that certain kinds of yellow minerals are 'gold', only later at time $t2$ to discover that some are 'gold', *aurum* Au79, but others are 'fool's gold', *pyrite* FeS_2: ordinary gold and non-ordinary gold. In both cases they mean a certain kind of yellow mineral, but after time t2 they can be distinguished at a more fine-grained level by reference to their chemical composition. So it may be that religious beliefs are different to ordinary beliefs, yet are still standard beliefs, because belief is a term that is polysemous between various ordinary and non-ordinary meanings.

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One way to test this would be to translate 'belief' into different languages (Bach 2004; Kripke 1977). For instance, Kent Bach says that if the definite article 'the' is ambiguous in regard to referential or attributive use, one could suspect it would be ambiguous in other (non-English) languages too, and in exactly the same way (Bach 2004, pp. 226–267):

> It would be a remarkable fact that an ambiguous word ('the' in this case) in one language should have translations in numerous other languages that are ambiguous in precisely the same way.

Does 'belief' mean the same thing in Vedic traditions as it does in Semitic traditions? Perhaps sceptics might be willing to accept that some religious beliefs are standard, for instance, they might assent that Vedic scriptures are more akin to philosophical approaches to carving the world at its joints, given the tradition's conception of itself as committed to a kind of proto-naturalist explanatory mission. However, said sceptics might still differentiate other, more incredulous religious beliefs from standard beliefs. If we translate 'belief' into Sanskrit we must distinguish between 'मत' which we can translate as 'opinion' or '(standard) belief' and 'विश्वास' which means something closer to 'faith' or 'trust'. This Vedic account of 'belief' is distinct from a translation of 'belief' into Hebrew 'אמונה' (*emunah*) which translates to 'faith' or 'faith in God'. This translation exercise shows that perhaps some religious beliefs are distinctive because they are faith-based or at least have faith as a load-bearing criteria. Translation may reveal that it is these kinds of religious beliefs that are interestingly different from standard beliefs.

Not all religious believes involve an aspect of faith, however, it could be the case that those religious beliefs which do are not standard beliefs. For many people 'faith-based' is synonymous with unreasonable, and 'non-faith-based' is synonymous with reasonable. On this di-

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chotomous account the categories of belief will be interestingly distinct. However, if we take a more nuanced approach to faith, the distinction is not so obvious. It is true that for some people and groups, such as rare fundamentalist Protestant Christian denominations, faith can mean something like 'trust in something despite, independent of, or in opposition to, reason'. Perry Miller in *The New England Mind* provides the following description of a Puritan understanding of God which comes close to this notion (P. Miller 1939, p. 10):

> The Puritan God is entirely incomprehensible to man. The Puritan system rests, in the final analysis, upon something that cannot be systematized at all, upon an unchained force, an incalculable power [⋯] He is a realm of mystery, in whom we may be sure that all dilemmas and contradictions are resolved, though just how we shall never in this world even remotely fathom. He is the reason of all things, and though men can "explain" the behavior of things, they cannot pretend to expound the reason of reasons.

Fideists and Fideist-adjacent philosophers such as Søren Kierkeegaard (Kierkegaard 1843) provide an apt case. Call this kind of faith *F-faith*.

Faith, from Latin *fides* which means trust, can be as much trust in something because of evidence as it is despite evidence. Thus, for other groups, for example Roman Catholics, faith means something more akin to an inference to the best explanation (Swinburne 1996). Pope Pius X (Pius X 1910) defines it thus:[12]

[12]Further evidence is provided by Thomas Aquinas (Aquinas 1265-74, STh II-II, 2, 9):

> Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace.

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> I hold with certainty and sincerely confess that faith is not a blind sentiment of religion welling up from the depths of the subconscious under the impulse of the heart and the motion of a will trained to morality; but faith is a genuine assent of the intellect to truth received by hearing from an external source.

Call this kind of faith *I-faith*. On this definition, faith is more like trust in the whole being coherent even if bridging information is missing, like someone trusting that a puzzle can be solved even if the solution eludes her. At least some appeals to faith, I-faith, are forms of abductive reasoning. Abductive reasoning is (by most accounts) rational.[13] Therefore, an appeal to faith alone does not explain why religious belief is unique, provided standard beliefs also occasionally appeal to abductive reasoning. We also here re-encounter the lesson of letting the religious describe their own beliefs rather than ascribing false definitions to them, such as ascribing all religious belief as involving F-faith.

A third kind of faith is as a covenant or contract (see P. Miller 1939, Ch.XIV), *C-faith*. Consider God's various covenants with the children of Abraham throughout the Old Testament/Torah. The contract is a conditional relationship between God and the Israelites: if they behave correctly (praxis) then they earn His favour, and if not, His wrath. To have faith on this account is to agree to the contract, to functionally aim to fulfill the contract, and to trust that the contract will hold. This covenant explanation is evident in standard-beliefs, for instance legal contracts, trusts, fiduciary duties, and even social contract theories informing the legitimacy of governments.

This appeal to faith does not successfully show that religious beliefs are not standard be-

[13] David Hume might have something to say about this (Hume 1739, Book 1, part iii, section 6).

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liefs, for not all religious beliefs are faith-based, and not all standard beliefs are non-faith based. One might have religious beliefs for a host of non-faith reasons, such as acceptance of a cosmological argument. Conversely, many standard beliefs can rely on F-faith, I-faith, or C-faith. Some standard beliefs can be classified as employing F-faith, such as a parent's denial of their murderous child's guilt despite overwhelming contrary evidence or a lover's unconditional trust that their serially unfaithful and deceptive spouse will remain true in the future despite all past evidence contradicting such a supposition. Some standard beliefs employ I-Faith, such as one's faith that an aeroplane will safely land, despite one's insufficient knowledge about aerodynamics.[14] And of course, many philosophers suggest that we daily operate under the auspices of social contracts, involving C-faith. We can conclude that faith is an aspect that can distinguish types of ordinary and non-ordinary standard beliefs and religious beliefs, but it is of little use as a tool for separating standard from religious belief.

3.8 Religious Beliefs Are Standard Beliefs

Is there any interesting difference between standard and religious beliefs? We analysed three different answers to this question: (1) religious belief is very different (*hard disparatism*); (2) religious belief is somewhat different (*soft disparatism*); and (3) religious belief is not different (*non-disparatism*). We concluded that religious beliefs are not different from standard beliefs in any significant manner; they are mental, dispositional attitudes that aim to provide a correct representation of the world. Therefore, religious beliefs are best characterised as non-ordinary, standard beliefs.

[14]There is a distinction between faith-in and faith-that, but we claim this applies to both accounts.

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Aside from presenting a more accurate account of religious belief, two additional insights follow from this analysis. First, we learned that if we wish to better understand what beliefs are then we ought to take all different kinds of beliefs, including religious beliefs, and analyse them together. In this way we can account for all kinds of beliefs, including some of our most deeply held, informative, and meaningful beliefs, and gain better understanding of how people employ the concept. Second, we learned that we ought not posit a stark division between standard and non-standard beliefs because there is insufficient reason to support such a distinction. By rejecting this dichotomous approach, we can thereby reject a dogmatic classification of religious beliefs (and some metaphysical beliefs) as peculiar, incredulous or even irrational. In these two ways, we have made progress in our understanding of what belief is and may now dare to say: *credo in unam credentiam*.

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Out beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing, there is a field.
I will meet you there.

Rumi (Rumi et al. 1997)

4

Reconsidering the Problem of Evil

Keywords: Problem of Evil; Contradiction; Metaphilosophy; Sufficient Reason; Plenitude.

Here is proposed a novel contribution to the contradiction that is the problem of evil. It is claimed that it follows from God's non-arbitrariness that nothing is precluded from

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existing in relation to how evil it is. To begin, it is argued that the principle of sufficient reason (*PSR*) contradicts God's self-sufficiency. Then it is shown that non-arbitrariness explains the multiplicity of God's creation without the need to assume that things have sufficient reason for existing. Subsequently, inspired by the application of the principle of plenitude to solve epistemological problems in mathematical Platonism, it is suggested that God actualises all plenitudinous possibilia unless He has non-arbitrary reasons to limit some aspects of creation. It is argued that the analysis of how evil a thing is cannot be a sufficient reason to prevent its creation. The reason for this is that every finite thing is equally evil with respect to the infinite perfection of God. In this way, the existence of evil can be accounted for in a manner that does not contradict those attributes of God that give rise to the premise-set of the problem of evil.

4.1 A New Approach to the Problem of Evil

The problem of evil is the alleged inconsistency of the existence of evil with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God. This inconsistency arises because of the alleged incompatibility of the following four premises:

1. God exists.
2. God is omnipotent.
3. God is omnibenevolent.
4. Evil exists.

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Epicurus provides the most famous articulation of the problem:[1]

> Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

Various solutions to the inconsistency of the premises have been proposed over the last two millennia. This chapter aims to contribute to this project by presenting a novel approach to the problem. The chapter proceed as follows. It begins by arguing that the principle of sufficient reason—the idea that God has sufficiently good reasons for every action He performs —contradicts God's self-sufficiency—the idea that God is in no way dependent on anything beyond Himself. Due to this contradiction, one should commit to the weaker principle of God's non-arbitrariness. This means that it can shown why God, given that He creates, does so to the extent to which He does. Having established this, the task then is to show that because God created at least one evil thing, it follows from his non-arbitrariness that He created the exact amount of evil things that exist. Yet why does this not contradict His omnibenevolence? The answer follows the thinking behind the Platonic *principle of plenitude*, a principle that asserts that all possible forms of existence in the universe are actual. It goes like this: due to non-arbitrariness, if God creates x for reason ϕ, and ϕ applies equally to some possible thing y, then God must also create y or else He would violate His attribute of non-arbitrariness. It follows that evilness applies equally to all possible things. Therefore, evil can be accounted for without it giving rise to a paradox.

What does it mean that evil applies equally to all possible things? The creation of evil is compatible with God's omnibenevolence because whatever exists is separate from God, and

[1] This quote is attributed to Epicurus, however, there is no direct reference available.

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whatever is separate from God is infinitely distant from God's perfection. Therefore, any evil that exists is equally infinitely distant from God's goodness. It follows from this view that nothing is precluded from being created by God because of how evil it is. Thus, evil is not something God must be willing or able to prevent. Of course, there remains the mystery of why God creates anything at all, but this is an altogether different philosophical problem.

It should be noted that herein is *not* argued, nor does it follow from the account, that full-blooded plenitude in regard to all aspects of creation is the case: only in relation to evil. Although it might be argued for in relation to other things—such as beauty—it does necessarily follow that it is applicable to these other aspects. It should also be stressed that because plenitude here is only in relation to evil, the view is not committed to the idea that necessarily all ontological possibilities (even of evil) exist. There might be alternative reasons for God's precluding something from existence. What is important here is that because of this relative plenitude, whatever these reasons are, they *must be unrelated to evil*. The world can be identical to how it is now presumed to be on such a view.

One might also be concerned that it follows from this approach that God is insensitive to different kinds or levels of evil, including horrendous suffering. Although this is not a counterargument to the position *per se*, it is an interesting intuition. One answer is that there is more than one perspective to omnibenevolence. The first is the just arbiter who impartially judges evil in the balance of the entirety of creation, while the second is the merciful co-sufferer who empathises with the victims of evil and their subjective experiences that some evils seem worse than others. The prior is often called the Father, and the latter the Son. In this way, the approach provides new insight and argumentation for Trinitarians as it not only accounts for evil, and our intuitions about evil, but also claims that God is necessarily

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multipersonal.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. We begin by arguing for the non-arbitrariness of God's creation. In section 4.2 four principles are explained: 4.2.1 sovereignty: the idea that everything that exists (other than God) was created by, or ultimately depends on, God; 4.2.1 self-sufficiency: the idea that God does not ultimately depend on anything other than Himself to exist; 4.2.2 sufficient reason: the idea that if there is sufficient reason for God to do something, then God does it; and 4.2 non-arbitrariness: the idea that God does not do anything arbitrarily; if God does something, then he has non-arbitrary reasons for doing so. At first pass, sufficient reason and non-arbitrariness appear to be similar principles, however, while the prior compels God's actions, the latter only evaluates His actions *post ex facto*. It is argued that the second principle is strong enough to account for creation, yet not so strong as to contradict God's traditional properties. From here the argument proceeds to make the case for the naturalness of the principle of plenitude in section 4.3. The principle of plenitude adopted herein is a relative one: it will be important to establish plenitude only with respect to evil. The strangeness of a plenitudinous position irrespective of context is acknowledged, as will be discussed at 4.5. This will include a brief discussion of mathematical plenitude at 4.3.2 to motivate the position. Then at section 4.4, a novel approach to the problem of evil is proposed. This begins at 4.4.1 by discussing the metaphilosophical problem of resolving contradictions. In order to understand the historical dialectic, an analysis of how some solutions to other contradictions have been approached is undertaken. It is observed that some solutions are better than others; good solutions preserve the pre-formalised notions that give rise the contradiction, while less optimal solutions bite the bullet on the contradiction or disregard the pre-formalised notions. With this general approach in mind, at ref 4.5 the novel

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approach to the problem is presented: the principle of non-arbitrariness, in conjunction with the self-evident existence of creation, justifies the principle of plenitude with respect to evil. The existence of all possible created entities necessarily entails the existence of that which is infinitely distant from God, which we call evil. Every evil is equally distant from God's perfection, thus because God is the non-arbitrary creator of everything, He must make actual all that is possible without constructing arbitrary boundaries to exclude evil. Therefore, evil necessarily exists without being inconsistent with God's omnibenevolence.

4.2 The Principle of Non-Arbitrariness

Before we approach the problem of evil directly, we ought to first clarify a few important concepts. In this section, it shall be seen that the principle of sufficient reason is too strong and that one ought rather to commit to the weaker principle of non-arbitrariness. This principle contrasts the idea that God does everything that He has reason to do with the idea that everything He does is not arbitrary. The shortcomings of the principle of sufficient reason are related to its coming into conflict with the principle of sovereignty, the idea that God is the creator of everything, and self-sufficiency, the idea that God is not dependent on anything other than Himself. Ultimately, the principle of non-arbitrariness is the optimal guide to God's relationship with His creation.

4.2.1 Sovereignty & Self-Sufficiency

Greg Welty (Welty 2019) and William Lane Craig (Craig 2016) say that (a) everything distinct from God depends on, or must be created by, God; and (b) God does not depend on anything

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distinct from Himself.[2] (a) is what is called the principle of 'sovereignty', and (b) the principle of 'aseity', from which one can derive self-sufficiency.

Sovereignty is traditionally a necessary condition of theism. For instance, John 1:3 (*Douay-Rheims Bible* 2011, John 1:3) states that "All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made". According to most forms of theism, anything that exists was created by God, or follows from, or is entailed by, a thing created by God. The principle of sovereignty is important, because it follows from it that if evil exists, then it is somehow dependent upon God for its existence.

The doctrine that God is uncreated is called the principle of divine aseity. Aseity means that God is '*a se*', from himself (Craig 2016). A consequence of aseity is that God is self-sufficient: He does not depend on anything other than Himself to exist. There is a potential concern that the existence of created things entails that God might necessarily have been compelled to create them, and this would run afoul of the principle of self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency is the notion that a thing's existence is not contingent upon anything else:

> X is self-sufficient if and only if there is no Y that is distinct from X that is a necessary or sufficient condition for the existence of X.

Regarding God, the principle of self-sufficiency is the notion that He is in no way contingent upon something outside of Himself (Arthur O Lovejoy 1963, p.55).

There are two ways to argue that self-sufficiency is a necessary property of God. The first way is descriptive: omnipotence entails self-sufficiency. As Aristotle explains in the *Eudemian Ethics*, "One who is self-sufficient can have no need of the service of others, nor of

[2]This is a debated attribute of God. For instance, William Lane Craig (Craig 2016) says that there is a potential concern that aseity is incompatible with the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo.

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their affection, nor of social life, since he is capable of living alone. This is especially evident in the case of God" (Aristotle 1935, VII, 1244b-1245b).[3] In other words, if God's existence is in any way contingent upon something other than Himself, then He would not be all-powerful, because said thing would have some manner of power over Him. Thus, God's omnipotence requires that He be self-sufficient.

The second way is normative: omnibenevolence entails self-sufficiency. Plato says in the *Philebus* (Plato 1892) that "The Good[···]differs in its nature from everything else in that the being who possesses it always, and in all respects, has the most perfect sufficiency and is never in need of any other" (Plato 1892, p. 60c). Plato takes self-sufficiency to be one kind of The Good.[4] God, who eternally possesses the Good in the highest degree, must therefore, be self-sufficient. If God is not self-sufficient, then it follows that the existence of some or all imperfect and finite things would bring an addition of excellence to reality. This would mean that the goodness of God is contingent upon these things.[5]

As shall be seen in the following subsection, the principle of sufficient reason is at odds with the principle of sovereignty and the principle of self-sufficiency, and this is why the weaker principle of non-arbitrariness is adopted.

[3]For further discussion, see chapter (Arthur O. Lovejoy 1971, pp. 41–45).

[4]See Uebersax 2013 for a reconstruction of a Platonic argument for God as The Good. ''The Good" is also claimed as a name for God at the beginning of Aristotle's Metaphysics (Aristotle 2016, p. 12.10).

[5]These are well-established monotheistic principles and thus we shall not justify them further. If the readers prefers, they may operate with the understanding that these are taken as presuppositions in this chapter.

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4.2.2 Sufficient Reason & Non-Arbitrariness

God traditionally possesses the properties of omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence (among others). Per the latter two properties, God can do anything, and anything He does is best. As God is all-knowing, He knows all the best reasons to do or not do something; as He is all-good, He only possesses the best reasons for doing something; as He is all-powerful, He cannot be compelled to do other than what He chooses. Thus, if something exists, God must have had the best reasons to create it and creating it must have been the best thing to do.

The previous paragraph inclines some philosophers to propose the principle known as the principle of sufficient reason. The principle stipulates that all contingent things have a reason or explanation for their existence. The idea is that everything must have a reason, cause, explanation, ground, and so on. There arises an unease that the principle of sufficient reason might pose a logical challenge to God's relationship with creation because if God has sufficient reason to create something, this entails that He *necessarily* must have created said thing. The upshot of this necessary condition is that it would undermine God's omnipotence because it constricts His powers by placing necessary limitations on His choices. Additionally, if God necessarily must ϕ, then God's perfection is contingent upon said action. This would undermine God's sovereignty and self-sufficiency because they are incompatible with His sufficient reason for creation. In order to appreciate this logical challenge, let us explain what exactly the principle of sufficient reason is in further detail and what follows from it.

The principle of sufficient reason has a long history with various articulations. In *Monadology*, Leibniz describes the principle as follows (G. W. Leibniz 1989):

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> And that of sufficient reason, by virtue of which we consider that we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although most of the time these reasons cannot be known to us.

Baruch Spinoza provides the following definition of sufficient reason (Spinoza 1986, p. 246):[6]

> Nothing exists of which it cannot be asked, what is the cause (or reason) [*causa (sive ratio)*], why it exists.

Spinoza notes that there is one exception to this principle: God (Carraud 2002, pp. 164–65). Therefore, save for God, everything that exists is contingent and must have a cause or ground.[7] Although there need not be a sufficient reason for the existence of God, some philosophers suggest that, as God is the creator of everything, He must provide sufficient reason for the existence of all contingent things. If we are supposing that there is a God who

[6] In a brief explanatory note to this axiom, Spinoza adds (Spinoza 1986, p. 246):

> Since existing is something positive, we cannot say that it has nothing as its cause (by Axiom 7). Therefore, we must assign some positive cause, or reason, why [a thing] exists either an external one, i.e., one outside the thing itself, or an internal one, one comprehended in the nature and definition of the existing thing itself.

[7] Shamik Dasgupta has proposed that a version of the principle of sufficient reason could be formulated in terms of grounds (Dasgupta 2016, p. 12):

> For every substantive fact Y there are some facts, the Xs, such that (i) the Xs ground Y and (ii) each one of the Xs is autonomous.

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created everything and on whom everything depends, then, as with Spinoza, the principle of sufficient reason is the notion that if there is sufficient reason for God to do something, then God does it.[8]

Lloyd Gerson provides a more recent articulation of the principle of sufficient reason (hereafter, *PSR*) (Gerson 1987, p. 129):

> Whatever exists must have an explanation of its existence either in the necessity of its own nature or in the causal efficacy of some other being.

Gerson continues (Gerson 1987, p. 129):

> Since contingent existents do not have the explanation of their existence in themselves (else they would exist necessarily), they must have the explanation of their existence in the causal efficacy of some other being.

Gerson has made an important distinction between those things for which existence is contingent on something else and those things for which existence depends on their own nature. Thus, the principle of sufficient reason, as it relates to God, can be articulated in the following manner:

[8] And this application has historical support; Peter Abelard articulates the principle as it applies to God in the following manner (Arthur O. Lovejoy 1971, p. 71):

> God neither does nor omits to do anything except for some rational and supremely good reason, even though it be hidden from us; as that other sentence of Plato's says, Whatever is generated is generated by some necessary cause, for nothing comes into being except there be some due cause and reason antecedent to it.

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Everything that exists, exists because God had sufficient reason to create it.

Yet *PSR*, in conjunction with the existence of the created world, as it relates to God, poses a problem: that God's will may be contingent on His necessary action, but this undermines His self-sufficiency.[9] However, *PSR* is not necessary to explain creation; rather as we shall see in the next subsection, the weaker principle of non-arbitrariness is a superior account because it can account for creation without encountering the logical challenges entailed by *PSR*. Before we come to non-arbitrariness, consider two important objections to *PSR* as it relates to God and creation.

The first objection is provided by James F. (Ross 1968) and can be articulated as follows: a necessary thing N causing a contingent thing C is a state of affairs *N-causing-C*. If a fact is necessary, then its result cannot be contingent.[10] If *N-causing-C* is necessary, then C is also necessary. But then C is not contingent, and this is absurd. Conversely, assume *N-causing-C* is contingent, from *PSR* it is causally dependent on a necessary N'. Now, we should inspect the fact of N' causing *N-causing-C*. This fact (call it *N'-causing-N-causing-C*) cannot be necessary by the same argument; so it is causally dependent on a further necessary thing N''. This explanation will repeat *ad infinitum* creating a vicious regress. Call this *the necessarily-existing-contingent argument*, or *NEC* for short.

Gerson takes issue with Ross' implied premise that if a fact is necessary, then its results cannot be contingent. There are two reasons for this.

First, the issue is not the cause of the contingent C, but the nature of C. The nature of C alone does not entail its existence. However, as we saw in Gerson's definition of *PSR*,

[9] See p.149-156 on Spinoza and Don Scotus in (Arthur O. Lovejoy 1971) for alternative arguments against *PSR*.

[10] This is not explicitly mentioned in the argument, but is an implied premise.

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this is not the case for necessary things such as *N*. Therefore, the question is: what grounds necessity? Is the fact that *N* is a necessary thing grounded in the necessary fact that *N* exists, or is *N* grounded in some prior cause? A key question in this regard has been greatly debated in recent literature, namely the distinction between necessity and essence. (Gerson 1987, p. 132) explains it thus:

> *C* is contingent despite the hypothetical necessity [it exists necessarily] because an existent is contingent if its nature alone [its essence] does not entail its existence.

One might be inclined to simply state that the essence is the collection of necessary properties of something; however, Kit Fine's truthmaker semantics has presented particular examples that undermine this singular account of necessity. Fine's (Fine 1994) work on Socrates singleton-sets can help us understand the distinction. By way of example, Fine says that planets are necessarily 'heavenly bodies that sparkle', but this necessity is contingent on nomologically necessary facts about the universe. We can contrast this with Socrates, who is necessarily by definition a member of the set containing Socrates: the Socrates singleton set. However, this is not grounded by any other necessary cause. Fine calls this latter kind of necessity 'essence'. Thus, we have two kinds of necessity: causal and essential. Kathrin Koslicki points out that from Fine's account we can appreciate that necessity and essence are not symmetrical, because essence unidirectionally explains necessity (Koslicki 2012), and not the other way around.[11]

[11] There may be a precursor to this distinction in kinds of necessity in Gottfried Leibniz's distinction between 'intrinsic'—things necessary of themselves—and 'extrinsic'—things necessary per something else—necessities (Loemker 1969, p. 333).

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Returning to Gerson, he is arguing that a contingent thing is simply something for which the nature—or essence in Fine's language—does not cause its existence. This distinction allows one to appreciate why essential necessity does not entail a vicious regress of necessities. Without the concept of essence, *NEC* is successful. By applying the distinction between essence and causal necessity, it becomes possible to avoid the vicious regress, since *N-causing-C* can now be necessary. Thus far, there is no issue for *PSR*.

It is clear that *N-causing-C* is necessary. However, this entails another problem concerning God's ability to choose. The problem is this: if *N-causing-C* is necessary, then it may be the case that God is compelled to act in such a way as to bring about *N-causing-C*, but this would undermine His infinite power and therefore His ability to freely choose *C*.

This problem leads to the second reason why Gerson takes issue with Ross' argument.[12] Gerson holds that God has free choice because God is rational and possesses infinite knowledge. Although *we* may suffer under the illusion that He does not have a choice due to necessity, in fact, in His infinite wisdom and power, it is He who chooses what is necessary and what is not. Necessary things do not compel Him, rather He freely determines what is necessary, not because He is compelled to do this, but because He has infinite knowledge and so chooses the best option. Gerson exemplifies this idea with respect to human action. Imagine there are two restrictive choices available to someone: *A* and *B*. Now imagine that the person facing the choice is all-good and all-knowing. This modification has nothing to do with the characterization of the choice, as these are not properties related to the ontology of the situation—the properties of the situation are identical—it is only the properties of the person choosing that are different. In this case, the fact the person chooses the best choice does not

[12]See Gerson 1987, p. 136).

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make the decision any less free.[13]

Per Gerson's argument, the fact that *N* has to necessarily cause *C* does not pose a problem for God because He has infinite knowledge and is infinitely good. Gerson's first objection to Ross appears sound. As for Gerson's second objection, it is persuasive to a point because it avoids compelling God to action in cases where He has sufficient reason to do something. However, there is a problem embedded in this objection to be avoided. The issue is this: if there is indeed sufficient reason for creation, then God is not (self)sufficient! As Fenelo argued, God is not obliged to act or produce simply because He can (Arthur O. Lovejoy 1971, p. 162). Just because God can act it does not mean that it is more perfect to act than not.

According to *PSR* God must have reasons to create. Yet one need not commit to this strong principle, for due to His omnibenevolence alone, God might create even where there is no sufficient reason to do so. In fact, it might be the case that nothing in the universe has a sufficient reason to exist. Note that the problem of why God creates *simpliciter*, although a very important philosophical matter in its own right, is not the concern here, rather, the extent of His creation is. Assuredly, God did create, and we should avoid inspecting the grounds on which He creates which relate to His unfathomable wisdom and goodness. Instead of appealing to *PSR* to explain the extent of creation, we can appeal to the better principle of non-arbitrariness, the notion that nothing God does is arbitrary. Non-arbitrariness, in conjunction with creation, says this: God does create (as evidenced by the existence of the world) *and* that whenever He creates He is not arbitrary. In this way, we avoid the problem of com-

[13] Alvin Plantinga (Plantinga 1974b) also argues that God need not be limited by sufficient reason.

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pelling God with *PSR*, and thus the tension between *PSR* and God's self-sufficiency. And we do not need to inspect the sufficient reasons for creating *X*, *Y*, *Z*, and so on. Rather, knowing that *X* exists and the reasons for the creation of *X* are equally good for *Y*, and *Z*; the necessary existence of *Y*, and *Z* can be inferred because God is not arbitrary. God would only not create *Y* or *Z* if His other attributes or dispositions preclude Him from multiplying entities. Thus, the evaluation occurs after the fact *which X* (and *Y*, and *Z*) He has created.

There is no sufficient reason for the creation of anything, and this is a consequence of self-sufficiency! For if there were sufficient reason for the creation of anything, then God would not be sufficient without His creation, ergo He could never be self-sufficient. Hence, not even God exists due to sufficient reason. Either *PSR* is incompatible with self-sufficiency, or nothing could exist at all because nothing has sufficient reason. Per the intuition that things exist, let us commit ourselves to the prior proposition.

The idea behind *PSR* is that not everything happens by accident, randomly, without a prior cause or explanation of some kind: one can in some manner make sense of the world because it is full of things like objects, properties, structures, etc. that are intelligible. The labour of this idea need not be that of explaining the initial act of creation, instead, one can invert the problem and make the labour about explaining the extent of creation, in other words, where creation ends![14]

[14] As Bruno puts it (2014):

> Why would you wish for the divine center, which can (it is possible to say) extend infinitely to an infinite sphere, to instead remain sterile, when it can be fecund, fatherly, ornate and beautiful? Why should it be diminished and mute rather than to fulfill its glorious power and plan?

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4.2.3 Maximum and Maximal Worlds and Creation

There is good reason to defer to the *principle of non-arbitrariness* rather than *PSR*. God's disposition to create may not be grounded in His reasons to create particular things, thus allowing for self-sufficiency. However, note that Gerson's second objection contains certain unpalatable metaphysical assumptions: that is, there is a presupposition that every choice has a maximally best option. Before expanding on why this is a problem, the distinction between maximal and non-maximal properties in relation to God's properties ought to be analysed.

Famously, there is the dialectic on this subject that occurred between Anselm and Gaunilo. Anselm's (Anselm 2001) ontological argument asserts that God is the greatest possible being, by definition, and therefore must exist. In response, Gaunilo (Marmoutiers 1903) applied the same reasoning to reach the absurd conclusion that there must exist, by definition, a greatest possible island. Anselm counters Gaunilo's argument by distinguishing between *maximal* and *non-maximal* properties to show that while God's properties are maximal, the properties of certain everyday entities, like islands, are not.[15] For example, the concept of 'the greatest possible island', as proposed by Gaunilo, is non-maximal; an island might contain infinitely many good things like coconuts, or your greatest island might have few trees to allow for sunshine, while my greatest island might be forested to provide shade. A maximal property, says Anselm, is something such as 'the most powerful thing' where there can be no

[15] A more contemporary mathematical perspective may be preferred for this distinction. When Anselm evaluates whether a property is maximal or non-maximal, we can translate his inquiry into a question about the type of order the property establishes. For example, in a square, there is a farthest point from a given corner, whereas in a circle, no single point is the farthest from the centre. In this scenario, the distance from the corner of a square is a maximal property, while the distance from the centre of a circle is a non-maximal property.

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negotiation. Therefore, concludes Anselm, the reasoning in the ontological argument is not applicable to non-maximal properties.

From this analysis, two problems arise: the first is that there might be competing maximally best choices for God (*A* and *B* are equally, maximally good, options); the second is that there may be no maximally best choice available (for every *A* there is a *B* that is better, *ad infinitum*). So, assuming that God in all His knowledge and goodness will always choose the best options, presupposes a narrow metaphysical structure to existence. The implicit insistence on necessary maximality is too narrow.

Contra Gerson's account that there is always a maximally best option available, consider a different ontology where there is no maximally best choice available to God. In this world, it may be perfectly reasonable to choose either *A* or *B* for equal or arbitrary choices. Let us consider a few examples regarding equal maximal choices:

1. *Mirrored Properties*: The first example is of a world identical to our own, except that some or all of the properties are mirrored, for instance, by swapping from left to right. While this prevents Liebnizian identity, there is no maximally determinable preference between the original world and the mirror world.

2. *Auxiliary Properties*: The second example involves changing auxiliary properties, that is, properties that have no bearing on the quality of the given world. There is no maximally determinable preference between, for example, blood's being blue or blood's being red.[16] Similarly, one could describe examples of scoring systems. In chess tour-

[16] Another example is found in Sydney Shoemaker's famous case of colour inversion: imagine a world identical to our own, but in which the colours are symmetrically inverted so that red things appear blue, and blue things red (Shoemaker 1982).

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naments, a player earns 0.5 points by drawing, 1 point by winning, and 0 by losing a game. The alternative world in which chess tournaments instead attribute 1, 2, and 0 for drawing, winning, and losing, is not better or worse than the current world.

3. *Exchange of Maximality*: Gerson (Gerson 1987, p. 136) says:

> I am unable to make sense of the notion that there could be no difference between a choice to do something in the light of an end and the choice to refrain from doing that thing in the light of the same end.

This signals a lack of imagination. There are indeed things equally good or bad. One can think of 'goodness' and 'badness' here as an exchange rate, as one might do for the USD and EUR. If the exchange rate is perfectly equal, the principle of sufficient reason gives no guidance as to which option to choose. In this regard, the value need not be precisely 1-1, it can be 1-2, 1-3, and so on. They are not identical but there is a way to equate their values for the purposes of exchange. What matters is not the exchange rate, but that one can trade from one to the other and thereby obtain equally good worlds.

Now let us consider whether there can be a maximally best choice available, even where it appears there are equally maximally best choices.

To begin, Gerson could argue that there will be cases where any adjustment for maximality will detract from another property's closeness to maximality, for example, if a giraffe's neck is made longer, it can reach more leaves and thereby increase its access to nutrition; however, simultaneously the giraffe thereby becomes less efficient at regulating its blood pressure, which detracts from its access to nutrition. Of course, there might be an optimal middle ground

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between these properties accounting for nomological parameters; perhaps the giraffe as it is presently constituted. Thus, although it appears that there are competing maximally best choices—a short neck *and* a long neck—there is a maximally best choice: the compromise between the two positions.

This position is too narrow: there are cases where no compromise exists or where there is always room for improvement *ad infinitum*, even within nomological bounds. Here is an example. Imagine a world where people are less greedy. However, as the least greedy entity is God, then on the infinite scale from us to Him there will always be room for improvement. We can clearly imagine other properties of the world being changed to make it a better place: less pain, more happiness, more temperate climes, fewer natural disasters, more known mathematical theorems, and so on. But the fact of the matter is that this is too complicated for us to decide: there are too many factors for a finite mind to consider, and we can only guess whether there is an optimal choice from simple intuitions.[17] There are good intuitions that there are maximally best choices for some categories and that there are other categories that have no maximal limit.

This is what has been covered so far. According to Ross, *PSR* allegedly entails that God is compelled to act whenever He has sufficient reason to do so. This undermines his self-sufficiency. Thus, *PSR* is incompatible with traditional monotheism. However, Gerson successfully argues that (a) *PSR* is not a problem for monotheism because there is a distinction between essence and necessity, and thus something can be contingent even though it necessarily exists; and (b) God's freedom of choice and omnipotence means that He chooses what

[17]This is only a concern for a finite mind which falls foul of Zeno's paradox and the infinitely expanding menu thought experiment, but not for God's omniscient mind, as he has infinite time to make any decision.

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is necessary, not that He is necessarily compelled to act: we can predict that He will choose the best choices because He is omnibenevolent and possesses perfect knowledge. There remain reservations about Gerson's solution (b), because it entails an ontology wherein there is always a maximally best choice, but this rests on an ambitious assumption that lacks sufficient support. If there are competing maximally best choices available, non-maximal choices for creation, or infinitely many non-maximal choices, then there are equally good worlds or alternatives for creative choices for this world. The upshot of this argument is that God must choose *C*, not due to *PSR* but because doing otherwise would be arbitrary. Hence, a preferable response is to defend the weaker principle of non-arbitrariness, the idea that God will not be arbitrary, and therefore, none of his actions will be arbitrary either.

4.3 The Principle of Plenitude

The overarching concept of this second segment of the chapter is as follows: if there exists a divine purpose behind the act of creation, then God has non-arbitrary reasons for the creation of every possible entity. It is important to note a pertinent consideration: the notion of 'creating every possible thing' could be subject to a limitation, perhaps by appending a qualifier such as 'with respect to *X*'. In this case, the *X* under consideration pertains to **evil**.

In this section, there follows a comprehensive exploration of the concept of plenitude. It begins with an exploration of plenitude in its most fundamental form as it has been developed in the philosophical literature. The discourse then extends to the notion of divine plenitude in the context of its interaction with the concept of evil, which also involves a short methodological aside concerning how to approach the paradox of evil in an optimal manner.

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4.3.1 The Concept of Plenitude

The principle of plenitude asserts that the universe contains all possible forms of existence. Medieval philosopher Giordano Bruno recovers a theological/metaphysical argument regarding the necessary infinitude of the universe from Lucretius in (*On the Nature of Things*, I, 968-973, 977-979 in Bruno 2014, p. 10):[18]

> Of course, if you have set up an end,
>
> To all of space, and if anyone ran its course to the furthest shore,
>
> And shot an arrow however weakly or strongly,
>
> Which do you think would happen?
>
> That there would be some obstruction which would prohibit further flight,
>
> Or that nothing would stop it,
>
> So that it continues on the path it was sent,
>
> But wherever it ends up, no doubt this is not the end either.

Bruno was of course talking about actual space being occupied with matter, not possible space being actualised. Take his case as an analogy. Regardless, the argument is that if there is logically something beyond a set limit, then that something falls beyond the original limiting girdle and therefore necessarily must expand the limits, and so on *ad infinitum*.

[18] Bruno argues explicitly from the principle of sufficient reason, that if there was a reason why the place occupied by our planet should be filled, there was still more reason why all other places equally capable of occupancy should be filled, and there is nothing in the nature of space which restricts the number of such places (Arthur O. Lovejoy 1971, p. 118).

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Plenitude says that possible things are actual: it asserts "the necessarily complete translation of all the ideal possibilities into actuality" (Arthur O. Lovejoy 1971, p. 50). Thus, if the world is infinite, it needs must be filled with infinitely many things, according to plenitude, including actualised possibilia. Yet, there is an issue: why would it be filled with infinitely *new* things, like unicorns? Could it not instead be filled with infinite duplicates of our world? These issues will be addressed in due course, but first, let us consider why one would consider such a principle at all.

4.3.2 What Plenitude Can Do for You

Principles of plenitude were neglected in most academic investigations during the 20th century because, at first glance, it seems to achieve too little while apparently producing an extravagant metaphysics. What is the point of saying that something with property P exists without actually being concerned with a specific P? In this sense, it feels like putting the cart before the horse—accepting the existence of a thing before any evidence or sign of the entity. This thinking is representative of the philosophical spirit of the 20th century until the rise of Quine-Putnam-style indispensibilism (Putnam 1971, p. 57).

In 20th century mathematics, the system known as Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory (ZF)[19]—proposed in response to Russell's paradox[20]—could allegedly account for the foundations of most known mathematics. However, a problem was encountered: when conceptualising the ordinal-numbers as sets containing all ordinal-numbers smaller than itself, we face a *collection*

[19]See Bagaria 2023 for more details, accompanied by a philosophical discussion.

[20]Russell's paradox is the inconsistency resulting from considering the property "x is not a member of x". If there is a set R resulting from abstracting this property, then "R is a member of R" if, and only if, "R is not a member of R".

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of sets, which should also be a set. This new set is also an ordinal number. This operation gives us the 'first level of infinity' in standard set theory. We can now go on to the next number, which is the set containing all the finite numbers, ω, and the set containing ω. At issue here is the problem that the totality of sets is naturally collectible in a set, so it is a set. And the totality of ordinals is naturally collectible in an ordinal, so it is an ordinal. Thus, when mathematicians talk about 'all ordinals', they are talking about an interesting but arbitrary stop to the ever-growing totality of ordinals. If they were in fact treated as finished totalities this would once again entail Russell's paradox. This means that every stopping point of collecting sets is seen as arbitrary.

Returning to God, it seems that God cannot accept any arbitrary boundary to His creation. This how the most famous modern advocated of plenitude, Arthur Lovejoy (Arthur O Lovejoy 1963, p. 118), puts it:

> If there is a limit, what is beyond that? Can there be something beyond that? If yes, then why would God not create the worlds beyond this point? If he failed to do so, then He might be accused of arbitrariness.

The idea is that to say there is something beyond a limit is incoherent, yet any limit has that which is beyond it by exclusion, by definition. As Bruno 2014, p. 10 says: 'if we give ourselves over to a finite world, we cannot escape the existence of a void [*vacuo*], where a void means an absence of things'.

It is natural to have this plenitude in mathematics.[21] Yet does plenitude beyond mathematics imply an extravagant metaphysics? Resorting to Occam's razor, one may pause before

[21] For detailed analysis of current issues in mathematical plenitude, see Antos et al. 2015; Zalta 1983; Balaguer 1998; Freire 2024; Hamkins 2012b; Steel 2014; Woodin 2011, Zalta 2024.

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admitting an existing entity into one's metaphysics. After all, in this framework, without it being *necessary* to posit an entity or kind, one should avoid the extra assumption. Perhaps then one should accept a stopping point to the limits of mathematical objects. Whenever one stops at a point in the tower of infinity, an intuitively legitimate mathematical problem will require one to go one more level. Thus, at odds with the prudence of avoiding multiplication of entities is the issue of setting an arbitrary limit to what exists, which is also imprudent. Furthermore, adding rules in order to set a limit to what exists could be itself extravagant, for it multiplies *rules* beyond necessity.

Imagine a person, Alexander, wishes to know: 'What are the polygons that exist?' A philosopher, William says to him 'Only triangles exist'. Alexander then points to something that looks like what he calls a 'square'. William responds: 'Worry not, squares are just mingled pairs of triangles'. Alexander seems convinced, that is, until along comes another philosopher, Giordano, who asks of William: 'What about heptagon-shaped things?' William responds: 'Allowing heptagons to exist would be too extravagant! It would multiply entities without necessity. Anyway, heptagons are just five mingled triangles.' 'But', replies Giordano, 'is it not simpler to assert that all polygons exist? The collection of all existing triangles is already an infinite quantity, so permitting squares and heptagons will not be any more extravagant in relation to how many entities exist. 'However', he adds, 'If we say that only triangles exist then we must justify the existence of infinitely many things *and* why the boundary is set at precisely polygons with three sides'.[22] With whom should Alexander side?

If one is talking about infinite countable entities, then one is not modifying the quantity with countable plenitude. Thus, it is just as parsimonious as the alternative. However, to

[22] As Bruno 2014, p. 87 says: 'there is no proportion between finite and infinite.'

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limit the number of entities in the world one must multiply the number of operators used to limit the said entities, and this is less parsimonious. So, even if parsimony is a value one wants, plenitude may not be less parsimonious. Once one rejects this traditional view of parsimony, the issue of what plenitudinous existence looks like becomes epistemological not metaphysical. We are not concerned with the entities that exist but with how to know and describe these existing things. Of course, there are other values, such as simplicity, and plenitude gives one simplicity because of the fewer explanatory tools needed.

Plenitude turns metaphysical/epistemological problems on their heads. Instead of being concerned with setting limits to what exists or not, one becomes concerned with describing what is already there. This was first noted in Balaguer's book *Platonism and anti-platonism in mathematics* (Balaguer 1998). An important concern in the Platonistic philosophy of mathematics was the issue of justifying access to mathematical objects—known as *Benacerraf's problem* (see Benacerraf 1965; Benacerraf 1973). In summary, since (i) we have no causal interaction with mathematical objects and (ii) we can only know about things with which we have causal interaction, then (iii) Platonistic mathematical knowledge is impossible. This problem is a modern reappearance of the ancient problem of access to the Forms in Plato's philosophy. Usually, one approaches this problem by finding a justification for the human causal interaction with abstract entities. Plato asserts that, even if we have forgotten, we experienced the forms in the real world before coming to this world.[23]

Plato presents his theory of recollection, also known as the theory of *anamnesis*, in several of his dialogues, including the *Meno* and the *Phaedro*. The theory holds that knowledge is

[23]Others (e.g. Descartes) assert that the basic intuition about abstracts comes with the soul and it is given by God.

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innate and a kind of *anamnesis*, meaning recollection or reminiscence of knowledge that the soul had already possessed in its previous existence. According to Plato, the soul is immortal, but before being physically embodied it existed in the realm of the Forms; here it had direct knowledge of eternal truths. Plato believed that the Forms were ethereal entities of extremely general terms, i.e. sameness, difference, justice, purity, vice, beauty, etc. In the process of becoming embodied, this knowledge is forgotten, or buried, and its recollection is limited; however, we can strive to recall by engaging in dialectics or the Socratic method.

Thus, for Plato, learning is actually a recollection of knowledge that the soul already possesses from experience in the realm of the Forms but has forgotten. For example, in the *Meno* Socrates guides a young slave boy to discover a mathematical truth through a series of questions, implying that the slave boy is remembering lost mathematical knowledge by accessing eternal truths in the realm of the Forms, rather than learning something new. In another example, in *Phaedro* Plato tells the myth of the river Lethe, or the River of Forgetfulness. In this dialogue, Socrates recounts how the soul's true nature is divine, but upon death the soul is judged and purified, and then drinks from the river Lethe, which entails amnesia. The soul forgets its life and is reincarnated. Again, through reminiscence, the soul can strive to remember knowledge (Plato 1997, Book X):[24]

> Then towards evening they encamped by the river of Unmindfulness, whose water no vessel can hold; of this they were all obliged to drink a certain quantity, and those who were not saved by wisdom drank more than was necessary; and

[24]Plato's Meno focuses on a priori, rational insight, while the Phaedro focuses on universal properties, such as equality, contrasting the imperfection of the physical world with the perfection of the Forms.

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each one as he drank forgot all things.

Plato likely did not mean for the Myth of Lethe to be literal. Regardless, his theory of recollection is captured by the myth, and the theory is Plato's attempt to avoid a more general version of what we now call the Benaceraff problem. Plato says that the human mind somehow has built into it a grasp of the Forms, suggesting that at some point the soul must have had contact with the Forms before incarnation. Thus, knowledge is recollection, and abstracta like universal concepts and mathematical objects can be known because of a previous interaction. As we already have these concepts 'inside us' so to speak, there is no disjunct between a causing abstract realm of the Forms and a caused material world of particulars. To articulate the idea in a more modern manner, we can say that for Plato possessing the concept of a universal implies the existence of the relevant particular, and we access universals via reminiscence.

With the assumption of plenitude, Balaguer attacks the problems from the other end, namely, the assumption that we require causal interaction to obtain knowledge. Knowing that every possible *X* exists allows one to know some facts about *X*ness, by operating with the properties used to recognise that something is *X*. Suppose an archangel is recognised as a spiritual, winged, human-like being that represents one or more of the attributes of the Christian God. With the assumption of God, any inferred characteristic of God (say God's kindness, God's word) tells us that there is an archangel representing this attribute (the archangel of kindness, archangel Gabriel) even if, for instance, no reference to this celestial being is made in the *Bible*. This is the explanatory power of plenitude.

To avoid the Benaceraff problem, Plato provides one with a rather difficult ontological pill to swallow: that of believing the story of the soul causally interacting with the Forms, but forgetting them in the process of incarnation. Balaguer, on the other hand, seeks not to

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avoid the problem but to grasp it by its horns and render it innocuous. By adopting plenitude, one can thereby know about universals because one understands the relevant properties to recognise the universals! This is a chaismatic flipping of Plato on his head. As with Plato, there is no causal problem, but unlike with Plato, the problem is avoided by plenitude, not by reminiscence.

What we learn from this analysis is that the assumption of mathematical plenitude is not a hard pill to swallow after all. Once one accepts the existence of universals, plenitude is just the result of understanding that any boundary limiting what exists is fundamentally arbitrary. In addition, plenitude inverts what is crucial in philosophical problems: instead of having to justify causal interaction with abstracts, one has to justify why any limit to mathematical existence is arbitrary or not. That is the inspiration for this chapters approach to the problem of evil: instead of having to justify why any given evil exists, one ought to instead justify why any boundary to the existence of evil is arbitrary or not.

4.3.3 Divine Plenitude

Now connect the concept of plenitude with God's omnificence, His limitless creative powers. The claim is that God actualises all plenitudinous possibilia *unless* He has non-arbitrary reasons to limit some aspects of creation, e.g. in relation to free will.

Before stating the principle of divine plenitude, consider an example. Suppose that God is considering whether or not to create the number 4.[25] Let us assume that He already created the number 12. How ought we understand God's plenitude in respect to evenness? Observe

[25]There is not commitment here to any account of how God creates numbers or whether there are eternally existing entities in conjunction with God; this is allegorical.

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that with respect to evenness, 12 and 4 are equally even. If God is going to decide whether or not to create 4, He cannot appeal to evenness to deny its creation, or else He would be arbitrary. He could appeal to some other aspect, such as location on the number-line but not evenness.

For the purpose of understanding the issue, consider the possibility that evenness is a property that comes in levels: 4 is even in that it is the product 2×2, while 12 is even in that it is the product $2 \times 2 \times 3$. Let us then say that the level of evenness in a number is how many 2s constitute the product that results in the number. In this sense, 4 is equally even with respect to 12.

Now consider the number 6. Should God create 6? Perhaps He should, but simply by knowing that 12 exists, God would not be arbitrary in denying 6's existence with respect to how even it is. That is because 6 is the product 2×3 which has only one 2 in its product. Of course, if evenness is considered to be a 'bad' quality, then we might want to say that 6 should not exist; however, 12 exists and has more 2s. By the measurement of evenness, 12 is worse than 6. Therefore, if 12 exists, evenness cannot be the measure by which God declines to create 6, lest He be arbitrary.

Even if evenness is a bad quality, God cannot refrain from creating a thing *only* because that thing has the property of evenness. God is plenitudinous with regard to the degree of evenness in 12. If 12 exists, we can see what related forms of evenness should also exist; however, it will not necessarily entail the existence of 8, which has a higher level of evenness than 12: $2 \times 2 \times 2$. Nor will the existence of 12 produce the existence of 16 or 24, and so on.

Plenitude is thus an equaliser as regards things that are already created. From something created one can infer the existence of a plethora of other things in regard to the given property,

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for instance evenness, unless some other properties of these things prevent their creation.

This is the weak principle of plenitude:[26]

> Suppose that *p* is a 'bad' property that may come in levels. Suppose further that something, *x*, exists and has the property *f* to some degree. Therefore, everything that has less or equal amounts of *f* exists with respect to its level of *fness*. That is, unless there is an additional property, *g*, that independently blocks its existence.

Is there a problem with this weak principle? Suppose that perfect non-evenness, call it *oneness*, is a divine attribute of God. This is not the same as 1; it is a divine attribute belonging to God and only God possesses a non-derivable one. If this were the case, God would be infinitely distant from anything that is even in level because He is not even at all. The number 5 is not even, yet it can be broken down into $4 + 1$, where 4 is the product 2×2, thus 5 may involve some weak level of evenness. Thus, 5 is not infinitely distant from evenness, only *oneness* is. If the infinite distance from evenness is an attribute of God, then because of this infinitude, everything is infinitely distant from God in respect of evenness. If God's creation

[26]Consider an illustrative case. God is sometimes faced with the paradox of Buridan's ass, which is a scenario wherein there is no single best choice for there are two equally good choices; choosing between food and water, to prevent either death by starvation or dehydration. Philosophers have sometimes argued that such dilemmas pose a challenge to the coherence of God's existence, and therefore, either deny God or deny that God is faced with such a dilemma at all. Yet God is no ass! As we can now see, non-arbitrariness and plenitude work in harmony, so we need not say that God is not faced with such dilemmas anymore. Rather, we can now appreciate how an omnipotent God can face such a dilemma head-on and both eat and drink to His heart's content: He creates both food and water without arbitrary distinction.

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is thought of in relation to God's attributes, then nothing would be precluded from existence only based on the bad quality of evenness. If it were, there would be no 4 or 5, or indeed, any numbers whatsoever. This is full-blooded plenitude: either there exist all the numbers or there exist none of them (in respect of evenness).

This is the strong principle of plenitude:

> Suppose that *f* is a 'bad' property that may come in levels. Suppose that being infinitely $\neg f$ is a 'good' property and an attribute of God. Suppose further that something, *x*, exists and has the property *f* to some degree. Therefore, everything that has any amount of *f* exists with respect to its level of *fness*. That is, unless there is an additional property, *g*, that independently blocks its existence.

The astute reader may already suspect what the next step will be. For evenness is probably not a bad thing, however, *evil* might be. The challenge now is to argue in what sense evil relates to these principles of plenitude, and moreover, whether one ought to commit to the principle of weak or strong plenitude.

4.4 Approaching the Problem of Evil with Plenitude

Now it is time to apply the principles of non-arbitrariness and plenitude to the problem of evil. By adopting these principles, one can provide new insight into the problem, and indeed, they present strong reasons to question whether the paradox obtains. This style of solution anticipates the counterarguments in a superior way to previous responses in the literature. Of course, every time a new solution is presented, a consequent problem may arise. Yet progress is still made. For if one accepts this chapter's solution, we need no longer explain why evil

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exists, rather, the remaining question is why anything exists at all, which is a different problem that deserves its own analysis.

4.4.1 What Does It Mean to Dissolve The Problem of Evil?

Before we present the plenitudinous approach to the problem of evil, first the nature of the problem itself ought to be addressed in further detail. What does it mean to make progress on the problem of evil? First, note that the problem of evil is a contradiction, and yet, no contradiction can be resolved. To be resolved means showing that there is no contradiction. The only way forward is to dissolve the contradiction by rectifying the premises. To be dissolved means grappling with the definitions to show that, under the given definitions, a contradiction does not obtain. Of course, a contradiction can never definitively be shown not to be the case. Yet, once the dissolution is done, it becomes apparent that the specific argument that purported the contradiction fails.

An historically popular solution to the problem of evil has been to block Epicurus' argument by re-framing what it means to be evil, omnibenevolent, and/or omnipotent. For instance, St. Augustine says that evil is not a created thing but rather is the absence of the Good (see S. Augustine 2013, VII: V, 7, VII: XII, 18; Augustine 1956, XI, CHAP. 9):

> Evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has received the name 'evil'.

He denies that there is any good reason to accept that 4 if the premise means that evil exists and is created by God. Does Augustine's solution fully engage with the *pre-formalised notions* that support the premise? By a pre-formalised notion, we mean a proposition that is loosely interpreted. This is contrasted with a formalised notion, which is rigidly interpreted

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and subject to logical scrutiny.[27] By a pre-formalised notion, what is meant is a proposition that is loosely interpreted and has the following properties: it must be in simple language, uncommitted to only a particular formalisation, and have a truth-priority over the formalised notion. The idea might be identified with what some philosophers refer to as intuitions, although unlike the ordinary sense of intuition, one need not *feel* it. The main structure of an example is that a pre-formalised statement ϕ is either literally true, or it requires from the formalisation a reason for why it seems literally true but is only indirectly true. In line with the philosophical tradition, to be indirectly true means something has to be perceived as true, even though it is not in fact true. One example is an idea defended by advocates of a B theory of time: the idea that past, present, and future all exist at once. Philosophers in this tradition have always considered it crucial that we explain why we perceive the flow of time. They are committed to accounting for the pre-formalised statement 'we observe the flow of time'. We would consider them remiss in their philosophical duties if they ignored this pre-formal notion. This is an experimental account,[28] but the idea is that philosophical analysis ought to be conducted with reference to this interplay between the formalised and pre-formalised of

[27] See Rudolf Carnap who distinguishes between observational language and theoretical (see Carnap 1967; Carnap 1975). Observational language ought to be simple and taken as more concretely true, while theoretical language deals with representations that fit observational language. We draw inspiration here from Carnap for the divide between what we have called pre-formalised notions and formalised notions. The pre-formalised notions can be accumulated for our background investigation in a similar manner that observation of nature adds to scientific investigation.

[28] see Ryan 2024b for an example of how this methodology is applied to the concern that physicalism cannot account for consciousness. See also Ryan 2024a for an application of the methodology to the concept of belief.

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notions. This is not to say that necessarily philosophical problems must be approached this way, however, there is value in employing the approach.

Let us take the initial four propositions of the Epicurean formulation—God exists 1, God is omnipotent 2, God is omnibenevolent 3, evil exists 4—all to be pre-formalised notions. However, they are not equal in regard to their intuitive force: 4 is the locus of the intuitive force behind the contradiction. While one might not feel the same compulsion to accept the other three premises, and although they may be false, they are necessary conditions for the set-up of the problem of evil. We accumulatively add these three premises to the list of formalised notions because they explain the origin of the problem, not because one intuitively ought to accept them.

Returning to Augustine's example, he will not be successful if he simply states that premise (4) is false. To satisfy the philosophical community—and this is an empirical observation —Augustine's answer should be that the premise is somehow true in the loose sense that evil exists—capturing the pre-formalised notion—while not in the specific sense that would produce the contradiction—the formalised notion. In Augustine's case, evil still exists, in the sense that we can gesture at evil, however, it is not discoverable in the same way the sun or tables and chairs are. These latter things exist in some constitutive sense, not as mere absence. Similarly, darkness is an absence of light, yet there is a pre-formalised notion that we can gesture at darkness. Augustine could argue that for premise (4) to produce a contradiction it must be interpreted as there being evil which is discoverable, in the ordinary sense.

Therefore, the optimal approach to the problem of evil is to point out that the pre-formalised versions of these four premises, taken together, do not constitute a contradiction in the first place, when they are properly formalised. So, when one asks 'What it is to be a a solution to

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the problem of evil?' the answer cannot be the presentation of a syllogism, nor an argument to block an Epicurean-style syllogism. [29] Rather, one should understand the logical structure of the interplay between formalised and pre-formalised notions. In this way, we can strive toward generality, and thereby, come to understand that no possible argument from these premises will lead to such a contradiction.

Before returning to the plenitudinous approach to the problem of evil, the analysis addresses this concept of how to appraoch the contradiction of the problem of evil. This will proceed as follows. At Section 4.4.1 the challenge involved in resolving a contradiction is presented: that is one must change the logic or change the premises, and yet, one ought to have a good case for connecting new premises to the original problem and also preserve the pre-formalised notions that motivate the premises. The premises, therefore, ought not to be changed, but rather approached as having bipartite levels: as a formalisation and as a pre-formalised notion. Then, at Section 4.4.2, how some solutions to other contradictions have been approached are considered as case studies for better and worse approaches to resolving contradictions. Using the framework from the first section, it is observed that some solutions are better than others, because they preserve the pre-formalised notions, while others bite the bullet on the contradiction or disregard the pre-formalised notions. Thirdly, at Section 4.4.3, this logic is applied to the historical dialectic of the problem of evil. With these lessons in mind, we shall then return to the plenitudinous approach to the problem.

[29] For our purposes, we understand syllogism to be an argument for which the solution is deduced from given premises, i.e. logic broadly conceived. We choose to use syllogism in this sense because this is how logical arguments are often referred to in the philosophy of religion literature.

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What is the solution to the contradiction? The obvious answer is that one must either (i) change the logic—that of proceeding from premises to conclusions—or (ii) change one or some of the premises. Although (i) is a legitimate option, that is the approach here: changing the logic will complicate the chapter with little added value for the conceptual analysis. Practically speaking—aside from logicians—changing one's logic is an uncommon move in philosophy in response to a problem, but it is not rejected in principle. Thus, the method proposed by option (ii) is employed.

In the case of the alleged contradiction of the problem of evil, one rather obvious solution is to reject premise (1), and say God does not exist. One could also say that (3), omnibenevolence, is extensionally the same as whatever God wants. In the case of (1), all the other conditions for arriving at the contradiction are embedded in the premise. In the case of (3), (4) becomes an impotent premise, because anything that exists is what God wants, and what God wants is good. These are, of course, logically valid solutions. However, while each of these premises might be changed, this does not eliminate the *pre-formalised notions* one might have for proposing the premises in the first instance. Thus, to account for these pre-formalised notions, it is not enough to simply change the definition or deny one of the premises, because the pre-formalised notion still remains. A solution should avoid the contradiction without eliminating these pre-formalised notions. Here is a conception of a solution:

> To dissolve the problem of evil, as with any contradiction, one must either make a change in the logic, or for our purposes, re-frame the premises such that the contradiction is avoided and the pre-formalised notions are captured.

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Capturing the pre-formalised notions is a daunting task because any proposed solution can be rejected for not aligning with them without proper characterisation. What is important to us is understanding the logical structure of proposed solutions to the problem of evil. To do this, one need only acknowledge that a premise captures a pre-formalised notion, not how exactly it does so nor how to cash them out.

Before addressing the problem of evil, consider the approach with reference to a historical contradiction: Russell's paradox. According to Bertrand Russell, Basic Law V of Gottlob Frege's logical system—which implies the notion that every concept has an extension—leads to the following contradiction:

> Let ω be the predicate[concept]: to be a predicate[concept] that cannot be predicated of itself[cannot be in the extension of itself] (Russell 1967).[30]

It follows from this that ω is in the extension of 'ω' if and only if, it is not. Hence, a contradiction. The traditional solution to Russell's paradox is to limit the scope of the extension of Basic Law V. This limitation states that Basic Law V ranges over concepts that do not make reference to the extension of those concepts, and so the range of a concept cannot be all extensions.

What is the pre-formalised notion at play here? It is the notion that every concept has an extension. In the traditional solution, this pre-formalised notion is not being eliminated, rather, what is happening is that some things that one at first takes to be extensions of concepts, are in fact, not. For the extension of a concept can only be obtained once we fix the range where we are extracting the new extension. Therefore, in this case, the concept that

[30]Frege employs the terms 'concept' and 'being in the extension' while Russell translates these to 'predicate' and 'being predicated'. We prefer the Fregean terminology for our purposes.

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led to the contradiction is deficient because it has a self-reference. The elimination of self-referential formulations of concepts, of course, must have a justification. In this case it does: that a good definition is a predictive definition, and is not grounded in a further concept. In this example there is a contradiction: Russell's paradox. The traditional solution to the contradiction proposed by Russell—and accepted by many logicians—is a re-framing of the premises. Russell says that some formulations of concepts are not allowed, while still retaining the pre-formalised notion, which in this case is that every concept has an extension. From this example one can appreciate how something is a properly proposed solution to a contradiction if it is a re-framing of the premises, while still retaining the pre-formalised notions behind them.

Does this proposed solution avoid a contradiction, and if so, in what sense? In the Russell case, the contradiction is avoided because one of the steps of the derivation of the contradiction does not hold. Does this mean, however, that the new re-framed theory is free from contradiction? No. What it means is that one cannot derive the original contradiction, but of course, there might be others. In this way one can never resolve a contradiction, but only show when a particular argument cannot be made. The fact that the Russell-style system is well-accepted as a solution is evidenced by the fact that many logicians have extensively worked in these systems and have yet to encounter any further contradictions arising from these premises.[31] Although most set-theorists accept Russell's solution to the paradox, there

[31] There are other proposed resolutions to Russell's paradox, e.g. the paraconsistent solution (see Irvine and Deutsch 2021 and Priest, Tanaka, and Weber 2022 for more details), and Quine's solution (Quine 1937; Forster 2019). In each instance the problem is dissolved, even though there is a further question about which solution is preferable. The method by which one ought to judge the preferred solution—in addition to the already presented notion that it avoids the

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are alternative solutions available. Now it is no longer the question of whether there is a paradox, but what is the correct conception of the premises: the problem of the paradox is left behind.[32]

Has a similar collection of resolutions to the problem of evil been offered? A proper solution to the problem of evil will avoid the Epicurean contradiction while maintaining the pre-formalised notions. While it is permissible to have multiple solutions to the problem, the issue is that historically there are no such solutions. In the next section, we shall see that philosophers engaged in the traditional dialectic have not approached the problem of evil in the manner in which philosophers approached Russell's paradox.

4.4.2 The Logic of How to Approach a Contradiction

How Not to Approach a Contradiction

Now consider some examples from the literature on the problem of evil. The cases presented are examples of responses that approach the contradiction in the wrong way. It is important to note that even though these cases are mistaken, that does not mean that they cannot be restructured in a more meaningful manner.

Consider the following two insufficient arguments for addressing the problem of evil. Firstly, there is what we can call the *Necessary Evil Solution*. One method for addressing the problem of evil is to contend that evil is built into creation. For instance, this is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism, which teaches that one ought to overcome *duḥkha* (दुःख) through

contradiction—is whether it maintains the pre-formalised notions behind the allegedly inconsistent premises.

[32] In the current literature, one finds alternatives even within what can be called the 'traditional' solution to Russell's paradox. See Hamkins 2012a; Freire 2024.

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dharma (धर्म), thereby achieving *moksha* (मोक्ष), and thus escaping *saṃsāra* (संसार) (Olivelle 1996). What this means is that the only way to escape misery is to become free from a cycle of suffering by cultivating a lifestyle prescribed by the Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha, thereby ceasing to exist otherwise than in the impersonal state of nirvāṇa (निर्वाण). In other words, this solution is to accept that evil is inescapable, in this world.

For some Buddhists the problem of evil never arises, because they deny the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent creator. In this case, there is no contradiction to address. This is the equivalent to rejecting 1, 2, and 3, were they to be presented with the contradiction. Of course, historically some Buddhists have directly considered the contradiction, including Siddartha Gautama himself, who appears to deny that God is the only cause of evil because humans have the power to act or abstain from action (Thera 2006, pp. 268–269):

> So, then, owing to the creation of a supreme deity, men will become murderers, thieves, unchaste, liars, slanderers, abusive, babblers, covetous, malicious and perverse in view. Thus for those who fall back on the creation of a god as the essential reason, there is neither desire nor effort nor necessity to do this deed or abstain from that deed.

The proposal that evil is a necessary consequence of creation simply reiterates one of the premises that leads to the contradiction. It counts as a response to the problem of evil, in the sense that it accepts that there is such a contradiction. Hence, it could motivate some Buddhists to be agnostic or deny a creator.[33] It does not, however, dissolve the contradiction

[33]Some scholars think Buddhism rejects the possibility or likelihood of a creator, and certainly not always because of the problem of evil (Harvey 2013). Of course, there is a long history of theistic Buddhism. Two examples include forms of Vajrayāna Buddhism, and Chinese philo-

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in any meaningful sense. Returning to Russell's paradox, it would be similar to saying that because Russell discovered a paradox, that therefore, sets are unreal. This is the wrong way to approach the argument, for it simply denies that the contradiction arises by denying one of the premises. The *Necessary Evil Solution* is an example of what someone who wishes to dissolve the problem of evil should not do, because they do not engage with the pre-formalised notions from which the contradiction is derived. Of course, this is an appropriate philosophical answer, but it does not advance a resolution to the problem of evil, rather it employs the contradiction as a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the existence of a theistic God.

The second approach to addressing the problem of evil we shall call the *Ontological Solution*. This approach concludes that God necessarily exists—for instance, because one accepts Anselm's conclusion in his ontological argument (Anselm 2001)—and so it resolves the contradiction by saying there is no contradiction because God necessarily exists (Plantinga 1974b; Plantinga 1974a; Plantinga 1977). The basic pre-formalised notion behind this is that, if something is real, it cannot be described by a contradictory theory; therefore, the scenario described by the contradiction must not exist. For this argument to work in any meaningful sense, one must argue that the proof for the necessary existence of God is better than the proof that follows from the problem of evil. There is no available reference for philosophers making such an additional argument, but it is implicit that the premise of the positive arguments for the existence of God should be better supported or justified, e.g. by simplicity, evidential burden, logical entailment, etc. However, even if the positive arguments are

sophical reconciliation of Buddhism with the supreme god Shangdi. There are also ongoing arguments for theistic Buddhism (Duckworth 2013; Hodge 2003; Norbu and Clemente 1999; Sangharakshita 2023; W. Smith 1987; Studholme 2002; Wallace 2010; Westerhoff Forthcoming; Yamamoto 1999-2000; Zappulli 2023).

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successful, as well as the additional argument that the positive arguments have better support than the contradiction, this amounts to ignoring the problem. This is also not the correct way to approach the contradiction, for again it simply denies that there is a contradiction in the first place, so it does not dissolve it. Rather, it is a denial that the problem of evil challenges God's existence. Having good reasons to believe that there is a solution is not the same as having provided a solution. This approach applies to other proposed solutions throughout the literature.[34]

How to Approach a Contradiction

The logical aspect of the solution to the problem of evil is similar to proposing a mathematical theory and then arguing that this theory is consistent.[35] At the heart of the matter is that consistency ultimately cannot be argued for.[36] So, one ought to navigate through the particular cases where a contradiction allegedly arises, while aiming for generality. This task is similar to that of finding a pattern.

Observe the structure of this logical problem in a simple example involving a number series. Take the numbers: 1,2,3,4,5. Can you predict the next number? 6? Actually, the next number in the chain is 7. Let us continue the sequence: 1,2,3,4,5,7,9,11,13,15. What is the next number? It is not 17. The answer is 30. So, the sequence is: 1,2,3,4,5,7,9,11,13,15,30,45,60,75,90. And the next number in the sequence? And so on. What is the problem here? The problem

[34] One example is Plato's argument that the Good necessitates evil because evil is necessarily the opposite of the Good, and the existence of some form implies its opposite (Bostock 1988).

[35] See Freire and Peluce 2022 for a discussion on the concept of consistency in mathematical platonism.

[36] This is a consequence of the conclusion of Gödel's second incompleteness theorem (Gödel 1932; Detlefsen 1986, pp. 77–92).

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is that one can identify a pattern that might elucidate a sequence of numbers. However, simply identifying a sequence does not necessitate that one has actually found *the* solution to the problem. In this case, with imperfect knowledge, the proposed answers are mistaken.

Try again with another number series: 3,1,4,1. What should the next number be in this sequence? 5? This is an intuitive pattern. The answer is 5, in fact. And after 5, what number? 1? No. The next number is 9. It might be the case that the pattern is related to the fact that 9 is the sum of 5 and 4, but it might not be. The next number in this sequence is 2: 3,1,4,1,5,9,2. One can always find a pattern in this sequence—even if it is difficult—by analysing the sequence. In other words, one can always find a story that fits the data. In order to really find the solution, one must know a pattern that is above any of the individual numbers, not just a pattern that fits the initial sequence. Of course, how to do this is not a simple method to explain. And yet there is an explanation here, and that is the decimal expansion of the number π. There is a clear method for providing the next correct number in the sequence, but nothing in the initial sequence will ever give this with certainty. One must reach beyond the initial data-set and understand the intention behind the sequence, and this requires full knowledge of the entire sequence.

It is this mode of analysis that should be brought to bear on the logical aspect of the problem of evil. The problem of evil has been traditionally dealt with in the same manner as one initially would approach the sequence of π, as was shown in the two examples. The answer sought by those who pose the problem of evil lies in understanding the intention behind the premise-set, and not in an *ad hoc*, syllogistic response to the alleged contradiction. Just as it is impossible to prove that the sequence is π with imperfect knowledge, it is impossible to resolve a contradiction. By striving for a more general view, rather than fixating on one or two

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particular arguments, one can appreciate that there may not be a contradiction in the first instance to be resolved. This is how one ought to approach the logical aspect of the problem of evil.

Does this mean we have reached a dead-end? One might find solace in Plato: understanding the sequence lies in knowing the rationale behind the sequence, or to put it Platonically, *remembering* the rationale. We can only know because we have always known, and we can only ever dissolve a contradiction when we have full knowledge. As St. Paul puts it (*Douay-Rheims Bible* 2011, 1 Corinthians 13:12):

> We see now through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face. Now I know in part: but then I shall know even as I am known.

The problem remains, how can we know even as we are known, how can we remember as Plato thinks we remember? Plato says that we battle and suffer with the concept until we grasp the memory. For Paul, we will not know until we reach the next world. Perhaps we want to know now: how can those of us without a strong connection to the realm of the Forms then deal with the problem? Again, solace is found in Plato. His remedy is the therapy of dialectic. The relevant dialectic here involves going through the history of the problem of evil with a strong desire to understand the contradiction and thereby reach generality.

The history of the solution to the problem of evil involves failure. Yet every time one strives and fails, we learn something new about the problem, and this something new that we learn is a greater understanding and expansion of the pre-formalised notions behind the contradiction. This is more of an art than a method, in that it involves repetition and practice. Similarly, when one strives and fails to determine the pattern behind the sequence 3,1,4,1,5,9,2 they learn that the specific pattern failed, however, as they proceed in searching for a new

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pattern they need not start from scratch. They might formulate ideas about what kinds of patterns seem not to work. For instance, in this case, finding a recursive code between the previous numbers does not seem to work. Moreover, one may formulate ideas about what kinds of things are behind the pattern. Now some historical arguments shall be analysed to show how one can use them to leverage a better understanding of the problem of evil, an understanding that allows for greater generality.

4.4.3 Applying the Logic of How to Approach a Contradiction to the Historical Dialectic

How does one derive a contradiction in a problem such as the problem of evil? The four basic premises do not directly give the contradiction. There is a sense that they may indeed produce a contradiction, but this only becomes apparent when one formalises these premises in more detail. For instance, we should lay down what exactly it means for something to be omnibenevolent. Does it mean being morally optimal at all possible times and places? Does it mean conforming to the laws, intentions, and desires of a morally optimal being? These definitions hint at something correct, although they are built over concepts that are difficult to grasp. As philosophers, we are aware that analysis has to stop at some point, so there is nothing necessarily wrong with conceptual difficulty. However, these definitions do not help with understanding the conflict between the four premises of the contradiction. So, we ought to start by looking at how the contradiction was first conceived. How did Epicurus bring about the contradiction? Epicurus implicitly defines omnibenevolence as a willingness to prevent *all* evil. Likewise, he implicitly defines omnipotence as the ability of God to do all that He is willing to do. Already, here is an important piece of the dialectic. The starting

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point for obtaining the contradiction lies in making sufficiently precise definitions of the terms occurring in the premises.

What do we learn from the Epicurean account of the problem? We learn about the kind of work we want our definitions to do. We might define concepts with various criteria in mind and various degrees of specificity. When determining the correct definition, we have a goal. For example, in the case of omnibenevolence, the definition must have something to say about God's actions and inaction. Similarly for omnipotence, on the Epicurean account, we are asked to be concerned about an alignment between an action and the willingness behind the action. God must want to do what he does. Preventing evil by accident just doesn't cut it. Hence, for Epicurus, omnibenevolence means a willingness to prevent evil wherever and whenever possible. Therefore, two pre-formalised notions with new premises can be included in the problem, which are derived from the historical account:

1. Omnipotence implies everything that God wills to do he does.

2. Omnibenevolence implies that God is willing to prevent evil.

There is still a more profound problem that was not on Epicurus' radar, but which is nonetheless important for how theologians have dealt with the contradiction. This is extracted from Augustine's account. The Epicurean problem is that there is evil and God is somehow unable or unwilling to prevent it. The Augustinian problem is that God is causally responsible for the existence of evil in the first place. Not only ought He be willing and able to eliminate evil, He ought not to be creating it in the first place! Augustine's solution to the problem of evil, therefore, is to show that evil does not originate from God. And yet, if God is the only uncreated entity, then there is an inference that every created entity is created by God, and this should include evil.

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Here is an historical example of the Augustinian concern. According to Zoroastrianism (Mazdayasna), Āhurā Mazdā (Ohrmazd) is perfect: he is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly benevolent, immutable, incorruptible, and timeless. Since life cannot coexist with non-life, light cannot coexist with darkness, and creation cannot coexist with privation, Āhurā Mazdā created the material realm, *getig*, to lure in Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) and thereby defeat him. Angra Mainyu is an evil god that corrupts the substances of creation. On Zoroastrianism, therefore, the diseases, parasites, and predators that make us question a perfectly good god, are explained by an evil god that can corrupt the substances of creation (Clark 1998). The Zoroastrian response to the problem of evil is that Āhurā Mazdā is able and willing to prevent evil, but has decided to do so only at the end of time. He uses human free will to choose virtue as an instrument by which to destroy evil (De Sena 2023, p. 3). Thus, humanity's free will is part of Āhurā Mazdā's omnipotent arsenal. In another instance, Manes, the founder of Manicheanism, held that matter was essentially partly evil, and therefore, a consequence of creation: evil necessarily follows from a world created by both God and the Devil (Schlesinger 1964). On this account, God is willing to prevent evil and is capable of doing so, but He contends with an omnimalevolent rival who is the originator of evil.[37]

From a perspective outside spacetime—such as God's—evil defeated at the moment of creation or a trillion years hence, is still evil overthrown by the power of God. Therefore, God is willing and capable of preventing evil. The important point is that there is a difference between God preventing evil and God creating evil. If God cannot prevent evil then He is

[37]This is similar to Rex Mundi and the demiurge in certain Gnostic movements such as Catharism (Barber 2000).

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not omnipotent. If He can prevent it but still is the source of evil, then He is omnipotent but not omnibenevolent. Thus, the concern about evil here goes beyond the Epicurean case. In the Epicurean case, the concern is with God's power and goodness at the present, with the Zoroastrian case the concern is with God's power and goodness across all time.

The Zoroastrians are on the right path when they say that evil should not be created by God. We can appreciate how their responses adds another piece to the dialectic, it provides a modified definition of 'omnibenevolence'. However, they come up against the problem that one of the two gods must be omnipotent, and whichever is omnipotent is truly greatest; truly God. This is Al-Ghazali's *argument from omnipotence* (al-Ghazali 1965, p.40): necessarily one of the all-powerful gods must defeat the other, because when it comes to omnipotent beings, there can be only one. If it is Angra Mainyu, then God is not omnipotent, and if it is Āhurā Mazdā, then God is the creator of the evil Angra Mainyu, and thus the originator of evil. The problem of evil thereby returns, because if Āhurā Mazdā created Angra Mainyu, who in turn created evil, then God is in the causal chain of evil.

Thus, we ought to pivot to Augustine's point that evil can in no way be created by God. Here is yet another implicit pre-formalised premise that can be made explicit in the contradiction:

3. There can be only one truly omnipotent being.

In response to this new pre-formalised notion, Augustine says that evil cannot be created at all, lest it contradict God's omnipotence.[38] Augustine, therefore, addresses the contradiction

[38]Siddartha Gautama also rejected the following proposition put to him (Thera 2006, pp. 268–269):

> Whatever happiness or pain or neutral feeling this person experiences, all that is

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by denying premise (4). But, the pre-formalised notions are indicative of something, and one ought not to simply dismiss them, rather one ought capture the pre-formalised notion even if the premise turns out to be false. The value of the dialectic lies in its eliminating certain explicit meanings and discerning these implicit ones.

These pre-formalised notions ought not be eliminated but accumulated. To deny the pre-formalised notions is to avoid philosophically engaging with the contradiction. When Augustine concludes that premise (4) is false, this is not the end of the story; one might still have a pre-formalised notion that there is evil in the world. Similarly, Augustine concludes that evil does not have existence in its own right, but is by definition an absence of good: it is not a created thing, rather it is a corruption of creation (S. Menn and S. P. Menn 2002). This denies (4), and yet this is not the end of the story, for the pre-formalised notion that 'evil exists' remains, just as for example, denying blue mammalian pigment does not remove the suspicion that there are blue human eyes.

Was Augustine's investigation fruitless? No, because now there are reasons for premise (4). And this story is applicable to each premise, so that we have pre-formalised reasons to reinstate a precise formulation of the premises. In this way, progress is being made. Even if one denies premise (4) and says that there is no contradiction, the premise can be redefined to revive the contradiction. Even so, we still have learned much. From Augustine, we have learned that God's omnipotence is separate from the idea that God is the only uncreated entity: omnipotence does not mean God must be causally connected to everything we see in the world, even if being the only uncreated thing indicates that God is the origin of all that is

due to the creation of a supreme deity (issaranimmāṇahetu).

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created. We can appreciate how this procedure can be applied to each premise. For example, from Augustine's rejection of premise (4), we can modify the setup used together with the premise (2) to produce the statement 'Everything is created by God':

4. Everything that is created is directly or indirectly created by uncreated beings.

Thus, the process involves specifying the kind of interpretation of the premises that leads to the problem of evil. The omnipotence of an existing God gives the notion that He is the unique uncreated being on Augustine's account; and, because every created thing is created by (or is in the causal chain of) uncreated things, then everything is created by God. The one can add an additional premise to make a stronger version of the contradiction, which is also an explicit articulation of what many theists implicitly have in mind when they posit such a contradiction. The stronger version is that the existence of evil produces a contradiction with God's omnibenevolence not because He was unwilling to prevent it but because He would be directly or indirectly responsible for such evil.

In other words, after rejecting a solution to the problem of evil, one should learn something about the pre-formalised notions, and the more pre-formalised notions we understand, the more insight one has into the mistaken formulation of the original contradiction.

Consider two kinds of cases, in brief, to further illustrate the point.

Educative Evil

Thomas Aquinas was unsatisfied by Augustine's proposed solution to the problem of evil. For although Augustine said that evil is uncreated—there are no evil objects—Aquinas worried that evil events still occur, because objects are corrupted by evil occurrences. Aquinas'

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solution is to accept that there is evil, but that these evil events occur as instruments of a higher purpose such as by bringing about maximal good (Aquinas 1920, Ia, 2, 3):

> This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist [occur], and out of it produce good.

Here Aquinas admits that evil occurs, yet that evil events do not contradict God's benevolence, on a better interpretation of what it means to be perfectly benevolent. According to Aquinas, benevolence is not about avoiding evil at all cost, but about producing as much good as possible. Thus, another premise can be added:

5. Omnibenevolence implies producing as much good as possible.

It is not inconceivable that some evil may exist to produce a better good. Free will is an example of good from which evil may follow, but the cumulative good of the existence of free will outweighs the cumulative evil that flows from it. Free will even allows one to gesture at evils in the world that are not caused by God. Michael Peterson (Peterson 1998, p. 39) writes:

> If a person is free with respect to an action A, then God does not bring it about or cause it to be the case that she does A or refrains from doing A. For if God brings it about or causes it to be the case in any manner whatsoever that the person either does A or does not do A, then that person is not really free.

Likewise, Alvin Plantinga argues (Plantinga 1974b, p. 190):

> The essential point of the Free Will Defence is that the creation of a world containing moral good is a cooperative venture; it requires the uncoerced concurrence of significantly free creatures. But then the actualisation of a world W

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containing moral good is not up to God alone; it also depends upon what the significantly free creatures of W would do.

Notice that the existence of free beings allows one to justify the good of education: the education of free beings to make better choices is a good that permits certain evil. In this context, it becomes apparent how some evil can be outweighed by the good consequences of said evil. This is a response in the style that a punishment can prevent a free being from committing evil, such as when one chastises a child who misbehaves. And evil can be used as an instrument in more subtle and profound ways, such as salvation.

Abstracting from free will to all educative evil, the general idea is that Aquinas' account avoids the derivation of a contradiction *in the terms presented* because it denies a strict reading of (2) that omnibenevolence implies preventing *all* evil. At first pass, this appears to be a denial of Epicurus' pre-formalised notion, so a proper response is to accept that (2) is somehow true. Aquinas' solution is to say that God is willing to prevent evil, but not if it undermines other aspects of his omnibenevolence, such as producing the most good possible (as well as preventing as much evil as possible). Thus, God is willing to prevent evil, but both these factors of omnibenevolence must be balanced for the optimal definition.

Aquinas has his own pre-formalised notion that evil exists (4) without contradicting God's omnibenevolence (3) (nor his omnipotency (2)) because evil can exist as a tool for producing maximal good. Indeed, without evil, according to such an account, God would not be omnibenevolent, because He must be freely choosing not to bring about the maximal good! Aquinas is not explaining exactly what such evil looks like, so his claim is speculative: if there is such a kind of evil e, it is not the kind of evil that produces the contradiction for the problem of evil. The same dialectical pattern is occurring here: Aquinas proposes a better definition

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for premise (3), one which captures a pre-formalised notion of what it means to maximise the good to dissolve the contradiction. In this way, we can appreciate how the dialectic cumulatively progresses, as Aquinas expands upon Augustine's proposed solution. Here is yet another premise:

6. If some evil is required to produce more good than evil, then omnibenevolence requires that this evil occurs.

And the pattern continues, there may be a way to derive a new contradiction. (6) accounts for evil e, but what if there is another kind of evil, e', that is not accounted for by the premise? There may be such evil. What is the good produced by suffering such as hunger, thirst, and heartbreak? It seems like there is none, and even if some good were produced by the evil event, was more good produced than evil? What instrumental good could be produced from them that outweighs the evil that occurred? Again, the dialectic progresses, and yet another philosopher proposes a pre-formalised notion that can allegedly account for evil e'. Basil proposes that evil is educative (Basil 1895, (Hexaem., Hom. ii)):

7. Evil can be educative: there may be cases where the good produced from education outweighs the evil that brought forth the education.

In the words of Eleonore Stump (Stump 1985), a world full of evil and suffering is "conducive to bringing about both the initial human [receipt of God's gift of salvation] and also the subsequent process of sanctification" (Stump 1985, p.409). Evil e' must be allowed by an omnibenevolent being as it is a necessary condition for salvation, and therefore, the Good. Similarly to Aquinas, God can be causally responsible for evil so long as more good comes from it. In this case, the presence of educative evil produces more good, or less harm, than its lack.

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The final point here is that premise (4) is not incompatible with the other premises. For it to be incompatible, we need to be more specific about the kind of evil that exists. For instance, if evil is required for greater good then it does not contradict God's omnibenevolence. Upon further analysis there is not one kind of evil that is allegedly problematic for (3), but not all evil that we take to occur. So, premises (1), (3), (4) are incompatible with the evil that we see, not one kind of idealised evil. This leads us to an investigation of the different kinds of evil, and whether all of these types of evil can be accounted for without entailing a contradiction.

Evil and the Best Possible World

Perhaps education is not sufficient to explain what are sometimes called 'global evils' like natural disasters (Adams 1988).[39] Of course, some educative value might attach to evil, such as a new gratitude for life or a charitable response to suffering, but it seems difficult to fathom, in some cases, how the good generated could outweigh the evil of the event. Again, philosophers have proposed a modified understanding of omnibenevolence to answer the challenge. Leibniz held that one ought to understand omnibenevolence from the perspective of all of creation, and that from such a perspective, it is apparent that evil is a necessary consequence of the good. The idea that the world cannot be created any better than it has been is touched upon by Abelard, Aquinas, and Avicenna (Strange and Zupko 2004). Contained in the view are the following ideas: (i) nothing exists in isolation; (ii) when evaluating the good and bad, we cannot neglect an ultimate purpose that can only be understood in the totality of time and space.

Returning to Leibniz, who is the most famous proponent of this line of thought, he fa-

[39] Marilyn Adams also refers to such evil as global 'horrendous suffering' or 'horrendous evils'.

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mously argues that (F. v. Leibniz G. W. n.d., p. 134. XIX):

> God cannot refrain from offering other remedies which he knows men will reject, bringing upon themselves all the greater guilt: but shall one wish that God be unjust in order that man may be less criminal? Moreover, the grace that does not serve the one may serve the other, and indeed **always serves the totality of God's plan, which is the best possible in conception** [emphasis added]. Shall God not give the rain, because there are low-lying places which will be thereby incommoded? Shall the sun not shine as much as it should for the world in general, because there are places which will be too much dried up in consequence? [···] God's object has in it something infinite, his cares embrace the universe: what we know thereof is almost nothing, and we desire to gauge his wisdom and his goodness by our knowledge.

Could God have made the sun shine other than it does? Perhaps, but with the full knowledge and goodness of God, it may be clear that the current condition of sunshine is part of the perfection of the totality of existence. Hence, all evil and good produced must necessarily be produced in the degree to which they occur, as they are necessary events for maintaining the greatest possible creation.

Malebranche also accounts for the compatibility of the existence of evil and God's omnibenevolence in this manner. He wrote to Leibniz that (Malebranche and G. W. Leibniz 1955, 14 December 1711, MLRP, 417):

> I am persuaded as you are [···] that God gave to creatures all the good that he can give them [and that] his work is the most perfect that it can be.

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According to Malebranche, God chose simple laws according to which He produces as much perfection as possible, even though such laws imply evil consequences. He puts it thus (Robinet 1958-1984, pp. V, 28):

> God, discovering in the infinite treasures of his wisdom an infinity of possible worlds [⋯] determines himself to create that world [⋯] that ought to be the most perfect, with respect to the simplicity of the ways necessary to its production or to its conservation.

In short, this created world is the best possible one for the purpose for which it was created, that is for the manifestation of the attributes of God. We have yet another premise derived from a pre-formalised notion:

8. Evil is an aspect of the whole universe: the scope under which (6) should be evaluated is the whole of creation at once.

As with Aquinas' solution to the problem of evil, this solution teaches us something, and yet is it also vague. It cannot be understood as properly a solution to the problem of evil. If it is understood as a solution, then it cannot account for a person why they have a pre-formalised notion that there is unjustified evil. Indeed, in his novel *Candide* (Voltaire 1975), Voltaire critiques Leibniz's solution by arguing that this totalist explanation for evil provides little comfort for finite creatures undergoing unbearable suffering. Tell the downtrodden and unwanted that their suffering holds all of creation in the balance, and see what comfort it is to them. There is a pre-formalised notion that it is unfair to dismiss anyone's complaint about evil as incorrectly motivated by a narrow perspective. Yet the solution does teach us something, and that is the idea that we must see the universe as an interconnected totality, to properly account for evil.

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4.5 Reflecting on Evil

It can be appreciated that the literature has historically developed along the following two paths: the first is to address canonical cases of something perceived as evil, and then show that this is not *actual evil* or else is justified by some other good; and the second is to appeal to a cosmological picture that balances out good and evil in such a way that deflates the problem. The first approach will continue to unearth problematic cases, while the second approach offers a solution that ignores our intuitions about the vastness and injustice of perceived evil in the world by appealing to some hidden mechanism or explanation. Although both approaches can advance the dialectic surrounding the problem of evil, it is better to approach the problem in a way that goes beyond this specific dialectic and advances not only this dialectic, but reveals how we ought to approach paradoxes more generally.

Hence, this chapter proposes an alternative approach, one which anticipates further cases of the problem, yet does not appeal to hidden explanations. This is the plenitudinous-cum-non-arbitrariness strategy. It provides a transparent explanation because, with plenitude and God's non-arbitrariness, the existence of any degree of evil is simply a consequence of God's properties in conjunction with the reasonable assumption that He, as creator, creates. In this solution, the exact explanation for each instance of evil need not be provided, because instances or levels of evilness are to be understood under different kinds of analysis, and none of these levels of analysis can be shown to clash with the properties of God under consideration, that is, His omnibenevolence and His omnipotence. For instance, evil x is accounted for by the existence of beauty, while evil y is accounted for by the existence of free will, and so on.

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That was an investigation for how and why evil exists. Yet, the problem of evil is not that it exists at all, it is that it proliferates; it exists beyond the scope of what we deem to be acceptable. In the literature, people talk about global "horrendous suffering" or "horrendous evils" (hereafter simply 'evil') (Adams 1988):[40]

> Horrendous evils: evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of) which gives one reason prima facie to doubt whether one's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole. Horrendous evil engulfs the positive value of one's life.

What really concerns people is the presence of horrendous evil. This is an evil that people feel especially strongly about, such that it should be prevented. Yet, on the view that evil is the absence of good, the existence of this horrendous evil is a necessary consequence of the existence of anything (other than God). So, one might wonder why God creates at all! The actual problem is: why does evil proliferate? It is a problem in the sense that we feel it ought to be prevented. Yet this prevention is only due to the commonly-appealed-to clause: 'all other things being equal'. Of course, there are other reasons why something does or does not exist. The more pressing issue in this regard, therefore, is whether something should be prevented from existing because of how evil it is.

God can prevent evil, but since evil exists, there must be an extra requirement that modifies God's desire to prevent it, if He is truly omnibenevolent:

> If God is omnibenevolent, then God would prevent evil as much as He can with respect of *X*.

[40]The literature will often account for the existence of personal evil, or evil entailed by human action, as a necessary consequence of free will. See Peter van Inwagen (Inwagen 2006).

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Here X is a variable, albeit it must be justifiable why He permits X. We can make this more explicit:

> (#) If God is omnibenevolent, then God prevents evil as much as He can *when it is fair that He prevents this evil*, X, keeping in mind further considerations Y, Z, etc.

Y can, for instance, include the pre-formal notions 'it is not incompatible with the free-will of free beings' (Inwagen 2006), 'it is not incompatible with the goodness of His divine plan', and so on. All these considerations are evaluated through the lens of non-arbitrariness.

This means that if every evil is equally distant from the infinite perfection of God, then He does not have reason to preclude the existence of something in respect of its evilness. From the perspective of God, the Creator, with respect to evil, the existence of anything is equally far. All evil is as distant from Him as the distance from any natural number is to infinity. Therefore, with respect to evil, the universe is plenitudinous. Here is how this works with the strong principle of plenitude:

1. There is something that possesses some degree of evilness, E.
2. For all Y, $X \overset{E}{\equiv} Y$. X exists $\Rightarrow$ Y exists unless other reasons apart from E are present.
3. From (1) and (2), every evil thing exists unless some other reason apart from its evilness is present.
4. Nothing is prevented by the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God from existence only because it possesses evilness.

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As everything is equally evil with respect to God, His reason to prevent the existence of something should be related to other considerations, such as beauty, order, simplicity, diversity, etc, but not evil.

How does this look under the analysis of the weak principle of plenitude? This would mean that we can extrapolate equal or lower levels of evilness from any given existing level of evilness. Thus, we need not account for unknown levels of evilness beyond that which we already know exists. In this way, we may end up in a situation where there is a threshold of evil, beyond which any existing things that possess it, would be prevented from existing by God. Strong plenitude has the advantage of avoiding the epistemological problems of determining what the upper levels of existence are because all levels are equal in the eyes of God. In this way, it is parsimonious and non-arbitrary. Accepting weak plenitude is more accommodating to the notion that, from the human perspective, there appears to be a limit to how much evil there can be. One may discover a scenario where one finds a maximal level of evilness, or as in the case of our discussion of maximality, a plurality of equally maximal yet distinct levels of evil. Within the Christian tradition, this could be taken as a reason to believe that the threshold of evil does have a maximal level, which is capped by the existence of Satan. Yet then we would have the same problem we find in justifying how evil things can be, but in the opposite direction: justifying the limits of goodness. It is left to the reader to choose between the respective strengths of strong and weak plenitude, in this case.[41]

That was the novel approach to the problem of evil. Now consider some of the more predictable objections to this project.

[41] See van Inwagen 1988; van Inwagen 1995 for an interesting discussion related to the issue of setting a boundary for levels of evilness. Van Inwagen notably draws our attention to the sorites problem as it relates to evil.

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First, many orthodox theists might worry that the above analysis has fundamentally altered the meaning of 'evil', to the point that one is no longer addressing the kind of evil that originally motivated the problem. However, the plenitudinous solution understands evil in relation to positive characteristics of the good, where the perfect good is one of God's attributes. Without going into too much detail, there is a vast historical literature in support of this view, which shall be briefly outlined.

According to Augustine, if the damned saw the beauty of God, "they should feel no pain, and hell itself would be converted into a Paradise" (Liguori 1886, Lib. de Trip. Hab.). He also says that "The separation from God is a torment as great as God" (Liguori 1886, Cf. Houdry, Bibliotheca concionatorum, (Venice, 1786, vol 2, "Infernus, " No. 4, p. 427). The idea is that because God is the supreme good, evil is then that which least resembles Him and which is farthest from his goodness. Augustine develops this view from the *Bible*; in Matthew (*Douay-Rheims Bible* 2011, Matt. xxv.41) we hear the curse: "Depart from me". This imperative constitutes the hell of the damned: "For you are not my people, and I will not be yours" (*Douay-Rheims Bible* 2011, Osee i. 9).[42]

Nearly two thousand years later, we find another church official expressing the same idea,

[42] Augustine is in esteemed company when he presents this position. Consider four additional philosophers. Thomas Aquinas says: ''The pain of the damned is infinite, because it is the loss of an infinite good" (Aquinas 1920, 1. 2, qu. 87, a. 4.). Bernard says (Liguori 1886, Serm. de Jud. Fin.): ''How great soever the torments which may be inflicted on the damned, they never can equal the great pain of being deprived of God: Addantur tormenta tormentis, et Deo non priventur". Chrysostom says (Liguori 1886, Hom, xlix., ad Pop.): ''A thousand hells are not equal to this pain". Lastly, Alphonsus Liguori says (Liguori 1886): ''Hence, hell does not consist in its devouring fire[...]the pain which constitutes hell is the loss of God. In comparison of this pain, all the other torments of hell are trifling".

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when in 1999 Pope John Paul II announced that hell was "the ultimate consequence of sin itself [⋯] rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy" (II 1999). The view is found in many Christian traditions, for instance, Anglican C.S. Lewis' vision of hell involves separation from God; to be forever removed from God's presence, eternally unable to know God's love and mercy (Martindale and Root 1994).

A second objection is that while two evils are infinitely distant from God's goodness, they are still comparable to one another. For example, while 10 and 1 are equally finite in respect of infinity, there remains the nagging pre-formal notion that 1 is smaller than 10, or in the case of evil, that from our perspective, some evils are more unjust than other evils. This is the idea captured in Voltaire's *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* (Voltaire 1912):

> As the dying voices call out, will you dare respond
> To this appalling spectacle of smouldering ashes with:
> "This is the necessary effect of the eternal laws
> Freely chosen by God"?

The answer that evil is accounted for on a cosmic scale renders God a distant figure. Such a God does not provide comfort for this local suffering. This is the kind of justice that, without tempering, "would freeze beer" (A. Miller 2003, p. 55). How do we account for this personalised suffering? One answer is to adopt the metaphysical method of approaching a paradox to reevaluate the correct understanding of the Trinity. Evil understood in relation to God the Father should be approached differently to evil understood by the incarnate God the Son. While the Father's interest is to achieve the goodness of justice—adopting distance just as a judge separates themselves personally from the perpetrator and victim—the Son's

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interest is to diminish the suffering of creation as a healer, merciful forgiver, and co-sufferer —as a psychologist adopts an empathic approach to their client when needed. God must incarnate to grapple with goodness at the human level, which in the mode of the Father is plausibly inaccessible. Thus, Their response to evil is in respect to Their adoptive role. On this view, the Trinity is a consequence of the fact that God expresses Himself as different personalities because there are different aspects of benevolence, all of which are necessary, yet must be balanced out in the cosmic scale. Creating the universe that He has shows that there is not a cosmic battle between good and evil (as the gnostics or Zoroastrians would have us believe), but that there is a cosmic grappling of good *with* good, between a global good, approached by a justice-based perspective, and a local good, approached by a mercy-based perspective. The good and evil of the universe are balanced once it is created because reality is a result of a dialectic between global good and local good, between justice and mercy. The only remaining mystery is why God creates at all.

Thus, we arrive at a third objection. One might wonder how the plenitudinous approach to the problem of evil differs from Liebnizian-style approaches that account for evil by appealing to the idea that from the cosmic perspective, good and evil balance out. If this charge is true, then the approach might be deflating the problem of evil. There are aspects of the plenitudinous approach that distinguish it from this Liebnizian-style approach. First, this position is not saying that the cosmic perspective eliminates the pre-formal notion that evil gives us reason to question God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence. This is because the problem is not that evil exists, the problem is whether or not something is ever prevented from existing because of how evil it is. Thus, what it is claiming is that the better approach is to narrow down the problem to the issue as to why God creates at all. This is the *real* prob-

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lem! Moreover, one need not show that good and evil balance out; rather, one only needs to show that they exist. This was proved with the principle of plenitude that once it is the case that something exists that nothing is precluded from existence in relation to its evilness, and this is all that is needed to be shown.

Additionally, the plenitudinous approach proposes a more intricate way of understanding the clash between the act of creation and the existence of evil. In this way it pays attention to something neglected in the literature: if God creates something for reasons that are unrelated to evilness, then this creation is not problematic for His omnibenevolence. Again, the real question is not 'Why does God create evil?', it is, 'Why does God create at all?' Our task is not to answer the latter question; interesting as it may be, however, by showing that the prior question collapses into the latter, this dissolves the paradox of the problem of evil.

Fourth, there might arise the issue of how God judges evil. Recall that all existent evils are present due to the absence of a non-arbitrary reason, unrelated to evil, to preclude them from existence and all of these evils are equally, infinitely distant from God's goodness. Does it then follow that all evil is equal in the eyes of God when it comes to judgement? For instance, if the evil involved in a slap across the face and murder are both infinitely distant from God, how might He judge these actions? The first, and most important point is to remember that the problem of evil is not about how God judges evil, but why we find evil to the extent that it exists in creation. Thus, we can remain agnostic as to how God judges evil for that is a separate issue to the paradox of the problem of evil. Second, God's judgement is only in relation to intentional evil, not global evil, for there is no agent involved to pass judgement on. Thus, this objection is only in relation to intentional evil. Yet as has been discussed at length in the dialectic, for instance by Van Inwagen (Inwagen 2006) and Alvin Plantinga (Plantinga 1974b;

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Plantinga 1974a), free will might be a non-arbitrary reason that accounts for why some evil exists, and therefore, how intentional evils are to be distinguished and judged. God's non-arbitrary desire for free will makes room for intentional evils, and this in turn makes room for judgement. This chapter's proposed plenitudinous account does not negate free will but allows for it: the plenitudinous account merely seeks to understand why global evil is not prevented from existing but it does not block accounts that seek to explain intentional evil. Regardless, this alternative problem of divine judgement is how an all-good and all-powerful God can judge intentional and freely chosen evil, and this is a problem beyond the original paradox. Interestingly, this notion was hinted at earlier when we considered how no contradiction can ever be truly solved, for it may give rise to further contradictions or problems that require analysis. Finally, the moral might not be just that a genocide is as equally bad as a slap but that a slap is just as bad as genocide! Perhaps we ought to take all the evil that we commit seriously. Yet we must also remember that it is Christ that judges the living and the dead. Christ as God can distinguish between slaps and genocide as humans experience them, while God the Father may still hold all evils as equally distant from His perfection.

4.6 Conclusion

The problem of evil is the alleged inconsistency of the existence of evil with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God. We saw how the principle of non-arbitrariness entails that God's creation is plenitudinous with respect to any criteria for creation. This idea is *divine plenitude*. The argument was that because the created world exists and God is not arbitrary, therefore, nothing will be precluded from existence by God due to the presence of a kind and level of property that already exists in creation. With regard to evil, it was then

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argued that every existing thing apart from God is equally evil with respect to his perfection. Thus, how evil something is cannot be used as a reason against its existence. The plenitudinous approach to the problem of evil acknowledges God's infinite creative powers.

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The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.

G. K. Chesterton (Chesterton 1936, p. 212)

5

Conclusion: Opening the Mind

This analysis has come a long way. Together we sought to understand the nature of philosophical problems, what it means to solve one, and how we ought to approach seemingly unsolvable philosophical problems, especially if we seek philosophical satisfaction and progress. Truly philosophical problems are unsolvable, and philosophical progress is made

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by engaging with them in a satisfying manner, which means striving to account for the pre-formalised notions that inform the relevant problem and generalising to related problems.

Specifically, a novel metaphilosophical approach called receptivism was presented. The case was made that due philosophical diligence requires that one engages with a dynamic interplay between pre-formalised notions and their formal representations, and this means being receptive to all the underlying pre-formalised intentions of the premises that motivate a given philosophical problem. The most effective answers to philosophical problems are those that maintain the integrity of the accumulated pre-formalised notions and the interplay with possible ways of formalising them.

This approach was applied to current issues in philosophy of mind, both human and divine. In doing so, it was determined that physicalism encounters serious challenges. This opened the door to reconsideration of claims in the philosophy of religion. Our analysis of religious beliefs provided a deeper understanding of the meaning of belief and the correct characterisation of religious beliefs. Lastly, the receptivist approach was applied to one of philosophy's most intractable puzzles: the problem of evil. By grappling with the pre-formalised notions that inform the problem, and proposing an answer which appeals to non-arbitrariness and plenitude, a novel answer to the problem was presented.

In exploring these issues, we dug to the depths of fundamentality and monism and climbed the heights of plenitude and infinity. This perfectly captures the value of an approach to analysis of philosophical problems that is receptive to all the pre-formalised notions that motivate the problem, no matter where the analysis leads us. To paraphrase Jean D'Arc: even if answers to philosophical problems hang from the clouds, yet we shall have them! Of course, the idea is not to be receptive to that which is ludicrous but to follow our philosophical hunches and

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be sceptical of unnecessarily dogmatic philosophical methodologies and presuppositions. If we wish to be reductive, we might characterise this project as a modest proposal to keep an open mind, with the usual caveat that one's mind should not be so open that one's brain falls out.

In being receptive, this thesis has opened one's mind to a novel way of addressing philosophical problems. It is hoped that through this approach, one has gained new insight into the given problems and made progress on the appropriate dialectics. It is also hoped that one can generalise from these specific problems to learn more about how to approach other philosophical problems. It is now time, therefore, to conclude this extended footnote to Plato, by bringing this opening of mind and *numen* to a close. And what is that 'something solid' upon which we should close our open minds? Perhaps it is this simple lesson: whereof one may speak, thereof one ought not to be silent.

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1. A modified version of Chapter 2, 'Going Mental: Physicalism Should Not Posit Inscrutable Properties', has been previously published in *Erkenntnis*, Vol. 89, Issue (8) doi:10.1007/s10670-024-00894-5.

2. A modified version of Chapter 3, 'Credo in unam Credentiam: Religious Beliefs are Standard Beliefs', has been previously published in *Synthese*, Vol. 204, Issue (73):31, 2024, doi:10.1007/s11229-024-04711-y.

3. A modified version of some of the content from Chapter 4, 'Reconsidering the Prob-

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lem of Evil', appears in Freire and Ryan 2023 and the draft paper 'All God No Brakes: Non-Arbitrariness and Plenitude Defeases the Problem of Evil' (Alfredo Roque Freire and Liam D. Ryan). This chapter has had content redacted, expanded, removed or significantly modified. Some technical and mathematical aspects have been simplified and removed (albeit with references to further reading) where they go beyond the author of the dissertation's research competencies and interests.

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