

https://dspace.org/

A sower of discord- God, Atheism and the Argument from Doxastic Discord

Fasser, Eron

2019

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29454

Fasser, Eron. (2019). A sower of discord :God, atheism and the argument from doxastic discord. University of the Witwatersrand, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29454

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

— A SOWER OF DISCORD —

God, Atheism and the Argument from Doxastic Discord

Master's Thesis

Submitted to Faculty of Humanities in partial fulfilment of

Master of Arts: Philosophy

University of the Witwatersrand

Department of Philosophy

Eron Fasser

0507675A

2019

The Lord hates one who sows discord among brethren.

~ **Proverbs 6:16-19**

Dissensions, like small streams, are first begun,

Scarce seen they rise, but gather as they run:

So lines that from their parallel decline,

More they proceed the more they still disjoin.

~ **Samuel Garth**

For God is not the author of confusion…

~ **1 Corinthians 14:33**

By concord little things grow great,

By discord the greatest come to nothing.

~ **Roger Williams**

AUTHENTICITY DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Philosophy, in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree, or examination, in any other university.



Eron Fasser

15 March 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the many people who have supported (and challenged) me throughout my life and who have contributed to my intellectual development. Only a few can be mentioned here.

First, my parents Robyn and Jeris, who instilled in me an insatiable desire to know more about the world and the confident ability to challenge all ideas presented to me, both sacred and profane. You bequeathed to me the most precious gift that could be provided to a child (besides unconditional love), namely, the capacity for autonomous thought and the courage to articulate my own ideas in a complicated and challenging world.

Second, my brother Justin, who I have had the pleasure of loving and the (uniquely) fraternal privilege of tormenting all these years. Jane Austen exclaimed 'what strange creatures brothers are!' How right she was. It is a source of profound happiness in my life that I get to be strange with you.

Third, my dear friend Brad. I am a better person because I have been friends with you. Our discourses continue to enrich my life, enlarge my imagination and embolden my intellect. It may be a tendentious and hyperbolic view, but I surmise that our friendship (unlike God) is indeed necessary and obtains in every possible world in which we do.

Finally, I would like to thank my supervisor, Murali Ramachandran, for his assiduous logical mind and his perspicacious contributions that made this thesis infinitely better.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore the pressing and perennial ontological question of the existence of God. In so doing, I set out to develop a (somewhat) novel deductively valid argument against the existence of God, more particularly, the type of God that is thought to constitute the common metaphysical and theological capital of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The argument, known as the **Argument from Doxastic Discord**, is an affirmative argument for Atheism and seeks to demonstrate that there is an explicit logical contradiction between (i) the observable empirical fact of doxastic heterogeneity amongst finite persons on the one hand, and (ii) the classic 'great-making' properties usually ascribed to God on the other. It will be argued that the empirical existence of doxastic heterogeneity (of a particular kind) cannot be logically reconciled with a perfect supernatural being that is supposed to simultaneously co-instantiate the properties of *omnipotence*, *omniscience* and *omni-benevolence* and who desires to have a deep, long lasting and meaningful relationship with all human persons.

I intend to divide the discussion into three broad sections. In the first section, I articulate the general landscape in which this discussion is taking place by first clearly explicating the core concerns that lie behind, and motivate, the **Argument from Doxastic Discord**. In so doing, it will be necessary to disambiguate two concerns viz. the e*pistemic* and *metaphysical* concerns. Of the two concerns, it will be the latter that will form the principal subject matter of this thesis.

It will also be necessary to explicate and distinguish the crucial concepts of 'God', 'Theism', 'Atheism', 'Ultimism' and 'Belief' as well as outline the inter-relationships between these concepts. Part of this exercise will involve distinguishing personal and impersonal conceptions of God as well as articulating what we really mean when we speak of the so called 'great making' properties of omnipotence, omniscience and omni-benevolence i.e. the properties of realist cataphatic 'perfect being' theology.

In the second section I set out the positive argument - **the Argument from Doxastic Discord**. The argument itself is divided into two parts. The first part of the argument contains just two premises - one *theological* and the other *empirical* – as well as the main conclusion. The second part of the argument is an extended sub-argument justifying the theological premise. In this section I, therefore, explain and unpack the content of both the theological premise and the empirical premise, as well as present the *prima facie* case for the crucial premises constituting the sub-argument.

Finally, in the third section I set out the principal objections that might be made by a theist to both the theological and empirical premises of the first part of the argument. In particular, the focus shall be on articulating the most promising theistic response to the crucial premises in the sub-argument and why, in the final analysis such responses are, to my mind, unpersuasive. In conclusion, I hope to persuade the reflective reader that the **Argument from Doxastic Discord** is a worthwhile affirmative argument for Atheism that can, and should, take its place in the atheistic armamentarium, alongside other prominent cognate atheological arguments such as the *Argument from Evil* and the *Argument from Divine Hiddenness*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part A: The Core Question & Conceptual Analysis 1

A.1. Introduction..... 1

A.2. A Tenant's Tale 7

A.2.1. Disambiguating the Two Core Concerns..... 13

A.3. Lay of the Land..... 22

A.3.1. Religion..... 22

A.3.2. Ultimism..... 26

A.3.3. Metaphysical Naturalism & Supernaturalism..... 28

A.3.4. Conceptions of God..... 33

A.3.4.1 Impersonalist Conceptions of God..... 34

A.3.4.2.Personalist Conceptions of God..... 36

A.3.5.Theism & Atheism 42

A.4. Great Making Attributes of an Anselmian God..... 45

A.4.1. Omnipotence..... 46

A.4.2. Omniscience..... 52

A.4.3. Omni-benevolence..... 62

Part B: The Argument from Doxastic Discord..... 74

B.1. The Main Argument..... 74

B1.1. The Theological Premise Explained 76

B1.2. What is Doxastic Heterogeneity & Homogeneity? 77

B1.4. The Temporal Assertion 83

B1.6. The Empirical Premise Explained..... 84

B.2. The Sub-Argument for the Theological Premise..... 85

B2.1. The World Actualizing Premise Explained..... 87

B2.2. The Epistemic Premise Explained..... 93

B2.3. The World Preferability Premise Explained..... 95

Part C: Theistic Objections and Responses..... 102

C1. The Empirical Premise..... 102

C1.1. Denying the Reality of Doxastic Discord..... 103

C2. The Theological Premise..... 109

C2.1.Denying the Temporal Assertion..... 110

C2.2.Denying the World Actualizing Premise..... 114

C2.3.Denying the Epistemic Premise..... 128

C2.4.Denying the World Preferability Premise..... 134

C.7. Conclusion..... 141

Appendix I: A Transcendent Taxonomy..... 145

Appendix II: Omnipotence, Free Will and Possible Persons..... 146

Appendix III: Glossary..... 147

References..... 158

PART A: THE CORE QUESTION AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

A.1. INTRODUCTION

The ontological question of whether God exists[1] is a question that has divided humanity for thousands of years. The reasons are not difficult to discern. Not only would an *affirmative* answer to this question be the most profound fact that humanity could learn about the metaphysical nature of reality[2] but, for many people, this fact would have far-reaching implications for how they order their lives, structure their axiological commitments[3], determine what they considered meaningful or purposeful, and understand what it means to be human.

Similarly, a *negative* answer to the question would be equally as profound and for precisely the same reasons. To discover that there is no God and that God is, say, a creation of the individual and collective imagination of finite human persons, would represent a stunning fact and have its own implications for how we structure our lives. In the judgment of many people who have considered this question (both layman and philosopher alike), important axiological, ethical and existential consequences appear to hinge on how this question is, in fact, answered.

[1] Ontology is the philosophical study of *what* exists.
[2] Metaphysics is the philosophical study of the *nature* of existence.
[3] Axiology is the philosophical study of the *nature* and *categories* of value.

William Lane Craig, for example, laments what, in his estimation, are the logical implications of a negative answer to this question and gives expression to a familiar and dour refrain: 'If there is no God, then man and the universe are doomed. Like prisoners condemned to death, we await unavoidable execution. There is no God, and there is no immortality. And what is the consequence of this? It means life is absurd. It means that the life we have is without ultimate significance, value, or purpose.' (2008, p.72).[4] In Craig's estimation 'the absurdity of life without God may not prove God exists, but it does show that the question of God's existence is the most important question a person can ask.' (2010, p.30).

George H. Smith agrees with Craig on the importance of the question when he writes '[t]he subject of god is not a remote, abstract topic with little influence in the lives of men. On the contrary, it is the core of Western religion – specifically, the Judaeo-Christian tradition – which includes a system of doctrines dealing with every major branch of philosophy . . . when considered within its proper context – within the framework of its historical, cultural, philosophical and psychological significance – the question of god is among the most crucial subjects of our time.' (1989, pp.25-26).

[4] Five points immediately bear mentioning. First, whether these really are the logical implications of a negative answer are themselves highly contentious questions in meta-ethics and axiological theory and are not immediately obvious. Second, even if these were the logical implications of a negative answer, this would go nowhere, as Craig rightly observes, toward justifying the truth of the affirmative answer which would have to stand or fall on its own merits. Third, a thorough and non-tendentious assessment of the logical implications of the affirmative answer might reveal unpalatable implications that outweigh those entailed by the negative answer. Fourth, there is the contestable assumption that an affirmative answer to the question *would* provide us with precisely what the negative answer is believed to foreclose. Fifth, insofar as the affirmative answer provides emotionally comforting answers to *other* philosophical questions (viz. human significance, value, and purpose) that we are strongly psychologically disposed to desire, we have *prima facie* grounds for scepticism.

In order to fully appreciate the gravitas of the question being asked and the import human beings have attributed to an affirmative answer, one need only cast one's gaze over the historical record. An affirmative answer to the question has had profound consequences for humanity. It has, *inter alia*, helped bind individuals into productive religious, social and economic communities, provided solace and comfort to individuals suffering the gravest of afflictions, given purpose and meaning to the lives of billions of people and, not incidentally, been the inspiration for some of the most glorious art, architecture and aesthetic artefacts that humanity has ever produced.

However, the affirmative answer has also, much to the chagrin of religious apologists, been a springboard for intolerance and superstition, as well as a catalyst for religiously inspired wars, bigotry and theocratic oppression.[5] Belief in the existence of God has contributed to the shattering and Balkanization of humanity into bellicose and belligerent moral communities each making competing and contradictory claims about the nature of reality as well as our place within it. It has also, historically, impeded the advancement of scientific inquiry and moral progress out of pious and devout deference to the divine. Such impediments are often still encountered today.

A.C. Grayling perspicaciously articulates the nature of belief in the existence of God, as well as the complex and variegated religious practices that inevitably bloom around this core belief:

[5] This fact did not go unnoticed even by the ancients. The Roman poet Lucretius inveighs '[r]eligion breeds wickedness and that has given rise to wrongful deeds.' (2007 [50 B.C.E], p.5).

> Religious faith has many manifestations. There are people of sincere piety for whom the religious life is a source of deep and powerful meaning. For them and for others, a spiritual response to the beauty of the world, the vastness of the universe, and the love that can bind one human heart to another, feels as natural and necessary as breathing. Some of the art and music that has been inspired by faith counts amount the loveliest and most moving expressions of human creativity. It is indeed impossible to understand either history or art without an understanding of what people believed, feared and hoped through their religious conceptions of the world and human destiny. . . In other of its manifestations, religious faith is neither so kind nor so attractive. History attests to the weight of suffering that religious tyranny and conflict have generated, from individuals struggling with feelings of sinfulness because of perfectly natural desires, to nations and civilizations engulfed in war and atrocity by interreligious hatreds. Religions have often been cruel in their effects, and remain so today. (2013, pp.1-2)

G. H. Smith has the following to say of this divisive and provocative philosophical question:

> Does god exist? This question has undoubtedly been asked in one form or another, since man has had the ability to communicate. Men have pondered the question, discussed it, argued it, and killed over it. It appears to be a simple question calling for a simple answer, but its simplicity is deceptive. Thousands of volumes have been written on the subject of god, and the vast majority have answered the question with a resounding "Yes!" (1989, p.ix)

The corollary of the fact that the majority have answered 'Yes' is that those persons who have endorsed the negative answer to the question have, and continue to be, in the global minority.[6] However, in the last fifteen years, a small number of firebrand non-believers have risen to almost celebrity status in the Anglophone West. For example, the

[6] As Louise M. Antony admits '[a]theism is a minority position in today's world. At least in the parts of the globe accessible to pollsters, most people believe in God.' (2007, ix). Phil Zuckerman concludes, on the basis of the most recent surveys of various countries across the world, that of the world's population '[b]etween 500 million and 750 million humans currently do not believe in God' (2007, p.61). The most recent estimate of the total global population is ≈ 7.7 billion.

writings of Sam Harris (2006 [2005]; 2007 [2006]), Richard Dawkins (2006), Christopher Hitchens (2007), Daniel Dennett (2006) and Victor Stenger (2008; 2009; 2012) have given strident and uncompromising expression to the mind-set of those in the minority, and have ushered in the era of so-called 'New Atheism'.

If nothing else, these thinkers have certainly done their part by (i) raising the profile of non-belief in popular culture, (ii) shining a spotlight on the egregious normative missteps of faith-based religious fundamentalism, and (iii) weakening the social and moral opprobrium that has historically been associated with unbelief. While these thinkers' views have not resulted in 'winds of change', it would not be inaccurate to say that they have nevertheless been instrumental in inspiring 'zephyrs of change'.

But what of the state of play in the hallowed halls of academic analytic philosophy? Quentin Smith, himself an ardent non-believer, has lamented what he characterizes as (i) a recrudescence of belief in the existence of God in academic circles since the late 1960's, (ii) the de-secularization of philosophy departments (at least in the United States), (iii) the intellectual apathy and indifference on the part of naturalistic philosophers to this resurgence, and (iv) the need for naturalistic philosophers to become better informed on the subject of philosophy of religion and epistemically[7] justified in their naturalism (2001).[8]

[7] Epistemology is the philosophical study of the *nature*, *categories* and *methods* of acquiring knowledge.
[8] Unsurprisingly, Craig is quick to concur with, and capitalize on, Smith's assessment, writing that '[t]heism is on the rise; atheism is on the decline. Atheism, though perhaps still the dominant viewpoint at the American university, is a philosophy in retreat.' (2011, p.69).

Whether Q. Smith is entirely correct in his apocalyptic anecdotal assessment is certainly up for debate.[9] However, he is almost certainly correct in pointing out that the question of the existence of God cannot be complacently and insouciantly dismissed as 'settled' by naturalistically inclined philosophers. Rather it is a serious ontological question that must be confronted and intelligently interrogated by every new generation of philosopher. To 'hand-wave' away the question is an abnegation of the intellect and to fail to live up to one's epistemic and noetic duties.

I take both the question itself and Smith's epistemic admonishment seriously. Accordingly, in this thesis I set out to articulate and defend a powerful affirmative reason for endorsing a negative answer to the question *'Does God Exist?*' I call this argument the **Argument from Doxastic Discord** and I hope it will contribute, in some small way, to the perseverance and growth of the minority position.

In this section I begin by articulating the core philosophical concerns that face both the sincere would-be and card-carrying believer. In particular, I distil and disambiguate two types of concerns that are raised viz. an *epistemic concern* and a *metaphysical concern*. I then proceed to explicate the core notions of 'Religion', 'Ultimism' and 'God' as well as the inter-relationship between these concepts. In so doing it is necessary to differentiate *personalist* and *impersonalist* conceptions of God. Next, I examine what Theists and

[9] By his own admission he cites no polling, statistical or survey data for his view. Contra Craig and Smith, and according to the only survey available, the overwhelming majority of contemporary Anglophone analytic philosophers believe that Atheism is true (72.8%). However, 86.78% of those philosophers did not specialize in philosophy of religion. Of those who specialized in philosophy of religion only 20.87% favoured Atheism. Importantly, the results of the meta-survey also concluded that 'philosophers have substantially inaccurate sociological beliefs about the views of their peers.' (Borget & Chalmers, 2013, p.29).

Atheists are each committed to believing. Finally, I examine the three core 'great making' properties that are supposed to constitute the beating heart of cataphatic 'perfect being' theology, to wit, *omnipotence*, *omniscience* and *omni-benevolence*, and which properties play an integral role in the **Argument from Doxastic Discord** as well as the possible responses to it.

A.2. A TENANT'S TALE: ARTICULATING THE CORE CONCERNS

Imagine you are a new tenant in a recently developed high-rise building. You arrive at the front door to move in and are immediately approached and greeted by numerous in-house tenant associations. While you are busy unpacking in your new room, you are enthusiastically approached by representatives from each one of the tenant associations and provided with reasons for why you should join their particular association.

One representative, for example, tells you that he represents an association that has a very good relationship with the landlord. The landlord has promised them that someday they will all get to visit the penthouse suite which has a pristine view and comfortable lodgings. This is conditional, of course, on whether the tenants comply with the Landlord's son's house-rules (the landlord's son apparently left the building many years before you arrived but graciously left some written instructions). If they do not listen to, and comply with, these house-rules then, regrettably, they will be forced to give up their current lodgings and move down into the basement which is very hot and uncomfortable.

Another representative tells you that the other associations are almost certainly wrong and that there is actually a committee of landlords who have assured them of something rather different. If they keep the gardens surrounding the building beautiful and well-watered on a daily basis then they will be allowed to swim in the luxurious pool on weekends to the exclusion of everyone else.

Yet another representative tells you that there is in fact no committee of landlords (who in their right mind would think that!) but rather the landlord is an elderly woman. She does not really care about either the cleanliness of the building or the gardens but rather desires that everyone living in the building should help everyone else with unpacking their groceries. If that happens then she will be very pleased and no one will have to pay rent. When asked about whether she has a son, you are greeted by laughter and told she is childless. And so it goes with each representative making a different sales pitch. After a while even the representatives of sub-associations and splinter groups are coming to talk to you. They all seem earnest and exceptionally eager to have you join their particular tenant association.

Facing this predicament it begins to dawn on you that there is, in the first place, a great *epistemic* difficulty deciding which tenant association to join (if any). They all make competing and contradictory claims about (i) the nature of the landlord(s) (whom you have never personally met) and (ii) what the landlord(s) wants from, and expects of the tenants in order for them to acquire some benefit or set of benefits.

While admittedly there is sometimes superficial agreement between the claims of the various tenant associations, when pressed on important details that make the associations distinctive of each other, it becomes clear that many of these associations have completely contradictory beliefs about (i) the nature of the landlord(s), and (ii) what the landlord(s) expect of the tenants while they sojourn in the building.

You also begin to notice that sometimes there are vociferous and vehement verbal disagreements between members of the various tenant associations. Sometimes these verbal spats even lead to outright violence with one association using force to prevent another association from achieving their goals, or even forcefully compelling another association to adopt its particular goals. Often this is accompanied by claims that they have been in personal contact with the landlord(s) who has assured them that their conduct is permissible and wholly sanctioned. Needless to say, it makes living in the building rather uncomfortable.

One association in particular is very vocal on the floor of the building where you have just moved. You notice that this association is essentially an umbrella association for a host of sub-associations. This umbrella association is adamant that there is a single landlord who loves and cares about *all* the tenants of the building very much (even the members of the other tenant associations and sub-associations). Furthermore, this association is confident that the landlord wants only the absolute best for everyone living in the building and has their *deepest and most enduring* interests and well-being at heart. Crucially, you are told that the landlord wants to have a personal, rich and long-lasting relationship with every single tenant in the building. This is natural because

the landlord, you are told, is morally exemplary in every conceivable way. Can you just imagine what a great relationship you could have with such a wonderfully superlative person? Could there be anything *better* to make your stay in the building as fulfilling and rewarding as possible?

Not only that, but you are told by the representatives of this umbrella association that the landlord personally designed and built the building in which every tenant is currently living for the *express purpose* of cultivating this deep personal relationship with all the tenants. It stands to reason that he must be extraordinarily powerful, well-financed and knowledgeable to have created such a wonderful building. Unsurprisingly, you are told this is yet a further reason it would be beneficial to be a willing participant in the relationship with the landlord. None of the tenants have the money, power, or architectural know-how to accomplish such a magnificent feat! Can you imagine what you could learn, experience and accomplish with such a wonderful ally in your corner and looking out for you? This tenant association is apparently one of the more successful associations. It claims to have the most members of any other association with new tenants signing up every day.

However, given the *particular* claims of this *particular* tenant association, a different sort of difficulty begins to take shape in your mind. It is not just that there are competing tenant associations to join and that they are making different claims and promises, and it is not just that you have never personally met the landlord(s) since you moved in, but rather it is a deeper *logical difficulty* about the very existence of the *particular* landlord described by this *particular* tenant's association.

Embers of doubt begin to glow in your mind and with such kindling incendiary interrogatives begin to flicker. Why, if there is a landlord that has the peculiar qualities this particular association says he has, are there even other tenant associations to begin with? Why would the landlord actively promote (or permit there to be) other tenant associations in the building who misrepresent (i) his nature, (ii) his desires for the tenants and (iii) who falsely claim the landlord expects things of the tenants that he does not really expect in order to have a relationship with them? Does this state of affairs in the building not put *everyone's* relationship with the landlord in serious jeopardy – jeopardy it need *not* have been in? After all, by signing up to the wrong tenant association a non-trivial number of tenants can (and will) miss out on this wonderful relationship and whatever benefits may have been entailed thereby.

Why does the landlord not just call a general meeting of *all* tenants and set the record straight himself once and for all? Could the landlord not ensure that all the tenants accept that he is the landlord, that there are no other landlords, and make it unambiguously clear what he expects of them so that he can have the relationship with them that he desires? Could he not have simply prevented certain tenants, who did not, or would not, have the correct beliefs about him and his expectations, from moving into the building in the first place?

Surely this would have been a simple feat for the landlord especially considering he had the opportunity to consider, in advance, and prior to their admission to the building, both (i) their individual tenant applications, and (ii) their extensive personality profile questionnaire! Perhaps he could have simply arranged an unambiguous and impressive

orientation meeting for *every* new tenant who arrived in the building whereby they were provided with full details of who the landlord was and what he expected of them while they sojourned in the building?

Or, even if this was not possible, surely he could have prevented new tenant associations from forming? Or could he not have intervened at any particular time to prevent untruths from being perpetuated, untruths which would, if left uncorrected, inevitably result in divergent tenant associations that would ensnare unsuspecting neonate tenants, thereby diverting them from the proper relational path and their ultimate well-being? Taking stock of the empirically undeniable situation, you might begin to think that discord (rather than concord) must be this landlord's *modus operandi,* and the following line of reasoning might begin to strike you as quite plausible:

Either (i) this particular landlord does not have the desire to prevent the discordant beliefs amongst the various tenant associations in the building and, thus, lacks the desire to have such a deep and long lasting relationship with the tenants (so he cannot be as concerned about tenant well-being as is claimed), or (ii) he is not capable of preventing these discordant tenant associations from forming or being perpetuated within the building (so he cannot be quite as powerful or influential as is claimed), or (iii) perhaps he simply does not know how to prevent divergent tenant associations from forming or being perpetuated (so he cannot be as knowledgeable as is claimed).

Any way you look at this logical trilemma, it does not seem that the landlord could be the *sort* of person this particular association claims he is. In fact, the more you think

about it, it would seem to follow that a landlord of that particular sort could not *possibly* exist given the unequivocal state of the building and, more particularly, the unequivocal existence of the competing and contrary tenant associations. In other words, if there were a landlord at all, the landlord cannot be this particular person.

You have come to realise that even if you thought the evidence regarding the existence and nature of this particular landlord were ambiguous, the very existence of the competing and contrary tenant associations would *logically* disambiguate the situation. You have found that consequently you do not believe such a landlord exists. You have been convinced of his non-existence by the **Argument from Doxastic Discord**.

A.2.1. DISAMBIGUATING THE TWO CORE CONCERNS

We can distil and disambiguate two core concerns that arise out of our tenant's tale. First, we can appreciate that the new tenant faces a difficulty in choosing which tenant association to join (if any). The new tenant faces the daunting and challenging task of adjudicating which of the competing and contrary claims are, in fact, true. On the assumption that our tenant is *rational*, and desires to fulfil his epistemic and noetic duties, he will be desirous to affiliate himself only with the tenant association that is *correct*.[10] He will not be swayed by which tenant association promises him the best

[10] Crucially, this means that he will not rest content to base his decision as to which association is correct simply on the basis of *faith*. In short, he will eschew, from the outset, any form of **Fideism.**

benefits and will, therefore, eschew affiliation on the grounds of actual or perceived utility.[11] This is the **epistemic concern**.

By analogy, the sincere spiritual pilgrim, faced with the clamouring and contrary claims of different and divergent religious sects, must adjudicate on which one is *correct* and to which he will give doxastic[12] allegiance. However, he must do this, all the while bearing in mind Bertrand Russell's percipient observation that '[i]t is evident as a matter of logic that, since they [religions] disagree, not more than one of them can be true.' (2010 [1957],xxii).[13]

Exacerbating this apparently aporetic predicament is the inconvenient fact that the smorgasbord of competing and contrary religions is truly Brobdingnagian.[14] This is a point well worth emphasising, since many people unjustifiably suppose that the dominant religion (and deities) of the culture in which they were raised constitute the

[11] This is not to deny either (i) the existence of *practical* or *instrumental* reasons for holding a belief, or (ii) that people do often hold beliefs for such reasons. As Kenneth A. Taylor writes: 'Whatever else beliefs are, they are instruments for guiding and supporting our practical projects. If holding a belief would be instrumental to the success of a practical project, then that by itself may give sufficient reason, in particular sufficient *practical* reason, for adopting that belief, even if that belief is false or unwarranted by the evidence. There is, to be sure, a legitimate fear that by considering the instrumental value of holding a belief *to constitute* rational grounds for adopting it, we may slide off into rationalizing self-deception or wilful neglect of the evidence.' (2007, p.151). Similarly, Harris tells us '[b]eliefs are *principles of action*: whatever else they may be . . . they are processes by which our understanding (and misunderstanding) of the world is represented and made available to guide our behaviour.' (2006, p.52).

[12] Of and relating to one's beliefs.

[13] There are two kinds of logical inconsistency - *contradiction* and *contrariety*. Two propositions are contradictories if and only if they cannot both be true and cannot both be false (e.g. 'the car is red' is the contradictory of 'the car is not red'). Two propositions are contraries if and only if they cannot both be true but they can both be false (e.g. 'the car is red' is a contrary of 'the car is blue'). A proposition can only ever have *one* contradictory but can have *innumerable* contraries. (Bradley, 2015).

[14] For a truly intimidating and awe-inspiring pictorial representation of the number of world religions and their evolutionary divergence, it is informative to examine the 'World Religion Tree' prepared by the 40 Foundation and Funk & Consulting. Retrieved online on 14/01/2019 from https://external-preview.redd.it/e5i27HPcaGrDPApm2lyfRyn3JQlLZV_K06mSzmIXa7Y.jpg?auto=webp&s=305e5527d3e7f831b338c26e205840836f26edaf

only 'live option' for endorsement. As John W. Loftus notes '[t]he fact is that religious options are myriad. This is the many-gods objection. Which one should we wager on? . . . How seriously should we take any of the possible gods when we only seriously consider the ones we were raised to be familiar with in our respective cultures?' (2012, p.49).[15]

Raymond D. Bradley articulates the more accurate and, thus, bleaker epistemic situation that faces the would-be believer when first setting out to scale Mount Religion:

> Right at the outset, one is faced with a huge number of possible candidates for belief. To which religion should one pin one's faith? To which should one commit one's life here and now, and perhaps in the hereafter? Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, or Taoism, perhaps? The list of options does not stop there, of course. No religion is without its schisms and its sects. Settle on a major religion – Christianity, for instance – and the question still remains: Which version? Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, or Protestant? Suppose you settle on Protestantism. Then the question arises: Do you accept the gospel according to the Anglicans, the Unitarians, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, or the Pentecostals? . . . Nor should one ignore less well-established religion, such as Baha'i, Theosophy, Jehovah's Witness, Christian Science, or the Church of Latter-day Saints. Or newer, first generation religions such as Unification Church, Krishna Consciousness, the Church of Scientology, the Divine Light Mission, the Urantia Foundation, and the Rajneesh Foundation. Well over 500 cults are presently active in North America alone. Why should not the truth lie with one or other of them? (2007, pp.1-2)

[15] Philip L. Quinn agrees, writing '[o]ur epistemological challenge is difficult enough even if we restrict our attention to the so-called world religions. It only becomes worse if we add in the many African religions, Native American religions, and religions from other parts of the world. Religions differ along the doctrinal dimension, and often their doctrines conflict. (2005, p.393). Furthermore, John Hick writes '[t]he fact that there is a plurality of religious traditions, each with its own distinctive beliefs, spiritual practices, ethical outlook, art forms, and cultural ethos, creates an obvious problem for those of us who see them, not simply as human phenomena, but as responses to the Divine.' (1988, p.292).

Writing further of the now forgotten religions of the past, as well as the thousands of 'dead gods' that were once their objects, and who have since been relegated by humanity, and the sheer passage of time, to that mass graveyard called 'mythology', Bradley continues:

> Can anyone, with justified confidence, suppose that the circumstances of his own birth, upbringing, or subsequent inquiries, are uniquely privileged so as to yield the correct view as to which of these gods, if any, really exists? . . . How can one prudently place one's bets before one has looked carefully at the credentials of the rival candidates – not just the favourite ones but the dark horses as well? How for that matter can one be sure that all of the candidates, and the competition itself, are not phonies (2007, p.3)

In a similar vein, Elizabeth Anderson articulates the epistemic concern succinctly:

> Every faith points to its own holy texts and oral traditions, its spiritual experiences, miracles and prophets, its testimonies of wayward lives turned around by conversion, rebirth of faith, or return to the church. Each religion takes these experiences and reports them as conclusive evidence for *its* particular set of beliefs. Here we have purported sources of evidence for higher unseen spirits or divinity, which systematically point to *contradictory* beliefs. Is there one God or many? Was Jesus God, the son of God, God's prophet, or just a man? Was the last prophet Jesus, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, or the Rev. Sun Myung moon? (2007, pp.226-227)

❖ The **epistemic concern** can then be more precisely articulated as follows: *(i) the challenge of investigating and confirming the essential truth claims of competing and contrary religions, and (ii) of correctly deciding between them within the temporally finite confines of an average human life*.

Upon coming to appreciate the gravity and extent of the epistemic concern the sincere would-be believer, who is desirous to subscribe to any *particular* religion, should be given serious pause. The epistemic concern ought also, in my estimation, to give those who are *already* 'card-carrying' members of a particular religion at least one powerful reason to reconsider and reassess their doxastic allegiance. (McKim, 2001). Accordingly '[t]he person who becomes aware of religious diversity might wonder whether he is correct about religious matters given that most people disagree with him.' (Dastmalchian, 2013, p.299). It would seem plausible to argue that the appropriate rational attitude of both the would-be believer and the card-carrying believer, in the face of the epistemic concern, ought to be (i) self-reflexive religious doubt, (ii) a corrosion of confidence in the veracity of any particular religion, and (iii) the engendering of greater epistemic humility.

Furthermore, what a genuine appreciation of the epistemic concern seems to demand is what could be termed *doxastic due diligence*. In other words, the epistemic concern appears to entail a strong normative injunction that serious investigation be made into the evidence and arguments for the central truth claims of competing and contrary religions. This will be especially true if one accepts a further reasonable assumption, namely, that there are very likely apologists among each of the competing and contrary religions who are knowledgeable, well-informed and epistemically sophisticated about the reasons for both (i) believing the truth of *their* particular religion, and (ii) disbelieving *other* contrary religions.[16] However, this onerous doxastic demand is often

[16] In other words, that at least some proponents and apologists of contrary religions are on an equal, if not superior, epistemic footing with our spiritual pilgrim.

difficult, if not impossible, to discharge. The difficulty is only exacerbated for many people in virtue of the simple fact that they do not have the time, ability or expertise to even attempt such an exhaustive enterprise.

While the epistemic concern may be thought to be beneficial enough as (i) a prophylactic against unbridled religious zealotry, religious intolerance and insouciant religious exclusivism, and (ii) an injunction to *suspend judgment* regarding truth of competing and contrary religious claims, some philosophers have gone even further and converted the epistemic concern into a positive argument for the *probable* falsity of all religions or general *disbelief* of all detailed religious claims (e.g. Bradley, 2007; Schellenberg, 1997).[17] We can call this argument, and those of its ilk, the **Argument from Inconsistent Revelations** or even the **Argument from Religious Pluralism.** While this is surely a persuasive and prodigious atheological argument it will not be the

[17] Bradley's version of the argument is a contemporary version of David Hume's argument (2000 [1748]) and involves four principal steps: (i) demonstrating that there are, in fact, contrary religions (i.e. that the essential doctrines of various religions express *distinctive* and *contrary* propositions), (ii) demonstrating that the purported evidence (e.g. miracles, revelations, personal experiences etc.) that probabilizes the truth of a given religion, implies the probable falsity of any and all *contrary* religions as well as the probable falsity of the purported evidence cited in support of each *contrary* religion, (iii) demonstrating that the purported evidence advanced in support of the truth of any particular religion is the same *type* or *sort* of evidence advanced by all the *contrary* religions for their truth (i.e. that the evidence advanced is neither unique nor compelling), (iv) concluding that the probability of all religions being true is very low.

Schellenberg's version of the argument has five principal steps: (i) take any central and sufficiently detailed truth claim for a specific religion (e.g. C) and observe that the negation of such a claim (~C) is logically equivalent to a truly enormous disjunctive set of possible alternative and contrary religious truth claims (D v E v F...n) (ii) observe that the probability of the entire disjunctive set being true is equivalent to the sum of each individual member's probability of being true (iii) observe that the combined total probability of this enormous disjunctive set being true, given the total relevant evidence, *swamps* the probability of a specific religion's central claim being true (iv) conclude either that the probability of C being true is low and thus not worthy of belief or, at the very least, insofar as we admit ignorance of the probability of each of the members of the disjunctive set (and thus ignorant of the probability of ~C), that we have no way to properly gauge the probable truth of C. (v) observe, perhaps distressingly, that this procedure can be repeated with any central and sufficiently detailed truth claim of *any* religion. Religious scepticism appears to be in the offing.

focus of our discussion which will deal instead with a cognate but, nevertheless, distinct challenge.

Returning then to our tenant's tale, there is a second concern which is, to my mind, far more pressing. Recall that the new tenant's concern was about the very existence of a particular sort of landlord who was supposed to have a set of very peculiar properties. The concern over *his* existence arose, not so much because of the lack of evidence for the landlord, or because of poor argumentation for the landlord on behalf of his apologists, but rather because the very state of the building spoke tellingly against him. In particular, the *very existence* of other competing and contrary tenant associations appeared to make the non-existence of the particular landlord logically mandatory. This is the **metaphysical concern**.

By analogy, the difficulty that confronts the sincere spiritual pilgrim who is considering the existence of God, is that her collision with competing and contrary religions appears, at a deeper level, to *logically* preclude the existence of a particular sort of deity i.e. a deity that is postulated to be omnipotent, omniscient and omni-benevolent. More particularly, such a state of affairs seems to *logically* preclude, in one fell swoop, the existence of the deity that constitutes the common theological and metaphysical capital of Judaism, Christianity and Islam - the latter two being the dominant religions in the world today.[18]

[18] According to the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, as of 2010, there were ≈ 2.2 billion Christians globally (31.4% of the global population) and ≈ 1.6 billion Muslims globally (23.2% of the global population). By comparison, as of 2010, there were only ≈ 13.9 million Jews globally (0.2% of the global population). Retrieved online on 14/01/2019 from http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/questions.

❖ The **metaphysical concern** can then be more precisely articulated as follows: *How can one logically reconcile (i) the unequivocal existence of competing and contrary religions on the one hand with (ii) the purported existence of the deity that is supposed to constitute the common theological and metaphysical capital of Judaism, Christianity and Islam on the other?*

Another way of making this question less opaque is to consider the logical relationship between the metaphysical concern and the epistemic concern. Variations of the following sorts of questions are informative in discerning that relationship:

(i) Why, if such a deity exists, should there even be an epistemic concern to begin with?

(ii) Why, if such a deity exists, should the epistemic concern be the sort of concern that any individual should have to wrestle with at all?

(iii) Why, if such a deity exists, is the state of the world such that it either generates or exacerbates the epistemic concern?

(iv) Since it is the very existence of competing and contrary religions that necessarily generates or exacerbates the epistemic concern, if there were no competing and contrary religions then surely the epistemic concern would evaporate?

Of course, what makes questions of this sort particularly poignant for proponents of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is that they do not have particularly mysterious answers on the hypothesis that there is no deity of the sort affirmed by these three religions. The existence of competing and contrary religions, as well as the epistemic concern, are quite easily explicable (and to be expected) on the hypothesis that no such deity exists. In short, competing and contrary religions are to be expected precisely if they are simply socio-cultural systems grounded in the evolved psychological architecture of human individuals and modulated by a concatenation of idiosyncratic historical, geographic and terrestrial factors.

It is this metaphysical concern that serves as the intellectual springboard for the **Argument from Doxastic Discord**. So far we have been speaking of 'religion' and of 'God' as if we already had a clear and unambiguous idea of what we were describing. However, in order to sharpen the metaphysical concern and lay the conceptual groundwork for the **Argument from Doxastic Discord** it will be necessary to first understand, in a slightly more rigorous way, these challenging concepts and their inter-relations.

A3. THE LAY OF THE LAND [19]

A3.1. RELIGION

Michael Martin asks an important preliminary question '[w]hat does it mean to say that something is a religion?' (2008, p.217). When first considered, it can seem undeniably obvious what a religion is. 'You know a religion when you see one!' is likely to be the response of the average layman. Whether God exists or not seems, at least, debatable but it does not seem debateable that there are religions and that we know what they are. One need only look around the world and ostensively point out clear examples!

However, upon further reflection, the apparent ease of recognising when one is in the presence of a religion quickly evaporates. Part of the difficulty in providing a more precise set of conceptually necessary and sufficient conditions for what constitutes a religion, is that the word 'religion' is notoriously polysemous and has been used to describe a dizzyingly diverse array of human practices, infatuations, beliefs, passions, moods, attitudes, preoccupations, values and rituals. Of this definitional difficulty, Nicholas Wade writes:

> The word itself has a range of meanings, referring sometimes to a set of beliefs in the supernatural, sometimes to an organized community of adherents of faith. Religion has been notoriously hard to define, perhaps because each observer seeks to emphasize a different aspect. Even the great sociologist Max Weber ducked the task. He opened his essay on the sociology of religion by warning readers they must wait to

[19] See **Appendix I**.

> hear exactly what it is – "Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study" – yet provided none at the end either. (2009, p.13)

Bearing witness to Wade's point, for some thinkers 'the essence of religion is a commitment to belief in something supernatural' (Grayling, 2008, p.1) or as 'social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is sought' (Dennett, 2006, p.9), while others have described religion as 'a set of habits: habits of speaking, habits of imagining, habits of behaving physically. Habits which are intended to anchor you in relation to something invisible, incomprehensible, and challenging.' (Williams, 2008, p.27).

Still other thinkers have described religion as 'our attempt to come to terms with the fundamental limits of life. Which are three: temporality, contingency and finitude. Or in popular language time, chance and death.' (Cupitt, 2008, p.49). Some have opined that '[r]eligion begins when a group of people decides to organize its life around a supernatural experience or series of such experiences.' (Sacks, 2008, p.212) or is 'the structured way in which we connect to God according to what He is asking us to do' (Ramadan, 2008, p.77). Finally some have proffered the general, and admittedly vague idea, that 'religion is what really matters to people.' (McGrath, 2008, p.99).

A slightly more rigorous attempt at definition comes from William Alston who considers the following to be the core 'religion-making' characteristics: (i) a belief in supernatural beings (ii) a distinction between sacred and profane objects (iii) ritual acts focused on sacred objects (iv) a moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods (v) feelings of awe, mystery, guilt, adoration etc. in the presence of sacred objects, during

rituals and which are connected to the idea of the gods (vi) prayer and communication with gods (vii) a worldview that postulates an overall purpose or point to existence and how the individual connects to it (viii) an organization of one's life around this worldview (ix) a social group that is bound together by the above. (1967, pp. 140-145) However, as useful as Alston's criteria are, given the explicit reference to the existence of supernatural deities, this set of criteria would still exclude some paradigm cases of religion that eschew explicit commitment to a particular deity or deities e.g. Buddhism (Martin, 2011, p.219). In light of the aforegoing, I believe it is conceptually useful to distinguish between two general accounts one could proffer in response to the question 'what is a religion?', namely, a cognitive and non-cognitive account.

A **cognitive account** of religion asserts that a religion is a socio-cultural *system of thought* that prescribes certain kinds of belief for an individual or community of individuals. In other words, only a system of thought that requires or demands beliefs of a particular kind will qualify as a true religion. If an individual, or community of individuals, hold or come to hold, the right type of belief then they will be deserving of the epithet 'religious person' or 'religious community' respectively. The difficulty for this sort of view lies in the fact that the types of belief prescribed must be general enough to capture what we consider literal religions despite their idiosyncratic differences (e.g. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism etc.) but also specific enough so as to exclude other general systems of thought that we do not consider to be literal religions (e.g. Nazism, Environmentalism, Liberalism, Socialism, Capitalism etc.).

On the other hand, a **non-cognitive account** of religion asserts religion is a socio-cultural *system of behaviour* that prescribes a specified set of habits, rituals and practices. On this view, the focus is not on what sort of beliefs an individual, or community of individuals, are required to hold but rather that the individual or community are required to adopt a specified system of behaviour. Certain specified modes of behaviour deserve the epithet 'religious' while others do not. Again the challenge for this sort of view is that the system of behaviour must be general enough to capture what we normally consider religious behaviour (e.g. acts of prayer, meditation, sacrifice, ritual, worship etc.) but specific enough to exclude what we would consider non-religious behaviour (e.g. painting, watching a sunset, attending a music festival etc.)

Neither account, taken on its own, appears to provide *sufficient* conditions for some socio-cultural system to count as a religion despite the fact that they both appear to provide *necessary* conditions. Simply embracing a cognitive account that prescribes certain types of belief for individuals and communities of individuals seems to conflict with the strong intuition that religions necessarily involve private and public ways of acting (or being) in the world. Similarly, embracing a non-cognitive account conflicts with the equally intuitive idea that religions necessarily involve individual and collective doxastic commitment to certain types of ideas and concepts.

However, if these two views do not provide sufficient conditions when taken on their own, perhaps they could nevertheless be taken to provide *jointly* sufficient conditions? Perhaps a **hybrid account** that combines both the elements of the cognitive and non-

cognitive accounts could provide jointly sufficient conditions for what constitutes a religion? Such a view seems promising and would allow us to provide a *formal* definition of religion as follows:

- *Some socio-cultural system 'R' is a religion if and only if: it prescribes that an individual, or community of individuals: (i) hold beliefs of a particular type (**R-beliefs**), and (ii) engages in private and public behaviour of a particular type (**R-behaviours**).*

Two questions immediately arise in light of this formal definition of religion viz. what types of belief constitute religious belief (R-beliefs) and what types of behaviours constitute religious behaviour (R-behaviours)? It seems plausible to suppose that the answer to the second question is bound up with the answer to the first.

A.3.2. ULTIMISM

To answer these two questions, I think it useful to make use of a concept coined by J.L. Schellenberg, namely, **Ultimism**. Ultimism can be thought of as articulating the core cognitive content of *any* and *all* religion. Ultimism is an exceptionally broad and general thesis that has three core propositional components and is thus an admirable contender for providing us with the appropriate content of an R-belief.

First, it asserts there exists a deepest or most fundamental ground (or fact) of **reality**. Second, it asserts that this deepest or most fundamental fact of reality instantiates, or expresses, the most profound form of **value**. Third, it asserts that communing with,

coming into contact with, or otherwise relating to this fundamental fact of reality, provides the deepest, most profound and longest-lasting **good** for human persons.[20] (Schellenberg, 2017). As Schellenberg explains:

> Ultimism, more precisely, is the general claim that there is a reality ultimate in three ways: in the nature of things (metaphysically), in the nature of inherent value (axiologically), and in its importance for our lives (soteriologically). And that's *all* it says: nothing more specifically about such things as love or knowledge or personal power will be found in it. (2015, p.18)

Accordingly, Ultimism is a thesis about an essentially *religious reality* as opposed to a *non-religious reality.*[21] By the use of the word 'ultimate' Schellenberg means 'the deepest or greatest or best . . .' and which 'takes us to the very limit of whatever it adjectivizes.' (2015, p.18). By '**metaphysically ultimate**' he, therefore, means 'the ultimate or most fundamental fact about the nature of things, in terms of which any other fact about what things exist and how they exist would have to be explained in a comprehensive and correct account.' (2015, p.19). Furthermore, by '**axiologically ultimate**' he means 'embodying the deepest possible value.' (2015, p.19), and by '**soteriological ultimate**' he means 'ultimacy as possessed by a reality if, in relation to that reality, the deepest or ultimate human good can be obtained.' (2015, p.20). Finally, in respect of Ultimism's apparently sparse propositional content, Schellenberg writes:

> Ultimism has more content than may immediately appear, because we have to factor in not just what it explicitly says but also all it *entails* – all those propositions, distinct from itself, that must be true if ultimism is, such claims as the claims that there is a reality transcendent of the natural world; that a dimension of reality transcending

[20]That is to say, a *summum bonum*.
[21]By 'reality' I should be understood to mean the sum total of whatever happens to *be t*he case.

> nature is most fundamental and important; that the core of reality is on the side of good; that even though we might have a hard time seeing exactly how, the universe or our environment in the largest sense is not indifferent to our deepest needs, and so on. (2017, pp.121-122)

Crucial to Ultimism is the thesis that the religious category of reality truly transcends the *terra firma* of the natural world. It is this feature of the transcendent that is the distinguishing feature of the **Divine.** [22] Accordingly, Ultimism is best thought of as a type of **Metaphysical Supernaturalism** and is thus logically incompatible with **Metaphysical Naturalism** - the world of the **Profane**.[23]

A3.3. METAPHYSICAL NATURALISM & SUPERNATURALISM

Providing a comprehensive and authoritative definition of Metaphysical Naturalism and Metaphysical Supernaturalism is a daunting task.[24] It is useful, however, to begin with a rather plausible account of Metaphysical Naturalism which is proffered by Richard Carrier:

> Now, by "nature" we mean a non-sentient universe, with all its properties and behaviours. Basically, we mean nothing more than space, time, material and physical law. There may be other dimensions besides space and time, but these would still be nothing more than mindless extensions of the same physical being, much as time may be a mere extension of space, and all three dimensions of space mere extensions of

[22] The philosophical study of the nature of the Divine is *theology*.
[23] This is not to say that a Metaphysical Naturalist cannot believe in fundamental value or the fundamental good for human persons. However, such things would have to be understood as being somehow 'immanent' in the natural order. The 'naturalisation' of value, goodness and morality is a continuous research programme in meta-ethics, normative ethics and axiological theory (e.g. Brink, 1989; Kurtz, 1997; Parfit, 2011; 2017)
[24] For an overview of the varieties of 'Naturalism' on offer and some of the difficulties in comprehensive definition. See: (Draper, 2005; Fales, 2011).

> one. There may also be materials other than matter and energy, and many metaphysical naturalists posit such things, though I do not, for there is neither evidence nor need for anything else (a view that is generally called "physicalism"). Nevertheless, if there are other materials, these would again be nothing more than mindless things populating the cosmos in just the same way as particles of matter and energy or the extension of being. Likewise, there are certainly other physical "laws" besides those we know – which may even permit things beyond our imagining, things we would otherwise call miraculous, just as a tribal shaman would call a jumbo jet's flight – but these would be no different than the laws we already know: brute properties of the universe that describe how its dimensions and materials manifest and behave. (2005, p.68)

In a similar vein, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* defines Metaphysical Naturalism as 'the view that everything . . . belongs to the world of nature, and so can be studied by the methods appropriate to studying that world, and the apparent exceptions can be somehow explained away . . . [t]he important thing for the naturalist in the metaphysical sphere is that the world should be a unity in the sense of being amenable to a unified study which can be called the study of nature. . . ' (2005, pp.640-641)

What is clear from this sort of account, is that Metaphysical Naturalism, considered as an ontological thesis[25], is committed to a single, holistic and unified reality which is free from 'outside' influence and 'external' explanation (i.e. *unus mundus*). This is perhaps the most crucial feature of Metaphysical Naturalism - it is a distinctly *monistic*

[25] Metaphysical Naturalism must be distinguished from **Methodological Naturalism** in which an election is made at the outset of enquiry to exclude the supernatural as a potential explanation for a given phenomenon i.e. one makes a methodological commitment to only look for, or assume, a natural explanation for phenomena. Stenger explains that it is '[t]rue that science generally makes the assumption called *methodological naturalism*, which refers to the self-imposed convention that limits inquiry to objective observations of the world and generally seeks natural accounts of all phenomena. This is often confused with *metaphysical naturalism,* which assumes that reality itself is purely natural, that is, composed solely of material objects.' (2008, p.15). I would only mention that Metaphysical Naturalism should only ever be thought of as a philosophical conclusion one reaches and not an assumption to which one helps oneself.

ontological thesis. It posits a single *type* or *category* of reality, unified by a set of physical nomological features and which is causally closed and self-contained.[26] (Hyman, 2011). Accordingly, such a view logically entails that there are no token phenomena or entities that fall outside this single unified category of reality.[27]

In contrast to this monistic portrait of reality, there is Metaphysical Supernaturalism. Metaphysical Supernaturalists and Metaphysical Naturalists are generally *ad idem* regarding the fact that (i) the natural world exists, and (ii) that the scientific method[28] has something to say about the 'goings on' of the natural world. Where they disagree, however, is with the Metaphysical Naturalist's additional assertion that the natural world *exhausts* the category of 'reality'. Instead, Metaphysical Supernaturalists contend that there exists another type, category or kind of existence in addition to the natural category. In short, Metaphysical Supernaturalism 'insists that there is more to reality than is conceived of in the naturalist's philosophy, and more than is accessible to scientific investigation.'[29] (Bradley, 2016, p.101).

[26] As Sean Carroll writes 'there is only one world, the natural world, exhibiting patterns we call "the laws of nature" and which is discoverable by the methods of science and empirical investigation. There is no separate realm of the supernatural, spiritual, or divine; nor is there any cosmic teleology or transcendent purpose inherent in the nature of the universe or in human life. . . Naturalism is a philosophy of unity and patterns, describing all of reality as a seamless web.' (2016, p.11).

[27] I use the word 'phenomena' to refer to some occurrence or event and 'entity' as any sort of metaphysical posit.

[28] I understand the 'scientific method' to be generally characterised by a set of (i) individual and social *a posteriori* empirical and sceptical methodologies (e.g. hypothesis and theory generation, derivation of predictions, empirical testing of hypotheses and theories, falsification and corroboration of hypotheses and theories, hypothesis and theory revision etc.) augmented by (ii) *a priori* mathematical and logical schema.

[29] 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' (Shakespeare, 1963 [1604], p.24). This could be thought of as the motto of Metaphysical Supernaturalism.

This additional category of reality is often described as being 'transcendent', 'fundamental' or 'deeper' than the single category of reality posited by Metaphysical Naturalism. In this sense we can think of Metaphysical Supernaturalism and, thus, Ultimism as endorsing an ontologically *bifurcated* view of reality. On such a view (i) reality is actually stratified into two distinct ontic levels, and (ii) it is generally thought that the strata of these levels are capable of some sort of bi-directional interaction.

If Ultimism is thought to provide us with the cognitive content of truly religious belief then truly religious behaviour can be thought of as that set of behavioural practices that both (i) caters for public acknowledgement and endorsement of the Divine, and (ii) facilitates private interaction, communication or communion between the distinct ontic strata (viz. the Profane and the Divine). This appears to be an admirable contender for R-behaviour and captures the idea that religions crucially 'involve espousal of values and practices taken to be required in response to the existence of [the divine], including worship and praise . . . submission and obedience to the commands taken to emanate from [the divine] and so on.' (Grayling, 2013, p.19)

From the aforegoing analysis we can then discern a number of important conclusions about the inter-relationship between Ultimism, Metaphysical Supernaturalism and the concept of religion. First, in order for a belief to count as 'religious' it must be a belief that Ultimism is true or, at the very least, a belief that logically entails a belief that Ultimism is true. Second, because religious beliefs are beliefs about the truth of Ultimism they will, of necessity, be beliefs about the truth of Metaphysical Supernaturalism. Third, the person who endorses Metaphysical Naturalism (or beliefs

that logically entail Metaphysical Naturalism) cannot be considered religious other than in a figurative, poetic or metaphoric sense. Fourth, the minimalist cognitive content of Ultimism allows great scope for how one might, in a more detailed manner, 'flesh out' what constitutes the Divine. Fifth, the concept of Ultimism provides us with (i) the generality required to capture the diverse panoply of idiosyncratic systems that we pre-theoretically identified as religions, and also (ii) with the specificity required to exclude socio-cultural systems that are best thought of as cognates of religion, such as ideologies, philosophies, political affiliations and economic doctrines. Finally, we are in a better position to give a *substantive*, as opposed to a merely formal definition of religion along the following lines:

- *Some socio-cultural system 'R' is a religion if and only if it prescribes that an individual, or community of individuals: (i) hold a belief in Ultimism (or hold beliefs that logically entail a belief in Ultimism), and (ii) engage in a set of behavioural practices that (a) publicly acknowledges or endorses Ultimism (or beliefs that logically entail an acknowledgement or endorsement of Ultimism) and (b) which facilitates private interaction, communication, or communion with The Divine.*

Now that we have some sense of the inter-relationship between the aforegoing concepts it is time to consider one specific way in which the notion of the Divine has been conceived and which forms the principal target of the **Argument from Doxastic Discord** – God**.**

A3.4. CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

One way that thinkers have historically sought to 'flesh out' the notion of the Divine is by postulating the existence of God (or even gods). Deities are indeed *one* way in which Ultimism could be expressed or instantiated. This perhaps explains why religion, at least in the Western tradition, has so frequently been preoccupied with the existence of deities. It perhaps also explains the related and ubiquitous idea that belief in the existence of deities is what is truly essential to religion. But of course, as we have seen, this need not be the only way that the notion of the Divine could be 'filled out' and that 'there may be *many* other ways of elaborating it, including ones we've never thought of.' (Schellenberg, 2017, p.121.). This way of conceiving of the Divine is logically equivalent to a very large disjunctive set of alternate possibilities.

However, granting for the sake of argument that there may indeed be a plethora of ways to 'fill out' the notion of an ultimate divine reality, our focus in this discussion shall be limited to conceptions of ultimate reality that are to be understood, or cashed out, in terms of the concept of God.[30] With this firmly in mind, the next natural question becomes: 'What are we to understand by the word "God"?' The difficulty that awaits us here, in many respects, eclipses that of the difficulty in defining religion. As G.H. Smith writes:

[30] Nothing in this thesis should, therefore, be taken as arguing for the falsity of Ultimism. The truth or falsity of Ultimism lies far beyond the scope of this thesis and would involve an extended discussion about the reasons for believing Metaphysical Naturalism to be true or false. For very good defences of Metaphysical Naturalism. See: (Carrier, 2005; Carroll, 2016).

> What, then, is meant by the word "god"? This is not a simple question. There have been many historical concepts of god, from the anthropomorphic deities of the Greeks to the omni-potent god of Christianity. Some gods are all-powerful, all-knowing and all-good, while others are not. Some gods are objects of reverence, while others are not. Some gods communicate with man, while others do not. Differences such as these make it impossible to give a detailed description of a god that will encompass every religion – and securing widespread agreement on the meaning of "god" is a formidable, if not impossible task. (1989, p.31)

Similarly, Bradley notes the importance of getting clarity on this score:

> If someone tells you that he or she believes in God, it makes perfect sense to ask, "Which god?" Is it the Hebraic god Yahweh as revealed in the Tanakh (roughly, the Old Testament)? Is it the God the father, God incarnate in Jesus, as revealed in the New Testament? Is it Allah as revealed in the Qur'ran? Or is it a deist god? Each believer will use the noun "God" as a proper name for his or her own object of worship or respect and is likely to insist that their object of reference is different from the god referred to by followers of other religions, denominations, or sects. And they would be right to do so. Each god differs from all the others in the properties her or she is supposed to possess. Hence they cannot be identical. (2015, p.96)

However, in order to make this admittedly formidable task somewhat tractable, it is perhaps useful to distinguish between two major conceptions of God viz. *personalist* conceptions and *impersonalist* conceptions. Once that has been attended to, then we will be in a better position to more clearly appreciate what it is that people can be said to either believe or disbelieve.

A3.4.1. <u>IMPERSONALIST CONCEPTIONS OF GOD</u>

That one could even conceive of an impersonal God (or gods) will, indeed, seem peculiar to many. However, if we are content to acknowledge the existence of impersonal forces

and entities in the natural world (e.g. gravitation, electro-magnetism, as well as the strong and weak nuclear forces) then why should there not, analogously, be a plethora of impersonal forces or entities in the supernatural world? Perhaps there is even one ultimate and overarching impersonal force or entity that deserves the moniker 'God'?

Without attempting to provide an exhaustive list of impersonalist conceptions of God, two examples are worth mentioning. First, the Mimasa School of Hinduism, conceives of the words of the Veda (a sacred Sanskrit text) as describing a set of eternal, sacred and transcendent *vibrations* or *vocables* that constitute the Divine and upon which the existence and order of the natural world ultimately depend. Moreover such vocables, by their very nature, make moral demands on human conduct in order to maintain the structure and order of the natural world. (Griffiths, 2005, pp.60-66). Second, the Advaita Vendanta School of Hinduism, appeals to a monistic and unified view of reality in which the so called 'natural world' of differentiated and variegated things is really an illusion (Maya) and that, in truth, there is only transcendent and ultimately salvific reality – Brahman - with which each human person or soul (Atman) is identical. (Griffiths, 2005, pp.67-72).

Such impersonal conceptions are mentioned not because they will be the subject matter of our discussion going forward, nor because I consider them particularly plausible, but rather because such clear examples provide an important philosophical and intellectual foil to the personalist conceptions of God which dominate contemporary discourse in philosophy of religion. In light of the fact that millions (if not billions) of human persons subscribe to such impersonalist conceptions, it is crucial to keep such examples firmly

in mind when we finally turn our attention to a more detailed explication of the **Argument from Doxastic Discord** in **Part B**.

A3.4.2. PERSONALIST CONCEPTIONS OF GOD[31]

In contrast to impersonal conceptions of God stand personal conceptions. The idea that God is to be understood in *personal* terms is without doubt the ubiquitous view of the average person in the Anglophone West and is certainly the *orthodox* view of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is also to be mentioned, at this juncture, that personalist conceptions of the Divine should in no way be thought to limit the number of Gods that there are thought to exist.[32]

But what is a person? While this is a vexed metaphysical question all its own[33], the common sense notion of a person will suit our purposes admirably. One might say that a person is the sort of being that has mental states[34] and can, at the very least, think and

[31] We must here distinguish between the traditions of **cataphatic** *(via positiva)* and **apophatic** *(via negativa)* theology. The cataphatic tradition takes the view that one is epistemically justified, at least to a certain extent, in ascribing positive properties to God (i.e. being able to articulate what God *is*). The apophatic tradition takes the contrary view that nothing, or at least very little, can be said about God's positive properties and, at best, we are only epistemically justified in saying what God is *not*. The latter tradition seeks to emphasize the inherent mysteriousness, ineffability and distinctness of God (often at the expense of his rational intelligibility), while the former seeks to emphasize God's rational intelligibility to human persons (often at the expense of his mystery, ineffability and distinctness) (Smith, 1989). I shall assume that something like the cataphatic tradition is correct and that something rationally intelligible can be said about what God *is* while still preserving his purported ontological distinctness.

[32] We can think here of the ancient Aztec, Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Norse pantheons as prototypical historical examples. Furthermore, in Hinduism, the Smarta tradition advocates the existence and worship of five personal deities that are, themselves, personal avatars of a deeper impersonal reality (viz. Brahman).

[33] This is the synchronic problem of personal identity that Robert Nozick refers to when he asks '[w]hat am I? What kind of entity, what kind of being? To what exactly does the term "I" refer?' (1981, p.27).

[34] This leaves open the challenging question of the metaphysical characterization of mental states. Of course, a Metaphysical Naturalist would likely argue that mental states: (i) are theoretically reducible to types of physical states of the central nervous system (**Central State Materialism**), or (ii) are

be aware of itself and its environment. A person is, thus, capable of having her own cognitive and non-cognitive mental states. A person can, accordingly, have beliefs, knowledge, desires, emotions, perceptions, values and attitudes toward herself and the world. Furthermore, a person can reason and deliberate about her behaviour and how she ought to act in the world. Relatedly, a person has the capacity to plan courses of action and can execute those plans. John Locke provided a useful account of personhood along these lines when he wrote:

> We must consider what *person* stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking and seems essential to it; it being impossible for anyone to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive. (1976 [1689], p.162)

A person can also generally communicate with other persons and be communicated with (Swinburne, 1993 [1977], pp.101-103). A person is, thus, an entity that is capable of 'conscious, interactive, and positively meaningful relationship' (Schellenberg, 2015, p.38). This conception of a personal divinity who interacts with the natural world and who relates to human persons, sits at the core of the three major Abrahamic religions[35]:

> The God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is supposed to care for his creatures, know their innermost hopes and fears, respond to their prayers, strengthen them against adversity, share in their joy, console them in their sorrow and grief, judge their deficiencies, and forgive them their sins. These divine activities are *personal*; they could issue only from a being with beliefs and desires similar, in some respects at least,

theoretically reducible to a complex set of causal capacities (i.e. functional states) that could be realized in a panoply of physical systems (**Functionalism**), or (iii) are non-reductive and emergent states that metaphysically supervene on physical states (**Non-Reductive Materialism**). (Fasser, 2017, p.28).

[35] This personal conception of God is also central to other lesser known religions such as the Baha'i and Sikh religions for example.

> to ours. Any characterization of God that denied him these personal activities or negotiated them away in favour of some advantage to philosophical theology would be rightly regarded by believers as akin to replacing your loved ones with their cardboard cutouts. (Mann, 2005, p.35)

For these three religions such a conception of God gives 'to ultimism a face, one might say (quite a familiar one).' (Schellenberg, p.20). However, if this is all that there was to being God then God would be very much like any other human person. There must, therefore, be important properties which can only be predicated of God and which *distinguish* him[36] from human persons. God's distinctness is thought to be secured by his being a particular *sort* of person. Accordingly, God conceived here as a **transcendent** token is thought to be metaphysically 'above and beyond' the natural order and thus cannot be thought of as a physical person or otherwise beholden to the laws of nature.[37] God is thus conceived rather as a **non-physical,** which is to say, **immaterial** person. God is, in short, a disembodied and **omnipresent** mind (Swinburne, 1993 [1977], pp.104-106; Craig, 2008, p.152). Georges Ray sums it up as follows 'God is a supernatural, psychological being, that is, a being not subject to ordinary physical limitations but capable of some or other mental state, such as knowing, caring, loving, disapproving . . .' (2010, p.246).

It is also supposed that if the natural order is conceived of as a four dimensional Minkowskian space-time manifold then God must be a person that does not exist in the

[36] The use of the masculine pronoun is simply traditional. God, although conceived of as a person, is not thought to have a sex or a gender.

[37] I understand the 'laws of nature' to be synthetically true universal or statistical descriptions that support counter-factual and subjunctive propositions (i.e. have modal force), and which are confirmed *a posteriori* (i.e. empirically) by their instances. (Bradley, 2015).

dimension of differentiated time or three dimensional extensional space, but rather exists **spacelessly** and **timelessly**.[38] God is thus an **eternal** person and will, accordingly, last forever i.e. he is everlasting (Swinburne, 1993 [1977], pp.217-218; Craig, 2008, p.152). Furthermore, although God is a person, he is an **immutable** or **changeless** person and, accordingly, does not change in his essential character traits diachronically (Swinburne, 1993 [1977], pp.219-223; Craig, 2008, p.152). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, God is thought to be a person that could not have failed to exist and is thus **necessary** de re.[39] God is thus considered to be unlike the natural world (and its proper parts) which are **contingent** and which could have failed to exist. (Plantinga, 1974).[40]

In addition to these qualities, God is thought to be a person who has historically done certain things and performed certain actions. For example, God is understood to be the person who **designed** the natural world (Craig, 2008, pp.170-172) and who freely chose to **create** the natural world (including human persons) *ex nihilo*[41] through a divine act of **intentional will** (Swinburne, 1993 [1977], pp. 130-134, p.145; Craig, 2008, pp.152-154).[42]

---

[38] Some, like Craig, have argued that God, who existed timelessly sans the natural world, 'entered into' real temporal relations (i.e. entered into time) once he created the first instant of the natural world through a divine act of will (i.e. agent causation) (2008, p.154). Prima facie, if God is supposed to hear and respond to prayer, to perform public and private miracles or to engage in acts of revelation and theophany, then something like this would need to be correct. I am willing to assume, for the purposes of this discussion, that *if* God created the natural world *then* he has been in time since creation. For an alternative view that conceives of God as a completely a-temporal being that can nevertheless relate to the temporal world. See: (Leftow, 1989; Stump & Kretzman, 1981).

[39] We must distinguish between **de re** necessity and **de dicto** necessity. The former refers to necessity that can be predicated of *objects*. The latter refers to necessity that can be predicated of *propositions*. (Grayling, 1997, p.54)

[40] This form of *logical necessity* is stronger than Swinburne is willing to grant to God. For Swinburne, God is necessary *only* in the sense that: 'God does not depend for his existence on himself or on anything else. . . His existence is the ultimate brute fact. Yet being the sort of being which he essentially is, everything else in the universe depends on him, and must do so – for he is by his nature the ultimate source of things. Hence his existence is not merely *an* ultimate brute fact, but *the* ultimate brute fact.' (1993 [1977], p.277)

[41] Out of nothing.

[42] God, in this sense, is understood to be a divine artificer who both (i) brought the natural world into being out of nothing, and (ii) fashioned it in accordance with his preferences and purposes. This must be

God is also understood to be the person who intentionally **sustains** the existence of the natural world[43] (Mann, 2005, pp.38-41) and who has **providentially** ordered the natural world for the **ultimate purpose** of cultivating a relationship with human persons and thereby granting them a knowledge of himself. (Craig, 2010, p.163).[44] God's providence has, in turn, been understood as his 'knowingly and lovingly directing each and every event involving each and every creature towards the ends he has ordained for them.' (Flint, 1998, p.12).

Finally, God is understood to be a superlative person. More particularly, God is thought to be a **perfect** person and is, thus, a being 'than which nothing greater can be thought' (Anselm, 1994 [1077], p.93). Such Anselmian acme is cashed out by an appeal to three further positive properties predicated of God. Namely, God is said to be a superlatively *powerful*, *knowledgeable* and *moral* person. This is the beating heart of what is known as 'perfect being' theology.[45] God is thus understood to be an **omnipotent**, **omniscient** and **omni-benevolent** person. This can be thought of as God's **omni-perfection.** (Millican, 2004). Such omni-perfection, together with his other attributes, are further taken to be **essential** to God. Accordingly, God is not supposed to 'possess [his] various excellences in some merely adventitious manner.' (Findlay, 1948, p.180).

---

contrasted with the more *limited* cosmic demiurge of Plato and Aristotle (i.e. the God of the philosophers) who simply fashioned the world, as best he could, out of pre-existing and uncreated materials.

[43] God, in this sense, is understood as the divine hypostasis of the natural world.

[44] The ultimate telos of human existence is thus understood to be proper *relationship with,* and *knowledge of,* God.

[45] Some have sought to identify the Anselmian God (viz. the greatest conceivable being) not with an *omni-perfect being* but rather with a *maximal being* that has the maximally consistent, or compossible, set of knowledge, power and benevolence, whatever that turns out to be after our best theoretical analysis. (Nagasawa, 2011). Whatever the merits of such an approach may be, it (i) represents a heterodox theological view, and (ii) embraces an impoverished and ever-atrophying concept of God. In response to such a view, one may be tempted to exclaim with the author of the Book of Samuel 'Oh, how the mighty have fallen…' (2 Samuel 1:27).

It is taken as a natural corollary of God's omni-perfection, and more particularly his superlative goodness, that he is the appropriate object of worship, reverence and honour by human persons and that human persons ought to worship him. (Swinburne, 1993 [1977], pp.292-303). As William Rowe writes 'central to the idea of God is that God is worthy of unreserved praise, admiration and worship. And when we seriously reflect on the qualities in a being that are most deserving of unreserved praise, admiration, and worship, we naturally think of qualities such as knowledge, wisdom, power, goodness and justice.' (2005, p.15).

- God, in this Anselmian sense, can then be minimally defined as follows: *(i) a necessary and essentially transcendent, timeless (sans creation), spaceless, eternal (everlasting), changeless, immaterial, omnipresent and omni-perfect person (ii) who, by means of an intentional act of will, designed and created the natural world and who continues to sustain it, and (iii) who providentially ordered the natural world for the purpose of cultivating a personal relationship with human persons.*[46]

Finally, it is an obvious corollary of this definition that God is himself understood to be willing and able to cultivate a personal relationship with human persons and he is understood to have done so both in the past and the present. I take this definition of God to be an accurate description of the ultimate divine token that constitutes the common metaphysical and theological object of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and

[46] This understanding is aligned almost entirely with Richard Swinburne's pithy definition of God as 'a person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who is eternal, free, able to do anything, knows everything, is perfectly good, is the proper object of human worship and obedience, the creator and sustainer of the universe.' (1993 [1977], p.1).

which description should be largely unobjectionable to orthodox adherents of those religions.[47]

A3.5. THEISM AND ATHEISM

We are now in a position to properly articulate the core commitments of **Theism** and **Atheism** respectively. Each view takes a stand on the truth or falsity of a given proposition.[48] The proposition being proffered for rational consideration and assessment is 'God exists'.[49] The definition of God that shall be considered is the personalist Anselmian definition articulated above. The proposition should be understood in a **realist**, as opposed to an **anti-realist**, sense. In other words I shall take the proposition 'God exists', and religious propositions in general, as robust cognitive and extensional claims of 'onto-theology'. As Simon Blackburn explains:

> Onto-theology makes existence claims. It takes religious language in the same spirit in which people calling themselves scientific realists take science. It makes claims about what exists, and these claims are more or less reasonable and convincing, and when they are true they point to an explanation of the way things are in one respect or another. Onto-theology believes that there is, literally, a three-decker universe, somehow governed by a unified intelligence akin to a person who has various plans

[47] This is not to say that this definition accords precisely with how God is portrayed in the Old Testament, New Testament or the Quran. This definition should rather be thought of as an intellectualized, refined and theologically sophisticated God of Abraham.

[48] I am endorsing a **Minimalist Correspondence Theory of Truth** whereby propositions are taken to be either true or false in virtue of their standing, or failing to stand, in the 'appropriate relationship' to the world. I understand the 'appropriate relationship' as being 'an accurate representation of the world'. On this view, the world can be thought of as consisting of 'states of affairs' or 'facts' that ground the truth of propositions. Accordingly, on this view, beliefs are *transparent* in that they inherit their truth or falsity from the truth or falsity of the propositions which constitute their representational objects. (Bradley, n.d.).

[49] I understand propositions to be (i) the appropriate abstract and representational objects of rational assessment, and (ii) truth-bearers (i.e. truth-apt).

> and preferences, and rewards and punishments at his disposal. The objects of religious belief – god or the gods – make things happen. They are part of the causal order. Religious beliefs are among the kinds of things they make happen. Onto-theologians see no real difference between the way a chair explains my perception of a chair and subsequent belief that there is a chair there in front of me, and the way in which God explains the production of fire in a bush and the appearance of a couple of stones with commandments written on them.' (2007, p.183).

In light of the aforegoing, we can then define Theism and Atheism, for the purpose of our discussion, as follows:

- *Theism is the thesis that the proposition 'God exists' is true. (i.e. that the proposition 'God does not exist' is false)*[50]

- *Atheism is the thesis that the proposition 'God exists' is false. (i.e. that the proposition 'God does not exist' is true)*[51]

Theism, so construed, is a thesis postulating the literal mind-independent existence of God. Atheism, while taking the proposition 'God exists' to express a cognitively meaningful proposition, charges Theism with being an error theory. In other words, Atheism contends that, because of a failure of reference, Theism, and all propositions

[50] So understood, Theism should then be contrasted with (i) **Deism** which asserts that God is a non-interventionist deity and 'is considered to be remote from the world and not immediately involved with its concerns', (ii) **Pantheism** which asserts 'God is identical with nature', and (iii) **Polytheism** which asserts there to be 'more than one God' (Martin, 2005, p.2).

[51] This accords with what has been termed **Positive Atheism** and should be distinguished from **Negative Atheism** which simply implies the psychological *absence* of a belief in God. Atheism (whether of the positive or negative varieties) can also be understood in either a **broad** or **narrow** sense. The former is a thesis about the non-existence of *any* Gods, while the latter is a thesis about the specific non-existence of the Anselmian God of Theism. (Martin, 2007).

derived from Theism, are systematically and uniformly false.[52] Atheism should, therefore, be distinguished from two related views viz. **Igtheism** and **Theological Non-cognitivism.** The former is the thesis that the proposition 'God exists' is cognitively meaningless because the concept of God is incoherent, while the latter is the thesis that the locution 'God exists', properly understood, fails to express a proposition at all.[53]

An Atheist is a person who believes Atheism (and disbelieves Theism), and (ii) a Theist is a person who believes Theism (and disbelieves Atheism).[54] The belief or disbelief in question could be either *occurent* or *dispositional*. Both occurent and dispositional beliefs are beliefs actually held by a person. The difference lies in the fact that an occurent belief is one presently held[55] whereas a dispositional belief is one that would be occurent given some appropriate realizing stimulus or context.[56]

Furthermore, insofar as a person identifies as either an Atheist or Theist he thereby announces to the world what he *believes* or *disbelieves* accordingly. It is necessary then to conceptually cater for the person who neither believes nor disbelieves the proposition in question. One could say that such person is in a psychological state of *doubt* about the proposition 'God exists'. This state of doubt could be thought of as the defining

---

[52] So construed, Atheism is in many respects simply the theological analogue of *error theory* in meta-ethics. (Mackie, 1977).

[53] Such a view interprets religious language in general, including the locution 'God exists' in particular, as really being 'symbolic or expressive, orientating us toward each other, or toward our place in this world' or as really 'expressing stances' toward the 'mysterious regions of space and time.' (Blackburn, 2007, p.184).

[54] I understand a 'belief' to be a cognitive mental state whereby a person endorses, or gives his noetic assent to, the truth of a given proposition. Similarly, I understand 'disbelief' to be a cognitive mental state whereby a person endorses, or gives his noetic assent, to the falsity of a given proposition.

[55] E.g. 'I believe that I am now reading this sentence'.

[56] E.g. If asked what you believed the chemical composition of water to be then you would answer 'I believe water is H2O'.

feature of **Agnosticism**.[57] According to Martin, Agnosticism, so understood, is incompatible with Positive Atheism but is compatible with Negative Atheism insofar as the Agnostic, precisely in virtue of his doubt, lacks a belief in God (2011,p.2).[58]

Finally, it is important for conceptual clarity to mention the relationship between Atheism and Metaphysical Naturalism. To endorse Atheism (whether positive or negative) is not necessarily to endorse Metaphysical Naturalism. As we have already seen, Metaphysical Naturalism stands in contrast to the ontological *type* Metaphysical Supernaturalism. On the other hand, Atheism and Theism are theses about a particular *token* supernatural entity. Therefore, one can consistently be an Atheist without being a Metaphysical Naturalist.[59] However, to endorse Metaphysical Naturalism is, of logical necessity, to endorse Atheism.[60]

A.4. GREAT MAKING ATTRIBUTES OF AN ANSELMIAN GOD

It is important at this stage in the discussion to turn our attention to the three omni-attributes that are supposed to be the essential ornaments festooning an Anselmian God viz. omnipotence, omniscience and omni-benevolence. I wish to emphasize that the

[57] Although perhaps another term like 'Theological Scepticism' would be more appropriate.
[58] There is, however, a different way to conceive of Agnosticism which defines the position solely in terms of whether a person can *know* the proposition 'God exists' to be true or false. **Weak Agnosticism** claims the proposition is unknown. **Strong Agnosticism** claims the proposition is, in principle, unknowable. On this conception one ought to distinguish between **Agnosticism** and **Gnosticism**. These two positions then become orthogonal to, and compatible with, either Atheism or Theism respectively. This results in a matrix of four possible positions (i) Agnostic Atheism (ii) Agnostic Theism (iii) Gnostic Atheism (iv) Gnostic Theism.
[59] This is not to deny that it is a contingent fact that many Atheists also happen to be Metaphysical Naturalists.
[60] More particularly Positive Atheism of the broad variety.

purpose here is not to offer an exhaustive or definitive critique of the internal logical coherence (or incoherence) of these attributes, whether considered individually or in conjunction with each other (i.e. whether they are logically compossible). Much ink has been spilled in that philosophical war of ideas and to do justice to the debates surrounding each attribute would take us far beyond the scope of our discussion. Nevertheless, some analysis is necessary, in order to provide a plausible functional account of each attribute that will serve one principal purpose: to sufficiently capture God's purported acme in a way that will be reasonably acceptable to the reflective Theist and Atheist alike, when discussing the **Argument from Doxastic Discord**, and which will not be an outright affront to logical ratiocination.

A.4.1. <u>OMNIPOTENCE</u>[61]

Central to the idea of God is the idea that he is essentially (i.e. non-accidentally)[62] *all powerful*. Of course, explicating what the concept of being 'all powerful' entails is an unenviably challenging task. Some thinkers sought to understand superlative power in an absolute, plenary and utterly unconstrained sense. Let us call this the **Voluntarist Account**. On such an account God is understood to be capable of doing *literally*

[61] The etymology lies with the Latin words 'omni' (all) and 'potens' (power).

[62] Properties are classically categorized into two kinds - **intrinsic** and **extrinsic**. Intrinsic properties are properties that can be predicated of the thing *itself* (e.g. the roundness of a circle). Extrinsic properties are properties that can be predicated of a thing only *in virtue of its relation* to some other thing (e.g. I am a brother in virtue of the fact that I am a male and there exists at least one other person who shares the same biological parents as me). Intrinsic properties are generally divided into two further categories – **essential** and **accidental**. The former are properties that something must have *necessarily* to be the sort of thing it is (e.g. it is an essential property of the element Gold that it has atomic number 79). The latter are properties that something has *contingently* but might not have had without thereby ceasing to be the sort of thing it is (e.g. it is an accidental property of me that I have hazel eyes but I could plausibly have had green eyes and still been me).

anything. (Descartes, 1984 [1641]; Conee, 1991). God is capable, for instance, of performing *logically impossible* tasks. For example, God could draw a square circle on a piece of paper or make it be the case that I am both taller and shorter than my brother at the same time.

Such a view is deeply problematic. Insofar as it permits God to perform contradictory actions such an account requires the rejection of a fundamental and axiomatic principle of classic propositional logic (viz. the axiom of non-contradiction).[63] Such an axiom is plausibly taken to be a necessary precondition for rational intelligibility itself and cannot be abandoned. It is for this principal reason that embracing such an account is considered to be 'intellectually disastrous' (Everitt, 2010). The upshot is that whatever tasks God can purportedly perform, he must, at the very least, 'bend the knee' to what is logically possible.

In light of the obvious implausibility of such an account, some have advanced the idea that God can perform any and all tasks that are *logically possible*. Let us call this the **Absolute Logical Task Account**. On such an account, there exists a certain set of actions that are logically impossible and a set of actions that are logically possible. Logically impossible actions are, properly understood, pseudo-tasks (i.e. to the extent they entail contradictions they fail to specify a *genuine* task at all) while the latter specify genuine tasks (Swinburne, 1993 [1977]). God's omnipotence is to be understood only in

[63] The three axioms of classic propositional logic are (i) the axiom of identity **□∀A [A=A]** (ii) the axiom of non-contradiction **□∀A [~ (A&~A)]** and (iii) the axiom of excluded middle **□∀A [A v ~A]**.

the sense that he is capable of performing all actions, or tasks, that fall into the latter category (i.e. tasks or actions which are logically coherent and non-contradictory).

The well-known problem for this sort of account is a modified version of the **Paradox of the Stone**, insofar as it purports to describe a logically possible task that God cannot perform, namely, the creation of a stone of mass *m* such that its *own creator* cannot lift it. Such an action is undoubtedly logically possible. Accordingly, it falls into the category of genuine tasks. I can perform this task. Could God? If the answer is 'no', then there is a task I can perform that God cannot (viz. create a stone of mass *m* that its own creator cannot lift). If the answer is 'yes' then there is still a task that God cannot perform (viz. lift a stone of mass *m*). After all, last considered, lifting a stone of *any* mass *m* will always be a logically possible task. Either way there appears to be a logically possible task God is unable to perform. In short, this account gives rise to the problem of first person reflexives or essentially indexical tasks (i.e. the problem of logically possible tasks that *I* can perform but which God could not perform or reproduce if challenged to do so)(Grim,2011).

Taking this problem to heart, some have tried to relativize the notion of omnipotence such that God is capable of doing, or performing all tasks, which are logically possible *for him* to perform. This could be called the **Relative Logical Task Account**. On this account, we are to understand that there are a set of logically possible tasks that God cannot perform given *his* essential nature (whatever that happens to be). Given his essentially omnipotent nature God cannot create a stone of mass *m* such that he cannot lift it. This is a logically impossible task *for him* given the sort of being that he is

essentially. Nevertheless such a limitation is not thought to count against his omnipotence.

However, a well-known problem that arises at this point is that this sort of relative account of omnipotence seems to entail the rather unpalatable (or amusing) consequence that (i) anything that exists, and (ii) which has an essential nature, and (iii) which is capable of performing at least one task, thereby becomes omnipotent. (Grim, 2011). The classic example is of the possible person – McEar - who is characterized by having only one essential property, namely, the ability to scratch his ear with his arm. McEar has an essential nature (like God). McEar can perform at least one activity (like God). And McEar can perform only those actions that are logically consistent with his nature (like God). Yet it seems patently absurd to say that McEar is omnipotent! (Plantinga, 1967). Omnipotence seems to have become a rather trivial and banal affair.

In light of the above, some thinkers have sought to circumvent these problems entirely by construing God's omnipotence not as the capacity or ability to perform actions or tasks, but rather as having the capacity to actualize any logically possible *state of affairs* (Ross, 1980). There are three ways to potentially classify 'states of affairs', namely, '[s]ome states of affairs are *necessary*; they are such that they simply cannot fail to be actual. Other states of affairs are *contingent*; they are such that they can be actual and they can fail to be actual. And still others are *impossible*; they are such that they simply cannot be actual.' (Rowe, 2005, p.17).

However, much in the way that it is not required of God that he be capable of performing a logically impossible task, it makes no sense to say that God could actualize an impossible state of affairs. Furthermore, it does not make sense to say that God could actualize a necessary state of affairs because a necessary state of affairs *must* be actual regardless of what any being (including God) does, or does not do, to make the state of affairs actual. Accordingly, talk of God's omnipotence in terms of 'states of affairs' must be limited to those states of affairs that are contingent in nature. In other words, those states of affairs that might, or might not, be actual.

A state of affairs can be explicated further in terms of the semantics of possible worlds. A possible world is a maximally consistent state of affairs that *could* have been actual but is not actual.[64] Such a world does not involve or entail any logical contradictions in its description. On the other hand, an impossible world is a state of affairs that could never be actual. Such a world involves or entails at least one logical contradiction in its description. The actual world is simply a possible world that *does* obtain. This could be termed the **World Actualizing Account**.

On such an account *if* there was a maximally consistent way the world might have been *then* God could have actualized *that* world.[65] So far so good. Of course, if we also accept

[64] The metaphysical status of possible worlds is itself a contentious issue. We can divide the views into two general camps – **Realist** and **Anti-Realist**. A proponent of the former believes that the extension of the locution 'possible world' is a real existing (but non-actual) world (**Modal Realism**). A proponent of the latter believes that the extension of such a locution is some abstract object, such as (i) a maximally consistent set of propositions (**De Dicto Ersatzism**), or (ii) a maximally consistent, but un-instantiated, set of properties (**De Re Ersatzism**), or (iii) a maximally consistent fictional story (**Fictionalism**). I shall assume that some form of anti-realism is correct.

[65] We must distinguish here between two notions of actualization - **strong** and **weak**. The former envisions God himself *directly* bringing about some state of affairs. The latter envisions God bringing

the assumption that God is supposed to have 'entered into' time since the creation of the actual world and that it is logically impossible to alter the past, then it would not be logically possible for him to *now* alter or change the actual world's past (i.e. alter tensed facts about the actual past) (Flint & Fredosso, 1983). Nor would it seem logically possible for God to *now* actualize states of affairs that, in virtue of their past temporal actualization, are unrepeatable (Hoffman & Rosenkrantz, 1980; Rowe, 2005). On such an account, with such qualifications, there appear to be no 'do-overs' or 'repeats' even for an omnipotent deity once he actualizes the world and finds himself in time with the rest of us temporally hamstrung mortals.

Although we will certainly have occasion to revisit the notion of omnipotence, especially in relation to the contentious issue of how much power God has (or does not have) over the actions, choices and beliefs of human persons, I shall take the account we have finally arrived at to be *basically* coherent and to sufficiently capture something very much like what most people mean when they say God is omnipotent. With such an account, suitably qualified, we could venture the following definition of omnipotence:

- *God is omnipotent if and only if: he is capable of (i) actualizing any contingently possible state of affairs 'prior to' the creation of the actual world, and (ii) actualizing any contingently possible state of affairs in the actual world, at the present time t, that (a) is not a state of affairs that has already been actualized prior to time t, or (b) is an otherwise unrepeatable state of affairs.*

about some state of affairs *indirectly* via some other mechanism (e.g. the actions of human persons). (Plantinga, 1978, pp.172-173).

A.4.2. OMNISCIENCE[66]

Central to the idea of God is the notion that he is, in addition to being all powerful, essentially omniscient. Again, filling out the notion of omniscience is no easy task. However, as Grim writes '[t]he core notion of omniscience is undoubtedly that of a being that knows all that is knowable, or all that can be known.' (2011, p.205). This intuitive idea, however, is immediately complicated by the fact that we often distinguish between at least three forms of knowing, namely, *knowing how*, *knowing that* and *knowledge by acquaintance*.

The first sort of knowledge relates to knowing how to perform some action or task (e.g. knowing how to ride a bike or tie one's shoelaces). The second form of knowledge relates to knowing necessary or contingent propositions (e.g. knowing that '2+2=4' or that 'Washington D.C. is the capital of the United States of America'). The third form of knowledge relates to knowledge of visceral, immediate and qualitatively subjective experiences (e.g. knowing the thrill of falling in love with a new paramour or the grief felt at the loss of a close friend). Is God really supposed to know *all* these sorts of things to the maximum degree? Suppose one did think so. We could call this the **Total Knowledge Account**.

However, on reflection, total 'knowledge how' is immediately problematic for the sort of God we are here discussing. One might ask 'Does God know how to find out things

[66] The etymology lies with the Latin words 'omni' (all) and 'scientia' (knowledge)

he does not know?' I, as a person that is ignorant of many things, certainly do know how to do this. However, if God has complete propositional knowledge then God will lack a form of knowing how (viz. to learn things he does not know). On the other hand, if God does know how to find out what he does not know, then there must have been a time when he did not have complete propositional knowledge and was, at one time, imperfect. It would also appear that some kinds of 'knowing how' are limited to entities of certain kinds and are thus precluded from God's divine ken. For example, because I am an embodied entity I know how to balance on one leg. God, being immaterial, lacks a body and thus cannot possibly know how to perform what is essentially a bodily task.

Furthermore, on reflection, total 'knowledge by acquaintance' also seems impossible for the sort of God we are discussing. For example, one of the feelings a human person might know is the feeling of disappointment when she fails at a task she might otherwise have succeeded at. God, being omnipotent, can never fail at a task. Thus God could never have knowledge by acquaintance of such disappointment. Furthermore, God, precisely in virtue of his omniscience, could not have the immediate and visceral awareness of what it is like to be ignorant, which is something human persons know all too well.

It is for reasons such as these that God's knowledge has tended to be limited to *propositional knowledge*.[67] Let us call this the **Propositional Knowledge Account**.[68] On such an account God has all propositional knowledge regarding necessary and contingent truths and thus holds all true beliefs as part of his mental life (Swinburne, 1993 [1977]). Two immediate qualifications need to be made. First, simply saying God has all propositional knowledge is insufficient because it would not preclude God from also holding false beliefs. Believing false propositions is obviously *infra dig* for an omni-perfect God. Accordingly, any account of omniscience will also need to exclude, either explicitly or by implication, false beliefs from God's mental life. Second, there is a well-known problem for such an account which is analogous to the problem that first person reflexive tasks posed for omnipotence. This is the problem of knowledge *de se*.[69]

The problem is that there appear to be some contingent propositions that can be known, but which are such that they are essentially first person propositions. That is to say, there appear to be a class of contingent propositions that only *I* can know. The classic example is that of following a trail of spilled sugar around a supermarket in the hope of discovering who is making the mess, only to discover the sugar is emanating from a torn sugar packet in *my* cart. Upon such a discovery of this fact, the natural realisation is that '*I* am now making a mess!' God might well know the different and distinct proposition

[67] Edmund Gettier counter-examples aside (1963), I shall assume that knowledge is something like *justified true belief*. Furthermore, I understand *a priori* knowledge (or justification) to be acquired in the absence of sensory experience (i.e. by means of pure reason, logic and deduction) whereas I understand *a posteriori* knowledge (or justification) to be acquired by means of sensory experience.

[68] Some thinkers have offered accounts of omniscience which seek to capture God's knowledge without recourse to the notion of belief (Alston, 1986), while others have offered completely non-propositional accounts which understand God's omniscience in terms of maximal and unsurpassable cognitive power. (Taliaferro, 1985). I will not be concerned with these alternative accounts.

[69] Of and relating to oneself.

'Eron is now making a mess' or even 'He is now making a mess'. But God surely cannot know what *I* know when *I* know the proposition '*I* am now making a mess'. (Perry, 1973).

Recognizing this difficulty some have sought to limit the propositional knowledge to what it is logically possible for God to know according to *his* nature. (Nagasawa, 2003). Of course, as with any attempt to relativize an omni-perfection to God's essential nature, this move opens up an analogous challenge to that which bedevilled the property of omnipotence. Instead of McEar, we can imagine McIgnorant. McIgnorant is a possible person whose essential nature is such that he only knows a meagre number of true propositions. It is logically impossible for him to know anything beyond the paucity of propositions that constitute *his* propositional knowledge. Yet on a relativized account of omniscience (as opposed to a plenary account) we would be forced to conclude that McIgnorant is as omniscient as God. As with McEar's easily purchased 'omnipotence', this is patently absurd. (Grim, 2011).

The upshot of this brief analysis is that it would appear that one is pushed to embrace an account of omniscience that is limited to propositional knowledge of all necessary and contingent truths. Such an account would entail believing all and only truths[70] (i.e. no falsehoods) and would have to exclude, on pain of incoherence, contingent propositions of the sort that constitute knowledge *de se* of other persons. What other types of contingent truth is God thought generally to possess? Classically, part of what God is supposed to know is all temporal facts. That is to say, he is supposed to know all

[70] I am assuming that there *is* a set of all truths that could be known. However, even the idea that there could be such a set has been challenged. (Grim, 2011).

true propositions about the *past*, *present* and *future* of the world he actually created. Let us call this the **Classical Account**.

Granting such an account, God must then know what I will do next Thursday. Intuitively this is a future temporal fact about the actual world. However, philosophical aporia immediately arises. Let us suppose, for example, that God now believes the true proposition that next Thursday I will go skiing. However, if God now believes this proposition then this seems to imply that I could not do anything but go skiing next Thursday. Yet if it is the case that I necessarily go skiing next Thursday then this appears to vitiate my free will.[71] On this view, God's knowledge of all future action would seem to imply that all future action is necessary and could, therefore, *not* have been otherwise. On the other hand, if I do act otherwise next Thursday (e.g. go bowling instead) then this would seem to imply that God *now* believes a falsehood and thus lacks knowledge of a future temporal fact.

Assuming then the truth of Metaphysical Libertarianism[72], the dilemma for this account can be framed as follows: Either God knows what I will do next Thursday or he does not

[71] Free will is here understood in the **Metaphysical Libertarian** sense. This is the incompatibilist thesis that asserts (i) the existence of human free will is incompatible with causal and/or nomological and/or theological determinism, and (ii) causal and/or nomological and/or theological determinism is false with respect to human persons. The implication of such a thesis is that human free will does exist. On such a view, two conditions are often thought to be *necessary* and which must be jointly satisfied in order for a human person to be truly free: (i) human persons must be the ultimate undetermined conscious authors of their thoughts and actions (fons et origo) and (ii) human persons must have been able to really act other than how they did in fact act (principle of alternative possibilities) (Harris, 2012).

[72] The second account of free will is known as **Compatibilism** or **Soft Determinism**. This is the thesis that asserts the existence of human free will is not logically incompatible with the truth of causal and/or nomological and/or theological determinism. (Iredale, 2011). **Hard Determinism**, by contrast, is the incompatibilist thesis that asserts (i) the existence of human free will is incompatible with causal and/or nomological and/or theological determinism, and (ii) causal and/or nomological and/or theological determinism is true. The implication of such a thesis is that human free will does *not* exist. (Iredale, 2011).

know. If God knows what I will do next Thursday then I could not do otherwise next Thursday and, thus, I do not act freely. If God does not know what I will do next Thursday then God lacks knowledge of a future temporal fact and the Classical Account is false. The proponent of the Classical Account appears to be caught in the horns of a dilemma. He is either impaled by a denial of human freedom on the one hand, or a denial of the truth of the Classical account on the other. To embrace the first horn of this dilemma is to succumb to **Theological Fatalism.**[73] (Hasker, 1985). To embrace the second horn of this dilemma is to endorse **Open Theism**.[74] (Hasker, 1998; 2004). To embrace either of these two views entails believing that God's knowledge of the future is incompatible with robust human free will. Something has to give.

Given this dilemma, Open Theism might initially be thought to be philosophically and theologically preferable to Theological Fatalism. If one must choose between the two horns surely it is better to limit God's knowledge of the future than abandon human freedom? However, for the proponent of the Classical Account, Open Theism will likely represent a philosophically untenable and borderline heretical restriction on God's omniscience for two principal reasons.

First, to embrace Open Theism would seem to severely cripple God's purported omni-perfection. After all, knowing the future is something that most people believe should be ascribed to a perfect and all-knowing being. Second, to embrace Open Theism would

[73] This is the thesis that necessarily if God foreknows that X will happen then X happens necessarily.
[74] This is the thesis that God does not know temporally future facts about the actual world either because (i) there are no such future temporal facts to know at all (i.e. the future is metaphysically open), or (ii) if there are future temporal facts it is simply impossible for anyone, including God, to know them until the fact 'occurs' or becomes 'instantiated' in reality (i.e. the future is epistemically open).

seem to do substantial violence to the notion of God's purported providential ordering of the actual world. If, as Open Theism suggests, God does not know a significant class of temporally contingent facts (i.e. facts about the future) then there is no way for God to ensure, or guarantee, an *ultimately good* providential result for human persons in the actual world. However, it is precisely this sort of providential ordering that is supposed to be absolutely central to Theism. As Taylor emphasizes:

> If we, with our merely finite wills and intellects, may divert creation from its divinely decreed course, then it would seem to follow that history is not after all guaranteed to culminate in a perfectly good outcome. Only if the outcome of history is guaranteed by god in a way that is beyond our capacity to undermine can the providential hypothesis even purport to provide invincible armour against despair. (2007, pp.152-153).

To the contrary, Open Theism would seem to entail that God took a gargantuan existential gamble when creating the actual world and populating it with free human persons. In short, one appears driven to the conclusion that God must have crossed his immaterial fingers and *hoped* it would all work out for the best. Is an omni-perfect God *really* supposed to have created the actual world and all human persons in it on a wing and a prayer? If nothing else, Open Theism would seem to indict God as a colossally careless cosmic creator. For reasons such as these, this view will likely prove anathema for proponents of the Classical Account. (Geirrson & Losonsky, 2005).

Is the proponent of the Classical Account then forced to embrace Theological Fatalism and abandon robust human free will? In other words, is he forced to conclude that God's foreknowledge of the future in the actual world entails human kismet? Well, not

necessarily (no pun intended). One plausible way for the proponent of the Classical Account to resist this conclusion would be to say that (i) such a conclusion would follow *only if* God's foreknowledge of future facts was based on, or grounded in, his *pre-ordination* of those future facts[75], and (ii) God's *mere* or *simple* foreknowledge of future facts does not necessitate those future facts any more than a weather-vane pointing in a particular direction necessitates the direction that the wind is blowing.[76] Let us call this the **Simple Foreknowledge Account.**

On such a view, God's mere foreknowledge of the future does not determine the future but rather the future determines what God's foreknowledge happens to be. This would be to say that God's foreknowledge of future events that occur in the actual world *would* have been different *if* human persons were to make different free choices in the actual world. For example, assume God believes the true proposition at t1 that at t2 I will freely go skiing. However, *if* it should actually turn out that I decide to go bowling instead *then* this would simply mean that God's belief at t1 *would* have been different to what it was.[77]

[75] In other words, that God necessarily knows that the future is X *because* he necessarily willed at creation, that the future will be X and thus there is no other possible future that could obtain.
[76] This is, in essence, to indict Theological Fatalism with committing the **modal fallacy**. (Swartz, 2017). This is the fallacy of confusing the *scope* of a modal operator (whether necessity or possibility) in a conditional proposition. In short, it does not follow from that fact that necessarily if God foreknows X that X occurs necessarily. Mere foreknowledge of the truth of a proposition cannot, on its own, alter the proposition's fixed modal status.
[77] This does seem, *prima facie*, to have the rather counterintuitive implication that the actions of human persons can retro-causally 'determine' the truth of the propositions which God believes in the past. Whether this is really retro-causality or simply a weaker form of counter-factual dependence will have to remain unpursued for the purposes of our discussion.

Some thinkers have embraced the Simple Foreknowledge Account and have coupled it with an interesting view that purports to provide an *explanatory mechanism* for how it could even be the case that (i) God acquires knowledge of all temporal facts of the actual world, including future temporal facts, without (ii) destroying robust human freedom, and which (iii) preserves God's providence for the actual world. (Craig, 1999; Flint, 1998; Fredosso, 1998; Plantinga, 1978). This view is known as **Molinism.**[78] Such a view is both theologically attractive and philosophically fecund for the purposes of our discussion of omniscience.

According to such a view, God's knowledge can be organized into three distinct categories and which are ordered into a kind of logical or explanatory hierarchy. First, God is supposed to have pre-volitional knowledge of all necessary propositions (**Natural Knowledge**). Second, God is supposed to have pre-volitional knowledge of *all* contingent counter-factual and subjunctive propositions, which includes an important sub-set of such propositions viz. all subjunctive propositions of human freedom **(Middle Knowledge)**.[79] Third, God has knowledge of all the contingent propositions (past, present and future) about the actual world which he, in fact, chooses to

[78] This view was first expounded by Louis de Molina, a Jesuit theologian and philosopher (1988, [1580]).
[79] This sort of knowledge is known in Latin as *scientia media*. The counter-factual propositions purport to describe what *any* possible human person *would* freely do *if* they were placed in any possible situation. Such propositions thus have the following form: *if* placed in situation S *then* person A *would* freely perform action X. The protasis of the conditional describes the possible counter-factual state of affairs that might obtain. The apodosis of the conditional describes the free action a person *would* perform if such possible state of affairs were to obtain. As Craig explains 'whereas by His natural knowledge God knew what any free creature *could* do in any set of circumstances, now in this second moment God knows what any free creature *would* do in any set of circumstances. This is not because the circumstances causally determine the creature's choice, but simply because that is how the creature would freely choose.' (1989, p.176).

instantiate and bring into existence, including all the propositions about the future of the actual world **(Free Knowledge)**. (Craig, 1989).

The crucial idea, for the purposes of our discussion, is that God's Middle Knowledge is supposed to permit him, 'prior to' his own free decision to create the actual world, to conceptually 'survey' the prodigious panoply of possible worlds on offer. God's scrutiny of the modal landscape allows him to 'survey' all the counter-factuals of human freedom in respect of all possible human persons and which are *not* dependent on God's will or action.[80]

Human freedom is supposedly preserved because, it is argued, there is a set of counter-factual propositions that capture contingent truths about what any possible human person would freely do in any possible situation and which are not determined in any way by God. In other words, such truths are supposed to be truths that are *autonomous* and *independent* of God's will. Nevertheless, God can still achieve a providential ordering of the actual world by choosing a world, from among the panoply of possible worlds, and which he is desirous of actualizing to achieve *his* ultimate ends. Contrary

[80] There appear to be two related problems for this account. The first problem is *epistemic* while the second is *metaphysical*. First, there is the problem of how God is supposed to acquire Middle Knowledge. This could be called the **Justification Problem**. The problem is that (i) the counter-factuals of human freedom are contingent and thus cannot be justified *a priori,* and (ii) the counter-factuals of human freedom cannot be justified *a posteriori* without God simultaneously actualizing those counter-factuals. However, if he were to do this it would destroy the very purpose of Middle Knowledge, namely, to provide the *intermediate* step between God's Natural and Free Knowledge which allows him to providentially order the world. (McCann, 2006). Second, there is the problem of what it could possibly be about reality that should make the counter-factuals of human freedom true. In other words, what are the 'truth makers' or 'truth grounds' that make such counter-factual propositions come out true? This is the **Grounding Problem**. The problem is to explain how such propositions gain their truth value *independently* of God's creative action and without there being any actual human persons in existence prior to creation that could make them true. (McCann, 2006). While these and other objections could be raised against the truth of Molinism, such objections will not be pursued further here.

to Open Theism, God would not be taking an existential gamble when deciding to actualize one possible world with free human persons.

Once again, I take the account we have finally arrived at to represent something very much like what most people believe to be God's state of knowledge and that such an account is *basically* coherent. Given this account, one could venture the following definition of omniscience:

- *God is omniscient if and only if: he believes all and only true necessary and contingent propositions, excluding de se propositions about other persons, but including (i) propositions about the past, present and future of the actual world, as well as (ii) all subjunctive and counter-factual propositions, including (iii) the set of all propositions about the free actions of all possible human persons in all possible worlds.*

A.4.3. OMNI-BENEVOLENCE

We come then to what is, for many people, the most important great making attribute, namely, God's essential and superlative goodness and moral perfection. God is not just supposed to be a know-it-all about the actual world (or all possible worlds). Nor is he supposed to be a tyrannical and authoritarian despot controlling and bending reality according to his every arbitrary whim.[81] Rather, God is supposed to exemplify moral

[81] I am reminded of Christopher Hitchens' scathing indictment of God as, inter alia, 'an unalterable, unchallengeable, tyrannical authority' presiding over 'a celestial North Korea'. Retrieved online on 02/02/2019 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPD1YGghtDk

apotheosis. A corollary of this fact is that God is supposed to necessarily act in a morally exemplary manner when exercising his divine power and will. God's goodness, understood in this way, is meant to imply that it is *logically impossible* for him to perform any evil actions or to command anything that is evil. It is furthermore understood that God performs all morally obligatory and supererogatory acts that can be performed. (Swinburne, 1993 [1977]).

God is also supposed to be devoid of any evil desires, predilections or inclinations. Accordingly, there is no sense to be made of a superlatively good God who would be desirous to commit (or permit) gratuitous or wanton suffering, or who is apathetic and indifferent to the well-being of other persons, especially those whom he might have created. Relatedly, God's goodness is not supposed to be so alien to human persons that his goodness is either incomprehensible or otherwise constitutes the absolute antithesis of what would normally be considered good. Rather, God's goodness must be relatable, explicable and understandable by human persons. On this score, John Stuart Mill was perspicacious:

> If in ascribing goodness to God I do not mean what I mean by goodness; if I do not mean the goodness of which I have some knowledge, but an incomprehensible attribute of an incomprehensible substance, which for aught I know may be a totally different quality from that which I love and venerate . . . what do I mean in calling it goodness? . . . To say that God's goodness may be different in kind from man's goodness, what is it but saying, with a slight change of phraseology, that God may possibly be not good? (1964 [1865], pp.42-43)

Of course, if one is committed to God's essential goodness this would immediately seem, at least *prima facie*, to fix logical manacles to his omnipotence and more

specifically his capacity to freely choose to act one way rather than another. An essentially good God would not be able to freely perform a set of actions that other persons, who were not essentially good, could freely perform (viz. the set of immoral actions). If God is logically determined, by his essential nature, to always act morally and he could not act otherwise, then could he really be said to be free in the robust Metaphysical Libertarian sense? (Pike, 1969; Reichenbach, 1982). Furthermore, it would be a rather inconvenient corollary of God's logical inability to act immorally, that he would not appear to be as laudable or as morally meritorious as a person who *does* have the ability to act immorally but who, as a matter of fact, chooses not act immorally.[82] (Rowe, 2005, p.23). Assuming then that God is also supposed to be free in the robust Metaphysical Libertarian sense, 'necessary moral perfection seems to exclude the possibility of precisely those choices that genuine moral perfection would demand.' (Grim, 2011, p.211).

The dilemma that forces itself upon the proponent of God's necessary moral perfection seems to be that he must forego *necessary* moral perfection to preserve God's freedom. This would be to embrace the idea that God's purported moral perfection is at best contingent. Alternatively, out of deference to God's necessary moral perfection, it must be conceded that he is not completely free in the Metaphysical Libertarian sense.

Many would resist mightily the demotion of God's moral goodness to contingent status due to the fact that this would severely undermine the notion of God's omni-perfection.

[82] A humorous quote that appeared in the Chicago Tribune in 1871, and which was attributed to Mark Twain, makes this point well 'I am different from Washington; I have a higher, grander standard of principle. Washington could not lie. I can lie, but I won't.'

After all, surely a God that can do no wrong in any possible world is greater than a God that merely happens do no wrong in the actual world? A demotion to contingent moral perfection would also seem to justify skepticism about whether God's moral perfection might be tarnished in the future. At best, one could only hope that God would *probably* be perfectly good in the future because he has been perfectly good up till now. There could be no deductive certainty that God's moral perfection would endure eternally. Such security would seem to be forfeit. (Rogers, 2000).

If contingency is not in the cards, must the proponent of God's essential goodness then concede that God is not as free and thus not as powerful as persons who can perform evil actions? It seems that there are only two options. One is to bite the bullet and endorse the concession. The alternative is to endorse the idea that God's logical inability to commit immoral actions poses no threat to his freedom, or his omnipotence, *provided that* God always retains the ability to choose from the set of alternative possible morally permissible and supererogatory actions.

Be that as it may, it is nevertheless natural for many to think of God's perfect goodness as consisting of his essential exemplification of all compossible *virtues* and failure to exemplify any *vice*. This can be called the **Divine Aretaic Theory**. On this account, God, like a human person, has a character. Furthermore, his character instantiates or expresses traits that we would normally think of as virtuous for a person to have. Craig explicitly endorses such an account when he writes that 'God is essentially compassionate, fair, kind, impartial and so on.' (2010, p.136). Similarly Bradley notes '[t]heologians and philosophers of religion conceive of him [God] to be just, righteous,

merciful, loving, and compassionate. . . a God who was otherwise good but who fell short of perfection in respect of justice, righteousness, mercy, love or compassion wouldn't be *perfectly* good.' (2015, p.232).

It is often considered a particularly attractive philosophical and theological virtue of Divine Aretaic Theory that, it not only captures what is meant by omni-benevolence, but it also does the best job of ontologically grounding objective moral value and obligations for human persons.[83] Such an account also seems to fit neatly with the notion of God as a personal axiological ultimate. Historically, the only real theistic alternative has been to construe God's *commandments* or *his will* as the ontological foundation of objective morality. This is known as **Divine Command Theory**. However, this theory is immediately vulnerable to the **Euthyphro Dilemma**. The dilemma is this: Does God command what is good because it is good? Or are God's commandments good because he commands them?

If one adopts the former route then it must be conceded that morality is ontologically *independent* and *autonomous* of God's commandments or will. God is no longer sovereign over morality but rather is subservient to it. In other words, God himself is deserving of the epithet 'good' only to the extent that he measures up to those independent and autonomous moral standards.[84] Accepting this horn, God might retain a limited role as an epistemic middle-man passing on moral knowledge to human

[83] In other words, that it serves as a meta-ethical non-natural realist account of ethical values and duties.
[84] On the assumption that God is *essentially* morally perfect then this would mean he would live up to such independent moral standards in every possible world.

persons, but his purported necessary role as the ontological foundation of morality appears to be circumvented entirely.

On the other hand, if one endorses the latter route then one must be committed to the view that God could *arbitrarily* and *without reason* command any action and the performance of that action would be good simply because he commanded it. This would be so even if the action commanded were one we would normally think of as morally contemptable, opprobrious or reprehensible. Not only does such a view seem to do substantial violence to the apparent necessary status of the set of basic moral truths[85] but it also appears to render God's own goodness tautological since his goodness is reduced to simply following, or approving of, his own commands. The Divine Command Theorist who thinks that God's commands (or will) plays an essential role in morality thus seems to be impaled either by the autonomy of ethics on the one hand or the arbitrariness of ethics on the other. (Brink, 2007).

In contrast, it is thought that Divine Aretaic Theory avoids this predicament by (i) indicting the Euthyphro Dilemma as a false dilemma, and (ii) providing a third plausible way in which morality could depend on God. On Divine Aretaic Theory, God's commandments to human persons (and thus moral obligation) necessarily flow from and reflect his character. God's character is, in turn, identified with the Good. As Craig explains 'moral values are not independent of God because God's own character defines what is good . . . His nature is the moral standard for defining good and bad. His

[85] E.g. it is necessarily true that it is impermissible to torture an innocent conscious creature for no reason whatsoever.

commands necessarily reflect His moral nature. Therefore, they are not arbitrary . . . God wills something because He is good, and something is right because God wills it.' (2010, p.136). Similarly J.P. Moreland writes 'I think God's will is ultimately expressed in keeping with his nature. Morality is ultimately grounded in the nature of God, not independently of God.' (1990, pp.130-131).

While this seems to have become the standard line in response to the Euthyphro Dilemma (Adams, 1999; Alston, 1990; Quinn, 1978) it would appear, to my mind, only to succeed in pushing the dilemma back one step. After all, if God's c*haracter* is the paradigm of the Good, or is to be theoretically identified with the Good, then it seems one must be identifying the Good with a set of particular character traits (e.g. being compassionate, loving, generous, just etc.). However, one can always ask 'are these character traits good because God exemplifies them?' Or 'is God good because he exemplifies these character traits?' The horns of arbitrariness and autonomy, seemingly sidestepped, return with a vengeance. (Morriston, 2001; 2011).

Ontological foundations of morality aside, if it is granted that God's moral perfection amounts to him expressing an essentially good character then it would appear that he must necessarily desire and be predisposed to actualize a world that is reflective and representative of his character. Again it would make no sense to say either that (i) God is callous or indifferent toward the goodness that either obtains or fails to obtain in the world he chooses to actualize and providentially order, or (ii) God desires to actualize a world that contains less goodness than is logically possible for such a world to contain.

One particular aspect of God's character calls for further analysis and is important for our discussion, namely, his superlative and perfect **love**. On reflection, it seems obvious that a morally perfect being could not be anything but perfectly loving. As J.L. Schellenberg explains:

> Here we need to think about the qualities a perfect or unsurpassably great person would have to possess. . . For a philosopher, all the omni-properties – omnipotence, omniscience, and so on – will come tumbling into view fairly quickly when the subject is raised. But perfect love is not always among them. Even, omni-benevolence . . . which does get a nod from philosophers, doesn't really get at what's distinctive about love. The "more" here has to do with a deep sharing valued for its own sake, which is tied to personal relationship. An unsurpassable love, for various reasons, would seek meaningful, conscious relationship with the beloved: it would always at least be open to sharing itself in such relationship. . . The greatest possible person, whatever else it may be, has to be perfectly loving. Indeed, it would be natural to expect its power and knowledge to be expressed on behalf of love, and certainly not in competition with it. (2015, pp.95-97).

Could we really be thinking about a 'greatest conceivable being' if we did not include 'having a perfectly loving character' as an essential attribute of such a being? Imagine a God that has all the perfections that one might want to attribute to him but he was *not* perfectly loving. Then imagine a second God that is identical to the first God except for the fact that this second God is *also* perfectly loving. Would the second God not be immediately recognised as 'greater' in the Anselmian sense? It would seem that the answer must be a resounding 'Yes'.

After all, 'what's distinctively wonderful about love, what makes us say that an unsurpassably great person must be loving in a way that goes beyond benevolence, is the desire of a loving person to come close, allowing us to explicitly share in her life.'

(Schellenberg, 2015, p.43). This should not seem an unreasonable endorsement about the value of love insofar as we believe that:

> [a] person who's open and sharing, willing to give of herself in relationship, has a quality we admire, as well as desire for ourselves; we rightly think it's good in itself for a person to be this way, and not just that we can *get* or *give* something by being loving. Consider for a moment this sharing, relational love in its various human manifestations: the love of friends, the love of siblings, the love of spouses. It is not only because of what it *produces* in the way of happiness or personal and societal growth that we value it. (Schellenberg, 2015, p.98)

In our everyday lives we thus immediately recognise the **intrinsic value** of being a loving person and that this sort of value is distinct from the extrinsic and **instrumental value** of being loving.[86] We can, therefore, naturally and easily recognise that God would be spectacularly deficient if he was not a perfectly loving person. He would lack something clearly worth having. We can, therefore, have no qualms in asserting that 'God is intrinsically better than God would otherwise be if God is loving toward finite persons.' (Schellenberg, 2015, p.99).

Being perfectly loving thus appears to entail always being open to sharing, connecting and communing with other persons both out of a recognition of (i) the value of relationship itself, and (ii) the instrumental benefits that accrue from engaging in relationship. Being 'always open to relationship' simply means 'not through one's own actions or omissions making it impossible for the other, whom one loves, to participate

[86] Intrinsic value is not dependent on anything else. In short, 'to say that a thing has intrinsic value is to say it is valuable in-and-of itself, as an end-in-itself, it has terminal value or its value is not axiologically dependent on anything else'. On the other hand, instrumental value relates to that which 'promotes, causes or somehow brings about another thing which itself has some type of value. The value of this further thing can in turn be intrinsic or extrinsic.' (Fasser, 2017, pp.22-23).

in personal relationship with one at that time should the other wish to do so.' (Schellenberg, 2015, p.41). Surely this must be what people mean when they talk of a 'God of love'?

It is further to the credit of this account of perfect love that it meshes seamlessly with God's purported providential ordering of the actual world, as well as his ultimate purpose for human persons. In other words, understanding God as a superlatively loving person who is open to relationship facilitates axiological and soteriological synergy and is conducive to resplendent individual metanoia:

> Not incidentally, there is a nice fit between this claim, which really concerns only *axiological* ultimacy, and what we have to say about *soteriological* ultimacy in a world created by God. As we've seen, theism, to count as a religious idea, must have soteriological content: it must be possible for the value of the ultimate to be in some way communicated to finite persons and the world, if we're working with a religious notion. And it's easy to see how this could be the case in a world in which God is ultimate, if positive transformation were brought about through personal relationship between finite persons and God. Now love seeks just such relationship. (Schellenberg, 2015, p.97)

However, even if we think of God as perfectly loving and that this is a crucial component of his omni-benevolent nature, is one really committed to the idea that God's love entails that God is open to relationship? Might not a person believe that God's perfect love could get on just fine without such openness, perhaps because *his* love is completely different, alien or incomparable to our terrestrial conception of love? Might God's love not be like our love? Who are we, as finite mortals, to say what Godly love ought to consist in? Schellenberg, gives short shrift to this convenient and craven evasion into the mysterious mist:

> Perhaps someone will suggest that God could be perfectly loving without perpetual openness to relationship if what it is for *God* to be loving is very different from what it is for *us* to be loving. Why should we think that ultimate love would be at all like our love? The short answer is that it had better be, since otherwise we have no business using that word to refer to it! . . . But what it *means* to be loving is determined by facts about human language, which link it to giving, sharing and relationship. The concept of love is our concept. There's no escaping this, even in the phrasing of the suggestion to which I'm responding. For either when one speaks of "what it is for God to be loving" one is referring to our concept of love or not. If so, then of course what I've said applies. If not, then why should we regard the suggestion relevant to our discussion? In that case, who knows what someone who makes that suggestion is talking about? (Schellenberg, 2015, pp.48-49).

In light of this analysis, and as with the two other great making attributes we have thus far discussed, I take the account we have finally arrived at to represent something very much like what most people believe constitutes the fulcrum of God's omni-benevolence and that such an account is *basically* coherent. Given this analysis, one could venture the following definition of omni-benevolence:

- *God is omni-benevolent if and only if: he has a character that necessarily (i) instantiates or expresses all compossible virtues (e.g. compassion, fairness, justice, mercy, love etc.) and (ii) does not express or instantiate any vices (e.g. hatred, cruelty, viciousness, iniquity, indifference etc.) and (iii) who, in no possible world, performs any morally impermissible action or commands anything morally impermissible, and (iv) who, as a consequence of his perfectly loving character, desires and is always open to relationship with any possible person in any possible world.*

We have now, albeit far too briefly, come to the end of our analysis of the three most important great making attributes that are so often attributed to the Anselmian God of Theism. Hopefully, when reading and ruminating over the three definitions thus far provided, the reflective and non-tendentious reader will feel that they fidelitously articulate the purported acme of God and sufficiently sketch the familiar theological terminus of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. With this conceptual groundwork now laid, we are finally ready to turn our attention to an articulation and defence of the **Argument from Doxastic Discord**.

PART B: THE ARGUMENT FROM DOXASTIC DISCORD

In this section I intend to set out the **Argument from Doxastic Discord** and articulate the core premises of the argument. There are two principal components to the argument. First, there is the main argument. The main argument contains two premises, namely, a Theological Premise and an Empirical Premise, followed by the conclusion. Second, there is an extended sub-argument. The purpose of the sub-argument is to provide support for, and justify, the Theological Premise contained in the main argument. After setting out the premises of the main argument as well as the premises of the extended sub-argument for the Theological Premise, I will then set out to explain and provide *prima facie* justification for the crucial premises of the argument. This process of *prima facie* justification will be done primarily against the backdrop of the conceptual groundwork that has already been laid in **Part A**.

B.1. THE MAIN ARGUMENT

1. If God exists then the actual world is one in which there is presently no doxastic discord among religious human persons (i.e. there is now doxastic homogeneity). **(Theological premise)**

2. The actual world presently contains doxastic discord among religious human persons (i.e. there is now doxastic heterogeneity) **(Empirical premise)**

---

3. Therefore, God does not exist.

The main argument is, of course, deductively valid by virtue of the rule of logical inference known as *modus tollens*.[87] The corollary of this rule of inference is that if the two premises of the main argument are true then the conclusion of the main argument follows as a matter of logical necessity. In other words, if the two premises are true then the conclusion *cannot* be false. Before unpacking the key components and concepts of the main argument we should first ask ourselves where this sort of argument fits in the atheological armamentarium. In other words, how ought we to philosophically taxonomize the main argument as an affirmative atheological argument for the non-existence of God?

Yugin Nagasawa has helpfully distinguished between at least three different categories, or types, of affirmative atheological arguments. First, there are what he calls **Type-A Arguments**. These sorts of arguments are 'meant to show that at least one of the divine attributes . . . is internally incoherent. From the internal incoherence of at least one of the divine attributes, the opponent of the [omni-perfect God] thesis deduces that there cannot exist an omniperfect being. Given that the Anselmian thesis entails the [omni-perfect God] thesis and that there cannot exist an omniperfect being, the arguments conclude that Anselmian theism is false.' (2011, p.3). Second, there are what he calls **Type-B Arguments**. These are 'meant to show that even if each of God's attributes is internally coherent, at least some of them are mutually inconsistent. If some of God's

[87] This sort of argument has the form **A→B, ~B ∴ ~A**. If the conditional proposition is true then by negating the consequent one can also logically negate the antecedent. This form of argument and inference constitutes the logical foundation of the epistemic principle of **Falsification**.

attributes are mutually inconsistent, then, again, the [omni-perfect God] thesis is false and Anselmian theism is false.' (2011, p.4). Third and finally, there are what he calls **Type-C Arguments**. These arguments are 'meant to show that, even if God's attributes are internally coherent and mutually consistent, the set of attributes is mutually inconsistent with a certain fact about the world. If that is true, then, again, the [omni-perfect God thesis] is false and Anselmian theism is also false.' (2011, p.4).

Utilizing this taxonomy we can then easily classify the Argument from Doxastic Discord as a Type-C argument. In other words, the argument seeks to establish an explicit logical contradiction, or inconsistency, between the existence of a particular sort of God on the one hand and some empirical feature of the world on the other.[88]It is important to emphasize that this argument has a bold and strong atheological conclusion. If the argument is sound then it does not simply lower the probability of God's existence, but rather, rules out God's existence as a matter of deductive certainty.[89]

B1.2. <u>THE THEOLOGICAL PREMISE EXPLAINED</u>

The first premise of the argument is a conditional proposition. In short, it asserts that the existence of God logically entails that the actual world in which we find ourselves should have a particular structure, composition and character. As Loftus notes, this:

[88] In this sense the argument parallels the logical versions of both (i) the **Argument from Evil,** and (ii) the **Argument from Divine Hiddenness**.
[89] This is the crucial difference between **deductive** and **non-deductive** argument forms. The latter involve inductive or abductive inferences to more or less probable conclusions that go beyond the original premises.

> [c[an best be described along the same lines as John Rawls's *veil of ignorance*. Let's say we are placed behind a theological veil of ignorance. Behind that veil we are to consider what world we should expect to find if God created the world before we actually experienced that world. Behind that veil we must think about the kinds of things we would expect to find, based upon a full description of the God that is supposed to exist. What would we expect to find prior to experiencing a world? (2012, p.229).

So what does this conditional premise tell us should logically be entailed on the assumption that the Anselmian God exists? It tells us that we should find ourselves in an actual world without doxastic discord among the sub-set of human persons who are also religious. That is to say, we should *not* live in a world with competing and contrary religious traditions vying for our doxastic allegiance but rather a world of uniform and homogenous religious belief! However, before we attend to providing justification for the Theological Premise and why one would be within one's epistemic rights to endorse such a logical entailment, it is important to be clear about what exactly the logical entailment actually is.

B1.3. WHAT IS DOXASTIC HETEROGENEITY & HOMOGENEITY?

First, let us think about what we are to understand by the terms **heterogeneity** and **homogeneity** in general.[90] Homogeneity simply refers to the uniformity, similitude, or the 'same-ness' of something. Heterogeneity, on the other hand, refers to the diversity, dissimilarity, or the 'other-ness' of something. Accordingly, to speak of doxastic heterogeneity and homogeneity is to speak of either the uniformity or diversity of belief

[90] I use these terms interchangeably with **discord** and **concord** respectively.

among human persons. Relatedly, to speak of doxastic discord or doxastic concord is to speak of the *divergence* or *convergence* of beliefs among human persons respectively.

It is obvious from our everyday experience that human persons converge and diverge with respect to their beliefs about any number of issues, ranging from the prodigious and profound to the petty and picayune. With respect to certain prosaic and quotidian issues there is universal, or near universal, homogeneity, concord and uniformity of belief (e.g. that the earth is geoid in shape, that 2+2=4, or that Barack Obama was the 44^{th} President of the United States of America). On the other hand, there are any number of contentious issues which generate heterogeneity and where discord and diversity of belief abound (e.g. whether, in the field of astrobiology, there is intelligent life on other planets. Or whether there could be a mathematical proof for Goldbach's conjecture. Or whether, in the field of computational science, P = NP).

For many contentious issues we can easily appreciate why there would be discord and diversity of belief among human persons. In many cases, the empirical data required for uniformity of belief is ambiguous or vastly underdetermined. In other cases, the sheer difficulty of the problems and issues that lie at the forefront of various intellectual disciplines naturally lend themselves to legitimate rational speculation and reasonable diversity of belief. In such cases, doxastic heterogeneity is understandable and to be legitimately expected.

Of course, the Theological Premise does not suggest that if God existed then one should rationally expect anything like doxastic homogeneity in respect of every single issue that

could possibly confront finite human persons. Rather, the question is whether one should rationally expect doxastic divergence or convergence with respect to core religious salvific issues and the existence of the Anselmian God in particular? In other words, should we think that such issues ought to be contentious or uncontentious for religiously inclined human persons? It is the central thrust of the Argument from Doxastic Discord that it ought to be the latter.

For the purposes of our discussion, we can begin to think of doxastic discord in relation to religious matters in the following way: First, we can distinguish discord among human persons regarding the very existence of an ultimate reality – that is to say discord over the truth of Ultimism. Let us call this **Tier-1 Discord**. This sort of discord represents, for our purposes, the widest possible gulf among human persons over the ontological structure of reality. Second, we can distinguish discord among those human persons who believe Ultimism is true but who do not believe that the nature of the Divine is to be understood in terms of God (or gods) at all. Let us call this **Tier-2 Discord**. Third, we can distinguish discord among those human persons who believe that the Divine is to be understood in terms of God (or gods) but who do not believe that God (or the gods) are personal entities. Let us call this **Tier-3 Discord**. We can then distinguish discord among those who believe the Divine is personal but differ over the number of divine personalities that there are. Let us call this **Tier-4 Discord.** Finally, we can distinguish discord among those who believe in the existence of a single personal Anselmian God rather than some imperfect God. Let us call this **Tier-5 Discord**. The orthodox adherents of Judaism, Christianity and Islam will find themselves on the 'other side' (so to speak) of this final tier of discord. These five tiers

of doxastic discord form a natural family which we could call **Divinity Discord.** Divinity Discord relates primarily to divergent beliefs, among human persons, over the *existence* and *nature* of the Divine.

However, the concept of doxastic discord is not exhausted by Divinity Discord. Even among those human persons who believe Ultimism is true or who have beliefs that entail a belief in Ultimism there will be a need to distinguish discord in relation to how human persons are believed to achieve personal and collective salvation in relation to the Divine. In particular, we must acknowledge such discord even amongst Anselmian Theists over precisely how human persons are to (i) achieve, experience and participate in the axiological ultimate that is the person of God, and thereby (ii) achieve their ultimate, deepest and most long lasting good. We can call this **Soteriological Discord**. This sort of discord relates primarily to divergent beliefs over the salvific characterisation of human existence and how human persons are to have *correct soteriological access* to the Anselmian God.

When talking of Soteriological Discord a further distinction must be made in respect of those who are likely to believe that correct soteriological access is possible from within each and every religious tradition, while others will likely believe that correct soteriological access is possible only from within one particular and exclusive religious

tradition. This category of discord marks the site of disputation between **Soteriological Pluralism**[91] and **Soteriological Exclusivism**.[92]

John Hick, himself a Soteriological Pluralist, provides a perspicacious distinction between these two views:

> It is of course possible, in an alternative approach, to define salvation in such a way that it becomes a necessary truth that only one particular tradition can provide it. If, for example, from within Christianity we define salvation as being forgiven by God because of Jesus' atoning death, and so become part of God's redeemed community, the church, then salvation is by definition Christian salvation. If on the other hand, from within Mhayana Buddhism, we define it as the attainment of *satori* or awakening, and so becoming an ego-free manifestation of the eternal Dharmakaya, then salvation is by definition Buddhist liberation. And so on. But if we stand back from these different conceptions and compare them, we can, I think, very naturally and properly see them as different forms of the more fundamental conception of a radical change from a profoundly unsatisfactory state to one that is limitlessly better because rightly related to the Real [ultimate reality]. . . I suggest that these different conception of salvation are specifications of what, in a generic formula, is the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to a new orientation, centred in the divine Reality. And in each case the good news that is proclaimed is that this limitlessly better possibility is actually available and can be entered upon, or begin to be entered upon, here and now. Each tradition sets forth the way to attain this great good: faithfulness to the Torah, discipleship to Jesus, obedient living out of the Qur'anic way of life, the Eightfold Path of the Buddhist dharma, or the three great Hindu *margas* of mystical insight, activity in the world, and self-giving devotion to God.' (1988, pp.293-294).

[91] This is the thesis that *all* religions prescribe and provide equally efficacious salvation for human persons.
[92] This is the thesis that only *one* particular religion can prescribe and provide efficacious salvation for human persons. The motto for this thesis might be '*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*' (outside the church there is no salvation).

It is felicitous, at this juncture, to recall that we are *not* here concerned with who is ultimately correct in this heated theological dispute between Soteriological Pluralists and Exclusivists, nor need the proponent of the Argument from Doxastic Discord take sides in that debate. Rather, we are simply marking yet another site of vociferous theological disputation and divergence. Finally, it should be obvious that, even among Soteriological Exclusivists, there will be further discord over which particular religion is believed to provide the *uniquely* correct 'salvific path' to God.[93]

Thus, doxastic discord can, in the context of the Theological Premise, be understood as being concerned with two particular types of discord in particular viz. Divinity Discord and Soteriological Discord. We are now in a position to appreciate that the Theological Premise is actually asserting the following conditional proposition: *If God exists then the actual world is one in which there is presently no Divinity and Soteriological Discord among any religious human person* (viz. the set of human persons who accept the truth of Ultimism or beliefs that entail the truth of Ultimism).[94]

From this, we can understand that doxastic homogeneity, or concord, necessarily involves convergence among religious human persons regarding (i) the nature or characterisation of the Divine, and (ii) how to have correct soteriological access to the Divine. In short, to speak of doxastic homogeneity, within the context of the Argument

[93] And lo! The deleterious distributaries of the discordant river diverge yet again.

[94] It is crucial to note this premise is *weaker* than one asserting that 'If God exists then there is an actual world in which there is presently no doxastic discord among *any* and *all* human persons'. This *stronger* cognate premise asserts that the actual world should be one in which *all* human persons that exist are (i) religious, and (ii) have doxastic homogeneity (i.e. that we would have an actual world with *no* non-religious persons at all). We can thus distinguish between **Theological Premise^{Weak}** and **Theological Premise^{Strong}**. Our principal focus shall be on the former.

from Doxastic Discord, is to speak of all religious human persons having (i) a universal and uniform belief that the Anselmian God exists, and (ii) universal and uniform beliefs about the true and correct path to salvation (whatever that happens to be).

B1.4. THE TEMPORAL ASSERTION

There is a further feature of the Theological Premise which warrants a brief mention otherwise it may go unnoticed due to its subtlety. This is the fact that the Theological Premise carries with it an explicit temporal assertion regarding the state of the actual world and the doxastic commitments of religious human persons within it. The Theological Premise tells us that we should not have an actual world with doxastic discord in the *present*.

The idea is that when we look around the actual world, and given the theoretical assumption that the Anselmian God exists, the question arises: why would we see doxastic discord *now*? What reasons could one put forward that might explain such an unexpected state of affairs in the present, given the existence of the Anselmian God? While proposed reasons will certainly be examined later, it is sufficient to state for the purposes of exposition, that the temporal assertion requires us to focus our attention to the immediacy of the present. It compels us to consider why we should rationally expect the actual world would be constituted in a particular way *today* and not, say, a million years in the future.

B1.5. THE EMPIRICAL PREMISE EXPLAINED

The Empirical Premise is vastly more straightforward than the Theological Premise. This premise simply asserts that there is, as a matter of fact, Divinity and Soteriological Discord among religious human persons who presently exist. The premise asserts that when we look out at the world we do, in fact, come face to face with doxastic discord. We learn of this fact through our *a posteriori* engagement with the actual world and our collision with competing and contrary religious traditions. The importance of the Empirical Premise in the main argument is to serve as the basis for deriving the *explicit* logical contradiction between the world and the logical expectation of the world predicted by the Theological Premise. As Carrier writes:

> '[t]he [Theist] proposes that a supremely powerful being exists who *wants* us to get things right, and therefore *doesn't* want us to get things even more wrong. This is certainly an intelligible hypothesis, which predicts there should be no more confusion about which religion or doctrine is true than there is about the fundamentals of medicine, engineering, physics, chemistry, or even meteorology . . . Yet this is not what we observe. Instead, we observe the exact opposite: unresolvable disagreement and confusion. This is clearly a failed prediction. A failed prediction means a false theory.' (2011, p.8).

The *prima facie* justification for the truth of the empirical premise has already been referred to in **Part A**. When we take our time to impartially observe the world's religious traditions we find that all the tiers of Divinity Discord are represented, and have found expression, in the actual world. We find that there really are hard-nosed sceptical Metaphysical Naturalists on one side of the theological spectrum, to pious Anselmian Theists on the other.

Furthermore, we do, in fact, find that among those human persons who are religious there is vociferous (and sometimes even violent) Soteriological Discord. On this score, one need only point, as a particularly illuminating example, to the soteriological dispute over whether human persons can achieve salvation through faith (or belief) in the Anselmian God alone, or whether it can be achieved by good deeds in accordance with the Anselmian God's commands, or perhaps even simple repentance? This is a contentious issue which divides many Theists. Orthodox Christians, for the most part, are likely to come down on one side of this issue, while orthodox Jews and Muslims are likely to come down on the other side. In fact, we naturally think that coming down on one side or the other in respect of issues of this sort is what *distinguishes* an individual as a Christian Theist, a Jewish Theist, or an Islamic Theist.

I will not belabour the point any further by providing additional examples of Divinity or Soteriological Discord. Any glance at a current newspaper or even a cursory scan over the historical record of religious disputation will articulate, in a more erudite and compelling fashion than I, the justification for the empirical premise. I, therefore, take it to be uncontroversial that there is, at least, *prima facie* justification and support for the empirical premise. Whether such *prima facie* justification can be defeated by counter-argument will be a consideration to which we will return later.

B.2. THE SUB-ARGUMENT FOR THE THEOLOGICAL PREMISE

However, far more pressingly, what reason do we have to accept the Theological Premise in the first place? Surely this is an astoundingly audacious claim that requires additional support? After all, why should we rationally expect that if the Anselmian God exists then there would not presently be any doxastic discord among the set of religious human persons? To answer this question it is necessary to articulate the sub-argument for the Theological Premise. The sub-argument can be put into standard form as follows:

1. If God exists then he is essentially omni-perfect (i.e. he is necessarily omnipotent, omniscient and omni-benevolent) **(Omni-perfect Anselmian God)**.

2. If God is omnipotent then he is capable of actualizing a possible world in which there is presently no doxastic discord among the set of religious human persons (i.e. where there is doxastic homogeneity) **(Omnipotence)**.

3. If God is omniscient then he has knowledge, 'prior to' the actualization of any world, of a possible world where there is presently no doxastic discord among religious human persons **(Omniscience)**.

4. If God is omni-benevolent then he has a perfectly loving character **(Divine Aretaic Theory)**.

5. If God has a perfectly loving character then he prefers a possible world in which there is presently no doxastic discord among religious human persons (i.e. in which there is now doxastic homogeneity) **(Omni-benevolence, Superlative Love and Providence)**.

---

6. Therefore, if God exists then he is: (i) capable of actualizing a possible world in which there is presently no doxastic discord among religious human persons, (ii) knew about such a possible world 'prior to' the actualization of any possible world, and (iii) prefers such a possible world **(from 1 -5)**

---

7. Therefore, if God exists then the actual world is one in which there is presently no doxastic discord among religious human persons (i.e. there is now doxastic homogeneity) **(from 6)**.

Before we explain some of the more important premises in the sub-argument, let us briefly dispense with two uncontentious premises. Premise (1) of the sub-argument is an endorsement of the Anselmian God thesis. This premise simply articulates what Theists in the Orthodox Jewish, Christian and the Islamic traditions have historically understood God to be. Premise (4) of the sub-argument should also be uncontentious. This premise simply makes the point that, as an essential part of God's divine character, he must instantiate perfect and unsurpassable love. Again, no orthodox adherent to the Jewish, Christian and Islamic tradition could seriously challenge this premise without placing herself well beyond the theological pale. With these uncontentious premises out of the way, let us turn then to an explanation of the more fundamental premises.

B2.1. THE WORLD ACTUALIZING PREMISE EXPLAINED

Premise (2) is grounded in our prior analysis of omnipotence in **Part A.** It will be recalled that there are two major components to God's omnipotence. First, he is capable of actualizing any contingently possible world. Plantinga makes plain what the Theist believes in this regard 'the theist says that God is omnipotent – which means roughly, that there are no non-logical limits to his power.' (1974, p.167). This is to say, if there is a logically possible world then God is capable, through a divine act of will, of making *that* possible world the actual world. Again, as Plantinga reminds us 'a possible world, then is a possible state of affairs – one that is possible in the broadly logical sense. But not every possible state of affairs is a possible world. To claim that honour, a state of affairs must be *maximal* or *complete*.' (1974, p.43). Second, God is capable, once having chosen to actualize a possible world, of causally intervening in the created order and actualizing any logically possible contingent state of affairs in accordance with his desires at time *t*.

The first component of God's omnipotence is meant to capture the idea that God could freely choose to actualize any logically possible world he so desires. According to Theists, this is one of the perks and privileges of being the regnant creator of *all* contingent reality. Limited only by logical impossibility, God is free to craft contingent reality in whichever way he deems fit. He is, in this respect, the ultimate artisan. The second component of God's omnipotence is meant to capture the idea that he can intervene, at any moment, in actual world history and interact with it according to his desires at that moment. According to Theists, it is on this basis, that he is supposed to

have performed miracles, answered prayers, comforted the sick, given hope to those in despair and engaged in other supposed spectacular supernatural spectacles. Having created the actual world, everything in it, as well as the natural laws that 'govern' it, he is capable of suspending them in accordance with his desires and whenever he so wishes.

To deny either of these two components of omnipotence would make a hash of God's acme and almost certainly relegate him to *imperfect* and *finite* status! As Geirsson and Lossonsky write '[w]hile it can be granted for the sake of argument that God's omnipotence is not diminished by the fact that truths of logic and other necessary truths are independent of God's power, the lack of power over contingent truths grounded in the world's contingent structures is the hallmark of weakness.' (2005, p.369).

Furthermore, it certainly appears that there is a possible world in which there is presently no doxastic discord (i.e. there is doxastic homogeneity) religious persons. We can easily c*onceive* of just such a world in which there are: (i) religious human persons who have universal and convergent beliefs about (a) the existence of the Anselmian God, and (b) how to have correct soteriological access to the Anselmian God, and (ii) who are, therefore, well-positioned to have a relationship with God. Accordingly, this is a world with a single universal and convergent religion. Let us call such a possible world $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$.[95] Furthermore, if we accept that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a logically possible world then it is

[95] I am here assuming that *conceivability* provides, at least, *prima facie* epistemic justification for asserting what is logically or metaphysically possible. As Richard Gale writes '[t]he only way that we humans can go about determining what has the possibility of existing is by an appeal to what we can conceive to be possible. Such modal intuitions concerning what is possible are fallible; they are only prima facie acceptable, since they are subject to defeat by subsequent ratiocination.' (2011, p.95).

necessarily a logically possible world. That is to say, in any possible world that might have been the actual world, it will be true that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ might have been the actual world.[96]

Take an extended moment to reflect carefully and consult your own intuition as to whether $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ entails any logical contradictions in its description? This is absolutely crucial. In my considered and reflective view, it certainly does not! To test this highly plausible modal intuition one need only compare the ease with which one can conceive of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ on the one hand, with truly inconceivable worlds on the other. For example, try as we might, we simply cannot conceive of a world where someone draws a square-circle on a piece of paper, or where someone is laughing at a joke without having a mouth. Such worlds are absolutely inconceivable and thus we are entitled to conclude that they are, at least, *prima facie* impossible worlds.

Armed with this plausible and prodigious modal intuition about $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, we must concede, on pain of contradiction, that God had (and presently has) the capacity to actualize $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$. As Bradley emphasizes '[n]ow it isn't hard to see that the range of possible worlds coincides with the range of things that God has power to bring about. It follows that, for any possible world we can without contradiction conceive, it is possible for God to bring it about.' (215, p.236). There are, at least, two principal methods by which God could 'bring about' $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$.

[96] This is based on the well-known, and generally accepted, axiom in S5 modal logic: $\mathbf{\Diamond P \rightarrow \Box \Diamond P}$.

First, God could causally intervene in the actual world's *present* in such a way that would convince all religious human persons who (i) are not already Anselmian Theists, and (ii) who do not already have the correct soteriological beliefs. While God might choose to do this in an ostentatious and grandiose fashion[97], he might also choose to do this *subtly*, without theological theatrics[98] and with *sensitive* and *sagacious* consideration to the psychological fragility of human persons in comparison to his grandeur. (Schellenberg, 2015, pp.66-67). We can thus easily conceive of innumerable ways an omnipotent being could demonstrate to presently existing doxastically wayward religious persons, in unequivocal and unambiguous terms, both his divinity as well as the preconditions for correct soteriological access. (Trakakis, 2007). We may go even further and say that, given God's omniscience, he would know precisely what causal interventions would be *sufficient* to unequivocally convince each and every doxastically wayward religious person both of his existence and of the correct salvific path to him.[99]

Would this be an unjustified and immoral violation of their cognitive liberty and free will? We can safely respond 'No' for three principal reasons. First, there are very good reasons to doubt that human persons have direct voluntary control over what they believe.[100] We simply do not voluntarily choose our beliefs (let alone our religious and

[97] Michael Martin provides some examples: '[t]here are many things God could have done to increase belief in Him. For example. . . God could have spoken from the Heavens in all known languages so no human could doubt His existence and His message . . . God could have implanted the belief of God and His message in everyone's mind. . . In recent times God could have communicated with millions of people by interrupting prime time TV programs and giving his message.' (1997, p.1).

[98] In other words, God need not intervene in anything like a garish, overbearing or 'Monty Pythonesque' way.

[99] We can thus say that, unless God has decided to actualize doxastically wayward religious persons who he knew, in advance of actualization, could not be convinced to believe at all under *any* circumstances, then God is capable of intervening in such a way that is sufficient to ensure belief.

[100] The thesis that human persons have *direct* voluntary control over what they believe is called **Strong Doxastic Voluntarism.** The thesis that human persons have *indirect* control of what they come to believe

metaphysical beliefs) like we choose what clothes we want to wear for the day.[101] Second, it is simply untrue that coming to believe a true proposition (or set of propositions) erodes one's cognitive liberty.[102] To the contrary, such a process of acquiring true beliefs actually allows one to exercise one's cognitive liberty in a more responsible and reasonable way. In short, we may come to believe propositions involuntarily but insofar as they are true propositions this allows us to make better voluntary decisions about how to behave. Third, even though such doxastically wayward religious persons would certainly come to believe that the Anselmian God exists and would come to have correct soteriological beliefs, they would still be free to decide whether to enter into personal relationship with God or not. (Trakakis, 2007). Their liberty would still be preserved.

By causally interacting with the actual world in this manner, God would thereby achieve two principal goals, namely, (i) the *prevention* of further doxastic discord among religious human persons in the future, and (ii) the *correction* of existing doxastic discord among religious human persons in the present. In fact, many orthodox adherents of Christianity, Judaism and Islam believe that such miraculous and theophanous interventions have already occurred historically. God would, by this method,

---

is more plausible insofar as we can engage or refrain from activities that we know, in advance, might change or affect what we believe. This is called **Weak Doxastic Voluntarism.**

[101] As Schellenberg writes '[w]hatever may be true of other attitudes such as assuming or accepting a proposition for the sake of discussion, you can't change or add to your *beliefs* just by trying to. . . believing is *involuntary*. If it weren't we'd have a quick cure for all sorts of problems. Feeling depressed? Just believe you're on top of the world! Worried about being overweight? Just believe you're not! Unsure about the existence of God, Pascal? . . . You can't produce beliefs at the drop of a hat, just by trying to.' (2015, pp.59-60).

[102] We certainly do not complain that our cognitive liberty has been impaired or coerced when, for example, we witness a beautiful sunset and involuntarily come to believe that a beautiful sunset exists, or when we rationally appreciate the truth of a geometric proof once it has been demonstrated to us.

metaphysically 'transfigure' the actual world *into* $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ (at least prospectively from the moment of his causal intervention(s)).

Second, and perhaps even more impressively, God could have chosen to actualize $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ from 'the beginning' (so to speak) and thereby providentially ensure that all the religious persons that came to exist in the actual world would have doxastic homogeneity. If God had actualized $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ from 'the beginning' then there would never have been doxastic discord among any religious person whether they existed in the *past*, *present* or *future*. If God had opted for this preventative procedure then this would have obviated the need for any subsequent intervention on his part at all. This second method shall be the principal focus of our discussion going forward.

B2.2. THE EPISTEMIC PREMISE EXPLAINED

Premise (3) is grounded in our prior analysis of omniscience in **Part A**. It is to be recalled that on the Classical Account, coupled with Molinism, God has knowledge of all necessary propositions, all contingent counter-factual and subjunctive propositions (including those propositions about what *all* possible human persons would freely choose to do in *any* possible situation in which they might exist), as well as knowledge of the contingent past, present and future propositions describing all possible worlds, including the actual world.

A pedagogically useful way of thinking about how God has this knowledge is to imagine God's mind 'instantly cycling through' all the possible world permutations. In one 'timeless moment' God mentally cycles through all these possible permutations and finally settles on the possible world permutation he is desirous to actualize. These permutations are combinatorial in nature and thus constitute logical pairings between all possible states of affairs and all possible religious human persons that might have been actualized.

This model of God's omniscience constitutes the principal mechanism by which God is supposed to be able to providentially order the actual world in accordance with his desires and preferences for human persons – desires and preferences which will be constrained by his essentially good character. In other words, this is the epistemic means by which the Anselmian Theist supposedly asserts that God is capable of *ensuring* that things work out for the best[103], and which prevents the unpalatable lapse into the 'heresy' of Open Theism. As Craig explicitly states:

> Providence is the doctrine that God orders events in history so that His purposes are achieved. The challenge is doing this while respecting human freedom. Some theologians abridge God's providence; some curtail human freedom. A better way is to say that God takes human free choices into account in His planning. He does this by knowing how every possible person would freely choose in whatever nondetermining circumstances God might place him in. By creating certain persons in certain circumstances, God knows exactly how they will freely choose and can plan accordingly. On this view everything that happens is either directly willed by God or permitted by God, including where and when people are born. (2010, p.279).

[103] One cannot help but think of Voltaire's famous satire of Leibnizian thought - 'Candide' – where the character of Professor Pangloss sanguinely remarks that 'all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.'

Given such an account of God's omniscience, it follows that 'prior to' the creation of the actual world God had knowledge of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$. If $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ was indeed a possible world that *might* have existed instead of the actual world then $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ was one of the possible worlds God 'cycled through' in the state of timeless existence he occupied sans creation. In short, $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ was one of the 'objects' of God's knowledge 'prior to' his creation of the actual world. It seems obvious that if God did not have knowledge of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ then he would not be able to either (i) intervene successfully, in the appropriate way, in the actual world's present to prospectively 'transfigure' it into $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, or (ii) providentially plan the trajectory and course of the actual world from 'the beginning' so as to ensure it would turn out to be $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$.

To deny God this sort of knowledge would, as with omnipotence, not only undermine his acme but also threaten the doctrine of providence. On this score, Bradley speaks plainly '[i]t makes no sense to suppose that at the moment when [God] chose our world, the actual world, to create he didn't know what he was getting into and didn't know the consequences of his creative act . . . So he must have known that the world he was creating would be the one we find it to be. . . ' (2015, pp.210-211).

B2.3. THE WORLD PREFERABILITY PREMISE EXPLAINED

Premise (5) is grounded in our prior analysis of omni-benevolence in **Part A**. It will be recalled that God is supposed to instantiate and express all compossible moral virtues and not express any moral vice whatsoever. Being a perfectly moral person, his

decisions, preferences and actions are constrained by this essential rectitude. We also saw that one of the most important virtues that God instantiates and expresses is superlative and unsurpassable love.

An essential aspect of love is the desire to come close and be proximate to the beloved. A person who is loving desires, and is always open to, relationship with the beloved both because of the intrinsic value of relationship and because of the instrumental benefits that might accrue for the parties involved. God, having created religious human persons, must then presumably love them – they are the objects and beneficiaries of God's love. Theists themselves openly admit this. Accordingly, God must necessarily desire that religious human persons be in a doxastic position that would allow them to come to have a relationship with him. God will thus necessarily desire and be open to this occurring not only because such a relationship is itself intrinsically valuable but also because relationship with God is instrumentally valuable. As an axiological and soteriological ultimate, God is the ultimate repository of the most fundamental and enduring value for religious human persons. Of this multi-layered reciprocal relationship, Schellenberg writes:

> Think first about what it would be to participate in such a meaningful, conscious relationship with God. . . "Conscious, interactive, and positively meaningful relationship" is compatible with a whole lot of quite different detailed descriptions, including ones according to which the proper response to God is one of humble gratitude or rigorous search for insight into God's will for one's life and difficult work in carrying it out. And God's proper response to us might be described not in terms of continually warm and fuzzy religious experiences that fail to challenge us but rather with reference to something like discernible assistance in the slow shaping of a finite and perhaps recalcitrant personality, through the offering of such things as forgiveness and emotional support. The common content of all such descriptions, though, is a

> pattern of reciprocal activity directed toward ever deeper and richer interaction in which both God and finite creatures participate and which both find valuable. (2015, p.58)

We can then discern two sub-components of God's perfect and unsurpassable love. First, there is always a desire to be relationally proximate to the beloved **(Proximity)**. Second, there is always openness to relationship with the beloved **(Openness)**. Given both Proximity and Openness, we can thus conclude that God would prefer to actualize a world in which religious human persons were doxastically well-positioned to have a relationship with him and where there were as few obstacles as possible in order for relationship with him to be consummated and maintained.

After all, obstacles to interpersonal relationship are inimical to the fulfilment of Proximity and undermine the hope of Openness. The intrinsic value of relationship is threatened. Not to mention, that by failing to have a relationship with God, religious persons would be deprived of communing with the repository of ultimate value and achieving soteriological beatitude and apotheosis.

In light of this, when God goes about choosing a possible world to actualize he will, of necessity, desire to actualize a possible world that does not contain obstacles that threaten to hinder or harm the possibility of religious human persons having a relationship with him. In short, God will necessarily prefer to create a world where it would be as easy as possible for religious human persons to have a relationship with him. This preference must then necessarily constrain and impact the world that God chooses to actualize.

In particular, such a preference must constrain and influence God's providential ordering of the actual world. If God has the power to remove serious obstacles to relationship with him then, given his superlative love, he would either (i) take steps to immediately remove such obstacles from the actual world, or (ii) would have completely prevented their existence in the first place. In short, 'if God exists as an omnipotent creator and an infinitely rich personal reality, *then God can make it so*. If also unsurpassably loving, God *would* make it so.' (Schellenberg, 2015, p.45).

Doxastic discord, however, is a *serious obstacle* to the cultivation of a deep, fulfilling and enduring relationship with God. There are two principal reasons to think so. The first reason comes from a consideration of those religious persons who might have incorrect beliefs about the nature of God or who might have incorrect beliefs about how to have correct soteriological access to God. These religious persons will either be in a doxastic position that: (i) prevents them from having a relationship with God at all, or (ii) prevents them from having the sort of relationship with God that is necessary for their salvation. In other words, those religious persons who are *doxastically ill-positioned* in the actual world cannot, for as long as they hold false beliefs, participate in relationship with God at all, let alone, participate in the correct way.

Having true beliefs about God appears to be a *necessary* condition to having any relationship with God at all. Having correct soteriological beliefs in relation to God appears to be a *necessary* condition for having the correct sort of relationship that is necessary for salvation. Take, for example, a religious person who is a committed Hindu in the Smarta tradition and who believes in a pantheon of Hindu Gods. Such a person

is a polytheist and is thus doxastically incapable of having a relationship at all (let alone the proper relationship) with the Anselmian God for so long as he owes his doxastic allegiance to polytheism. To have meaningful relational commerce with the Anselmian God one must, at least, believe there is such a being one can relate to! (Schellenberg, 2015, pp.56-59).

By analogy, think of a person who has come to believe that her mother is Woman X and who does not believe that Woman Y exists. Accordingly, she cannot believe that Woman Y is her mother. However, in reality, Woman Y is her mother and Woman X does not exist. How can this person have a deep, fulfilling and enduring relationship with Woman Y unless she abandons her belief that Woman X exists and embraces the belief that Woman Y exists and his her mother? It simply does not seem possible. Furthermore, suppose that this person were to come to believe that Woman Y exists (and is her mother) but had incorrect beliefs about how Woman Y wanted her to behave, or what she wanted her to believe, in order for such a relationship to exist, flourish and be maintained. Would such a person be able to sustain a deep, fulfilling and enduring relationship with Woman Y? Would such a person be able to reap the full benefits from this reciprocal interpersonal relationship? Again, this simply does not seem possible.

The second reason arises when we consider religious persons who might believe in the Anselmian God and who have true beliefs about how to have soteriological access to him. These religious persons are at risk of having their beliefs eroded (or lost completely) as a result of their collision with, and appreciation of, the epistemic

concern. In other words, those religious persons who are *doxastically well-positioned* for relationship with God are at risk of having that favourable doxastic position undermined simply by existing in a world with doxastic discord and the epistemic concern. What is more, a number of doxastically well-positioned religious persons have, in fact, had the confidence of their beliefs eroded (or even lost) as a result of wrestling with the epistemic concern. Thus, for such people, the possibility of relationship with God is either distressingly weakened or utterly destroyed.

Of the undeniable corrosive effect of doxastic discord and the epistemic concern, Amir Dastmalchian writes '[r]eflecting on the fact of religious diversity can make a person with religious convictions lose confidence in his religious convictions, or in any religious beliefs whatsoever. This confidence problem is exacerbated by the desire for certainty regarding matters of such primary importance as religious matters.' (2013, p.299). In short, doxastically well-positioned religious persons are in real danger of either becoming doxastically ill-positioned religious persons or, perhaps even worse (from a soteriological perspective), completely non-religious persons! In either case, the possibility of relationship with God is severely threatened. To deny that God would be concerned with limiting severe obstacles to relationship, or to contend that God could be indifferent to whether severe obstacles to relationship exist in the world he wishes to actualize, would be to forfeit the right to call him superlatively and unsurpassably loving.

In light of the serious threat that doxastic discord poses to relationship with God for all religious human persons and given God's purported omnipotence, omniscience and

omni-benevolence, the world we would rationally expect to find from behind the veil of theological ignorance is one where there is doxastic homogeneity. In other words, we would expect $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DH}}$. If this is indeed correct, and we nevertheless find ourselves confronted with a world where there is doxastic discord, we can logically conclude that such a God does not exist.

If such a God does not exist then Judaism, Christianity and Islam are absolutely false in their core claims and the adherents of those faiths are fundamentally mistaken about the nature of reality. Are there any plausible responses to the Argument from Doxastic Discord? In the next section, I will consider the most plausible ways that the Anselmian Theist might seek to neutralize the force of the argument and attempt to rescue the Anselmian God from being buried alongside the plethora of dead gods in the mass grave of mythology.

PART C: THEISTIC OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

Our attention must now shift to the defensive side of the theological divide. How might a Theist respond to the Argument from Doxastic Discord and prevent God from expiring in its maw? In this section, I will examine some of the most plausible responses to both the Empirical and Theological Premises. In assessing the responses to the Theological Premise, in particular, it will be necessary to articulate Theistic responses to the three principal premises of the sub-argument, to wit, the *world actualizing premise*, *the epistemic premise* and the *world preferability premise*. Finally, I shall argue against these Theistic responses and conclude that, in the final analysis, they are not philosophically persuasive. Accordingly, I hope to persuade the reflective and non-tendentious reader that the *prima facie* reasons that have thus far been provided for the soundness of the Argument from Doxastic Discord have not been displaced.

C1. THE EMPIRICAL PREMISE

The first premise that a Theist might set his sights on is the Empirical Premise in the main argument. Recall, that this premise purports to be justified on the basis of our *a posteriori* knowledge of the actual world. More particularly, it is justified by our observations of what appear to be instances of *genuine* Divinity and Soteriological Discord among the set of religious persons. Such doxastic discord is instantiated and institutionalized in the corpus of competing and contrary religions that have historically existed in the world and which still flourish today.

But what if the conclusion drawn from such observations is incorrect? What if there is not really any Divinity or Soteriological Discord? What if the Atheist has moved too quickly from the observation of *apparent* doxastic discord to the conclusion that there is *genuine* doxastic discord? What if the apparent doxastic discord we observe in the actual world is simply illusory? What if what we consider to be contrary and contradictory religions are actually *complementary* of each other?

C1.1. DENIAL OF DOXASTIC DISCORD

John Hick, probably more than any other philosopher of religion, has advanced the idea that the variegated religions of the world are complementary and not contradictory. For Hick, appearances in religious matters are indeed deceiving. If Hick is correct in his assessment then the Empirical Premise is simply false and the Argument from Doxastic Discord is unsound.

Hick's central argument is that ultimate reality is apprehended in different ways by different religious traditions. Apparent contradictions and contrary beliefs amongst religions (either about the nature of the Divine or how to achieve salvation through the Divine) are to be understood merely as different *perspectives* of ultimate reality and how to soteriologically relate to it. As Janusz Salamon explains '[t]he central claim Hick is making is that beliefs of adherents of religions as different as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism are not contradictory, and therefore all religions can be considered as authentic manifestations of the same Ultimate Reality.' (2003, p. 173).

Hick articulates the central thrust of his argument as follows:

> The first is to postulate an ultimate transcendent divine reality (which I have been referring to as the Real) which, being beyond the scope of our human concepts, cannot be directly experienced by us as it is in itself but only as it appears through our various human thought forms. And the second is to identify the thought-and-experienced deities and absolutes as different manifestations of the Real within different historical forms of human consciousness. In Kantian terms, the divine noumenon, the Real *an sich*, is experienced through different human receptivities as a range of divine phenomena, in the formation of which religious concepts have played an essential part. These different "receptivities" consist of conceptual schemas within which various personal, communal, and historical factors have produced yet further variations. The most basic concepts in terms of which the Real is humanly thought-and-experienced are those of (personal) deity and of the (non-personal) absolute. But the Real is not actually experienced either as deity in general or as the absolute in general. (1988, pp.297-298).

In advancing this argument, Hick makes use of the well-known Kantian distinction between *phenomenal* reality and *noumenal* reality. For Hick, the Divine, as it is in itself (*ding an sich*), is the one ultimate noumenal reality unmediated by any religious person's perceptions or experiences of it. Different religious traditions, however, come to perceive and experience the one ultimate noumenal reality in different ways and thus have apparently contrary (i) phenomenal descriptions of it, and (ii) prescriptions about how to have soteriological access to it. (Ruhmkorff, 2013). Nonetheless, different religions are all describing complementary aspects of the Divine and how to properly relate to it. Therefore, religions do not *really* contradict each other either in their characterization of the Divine or about how to have correct soteriological access to it.

Hick buttresses this argument by an intuitive appeal to how even physical reality may be variously experienced and described by different people. He notes '[t]hat the same reality may be variously experienced and described is true even of physical objects. But

in the case of the infinite, transcendent divine reality there may well be much greater scope for the use of varying human conceptual schemas producing various modes of phenomenal experience.' (1988, p.298). He thus concludes:

> Those doctrinal conflicts, then, that embody different conceptions of the ultimate arise, according to the hypothesis I am presenting, from the variations between different sets of human conceptual schema and spiritual practice. And it seems that each of these varying ways of thinking-and-experiencing the Real has been able to mediate its transforming presence to human life. For the different major concepts of the ultimate do not seem – so far as we can tell – to result in one religious totality being soteriologically more effective than another. (1988, p.299).

To rhetorically press his point and lull us into agreement, Hick has had occasion to make use of an admittedly charming allegory:

> An elephant was brought to a group of blind men who had never encountered such an animal before. One felt a leg and reported that an elephant is a great living pillar. Another felt the trunk and reported that an elephant is a great snake. Another felt a tusk and reported that an elephant is like a great plowshare. And so on. And then they quarrelled together, each claiming that his own account was the truth and therefore all others were false. In fact they were all true, but each referring to one aspect of the total reality and all expressed in very imperfect analogies. (1977, p.140).

Like the dispute between the blind men, the disputes and differences between the various religions and their adherents are simply apparent. They are not genuine. Each religion (like each of the blind men) is correct in his description of the *part* of the ultimate reality he has apprehended from his terrestrial *perspective*. As Johnson writes 'Hick believes that each religious tradition is like a blind man who, suffering from Kantian blindness, is unable to see the elephant as it really is.' (1997, p.16). Ultimately though, and at the deepest level of theological analysis, *all* religions believe and assert

the same thing – the existence of an ultimate reality and ways to relate to it. Admittedly, this sort of argument does 'indeed have strong intuitive appeal' insofar as Hick translates 'into philosophical language what many people seem to believe, namely that all major religions lead to the same destination.' (Salamon, 2003, p.173).

But how philosophically persuasive is this line of argument as a defeater to the truth of the Empirical Premise? I would suggest not very. Difficulties inherent in Kantian epistemology aside, there are at least two principal problems with Hick's argument. First, Hick's position commits him to a radical revisionism of the various religious traditions which 'does not accurately accept the religious data on its own terms.' (Johnson, 1997, p.12). The different religious traditions of the world do not take *themselves* to be expressing mere idiosyncratic phenomenal perspectives on the nature of the Divine or the correct way to have soteriological access to it. Rather, they take themselves to be characterising the *actual* nature of Divine reality and how a person is to *actually* achieve soteriological beatitude. As Johnson explains '[i]n order to make his hypothesis work, Hick must redefine many religious concepts in ways the founders and adherents of various traditions would reject.' (1997, p.11).

For example, Judaism, Christianity and Islam explicitly say that the Divine *is* personal in the Anselmian sense. Advaita Vedanta Hinduism explicitly says that the Divine *is* impersonal Brahman. Mimasa Hinduism explicitly says that the Divine *is* a set of impersonal vibrations or vocables. Christians explicitly believe that Jesus was the incarnate God and soteriological beatitude lies through belief in him alone. Jews and Muslims demur on this score. Buddhists, on the other hand, explicitly say that

relinquishing all terrestrial desire and individual ego is the way to achieve nirvana and obtain ultimate freedom, happiness, liberation and indescribable bliss. These are radically different claims about ultimate reality and how we ought to relate to it. They cannot all be correct. Hick, however, in order to be successful, must redefine and refurbish these theological schema in a way that makes them, ultimately, all say the same thing!

Similarly in the allegory of the blind men, each of the blind men is asserting what the elephant is, and not what they simply consider a portion of the elephant to be. Furthermore, they are all incorrect in asserting that an elephant *is* a living pillar, or *is* a snake or *is* a plowshare. An elephant is not identical to any one of those things! What is more, claiming that an elephant *is,* at one and the same time, a living pillar, a snake and a plowshare, violates the axiom of non-contradiction. Accordingly, unless one is willing to reject such an axiom and argue that there can be 'true contradictions' in reality, Hick's argument (and the analogy he relies on to buttress it) is fallacious.

As Bradley notes '[t]he fact of the matter is that the blind men of religion do not regard their own doctrines as "imperfect analogies," partial visions of a single transcendent reality. Rather . . . each claims that his vision alone offers the complete and absolute truth.' (2015, p.55). Similarly, Salomon concludes '[i]n the final analysis Hick appears to be a typical revisionist theologian who does not take religious beliefs as they are understood and held by millions of believers, but ends with telling people what and how they should believe, so that his theory can work.' (2003, p.179).

Second, and following upon these observations, we might wonder what exactly Hick has actually achieved in his attempt to quash the indictment of contrariety and contradiction levelled against the various religions? It would appear that Hick has succeeded only in creating yet another competing and contrary religion! Hick sets out to defend the various religions as providing complementary (and non-contradictory) accounts of the Divine and how to have soteriologically access it. However, what Hick ends up achieving is the construction of a new highly abstract 'meta-religion' that bears absolutely no resemblance to any of the *particular* religions he was defending.

This 'meta-religion' itself constitutes a competing and contrary religion that must now be considered amongst the extant and vertiginous panoply. It is a wholly new religious system which, if endorsed, would instantiate and institutionalize yet another instance of doxastic discord. Far from extinguishing the fire started by the Empirical Premise, Hick seems only to have fanned the flames! Bradley is scathing on this score:

> Of course, one might claim – as John Hick does – that, whether theistic or otherwise, these religions, and all others as well, "represent diverse awarenesses of the same limitless transcendent reality." But although Hick's terminological ascent into high generalities may look promising, it serves only to obscure the logical situation. We need to remember that this claim is not itself part of the belief system of any of these religions themselves. Just as the claim that each of the blind men is "referring only to one aspect of the total reality" is itself different from, and contrary to, the claims of each blind man to know what an elephant *is*, so his own universalist, inclusivist, religious worldview is different from, and contrary to, the worldviews of these other religions. Hick's inclusivist religion promises to reconcile rival religions but finishes by offering us a new one to rival all the others. (2015, pp.59-60).

Accordingly, Hick's attempt to deny the empirical fact of doxastic discord thus (i) ignores the actual beliefs and assertions of the various religions themselves, and/or (ii) culminates in the creation of yet a further competing and contrary 'meta-religion' which serves only to aggravate, rather than dissolve, doxastic discord. In short, it simply does not appear feasible to deny the plain fact that there is Divinity and Soteriological discord among the set of religious persons. However, instead of denying the empirical facts of the actual world, perhaps the Theist could adopt another more plausible line of defence?

C2. THE THEOLOGICAL PREMISE

Given the truth of the Empirical Premise, the Theist must then deny the Theological Premise of the main argument. If the Theist cannot provide sound reasons to undermine the truth of this premise then the Argument from Doxastic Discord will stand. Recall, that this premise asserts that given the assumption that the Anselmian God exists one can logically derive an expectation about how the actual world should be. Accordingly, the crux of any Theistic denial of this premise must lie in the provision of reasons to resist this particular logical entailment. In short, the Theist must argue that we do *not* have good reasons to believe that if God existed we would find ourselves in an actual world without doxastic discord (i.e. in an actual world with doxastic homogeneity). To do this, the Theist must take up the mantle against the sub-argument for the Theological Premise.

To my mind there are four principal ways to challenge the sub-argument for the Theological Premise. First, the Theist may accept the conclusion of the sub-argument for the Theological Premise but challenge the temporal assertion. Second, he may challenge the world actualizing premise – premise (2). Third, he may challenge the epistemic premise – premise (3). Fourth, he may challenge the world preferability premise – premise (5).

C2.1. DENIAL OF THE TEMPORAL ASSERTION

Recall that an integral part of the Theological Premise is that we should expect to find ourselves in a world without doxastic discord in the *present*. In other words, the Theological Premise asserts that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ should be the actual world *now*. But why should this be the case? Is this not just an unjustified assumption on the part of the Atheist?

Perhaps the Theist could accept the Empirical Premise as well as the entirety of the sub-argument for the Theological Premise yet resist the temporal assertion on the following grounds: While it is true that there is doxastic discord in the present, this does not mean that this will continue indefinitely into the future. God's loving character ensures that in the *end* the actual world will be $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$. God's providential plan for religious human persons is that they will all *ultimately* come to believe in his existence and have correct soteriological beliefs in order to have the relationship with him that he so desires. God both knows how to execute this plan and is in the process of executing it! In short, $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is presently under construction and will be here eventually. The Atheist advancing the Argument from Doxastic Discord is unjustifiably demanding that God walk to the beat

of *his* temporal drum. The Atheist is rather like an impatient and querulous client who keeps pestering the construction foreman at a building site with questions like *'Why is the building not finished yet?',* instead of humbly trusting in the foreman's superior ability, knowledge and desire to construct the best building he can. Let us call this the 'World Under Construction Response' **(WUCR)**.

There are two principal reasons to reject the WUCR. First, the empirical data does not support the claim that the 'construction' of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is likely at all, let alone in the offing. Second, and more fundamentally, the WUCR ignores the fact that if $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is indeed 'under construction' this would still leave millions (if not billions) of religious human persons in the *present* who are either (i) doxastically ill-positioned to participate in the correct relationship with God, or (ii) are at risk of becoming epistemically ill-positioned. Relatedly, the WUCR completely ignores the billions of religious persons who existed in the *past* and who were then doxastically ill-positioned and thus incapable of having the correct relationship with God. I shall address each of these objections to WUCR in turn.

If one engages in a survey of the 'river of religion' that flows through human history, the pattern that emerges is certainly not one of religious convergence but rather religious divergence. The honest 'religious potamologist' must conclude that there has been a stupefying proliferation of distributaries and not tributaries. If one truly grasps the tale told by the 'World Religion Tree'[104] one has to be severely sceptical of the plausibility of

[104] See footnote 14.

the WUCR. There is simply no good reason, in light of the historical and contemporary evidence of continuous and persistent religious divergence, to believe that anything like doxastic homogeneity will ecumenically spread to the set of all religious persons at all, let alone that this will occur in the near future.

However, perhaps this response is unfair to the proponent of the WUCR? After all, the argument the Theist is responding to is a deductive and not inductive argument. The Argument from Doxastic Discord is asserting that there is an explicit logical contradiction between the state of the actual world and the existence of God. Accordingly, likelihoods and probabilities do not enter into consideration. Perhaps all the proponent of the WUCR needs to argue for is that it is *logically possible* that $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DH}}$ will exist in the future (even if this might be unlikely or improbable). Accordingly, the Theist might argue that if it is even logically possible (albeit highly unlikely) that $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DH}}$ is 'under construction', in accordance with God's plan, and will come to be realized in the future, then the Argument from Doxastic Discord is unsound. However, it is at this point that the second reason to reject the WUCR springs sharply into focus.

Assume for a moment that the Theist is correct and that $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DH}}$ is indeed 'under construction'. Assume then that, in the fullness of time, humanity will usher in a theological and religious golden-age in which all religious persons alive will be united in their doxastic commitments about the existence of God and will universally converge on how to properly relate to him. Assume that there will be a single religion whose adherents will all be doxastically well-positioned to participate in a meaningful, deep and enduring relationship with God should they so choose. Consequently, the epistemic

concern will no longer exist and thus the threat posed by it to any doxastically well-positioned religious person will be a thing of the past. This is undoubtedly something that many Theists would pray for!

However, now consider how this future state of affairs benefits the doxastically ill-positioned religious persons who existed in the *past* or who exist *now*? Those religious persons who lived in the past certainly cannot benefit at all from the fact that at some point in the future $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ will come to be realized. Their opportunity to have a proper relationship with God while in existence cannot be resuscitated now or in the future. The fact that such people existed in the past and were not doxastically well-positioned to have a proper relationship with God simply does not seem compatible with God's omni-perfection. Sticking with the construction metaphor, if God's providential 'construction' of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ will only be completed in the future then either he did not care sufficiently about the doxastic position of those religious persons who lived in the past, or he was not powerful enough to 'construct' $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ sooner at all, or he did not know how to plan the actual world so that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ was 'constructed' sooner.

Furthermore, even if we were to callously ignore those doxastically ill-positioned religious persons who lived in the past, and simply focussed on those who exist in the present, similar, if not identical, considerations would apply. There are billions of religious persons who exist now who are either not doxastically well-positioned to have a relationship with God at all or, are doxastically well-positioned, but are at severe risk of becoming doxastically ill-positioned. The fact that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ will be realized at some point in the future simply cannot assist them in the present.

In short, while God takes his time 'constructing' $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, billions of religious people will languish in doxastic no-man's land, unable to properly participate in relationship with the one true personal axiological and soteriological ultimate of reality. Once again, God's omni-perfection is severely undermined.

It is not the Atheist who is asking God to march to the beat of his drum but rather the purported properties of God which dictate that the 'construction' of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is already far behind schedule and over-budget. Not to mention that the doxastically ill-positioned are the ones liable for the construction penalties! The WUCR is not then, to my mind, even possibly true if God really exists. It thus fails to commend itself as a plausible or persuasive answer to the Theological Premise.

C2.2. DENYING THE WORLD ACTUALIZING PREMISE[105]

Perhaps the best defence for the Theist lies not in challenging the temporal assertion but rather in challenging premise (2) of the sub-argument itself? Recall that premise (2) asserts that, on the basis of the definition of omnipotence, God is capable of actualizing any logically possible world. That is to say, God has the power to actualize any maximally consistent state of affairs. Premise (2) of the sub-argument then asserts that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a maximally consistent state of affairs, from which it follows that God has the capacity to actualize and 'bring about' $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$.

[105] See **Appendix II**.

How might the Theist go about challenging this crucial premise in the sub-argument? To my mind, there are only two ways to do so. First, the Theist could argue that, contrary to our modal intuitions, $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is not actually a possible world after all, but rather is a logically impossible world. Second, the Theist might accept that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a logically possible world, but argue that: (i) God prefers another possible world that is more valuable than $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, and (ii) this other possible world is not within God's power to actualize.[106] I shall examine each one of these responses in turn.

What are we to make of the Theist's contention that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a logically impossible world? The Theist might argue, after all, that the definition of omnipotence we are endorsing does not require that God actualize logically impossible states of affairs. If $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a logically impossible world then God cannot be expected to actualize it and this will not count against his omnipotence. But could $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ really be logically impossible? Are we really to believe that there is a logical contradiction lurking in the description of such a world? Does a person contradict themselves if they imagine that the actual world might have been $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$? In describing $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ do we commit a logical *faux pas* on par with asserting that there can be a world in which there exists a square-circle? Surely not!

I believe the proper response here is to demand that the Theist provide reasons to overcome the very powerful *prima facie* modal intuition that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is indeed a logically possible world. I am not at all confident that the Theist can provide such reasons unless he rejects the idea that conceivability constitutes *prima facie* justification about what is

[106] In other words, this other possible world is *unfeasible* for God to actualize for other reasons and despite his omnipotence. In this context, 'feasible' is understood to mean 'possible within the limits set by one's plans, aims, or intentions.' (Flint, 1983, p.257).

metaphysically or logically possible. However, if human conceivability cannot be utilized, even as *prima facie* justification in relation to such matters, then analytic philosophy and logical ratiocination is in a sorry state indeed. Needless to say, I cannot think of a good reason to think that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a logically impossible world. I can do no better than Bradley when he writes '[t]here are worlds that have no Heaven and no Hell. There are possible worlds in which God doesn't exist, worlds in which Jesus doesn't exist, and worlds in which there is neither salvation nor damnation. All these are conceivable without contradiction, hence logically possible. There can be no debate about this.' (2015, p.236).[107]

If the Theist concedes that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a logically possible world then he must argue that God would nevertheless not actualize $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ for other philosophical reasons. But what could those reasons be? Perhaps the Theist could make the following argument: In advancing the Argument from Doxastic Discord, the Atheist has a fundamentally flawed assumption. He is assuming that God simply desires religious human persons to be doxastically well-positioned for relationship with him. However, God does not desire this. The ultimate purpose of human existence is not just knowledge that God exist but

[107] I am aware of Plantinga's *modal ontological argument* for the *necessary* existence of God (1974, pp.212-216). I find myself completely unpersuaded. First, I believe that there are a number of sound incompatible property arguments which make the crucial notion of God's 'maximal excellence' *internally incoherent* (Grim, 2011). Second, I believe the argument clearly *begs the question* in its possibility premise insofar as it disingenuously engenders epistemic assent by obfuscating the nested modal operators required for the argument to succeed (Gale, 2011, pp. 88-89). Third, I believe the argument illicitly treats necessary existence as a property (or perfection) that can be predicated of God when neither 'existence' nor 'necessary existence' are true predicates of *any* object (Bradley, 2015, pp.136-141). Fourth, we can construct an *equally plausible* parallel ontological argument that leads to an *opposite* and *contradictory* conclusion (Mackie, 1982, pp.59-63). Finally, the **Argument from Doxastic Discord** itself, if sound, would demonstrate that God's existence is necessarily false.

relationship *freely* entered into with him.[108] A possible world containing free will and in which all religious persons freely enter into relationship with God is supremely more valuable than $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$.

If $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ were actualized by God there would certainly be religious persons in a doxastically favourable position to have a relationship with him but there would be no guarantee that they would *freely* choose to have a relationship with him. Furthermore, while it may be logically possible for God to actualize $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, it is logically impossible for God, having made the decision to bequeath free will to human persons, to determine that all the doxastically well-positioned religious persons inhabiting $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ freely choose to enter into relationship with him.

All relationships, in order to be genuine, must be undetermined and freely entered into by the parties. Relationship with God is no exception. In short, if God were to simply actualize $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ it would not be a world in which it is guaranteed that those religious persons would freely enter into relationship with him. Furthermore, God could only ensure that all the religious persons inhabiting $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ would have a relationship with him if he undermined their free will. Thus, God does not prefer $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, and the possible world

[108] As Craig writes 'it is actually a matter of relative indifference to God whether people believe that he exists or not. For what God is interested in is building a love relationship with us, not just getting us to believe that he exists. There is no reason at all to think that if God were to make his existence more manifest, more people would come into a saving relationship with him' (2011, p.71). Furthermore, 'God's ultimate goal for humanity is knowledge of Himself – which alone can bring eternal happiness to people. . . The purpose of human history is the Kingdom of God. God's desire is to draw freely as many people as He can into His everlasting kingdom.' (Craig, 2010, p.163).

that he does prefer is not one that is feasible for him to actualize. Let us call this the 'Free Will Response' **(FWR).**[109]

The FWR has far more to commend it than the anaemic and enervated denial of the logical possibility of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$. When articulated in this way it can indeed sound quite persuasive. First, the FWR appeals to very strong pre-theoretic intuitions many people have about (i) the existence of human free will, and (ii) its value and importance for us. Second, Theists (almost universally) believe that God, as part of having made human persons in his image, created them with free will. Third, given that the Argument from Doxastic Discord seeks to establish the impossibility of the simultaneous existence of God and doxastic discord, if the FWR is even *possibly* true (i.e. true in some possible world) then premise (2) of the sub-argument will be false and the Argument from Doxastic Discord will be unsound. Accordingly, we must acknowledge the FWR poses a serious challenge to premise (2) of the sub-argument.

However, before critiquing the FWR let us first make sure we understand it. To my mind, the FWR makes three distinct claims. First, God is not concerned merely with the doxastic status of human persons but rather desires the cultivation of a loving relationship with them and which is freely chosen on their part. Second, God made the decision to create human persons with free will based on his assessment of its great value. Third, consequent upon God's decision to generously gift human persons with

[109] It is important to note that this response is not available to the Theological Fatalist. On such a view there is no human free will in light of God's foreknowledge of the future.

free will, God *could not* have actualized possible world in which all the doxastically well-positioned religious persons would freely choose to have a relationship with him.

It is crucial to remember that the model of human freedom that the Theist is endorsing when advancing the FWR is Metaphysical Libertarianism. (Craig, 2010). Plantinga is clear about what this entails:

> . . . if I am free with respect to action A, then causal laws and antecedent conditions determine neither that I take A nor that I refrain. More broadly, if I am free with respect to action A, then God does not *bring it about* or *cause it to be the case* either that I take or that I refrain from this action; he neither causes this to be so through the laws he establishes, nor by direct intervention, nor in any other way. For if he *brings about* or *causes it to be the case* that I take A, then I am not free to *refrain* from A, in which case I am not free with respect to A. Although of course God may cause it to be the case that I am free with respect to A, he cannot cause it to be the case either that I freely take or that I freely refrain from this action – and this though he is omnipotent. But then it follows that there are plenty of contingent states of affairs such that it is not within the power of God to bring about their actuality, or cause to be actual. He cannot cause it to be the case that I freely refrain from an action A; for if he does so, he causes it to be the case that I refrain from A, in which case I do not do so *freely*. (1974, p.171).

Plantinga explains further that there are two ways by which God might 'bring about' or 'actualize' some state of affairs viz. *strongly (narrowly)* or *weakly (broadly):*

> The narrow sense of 'bring about' is such that the sentence. . . If God brings it about that I refrain from A, then I do not freely refrain from A . . . expresses as necessary truth. You are free with respect to an action A only if God does not bring it about or cause it to be the case that you refrain from A. But now suppose that God knows that if he creates you free with respect to A in some set S of circumstances, you will refrain from A; suppose further that he brings it about (narrow sense) that you are free with respect to A in S; and suppose finally that you do in fact freely refrain from A. Then in

> a broader sense of 'bring about' we could properly say that God has brought it about that you freely refrain from A. We must make a corresponding distinction, then, between a stronger and weaker sense of 'actualize'. In the strong sense, God can actualize only what he can cause to be actual; in that sense he cannot actualize any state of affairs including the existence of creatures who freely take some action or the other. But so far we have no reason to for supposing the same holds for *weak* actualization. (1978, pp.172-173).[110]

Three preliminary responses need to be made to the FWR. First, in advancing the FWR, the Theist is assuming that the Metaphysical Libertarian model of free will is logically possible (i.e. that it is *possibly* true). However, if such a model of free will is impossible, then there is no possible world in which it might exist and thus no possible person could have it. We would then be in a position to conclude that, insofar as the FWR relies on that particular model of free will, it fails as a response. Relatedly, if Compatibilism constitutes the true account of free will then there is absolutely no problem in God determining that doxastically well-positioned religious persons freely choose to enter into relationship with him.[111]

Second, in advancing the FWR, the Theist is assuming that free will (in the Metaphysical Libertarian sense) is of such great value that human persons are simply better off having it regardless. However, this value judgment (while certainly common) is not at all obvious and is unlikely to be universally shared. For example, if offered the opportunity to exist as a doxastically well-positioned religious person who was *determined* to have a deep, rich and enduring relationship with the true axiological and soteriological

[110] See footnote 66.
[111] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to argue either for the logical incoherence of Metaphysical Libertarianism or the truth of Compatibilism.

ultimate of all reality, many might be inclined to say that this would be an infinitely more valuable state of affairs than having freedom of the will!

Third, even if the FWR were successful, it would serve *only* to show that God cannot actualize certain states of affairs given that he has made certain choices. In other words, the proponent of the FWR is arguing that given God's desire and decision to create human persons with free will then he is *consequently* prevented from actualizing a possible world in which religious human persons who are doxastically well-positioned are guaranteed to freely come to have relationship with him. However, this conclusion would do nothing to show that God's decision to create human persons with free will was logically necessitated in the first place! In other words, the fact that God labours under constraints regarding what possible worlds he can and cannot actualize as a *consequence* of his own free decision to give human persons free will, does nothing to show that it was logically impossible for him to actualize a possible world in which doxastically well-positioned religious persons were guaranteed to come to have a relationship with him. In short, there was no principle of *logic* that prescribed that God necessarily had to create human persons with free will. (Bradley, 2007; Geirsson & Losonsky, 2005).

However, for the sake of argument, I am willing to accept the Theist's assumptions that (i) God desires that human persons should freely come to have a relationship with him, (ii) human persons were created by God with free will in the Metaphysical Libertarian sense, and (iii) it really is more valuable for human persons to have such freedom than not to have it. What I wish to focus on is a more substantive response to the FWR. In

my view, the Atheist ought to grab the bull by the horns and argue as follows: Contrary to what the proponent of the FWR asserts, it is possible for God to actualize a world in which every religious person is doxastically well-positioned and, as a matter of fact, *freely* chooses to have a relationship with him. Let us call this relationally luxuriant world $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$.

$\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ can, as with $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, be conceived without logical contradiction.[112] Thus, $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ is a possible world. There can be no argument on this score. Furthermore, if $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ is a possible world then it is necessarily a possible world. Accordingly, in virtue of his omnipotence, God has the power to actualize $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$! If he does not have the power to actualize $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ then he is not omnipotent.

The Theist is, however, unlikely to accept this argument at face value. How could it really be possible for God to actualize $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$? Following Plantinga, if God *strongly* actualizes $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ then he would be directly determining and consciously causing the religious persons who inhabit that world to have a relationship with him. This would violate their free will. Accordingly, if God strongly actualizes $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ then the doxastically well-positioned religious persons inhabiting that world would not, after all, freely come into relationship with him. We are faced with a contradiction – God cannot determine that someone freely choose to have a relationship with him. Given that God cannot actualize contradictory states of affairs, he cannot strongly actualize $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$.

[112] Again, test your intuitions in this regard. Is there something contradictory about conceiving of a world where all doxastically well-positioned religious persons, of their own undetermined volition, freely decide to have a relationship with God? Perhaps you might think such a world extremely unlikely or highly improbable, but it is certainly not logically impossible!

I believe the proper response by the Atheist is to grant that the Theist is correct on this score. However, the Atheist can press the argument that it is nevertheless possible for God to *weakly* actualize $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$. Namely, the Atheist is within his rights to argue that it is possible for God to weakly actualize a world in which: (i) a compossible number of doxastically well-positioned religious persons are created free *with respect to* the decision to have a relationship with God, and (ii) who he knows, in advance of actualization, *would* freely choose to have a relationship with him if they were actualized.[113]

In such a world, God does not determine that this compossible set of doxastically well-positioned religious persons will have a relationship with him. Rather, they decide entirely on their own (and in a completely undetermined manner) to have a relationship with God.[114] God simply knows, from 'eternity past' which compossible set of doxastically well-positioned religious persons would freely choose to have a relationship with him if they were actualized.

How is the Theist to respond to this argument? After all, if this is a possibility then the FWR fails. This is because there would be a compossible set of doxastically well-positioned religious persons who God could choose to actualize and who would freely choose to have a relationship with him. I believe the only plausible way for the Theist to respond is to argue that it is possible that there is no compossible set of doxastically

[113] Notice that (ii) relates to subjunctive propositions about human freedom and must form part of God's Middle Knowledge.
[114] Accordingly, the set of doxastically well-positioned religious persons who inhabit $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ 'complete' the world (so to speak) through the exercise of their free choices, including their free choices to enter into relationship with God.

well-positioned religious persons who would fit the bill.[115] In other words, the Theist must argue that it is possible that the set of compossible doxastically well-positioned religious persons who would freely choose to have a relationship with God *if* they were actualized is *empty* (i.e. is the null set). But why on earth should the Atheist accept that this is a genuine possibility?

The Theist might offer the following as a reason to suppose that such a set is empty: It is possible that *all* possible doxastically well-positioned religious persons are constituted in such a way that any one of them simply would not choose to have a relationship with God *if* he were actualized. Adapting Plantinga's metaphysical nomenclature, it may be argued that it is possible that *all* possible doxastically well-positioned religious persons are afflicted with 'Transworld Relational Abstinence.' (Plantinga, 1974, p.188). This is to say, the Theist may argue that it is possible that *all* possible doxastically well-positioned religious persons are constituted such that *if* they were actualized *then* they would freely choose not to have a relationship with God. This need not be true or even likely. If it is even *possibly* true then the FWR will succeed.

This is quite an assertive and audacious argument. However, I do not myself feel the force or persuasiveness of this response for two principal reasons. First, this response would only be remotely compelling if we had good reason to believe that God had a

[115] Another option might be to argue that God does have the *capacity* to have knowledge of $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ but he *chooses* not to know about $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ (i.e. he chooses to limit his knowledge) and he thereby cannot weakly actualize $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$. However, as Geirsson and Lossonsky point out '[t]his approach will certainly not convince an Atheist. In these circumstances, God does not have the power to actualize states of affairs . . . only as a consequence of God's choice not to exercise his power to have middle knowledge. But this choice is God's choice, and it was in God's power to make a different choice, namely, simply to know [$\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$].' (2005, p.365).

limited or finite number of possible doxastically well-positioned religious persons from which to choose for actualization purposes. But there is no such limitation! There are an *unlimited* and *infinite* number of possible doxastically well-positioned religious persons who God might have chosen to actualize. Perhaps *some* suffer from Transworld Relational Abstinence while others do not. However, if *some* suffer from Transworld Relational Abstinence then God must simply abstain from actualizing *those* persons! He has an unlimited number of others from which to choose.

Second, given that $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ is a world that can be conceived without contradiction, we already have good grounds for believing that (i) not all doxastically well-positioned religious persons suffer from Transworld Relational Abstinence, and that (ii) the set of compossible doxastically well-positioned religious persons who would freely choose to have a relationship with God if they were actualized is *not* empty (i.e. is not the null set). To the contrary, what the conceivability of $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ shows is that there is a set of compossible doxastically well-positioned religious persons who are 'blessed' (pun intended) with 'Transworld Relational Avidity'.

We also know that the logical possibility of $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ is itself necessary. Accordingly, we must conclude that it is *necessarily* possible that the set of compossible doxastically well-positioned religious person who would freely choose to have a relationship with God if they were actual is *not* empty. Thus, the Theist's contention that it is possible that such a set is empty is not simply false, but necessarily false! That is to say, the Theist's contention is not just false in the actual world but false in every possible world.

(Bradley, 2007, pp.13-15).[116] It would appear, in the final analysis, that not only is $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ a possible world that God can actualize but it is also feasible for him to actualize.

We can thus take J.L. Mackie's observations and (minimally) modify them for the purposes of the sub-argument for the Theological Premise:

> But how is it possible that every [possible doxastically well-positioned religious person] suffers from [Transworld Relational Abstinence]? This possibility would be realized only if God were faced with a limited range of [possible doxastically well-positioned religious persons], a limited number of [possible doxastically well-positioned religious persons] from which he had to make a selection, if he was to create free agents at all. What can be supposed to have presented him with that limited range? As I have argued, it is not logically impossible that even a created [doxastically well-positioned religious person] should [freely choose to have a relationship with God]; the supposed limitation of the range of [possible doxastically well-positioned religious persons] is therefore logically contingent. But how could there be logically contingent states of affairs, prior to the creation and existence of any created beings with free will, which an omnipotent god would have to accept and put up with? This suggestion is simply incoherent. (1982, p.172).

T.S. Eliot once wrote that 'men tighten the knot of confusion into perfect misunderstanding.' (2012 [1939], p.20). Indeed. But who was responsible for both the knot and the men in the first place? To drive home the point, the Atheist need only

[116] Another way of grasping this point is to carefully consider the proposition being asserted by the proponent of the FWR: '*It is possible that all possible doxastically well-positioned religious persons suffer from Transworld Relational Abstinence*'. Now, ask yourself, is this proposition to be understood to be referring to (i) all such persons in one *particular* possible world, or (ii) all such persons in *all* possible worlds? If it is taken to be asserting (i) then there is another possible world in which such persons do *not* suffer from 'Transworld Relational Abstinence'. God was then free to create the religious persons inhabiting *that* possible world and who do not suffer from such a grievous affliction. If God nevertheless chooses to create a world in which people suffer from 'Transworld Relational Abstinence' then that is on him. However, one cannot then say that God could not have done otherwise. On the other hand, if it is taken to be asserting (ii), then the proposition would be denying the logical possibility of a world in which there are religious persons 'blessed' with 'Transworld Relational Avidity'. However, not only are such persons possible but they are necessarily possible!

point out to the Theist that *Heaven* is not only a logically possible world but a feasible one too.[117] After all, Heaven is a state of affairs in which there exist only religious persons who believe in God, who have the correct soteriological beliefs about God, and who have freely chosen to be in relationship with him.[118] Clearly, Heaven is not just a possible world but also a feasible world insofar as God can weakly actualize it! In this regard Bradley writes:

> [t]his concept of Heaven – no matter how plausible or implausible it might be – involves nothing self-contradictory. Such a world is therefore a logically possible one. After all, if it were not, then it couldn't be God's place of abode . . . or that of the angels and the souls of the saved. But equally, it is conceived of as a temporal stage of the actual world. It is conceived of as the place where God existed prior to creating any world, now exists, and will exist in the future. Yet clearly, if Heaven is part of the actual world, then the state of being in Heaven is also feasible for God to create. Contrary to [the Theist] it was *not* beyond the capacity of God to create such a world at the outset. So such a world was both logically possible and feasible for God to create. . . (2015, p.239).

Finally, there is absolutely nothing about Heaven that *logically* entails that it could *only* exist as a 'transcendent temporal coda' or a 'post-mortem post-script' for human persons. Thus, if the Theist were to insist that the existence of Heaven necessarily entails that there be a sort of pre-mortem 'run-up' in order for Heaven to be actualized, the

[117] Again, check your own intuitions. While one might legitimately believe the existence of Heaven to be highly unlikely or improbable, it certainly does not entail any logical contradictions in its description or conception.

[118] Some Theists might deny that human persons have free will in Heaven. This breeds logical problems of its own. It seems, in the first place, to be an assertion in logical conflict with the very crux of the FWR, which placed an enormous premium on freedom. So much so, that God felt compelled to give it to us. Yet, if in Heaven, human persons are not free (and Heaven is still supposed to be a desirable state of affairs) then either (i) human persons could get along just fine without it, or (ii) it is a possible world whose denizens are drones. This is the **Problem of Heavenly Freedom**. See: (Pawl & Timpe, 2009).

Atheist need only point out that Heaven's temporal status as a post-mortem realm is *contingent* and not necessary.

It may be contingently true that Heaven's existence entails some antecedent terrestrial existence but it is not logically required to do so. Accordingly, the Atheist can rightly conclude that 'just as there is nothing self-contradictory involved in the creationist hypothesis that the universe was created only a few thousand years ago, so there is nothing self-contradictory involved in the supposition that Heaven might have existed . . . without being preceded by the "vale of tears" in which we currently find ourselves.' (Bradley, 2015, pp.240-241).[119]

Accordingly, in the final analysis, not only do I believe that the Atheist can safely conclude that it is possible for God to actualize $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, he can also conclude that it is possible (and feasible) for God to weakly actualize $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$. Thus, even if the Atheist grants that God would prefer $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ over $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, it would still be a possible world that was within his power to bring about. The FWR and the Theistic challenge to premise (2) fails.

C2.3. <u>DENYING THE EPISTEMIC PREMISE</u>

Given the Theist's failure to undermine premise (2) of the sub-argument perhaps she might have better success challenging premise (3). Recall, that premise (3) of the sub-argument asserts that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ was an 'object' of God's knowledge 'prior to' his decision to

[119] In 1987 the singer Belinda Carlisle sang that 'Heaven is a place on earth'. The Atheist demurs only slightly with her assessment, arguing simply 'Heaven *could* have been a place on earth.'

actualize any world. What is more, we are now in the favourable position to assert that God also knew about $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ in virtue of his Middle Knowledge. If it is indeed true that God desires a world in which doxastically well-positioned religious human persons freely enter into relationship with him, then we can say he had knowledge of such a world 'prior to' creating any world whatsoever.

How might the Theist go about challenging this premise? As I see it, there are only two options. First, the Theist could try deny that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a proper object of knowledge and thus there was nothing for God to know**.** Second, the Theist could argue that even if God had knowledge of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ it was impossible for him to have knowledge of the world he would actually prefers to actualize - $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$. I shall deal with each contention in turn.

The Theist's first contention is that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is not a proper object of knowledge and thus 'prior to' the actualization of any world it was impossible for God to have knowledge of it. However, recall that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is simply a possible world that might have been the actual world. We have already seen that there is no good reason to deny that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a possible world and thus we can conclude that the possibility of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is necessary. Is the Theist really contending that there is no necessary proposition of the sort '$\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a possible world'? If there is no such proposition then even I could not know that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ is a possible world. Yet I do know it. If I can know it, so can an omniscient God. If God does not know it then I know something he does not and his omniscience is undermined. This contention does not seem even remotely promising.

Perhaps the Theist could instead argue as follows: God does have knowledge of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$. However, 'prior to' actualizing any world whatsoever, it is impossible for him to have true beliefs, and thus knowledge, about $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ which is the world he would prefer over $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$. In order to have knowledge of $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ 'prior to' actualizing any world, God would have had to have held true beliefs about (i) future contingent propositions, and (ii) the subjunctive propositions of human freedom 'prior to' his creative decree.

However, there are simply no such true propositions until free human persons actually exist and make the choices they make at the times that they choose to make them. It is only when they make the choices they do in fact make that God has propositional knowledge of those choices. Thus, despite his *hope* that the actual world should turn out to be $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$, it was impossible for God to have known that the actual world would turn out to be $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ 'prior to' his creative decree. It also follows that since God did not know about $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ there was no way for him to 'bring it about'. As we have already had occasion to discuss, this constitutes a rejection of the Classical Account and Molinism and is the preserve of Open Theism. In short, the Theist who endorses Open Theism argues that (i) God would prefer $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ to $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ **,** (ii) if God knew about $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ then he would be able to weakly actualize it, but (iii) it is simply impossible for God to know $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ 'prior to' the actualization of any world.

Mackie points out that '[t]o suppose [Open Theism] is to take sides in a great debate about 'future contingents': God does not know these things, although he knows everything that there is to be known, because until [some human person], has made his decision, there is no truth about what he will decide to do. When God created free

agents – free in this sense – he had to do so without knowing how they would use their freedom.' (1982, p.173).

However, there are three substantial problems with such a response. First, it constitutes a heterodox and perhaps even 'heretical' account of God's knowledge. Second, if correct it does severe violence to God's ability to providentially order the actual world. Third, if correct then it succeeds only at the price of tarnishing God's apparently superlative and unsurpassable love. I shall deal with each problem in turn.

First, and most obviously, for the Theist to embrace Open Theism is to place herself firmly against what most orthodox Theists have traditionally wanted to ascribe to God in respect to his knowledge. The Anselmian God has classically been thought to know future contingents and how human persons would behave. The orthodox adherents of Judaism, Christianity and Islam take this to be an essential part of God's acme. In short, a God that knows the future and how human persons will behave in the future is simply 'greater than' a God who does not! Accordingly, to embrace Open Theism will, for many orthodox theologians, philosophers and laymen alike, constitute nothing short of endorsing the existence of a finite godling – in other words, blasphemy.

Second, as has been previously mentioned, Open Theism drastically undermines God's providence. Divine providence, however, is a core tenant of Theism and is a central feature of Orthodox Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Accordingly, we must conclude that 'the option that [God] does not have [Middle Knowledge] is not at all appealing. Again, God not having such knowledge seems incompatible with his providence.

Instead of God deliberately actualizing a world and caring that the best possible world is actualized, we now get the impression that God actualizes a world, and then simply hopes for the best, and this is not a very reassuring picture of God's act of creation.' (Geirsson & Losonsky, 2005, p.365).

Similarly, Mackie writes '[i]f [God] does not know future contingents, and in particular, does not know what free choices human agents will make, it follows that in 1935, for example, he knew little more than we did about the catastrophic events of the twenty years to 1955, and equally he knows little more than we do now about the next twenty years. And such a limitation of his knowledge carries with it a serious effective limitation of his power.' (1982, p.173). In short, without the net of providence there is simply no guarantee that human history will culminate in anything valuable, useful or good! It may ultimately prove to be a pathetic litany of chaos, confusion, disaster and discord.

Third, if Open Theism is true then we must concede that God did not have knowledge of $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$. However, we now have good grounds for indicting God as less than superlatively loving and far from perfect. After all, if Open Theism is true then God knew 'prior to' actualizing a world that he *could not* providentially ensure any ultimately good end for humanity. God knew that there was a very real likelihood that everything could go horribly wrong in all sorts of ways. Nevertheless, and in spite of the risks involved, he apparently had a perverse desire to persist.[120]

[120] In law there is a form of intention known as *dolus eventualis*. It exists when a person (i) foresees the real risk of some harm ensuing pursuant to his chosen course of action, (ii) reconciles himself to the risk and (iii) proceeds regardless. This form of intention is *sufficient* to render the person liable for the harm should it eventuate.

If God gave human persons free will knowing, in advance, that there was a risk many religious human persons were likely to go 'doxastically awry', or that many religious human persons would choose not to have a relationship with him, then this implies God played roulette with human salvation. If Open Theism is true then God took a gargantuan gamble that the intrinsic and instrumentally valuable relationships between him and religious human persons might never obtain. In short, God would have knowingly risked an actual world filled with doxastic discord and doxastically ill-positioned religious persons. God might have gambled at the 'Creation Casino', but it would appear that it was us who were left to settle the soteriological debt with the house! Needless to say, this hardly seems to be a paradigm of perfect planning or an unsurpassable display of love.

The Atheist is then in a position to argue that if the Theist accepts the Classical Account together with Molinism then there do not seem to be any good grounds to deny that God knew about either $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DH}}$ or $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ 'prior to' the actualization of the world. The only plausible way for the Theist then to deny premise (3) is to argue that (i) God would prefer $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$, and (ii) God could not have knowledge of $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ 'prior to' the actualization of the world. This would be to reject the Classical View and Molinism (i.e. to embrace Open Theism).

However, the price for rejecting God's knowledge of future contingents and the subjunctives of human freedom is terribly high. Not only is God's omniscience seriously limited in a way that many Theists would find anathema, but the doctrine of divine providence is eviscerated. Finally, given the serious soteriological risks involved for

religious human persons actualized in a world without the safety net of providence, God's once sparkling and superlative love now seems distressingly dim and defective. He seems more like a reckless rogue than a loving parent. Thus, the Theistic challenge to premise (3) of the sub-argument either fails outright, or succeeds only at the cost of abandoning divine providence, limiting God's power and undermining his superlative love. This may be a cost many Theists will not wish to pay.

C2.4. DENYING THE WORLD PREFERABILITY PREMISE

We come now to the final premise that could be challenged by the Theist. Recall, that premise (5) of the sub-argument asserts that God prefers $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$**.** It is in virtue of his superlative and unsurpassably loving character that God prefers that $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ be the actual world. Why? Because in such a world all religious persons are (i) doxastically well-positioned to have a relationship with God, and (ii) the threat of the epistemic concern is non-existent. There are thus fewer serious obstacles to such persons freely entering into a relationship with God should they choose to do so. On the assumption then that God had knowledge of $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ 'prior to' the actualization of any world and has the power to actualize $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$, premise (5) asserts God would actualize $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$.

How is the Theist to challenge this premise? Well, we have already seen one plausible attempt in our discussion of the FWR. A crucial part of the FWR was to argue that God does not prefer $\mathbf{W^{DH}}$ but rather prefers $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$. According to the proponent of the FWR, the ultimate telos and purpose of human existence is not just knowledge of God's

existence but freely chosen relationship with God. I believe this is a fair and reasonable point for the Theist to make from within his own worldview. Accordingly, I believe that the Atheist ought to accept the contention that God would desire and prefer $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ over $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DH}}$.

However, as we have already seen, not only does God know about $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ 'prior to' actualizing any world at all, but he also has the power to weakly actualize $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$. So without providing any further argument, the Theist will not have done any substantial damage to the Argument from Doxastic Discord. The argument can quite easily be modified to take the Theist's contention about human free will into account.[121] The real question then becomes the following: Can the Theist provide any good reasons to believe that $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ would not be preferable to God after all? In other words, is it possible that God might not prefer $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$?

The Theist might try arguing as follows: While $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ is certainly a valuable world, it is possible that it nevertheless suffers from 'overriding deficiencies'. Perhaps in virtue of these 'overriding deficiencies' God would not necessarily prefer it. Perhaps, for example, it is possible that in $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ the number of doxastically well-positioned religious persons who freely enter into relationship with God is tiny – a mere handful. Surely, God is not necessarily obliged to prefer such a *sparsely* populated world over a more *bountiful* world even if, in a more bountiful world, it would also contain more doxastically ill-

[121] If God exists then $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ is actual. $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ is not actual. Therefore, God does not exist.

positioned religious persons? (Craig, 1989). Let us call this the 'Overriding Deficiency Response' **(ODR).**

The ODR is not very persuasive to my mind for two principal reasons. First, if the price of such a world is that there would be a *single* religious person who would not be in a position to have relationship with God at all (or who would freely choose not to have such a relationship) then we can be certain that a perfectly loving God would not prefer it. After all, to say that God might prefer such a world would mean that he would be content to actualize a number of religious human persons who he would know, in advance, would (i) not have the opportunity to be participants in the single most important relationship they could ever hope to participate in, nor (ii) fulfil the very purpose of human existence.

If God preferred such a world this would be indicative of utilitarian *callousness* not perfect and unsurpassable love. It is inconceivable that a perfectly and unsurpassably loving God would desire such a state of affairs simply for the sake of a world with more doxastically well-positioned persons who would freely choose relationship with him. If God would prefer such a world, it strongly implies that he does not love all people *equally* and is quite prepared to sacrifice the soteriological success of some for the benefit of others. I guess, for God, those unlucky people are simply grist for the soteriological mill. While we might easily believe that terrestrial fathers have favourite children, must we now conclude the same about our heavenly father?

Second, and even more importantly, God need not engage in such callous utilitarian calculus at all. After all, it is 'a purely contingent matter as to how many and which individuals comprise the set of individuals in any given world'. (Bradley, 2015, p.235). What is more, a possible world 'can be object-enhanced (having more objects than the actual world) or object-depleted (having fewer objects than the actual world). Possible worlds can also be object-diverse with respect to the actual world (having some or no objects in common with the actual world). (Bradley, 2015, p.235).

The Atheist can thus plausibly argue that even if it were to be conceded that $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ might have a paucity of doxastically well-positioned religious persons who freely choose relationship with God, it is possible to conceive of another possible (and feasible) world similar to $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ but simply inhabited with more of those sorts of persons. In fact, we already had good reason to believe that there is just such a possible and feasible world. There is absolutely no contradiction in conceiving of a possible world populated with *billions* of compossible doxastically well-positioned religious persons who all freely choose relationship with God. There are an infinite number of possible persons to choose from.

Perhaps the Theist could try another line of argument: Perhaps $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ would not necessarily be preferred by God because it is possible that *only* in a world which is suffused with widespread doxastic discord that some other 'greater good' could be achieved.[122] God being omni-benevolent would thus prefer a world with doxastic discord

[122] Perhaps some outweighing and overriding good like 'mind-building' (epistemic good) or 'soul-building' (moral good). The idea might be that it is possible that only in a world suffused with doxastic discord and

in order to secure this 'greater good'! In other words, it is possible that God has a morally sufficient and overriding reason for permitting doxastic discord, eschewing doxastic homogeneity and not preferring to actualize $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$. Let us call this the 'Morally Sufficient Reason Response' **(MSRR).**

This MSRR is a response often pressed into service by the Theist in the context of the Argument from Evil. For example, Craig has had occasion to respond to that argument as follows: 'many evils occur in life that may be utterly pointless with respect to producing human happiness, but they may not be pointless with respect to producing a deeper, saving knowledge of God.' (2011, p.74) and that '[i]t may well be the case that suffering is part of the means God uses to draw people freely into His kingdom.' (2010, pp.163-164).

The idea behind the MSRR, in the context of suffering and evil, is that God permits certain evils in the world because it facilitates some 'greater good' for human persons (perhaps knowledge of, and relationship with, God). Thus, it is argued, it is possible that God has a morally sufficient reason to permit those evils. But even if we were to grant that the MSRR were plausible within the context of the Argument from Evil, should we think it even a remotely plausible response here? I think not for two reasons.

First, it seems patently absurd to argue that God would prefer a world containing Divinity and Soteriological Discord as the primary means of bringing more religious

---

the epistemic concern that we can truly forge and develop our minds and hearts into what they should be!

persons into relationship with him. Are we really to accept that a world suffused with competing and contrary religious traditions would facilitate *more* people freely entering into relationship with God than a world where there was only one single uniform religion that prescribed belief in him and how to relate to him? To my mind, this seems to be like arguing that 'it is possible that in a world ravaged by a deadly world-wide epidemic more people would come to live prosperous and healthy lives.' The suggestion is logically incoherent.

Second, as the Theist himself has been at great pains to emphasize, knowledge of God and *freely* chosen relationship with him, is the *ultimate* goal and purpose of human life. There simply is no 'greater good' for any human person than knowledge of, and freely chosen relationship, with God. Why? Because such knowledge and relationship is not only intrinsically valuable but it facilitates *unlimited* instrumental benefits for human persons. After all, we are considering a relationship with the personal axiological and soteriological ultimate of all reality! And what is more, it is a relationship that is being freely consummated! It is important to remember that:

> A relationship with *God* would not be a flat one-dimensional thing that, once you have it, means all the interesting searching for God is over. Instead, in a very important sense a life of religious searching would just be beginning. Think, by analogy, of your relationship with a wise guru or even the tennis pro you, as an amateur, are consulting to improve your tennis. You're constantly learning and growing, but you also realize that there's so much more to be attainted and this squeezes out of you even more interesting desires that you had at the beginning, desires for this or that subtle feature of wisdom or of excellence in tennis that you can have only by proceeding beyond the beginning. These are of course only humble analogies. But their very humbleness is helpful – when . . . you imagine by comparison being in a relationship with God, an

> *infinitely* interesting, rich, beautiful, sublime (etc.etc.) Person. (Schellenberg, 2015, pp.68-69)

Relationship with, and knowledge of, God is thus an unsurpassable and incommensurable good in-and-of itself, not to mention that it is a cornucopia of unending epistemic, soteriological and axiological splendour.[123] Such a relationship could deepen over the entirety of a human life and even spill over indefinitely into the after-life (if there is one). $\mathbf{W}^{\mathbf{DHF}}$ is a possible world in which *all* doxastically well-positioned religious persons have precisely *this* sort of relationship with God. It is a world that contains robust free will and where all religious people choose to have a relationship with God. Such a world would be like hitting a gigantic soteriological piñata - epistemic, spiritual and moral development for everyone!

The contention mooted by the Theist, namely, that God would not prefer this world because there might possibly be some other 'greater good' that may be achieved if he were to actualize a world of doxastic discord, is thus logically incoherent. The value of relationship with God, freely and willingly concluded, simply *swamps* any other possible good for human persons. The Atheist might turn Craig's own words back against the Theist when he tells us '[t]o know God, the locus of infinite goodness and love, is an incomparable good, the fulfilment of human existence. The sufferings of this life cannot even be compared with it.' (Craig, 2011, pp.74-75). Thus, while perhaps a plausible sounding rebuttal in the context of the Argument from Evil, it fatally fells the Theist in the context of the Argument from Doxastic Discord.

[123] The goods that would precipitate out of such a relationship would constitute an *axiological avalanche*.

In fact, the Atheist can respond with this piercing argumentative riposte: It can be granted to the Theist that there may indeed be another possible (and feasible) world more preferable than $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ and which God would be desirous of actualizing because he would thereby achieve a 'greater good'. However, the world that God would prefer to actualize instead of $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$ is one in which *all* human persons (not just religious human persons)have come to believe in him, have come to have the correct soteriological beliefs and have freely chosen to have a relationship with him! Let us call this possible world $\mathbf{W^{DHF\text{-}Prime}}$.[124]

Perhaps in the final analysis the Atheist might contend that Argument from Doxastic Discord has actually been too humble in its philosophical aspirations and far too lenient on God![125] It would seem then that, whatever merits the MSRR might have in the context of the Argument from Evil, it carries absolutely no water in the context of the Argument from Doxastic Discord.

C.7. <u>CONCLUSION</u>

We have now come to the end of our discussion. It is worthwhile surveying some of the ground that has been covered. In **Part A,** we began by disambiguating two core concerns viz. the *epistemic* and *metaphysical* concerns. We saw that the epistemic concern was

[124] This possible world would be the soteriological high-octane version of $\mathbf{W^{DHF}}$.
[125] In other words, the Argument from Doxastic Discord could plausibly be refurbished with **Theological Premise**$^{\mathbf{Strong}}$ together with the possibility (and feasibility) of $\mathbf{W^{DHF\text{-}Prime}}$. Given the obvious empirical fact that the actual world is not even remotely like $\mathbf{W^{DHF\text{-}Prime}}$, it follows that God does not exist. See footnote 94.

the challenge posed to sincere would-be and card-carrying religious persons to correctly decide, from among the dizzying panoply of competing and contrary religions, which was correct. The metaphysical concern related to how one could *logically reconcile* the existence of the God common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam with a world clearly suffused with competing, contrary and contradictory religious beliefs (i.e. a world that not only produced, but exacerbated, the epistemic concern).

Having made these philosophical concerns explicit we then explored the relationship between 'Religion', 'God' and 'Ultimism'. We saw that there are a multitude of ways in which the Divine can, and has been, construed by human persons. One way to conceive of the Divine is in terms of God. God, in turn, can be conceived of in personal and impersonal ways. The God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is understood to be a personal metaphysical, axiological and soteriological ultimate who has a range of great-making properties viz. *omnipotence*, *omniscience* and *omni-benevolence*. He is also unsurpassably loving. He is thus the greatest conceivable being. Such attributes permit a definition of a perfect God whose acme is instantly recognizable as the refined and sophisticated theological object common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

In **Part B** we used the metaphysical concern as the intellectual springboard to construct an affirmative argument for Atheism – the **Argument from Doxastic Discord**. The argument sought to demonstrate that there is an explicit logical contradiction between the existence of God, on the one hand, and the empirical existence of doxastic discord among religious persons on the other. Doxastic discord was to be understood, in a religious context, as heterogeneity and divergence of beliefs among religious persons

over (i) the existence and nature of the Divine (**Divinity Discord**), and (ii) how to have correct soteriological access to the Divine (**Soteriological Discord**).

We then articulated and examined the twin components of the argument itself - the main argument and the sub-argument. The main argument contained the **Theological Premise** which sought to derive a logical expectation about how the world should have been given the assumption that God existed. It also reflected the **Empirical Premise** which sought to establish that the actual world did not fulfil that logical expectation. The argument concluded that, given such an explicit logical contradiction, God could not exist in any possible world. In other words, not only was the proposition 'God exists' false in the actual world, but it was necessarily false. The Theological Premise was justified by the reasonable expectations that God was capable of actualizing a possible world without doxastic discord **(Omnipotence)**, had knowledge of a possible world without doxastic discord **(Omniscience)**, and preferred such a world in virtue of his superlative loving character and desire that religious human persons be doxastically well-positioned for relationship with him **(Omni-benevolence, Providence and Superlative Love)**. From these crucial premises the Theological Premise was logically derived.

In **Part C** we examined some of the most plausible Theistic responses to both the Theological Premise and the Empirical Premise. In respect of the Theological Premise, in particular, we examined the major Theistic challenges and ultimately found these responses unpersuasive. In the absence of other persuasive arguments to the key premises, the Atheist is well within her rights to conclude that the Argument from

Doxastic Discord is indeed sound. God was capable of preventing doxastic discord, knew how to prevent it, and would have wanted to prevent it. The existence of doxastic discord in the actual world thus logically entails the non-existence of God.

It is undeniable that the concept of God is emotionally and psychologically powerful. Not to mention that belief in God is the cornerstone of the *Weltanshauung* of many sincere and thoughtful people around the world. However, it is my hope that the open-minded and non-tendentious reader, who takes the time to carefully reflect on the Argument from Doxastic Discord, will come to concur with me that it constitutes a powerful reason to reconsider the solidity of that cornerstone.

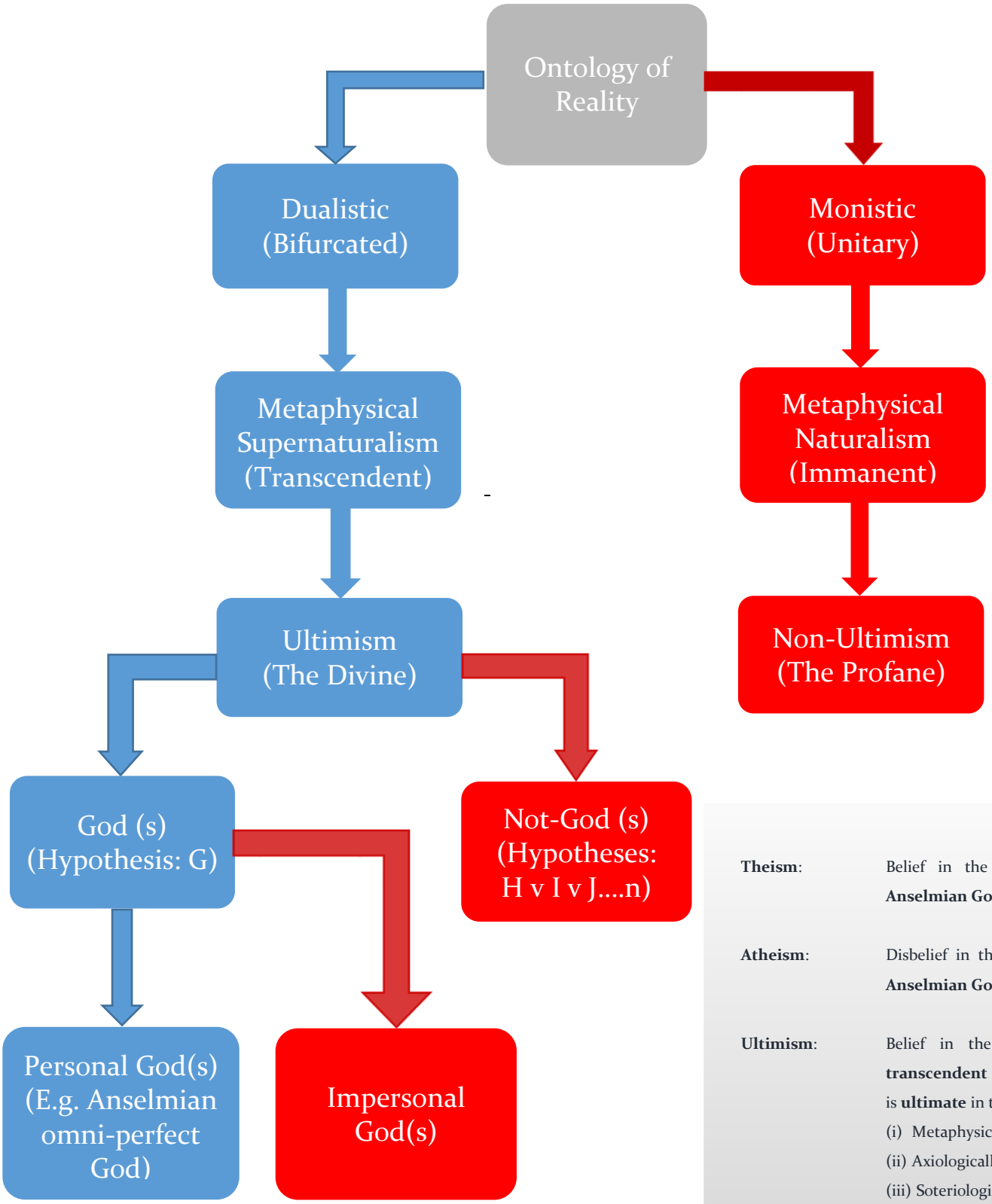
Almost one hundred years ago, H.L. Mencken wrote poignantly about the now forgotten deities that were once so fiercely and ferociously worshiped during the infancy of our species:

> Where is the graveyard of dead gods? What lingering mourners water their mounds? There was a day when Jupiter was the king of the gods, and any man who doubted his puissance was *ipso facto* a barbarian and an ignoramus. But where in all the world is there a man who worships Jupiter today? . . . Men laboured for generations to build vast temples to them [the gods] – temples with stones as large as hay-wagons. The business of interpreting their whims occupied thousands of priests, wizards, archdeacons, evangelists, haruspices, bishops, archbishops . . . Yet in the end they all withered and died, and today there is none so poor as to do them reverence. Worse, the very tombs in which they lie are lost, and so even the respectful stranger is debarred from paying them the slightest and politest homage. (2007 [1922], pp.143 - 144).

And so we might hope, that after one more grave has been dug, and we have dutifully sung a final *requiem aeternam deo*, the God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam might finally be laid to rest with his divine brethren. However, instead of allowing the grave to become lost as with the other gods of old, we might think it befitting to set a tombstone, not as a tribute to the departed, but as a sound warning to those pious mourners who would imprudently attempt to resurrect the dead –

'Beware! Here lies a Sower of Discord.'

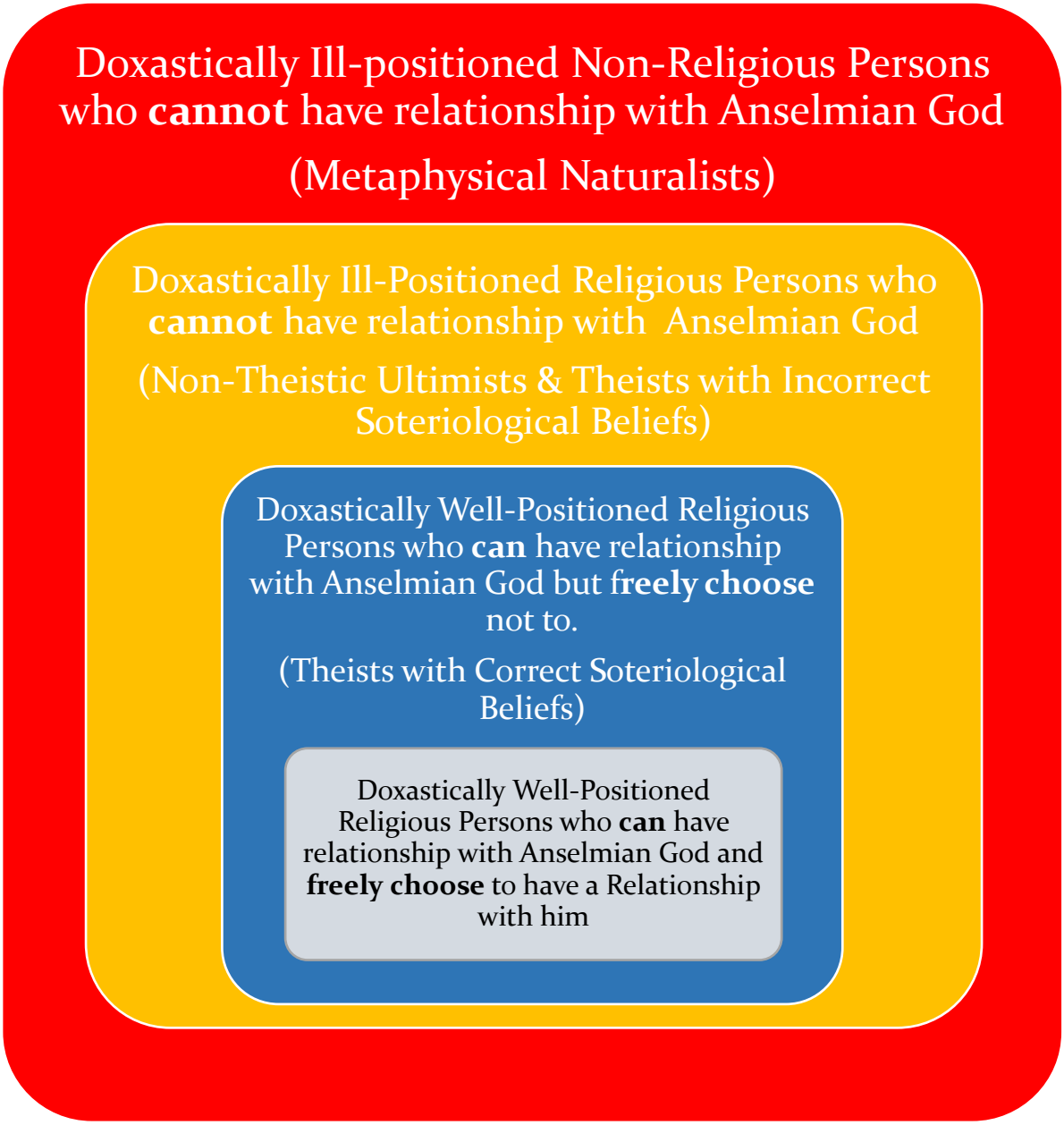
APPENDIX I: A TRANSCENDENT TAXONOMY



The Anselmian omni-perfect God constitutes the *sophisticated* and *refined* theological and metaphysical object common to **Judaism**, **Christianity** and **Islam**

Theism:	Belief in the existence of an **Anselmian God**.
Atheism:	Disbelief in the existence of an **Anselmian God**.
Ultimism:	Belief in the existence of a **transcendent** divine reality that is **ultimate** in three ways: (i) Metaphysically. (ii) Axiologically. (iii) Soteriologically.
Anselmian God:	**Personal God** who is **perfect** in the following key respects: (i) Omnipotent. (ii) Omniscient. (iii) Omni-benevolent.

APPENDIX II: OMNIPOTENCE, FREE WILL AND POSSIBLE PERSONS



The Theist must argue that it is **possible** that the compossible set of Doxastically Well-Positioned Religious Persons who would **freely choose** to have a Relationship with God, if they were actual, is **empty**. If this sub-set is possibly empty then it is possible that God cannot weakly actualize a world containing such persons. If the sub-set is **not** empty then God can weakly actualize a world containing such persons and the Free Will Response (**FWR**) **fails**.

APPENDIX III: GLOSSARY

Absolute Logical Task Account: The thesis that God can perform all logically possible tasks (i.e. genuine tasks that involve no contradiction in their specification).

Actual World: A maximally consistent state of affairs that is actual.

Atheism: The thesis that the proposition 'God exists' is false.

Belief: A cognitive mental state endorsing (or assenting) to the truth of a proposition.

Classical Account: The thesis that God does know future contingent propositions about the Actual World.

Compatibilism: The thesis that asserts (i) it is *not* a necessary condition for free will that persons be *undetermined* with respect to their thoughts and actions, (ii) human persons are determined, (iii) human persons do have free will. Also known as 'soft determinism'.

Compossible Persons: Possible persons who might have been actualized together without any contradiction.

Conceivability Assumption: If *P* is conceivable without contradiction then we are, *prima facie*, justified in asserting P is logically possible. Such justification is subject to further ratiocination.

Contingent proposition: A proposition which is true in some possible worlds and false in others.

Correct Soteriological Access: The state of having a conscious, meaningful and sustained salvific inter-personal relationship with God.

Divine Aretaic Theory: The thesis that (i) God's *character* is perfectly good, and (ii) serves as the ontological foundation for the objectivity of moral values and duties.

Divine Providence: The planning and ordering of the Actual World by God, in virtue of his omni-perfection, so as to *ensure* or *guarantee* an ultimately good end for the human persons whom he loves.

Divinity Discord: The state of having divergent and heterogeneous beliefs about the *existence* and/or *nature* of the Divine.

Doxastic Discord: The state of having Divinity Discord and/or Soteriological Discord.

Doxastically Ill-Positioned: The cognitive state of *not* holding: (i) the belief that the Anselmian God exists, and/or (ii) soteriological beliefs that facilitate correct soteriological access to the Anselmian God.

Doxastically Well-Positioned: The cognitive state of holding: (i) the belief that the Anselmian God exists, and (ii) soteriological beliefs that facilitate correct soteriological access to the Anselmian God.

Empirical Premise: There is an actual world in which there is presently doxastic discord among religious persons.

Epistemic Concern: The problem of: (i) investigating and confirming the essential truth claims of competing and contrary religions, and of (ii) correctly deciding between them within the temporally finite confines of an average human life.

Euthyphro Dilemma: The philosophical challenge posed to attempts to ground objective moral values and duties in God's *commands*, *desires* or *preferences*.

Feasible World: A possible world that might be actual subject to the limits and parameters set by one's *antecedent* plans, aims, intentions or preferences.

Free Knowledge: God's knowledge of the past, present and future of the Actual World.

Free Will: The ability or capacity of a person to have conscious and deliberate control over her choices and actions.

FWR: Free Will Response.

God: The necessary and essentially transcendent, timeless (sans creation), spaceless, eternal (everlasting), changeless, immaterial, omnipresent and omni-perfect person who, by means of an intentional act of will, (i) designed, created and sustains the natural world, and (ii) who providentially ordered the natural

world for the purpose of cultivating a personal relationship with human persons.

Hard Determinism: The incompatibilist thesis that asserts: (i) it is a *necessary* condition for free will that persons be *undetermined* with respect to their thoughts and actions, (ii) human persons are determined, and (iii) human persons do not have free will.

Instrumental value: A type of derivative value. Something is instrumentally valuable if it is desirable as a means to something else which is valuable as an end-in-itself.

Intrinsic value: Non-derivative value. Something is intrinsically valuable if it is desirable as an end-in-itself (*summum bonum*).

Impossible proposition: A proposition that cannot be true in any possible world.

Impossible World: An inconsistent state of affairs that can never be actual (viz. there is *at least one* contradiction in its description).

Knowledge: Justified true belief.

Knowledge by Acquaintance: Non-propositional knowledge of qualitative and sensorial experience.

Knowledge *De Se:* Propositional knowledge that is *essentially* first-person.

Knowledge How: Non-propositional knowledge relating to the *performance* of tasks and activities.

Metaphysical Concern: The problem of *logically* reconciling: (i) the existence of competing and contrary religions, and (ii) the existence of God.

Metaphysical Libertarianism: The incompatibilist thesis that asserts: (i) it is a *necessary* condition for free will that persons be *undetermined* with respect to their thoughts and actions (ii) human persons are undetermined, and (iii) human persons have free will.

Metaphysical Naturalism: The thesis that the proposition 'only the natural world exists' is true.

Metaphysical Supernaturalism: The thesis that the proposition 'only the natural world exists' is false (i.e. that there is a transcendent reality in *addition* to the natural world)

Middle Knowledge: God's knowledge of all counter-factual propositions including all the subjunctive propositions of human freedom (*scientia media*).

Molinism: The thesis that God's omniscience consists of a 'hierarchy' of Natural Knowledge, Middle Knowledge, and Free Knowledge.

MSRR: Morally Sufficient Reason Response.

Natural Knowledge: God' knowledge of all necessary propositions and possibilities.

Necessary proposition: A proposition which is either true in all possible worlds, or false in all possible worlds.

Non-Religious Person: A person who either (i) has a belief that Ultimism is false, or (ii) has other beliefs that entail the belief that Ultimism is false.

ODR: Overriding Deficiency Response.

Omni-benevolence: To be a person: (i) who instantiates or expresses all compossible virtues, (including Superlative Love) and does not express or instantiate any vices, and (iii) who cannot perform any morally impermissible action or command anything morally impermissible.

Omni-perfect: Having the properties of omnipotence, omniscience and omni-benevolence. The greatest conceivable being.

Omnipotence: To have the power to: actualize (i) any contingently possible state of affairs 'prior to' the creation of the actual world, and (ii) any contingently possible state of affairs in the actual world, at the present time t, that (a) is not a state of affairs that has already been actualized prior to time t, or (b) is an otherwise unrepeatable state of affairs.

Omniscience: To have beliefs about all and only true necessary and contingent propositions (excluding *de se* propositions about other persons) including: (i) propositions about the past, present and future of the actual world, (ii) all counter-factual propositions, and (iii) all subjunctive propositions about the free actions of all possible human persons in all possible worlds.

Open Theism The thesis that God does *not* know future contingent propositions about the actual world, or the subjunctive propositions of human freedom at all.

Possible Person: A person that might have been actual but who is not.

Possible World: A maximally consistent state of affairs that might have been the actual world but is not (viz. there are *no* contradictions in its description).

Propositional Account: The thesis that God believes all and only true propositions (and no false propositions) as part of his mental life.

Relative Logical Task Account: The thesis that God can perform all logically possible tasks in accordance with *his* own essential nature.

Religion: Any socio-cultural system that prescribes: (i) a belief in the Divine, and (ii) a set of behavioural practices publicly acknowledging and endorsing the Divine, and which facilitates private interaction, communication, or communion with the Divine.

Religious Person: A person who either (i) holds a belief that Ultimism is true, or (ii) holds other beliefs that entail the belief that Ultimism is true.

Simple Foreknowledge Account: The thesis that God's simple (mere) foreknowledge of future events does not necessitate future events.

Soteriological Discord: The state of having divergent and heterogeneous beliefs about how to achieve salvation and have correct soteriological access to the Divine.

Soteriological Exclusivism: The thesis that *only* one particular religion can provide effective and efficacious salvation for human persons. (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus)*

Soteriological Pluralism: The thesis that *all* religions can provide effective and efficacious salvation for human persons.

Strong Actualization: God's power to *directly* (narrowly) cause (bring about) some state of affairs to be actual.

Subjunctive of Freedom: A conditional counter-factual proposition of the form: If *X* had been in situation *S* then she would have freely chosen *Y*.

Superlative Love: Perfect love that entails, *inter alia*, (i) the desire to be *proximate* to the beloved, and (ii) always being *open* to relationship with the beloved.

Theism: The thesis that the proposition 'God exists' is true.

Theological Fatalism: The thesis that God's foreknowledge of future events necessitates those events. (i.e. necessarily, if God foreknows that X will happen then X will happen necessarily).

Theological Premise^{Strong}: If God exists then there is an actual world in which there is no doxastic discord among *any* human persons (i.e. *all* human persons are doxastically well-positioned religious persons).

Theological Premise^{Weak}: If God exists then there is an actual world in which there is no doxastic discord among *any* religious persons (i.e. all religious persons are doxastically well-positioned).

Tier-1 Discord: Divinity Discord over whether Ultimism is true or not.

Tier-2 Discord: Divinity Discord over whether the Divine is to be understood in terms of Deity at all, or as something else entirely.

Tier-3 Discord: Divinity Discord over whether God is to be understood as a personal entity or an impersonal force.

Tier-4 Discord: Divinity Discord over whether there is more than one personal God and if so, how many.

Tier-5 Discord: Divinity Discord over whether the single personal God is omni-perfect or not.

Total Knowledge Account: The thesis that God has *total* knowledge how, knowledge by acquaintance and propositional knowledge.

Transworld Relational Abstinence: The property of freely deciding *not* to enter into relationship with God *if* actualized in the Actual World.

Transworld Relational Avidity: The property of freely deciding to enter into relationship with God *if* actualized in the Actual World.

True proposition: A proposition that accurately *corresponds* to some state of affairs.

Type-A Argument: An atheological argument that seeks to demonstrate that at least one individual property ascribed to God is logically incoherent or results in a contradiction.

Type-B Argument: An atheological argument that seeks to demonstrate that the conjunction of various properties ascribed to God are logically incoherent or result in contradictions

Type-C Argument: An atheological argument that seeks to demonstrate that there is a logically contradiction between a God that has certain compossible properties and some empirical fact about the world.

Ultimism (Divine): The thesis that the proposition 'there exists a transcendent super-natural reality that is metaphysically, axiologically and soteriologically ultimate' is true.

Voluntarist Account: The thesis that God can perform all logically possible and impossible actions.

W^{DH}: A possible world in which *all* religious human persons are doxastically well-positioned to have a relationship with God.

W^{DHF}: A possible world in which *all* religious human persons are (i) doxastically well-positioned to have a relationship with God, and (ii) who freely choose to enter into relationship with God.

$W^{DHF\text{-}Prime}$: A possible world in which *all* human persons are doxastically well-positioned to have a relationship with God, and (ii) who freely choose to enter into relationship with God.

Weak Actualization: God's power to *indirectly* (broadly) cause (bring about) some state of affairs to be actual (e.g. via the free actions of human persons). The mechanism by which God, in conjunction with his Middle Knowledge, providentially orders the Actual World while simultaneously preserving human Free Will.

World Actualizing Account: The thesis that God can actualize any logically possible states of affairs.

WUCR: World Under Construction Response.

REFERENCES

BOOKS AND JOURNAL ARTICLES

1. Adams, R.M. (1999). *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics.* New York: Oxford University Press.

2. Alston, W. P. (1967). Religion. In Edwards, P. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (7th volume). New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 140 – 145.

3. Alston, W. P. (1986). Does God Have Beliefs? *Religious Studies*, Vol 22 (3-4), 287-306.

4. Alston, W. P. (1990). Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists. In Beaty, M. (ed.).*Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy.* University of Notre Dame Press, 303–26.

5. Antony, L.M. (2007). Introduction. In Antony, L.M. (ed.). *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, ix-xiv.

6. Anderson, E. (2007). If God is Dead, Is Everything Permitted? In Antony, L.M. (ed.). *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 215-230.

7. Anselm. (2000 [1077]). Proslogion. In Hopkins, J. & Richardson, H. (trans.). *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*. Minneapolis: Arthur J Banning Press.

8. Bourget, D., & Chalmers, D.J. (2013). What do Philosophers Believe? *Philosophical Studies,* Vol 170 (3), 465-500.

9. Blackburn, S. (2007). Religion and Respect. In Antony, L.M. (ed.). *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 179-193.

10. Bradley, R.D. (n.d.). What is Truth? Published Online. Retrieved on 25/12/2018 from http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/philosophy/docs/bradley/what_is_truth.pdf

11. Bradley, R.D. (2007). The Free Will Defense Refuted and God's Existence Disproved. Published Online. Retrieved on 02/12/2018 from https://infidels.org/library/modern/raymond_bradley/fwd-refuted.html

12. Bradley, R.D. (2007). The Rivalry between Religions. Published Online. Retrieved on 21/12/2018 from https://infidels.org/library/modern/raymond_bradley/rivalry.html

13. Bradley, R.D. (2015). *God's Gravediggers: Why No Deity Exists*. United Kingdom: Ockham Publishing.

14. Brink, D. (1989). *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

15. Brink, D. (2007). The Autonomy of Ethics. In Martin, M (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 149-165.

16. Carrier, R. (2005). *Sense and Goodness without God: A Defence of Metaphysical Naturalism*. Bloomington: Authorhouse.

17. Carrier, R. (2011). *Why I am not a Christian: Four Conclusive Reasons to Reject the Faith*. California: Philosophy Press.

18. Carroll, S. (2016). *The Big Picture: On the Origins of Life, Meaning and the Universe Itself*. New York: Penguin Random House.

19. Conee, E. (1991). The Possibility of Power beyond Possibility. *Philosophical Perspectives*. Vol 5, 447-473.

20. Craig, W.L. (1989). "No Other Name": A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ. *Faith and Philosophy,* Vol 6, 172-188.

21. Craig, W.L. (1999). *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge & Human Freedom*. Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

22. Craig, W.L. (2008). *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth & Apologetics* (3rd ed). Illinois: Crossway Books.

23. Craig, W.L. (2010). *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision*. Colorado Springs: David C Cook Publishing.

24. Craig, W.L. (2011). Theistic Critiques of Atheism. In Martin, M (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 69-85.

25. Cupitt, D. (2008). Conversation with Don Cupitt. In Gordon, M, & Wilkinson, C. (eds.). *Conversations on Religion*. London: Continuum, 49-58.

26. Dastmalchian, A. (2013). The Epistemology of Religious Diversity in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion. *Philosophy Compass*, Vol 8 (3), 298-308.

27. Dawkins, R. (2006). *The God Delusion*. Great Britain: Bantam Press.

28. Descartes, R. (1984 [1641]). Meditations on First Philosophy. In Cottingham, J., Stoothoff, R., & Murdoch, D. (trans.). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol II*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

29. Dennett, D. (2007). *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. United States: Penguin Books.

30. Draper, P. (2005). God, Science, and Naturalism. In Wainwright, W. J. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 272 – 303.

31. Eliot, T.S. (2012 [1939]). *The Family Reunion*. Published Online. Retrieved on 13/03/2019 https://archive.org/stream/familyreunionplooelio/familyreunionplooelio_djvu.txt

32. Everitt, N. (2010). The Divine Attributes. *Philosophy Compass,* Vol 5 (1), 78-90.

33. Fales, E. (2011). Naturalism and Physicalism. In Martin, M (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 118 - 134.

34. Fasser, E. (2017). *Judging Lives: Autonomy, Dignity & Human Well-Being in cases of Voluntary Assisted Suicide in a South African Constitutional Context*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Retrieved on 02/02/2019 from http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/24525/Judging%20Lives%20-%20Thesis.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

35. Findlay, J.N. (1948). Can God's Existence Be Disproved?. *Mind,* Vol 57 (226), 176-183.

36. Flint, T., & Fredosso, A.J. (1983). Maximal Power. In Fredosso, A. (ed.). *The Existence and Nature of God*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 81-113.

37. Flint, T. (1983). The Problem of Divine Freedom. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol 20, 255-264.

38. Flint, T. (1998). *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*. New York: Cornell University Press.

39. Freddoso. A.J. (1998). Molinism. In Craig,E. (ed.). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge.

40. Gale, R.M. (2011). The Failure of Classical Theistic Arguments. In Martin, M (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 86-101.

41. Geirsson, H., Losonsky, M. (2005). What God Could Have Made. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy,* Vol 43, 355-376.

42. Gettier, E.L. (1963). Is Knowledge Justified True Belief? *Analysis,* Vol 23, 121-123.

43. Grayling, A.C. (1997). *An Introduction to Philosophical Logic* (3rd ed). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

44. Grayling, A.C. (2008). Conversation with A.C. Grayling. In Gordon, M, & Wilkinson, C. (eds.). *Conversations on Religion*. London: Continuum, 1-15.

45. Grayling, A.C. (2013). *The God Argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

46. Griffiths, P. J (2005). Nontheistic Conceptions of the Divine. In Wainwright, W. J. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 59-79.

47. Grim, P. (2011). Impossibility Arguments. In Martin, M (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 199-214.

48. Harris, S. (2006 [2005]). *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason*. Great Britain: Free Press.

49. Harris, S. (2007 [2006]). *Letter to a Christian Nation*. London: Transworld Publishers.

50. Harris, S. (2012). *Free Will*. New York: Free Press.

51. Hasker, W. (1985). Foreknowledge and Necessity. *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol 2(2), 121-157.

52. Hasker, W. (1998). *God, Time and Knowledge (Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion)*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

53. Hasker, W. (2004). *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God* (*Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion)*. New York: Routledge.

54. Hick, J. (1977). *God and the Universe of Faiths*. London: Macmillan Publishers.

55. Hick, J. (1988). Religious Pluralism and Salvation. Published Online. Retrieved on 17/02/2019 from http://groups.apu.edu/theophil/Abare/Religious%20Pluralism%20and%20Salvation.pdf

56. Hitchens, C. (2007). *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. New York: Hachette Book Group.

57. Hoffman, J., & Rosenkrantz, G. (1980). What an Omnipotent Agent can do. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* Vol 11 (1), 1-19.

58. Honderich, T. (ed.). (2005). *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (2nd ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

59. Hume, D. (2000 [1798]). Of Miracles. In Quinn, P.L & Meeker, K. (eds.). *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 29-37.

60. Hyman, G. (2011). Atheism in Modern History. In Martin, M (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 27-46.

61. Iredale, M. (2012). *The Problem of Free Will*: *A Contemporary Introduction*. Durham: Acumen Publishing.

62. Johnson, K.E. (1997). John Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis and the Problem of Conflicting Truth-Claims. Published Online. Retrieved on 02/03/2019 from http://www.leaderu.com/theology/hick.html

63. Kurtz, P. (1997). *The Courage to Become: The Virtues of Humanism*. Westport: Praeger Publishers.

64. Leftow, B. (1989). *Time and Eternity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

65. Locke, J. (1976 [1689]). An Essay Concerning Human Understanding: An Abridgment. J.W. Yolton (ed.). London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.

66. Loftus, J.W. (2012). *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

67. Lucretius (2007 [50 B.C.E]). *The Nature of Things*. Stallings, A.E. (trans.). London: Penguin Publishers.

68. Mackie, J.L. (1977). *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. London: Penguin Books.

69. Mackie, J.L. (1982). *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

70. Martin, M. (1997). Human Suffering and the Acceptance of God. Published Online. Retrieved on 03/03/2019 from https://infidels.org/library/modern/michael_martin/suffering.html

71. Martin, M. (2011). General Introduction. In Martin, M (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1-7.

72. Martin, M. (2011). Atheism and Religion. In Martin, M (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 217-232.

73. Mann, W. E. (2005). Divine Sovereignty and Aseity. In Wainwright, W. J. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 35 – 58.

74. McCann, H.J & Johnson, D.M. (2017). Divine Providence. In Zalta, E.N. (ed.). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2017)*. Published Online. Retrieved on 24/01/2019 from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/providence-divine/

75. McGrath, A. (2008). Conversation with Alister McGrath. In Gordon, M, & Wilkinson, C. (eds.). *Conversations on Religion*. London: Continuum, 99 – 111.

76. McKim, R. (2001). *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

77. Mencken, H. L. (2007 [1922]). Memorial Service. In Hitchens, C. (ed.). *The Portable Atheist: Selected Readings for the Nonbeliever*. USA: Da Capo Press, 143-146.

78. Mill, J.S. (1984 [1865]). Mr. Mansel on the Limits of Religious Thought. In Pike, N. (ed.). *God and Evil*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

79. Millican, P. (2004). The One Fatal Flaw in Anselm's Argument. *Mind,* Vol 113, 437-476.

80. Molina, L. (1988 [1588]). *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*. Fredosso, A.J. (transl.). Ithaca: Cornell.

81. Moreland, J.P. & Nielsen, K. (1990). *Does God Exist? The Great Debate*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc.

82. Morriston, W. (2001). Must there be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God. *Philosophia Christi,* Vol 3 (1), 127–138.

83. Morriston, W. (2011). God and the Ontological Foundation of Morality. *Religious Studies,* Vol 48, 15-34.

84. Nagasawa, Y. (2003). Divine Omniscience and Knowledge *de se*. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol 53, 73-82.

85. Nagasawa, Y. (2011). The Maximal God and the Problem of Evil. Published Online. Retrieved on 11/01/2019 http://www.apologeticsinthechurch.com/uploads/7/4/5/6/7456646/maximalgod.pdf

86. Nozick, R. (1981). *Philosophical Explanations*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

87. Parfit, D. (2011). *On What Matters: Volume I &II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

88. Parfit, D. (2017). *On What Matters: Volume III*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

89. Pawl, T., & Timpe, K. (2009). Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven. *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol 26 (4), 398-419.

90. Perry, J. (1979). The Problem of the Essential Indexical. *Nous*, Vol 13, 3-21.

91. Plantinga, A. (1967). *God and other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*. New York: Cornell University Press.

92. Plantinga, A. (1974). *The Nature of Necessity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

93. Pike, N. (1969). Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin. *American Philosophical Quarterly,* Vol 6, 208-216.

94. Quinn, P.L. (1978). *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

95. Quinn, P.L. (2005). Religious Diversity. In Wainwright, W. J. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 392 – 418.

96. Ramadan, T. (2008). Conversation with Tariq Ramadan. In Gordon, M, & Wilkinson, C. (eds.). *Conversations on Religion*. London: Continuum, 77 - 87.

97. Reichenbach, B. (1982). *Evil and a Good God*. New York: Fordham University Press.

98. Rey, G. (2007). Meta-atheism: Religious Avowal as Self-Deception. In Antony, L.M. (ed.). *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 243-265.

99. Rogers, K. (2000). *Perfect Being Theology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

100. Ross, J.F. (1980). Creation. *Journal of Philosophy,* Vol 77 (10), 614-629.

101. Rowe, W. L. (2005). Divine Power, Goodness and Knowledge. In Wainwright, W. J. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 15-34.

102. Ruhmkorff, S. (2013). The Incompatibility Problem and Religious Pluralism Beyond Hick. *Philosophy Compass*, Vol 8 (5), 510-522.

103. Russell, B. (2010 [1957]). *Why I am Not a Christian*. Abingdon: Routledge Classics.

104. Sacks, J. (2008). Conversation with Jonathan Sacks. In Gordon, M, & Wilkinson, C. (eds.). *Conversations on Religion*. London: Continuum, 212-221.

105. Salamon, J. (2003). John Hick's Philosophy of Religious Pluralism – A Critical Examination. *Forum Philosophicum: International Journal for Philosophy*, Vol 8, 167-180.

106. Schellenberg, J. L. (1997). Pluralism and Probability. *Religious Studies,* Vol 33 (2), 143-159.

107. Schellenberg, J.L. (2015). *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

108. Schellenberg, J.L. (2017). Religion without God (and without Turning East): A New Alternative to Traditional Theistic Faith. *Word & World*, Vol 37 (2), 118-127.

109. Shakespeare, W. (1963 [1604]). *The Tragic History of Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*. New York: Norton & Company Inc.

110. Swartz, N. (2017). Foreknowledge and Free Will. Published Online. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved on 31/01/2019 from https://www.iep.utm.edu/foreknow/

111. Smith, G. H. (1989). *Atheism: The Case Against God*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

112. Smith, Q. (2001). The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism. *Philo*, Vol 4 (2), 195-215.

113. Stenger, V. (2008). *God, The Failed Hypothesis: How Science shows that God Does not Exist*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

114. Stenger, V. (2009). *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

115. Stenger, V. (2012). *God and the Folly of Faith: The Incompatibility of Science and Religion*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

116. Stump, E., & Kretzmann, N. (1981). Eternity. *The Journal of Philosophy,* Vol 78 (8), 429-458.

117. Swinburne, R. (1993 [1977]). *The Coherence of Theism* (revised ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

118. Taylor, K.A. (2007). Without the Net of Providence: Atheism and the Human Adventure. In Antony, L.M. (ed.). *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 150-164.

119. Taliaferro, C. (1985). Divine Cognitive Power. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol 18, 133-140.

120. Trakakis, N. (2007). An Epistemically Distant God? A Critique of John Hick's Response to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness. *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol 48 (2), 214-226.

121. Wade, N. (2009). *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why it Endures*. New York: The Penguin Press.

122. Williams, R. (2008). Conversation with Rowan Williams. In Godon, M, & Wilkinson, C. (eds.). *Conversations on Religion*. London: Continuum, 27-37.

123. Zuckerman, P. (2007). Atheism: Contemporary Numbers and Patterns. In Martin, M (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 47-65.

INTERNET AND MEDIA

124. Hitchens, C. (2012). Hitchens vs. Hitchens – "Religion: A Celestial North Korea. Retrieved online on 02/02/2019 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPD1YGghtDk

125. 40 Foundation & Funk and Consulting. World Religion Tree. Retrieved online on 14/01/2019 from https://external-preview.redd.it/e5i27HPcaGrDPApm2lyfRyn3JQlLZV_K06mSzmIXa7Y.jpg?auto=webp&s=305e5527d3e7f831b338c26e205840836f26edaf

126. Pew-Templeton Religious Futures Project. Retrieved online on 14/01/2019 from http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/questions

127. Quote Investigator. Retrieved online on 02/02/2019 from https://quoteinvestigator.com/2018/08/28/lie/