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INTRODUCTION TO THEOPHRON

Between the first and second centuries AD, an anonymous writer later misidentified as Apollodorus composed *Bibliotheca*, a compendium of encyclopedic entries on Greek mythology. In it lies a retelling of Penelope and her suitor conundrum, in which local youths vie for her hand in marriage, surmising that Penelope’s husband, Odysseus, perished while returning from the Trojan War. *Bibliotheca* catalogs a complete list of these miscreants, including more than 120 names traditionally unrecorded in Homer’s *Odyssey*. “Theophron” is one such name. Perhaps to a classicist’s chagrin, however, this journal derives its title not from a Pseudo-Apollodorian suitor but rather from the literal meaning of “θεόφρων” in Greek: “godly minded.”

Our title selection represents the publication’s three primary goals. The first is to develop upcoming scholars through rigorous, double-blind peer review and revisions processes. Every submitted manuscript thus remains subject to standards of excellence commensurable with nonsectarian journals in the same fields. Nevertheless, *Theophron*’s unequivocally Christian interests subsequently encourage inquiry with a worshipful posture as an additional aspiration. We aim specifically to kindle not dry intellectualism but a robust extension of humankind’s faculties toward God, to know and glorify Him more deeply through study and reflection. The final—though most ambitious and foundational—objective is to bridge the intellectual communication gap between Christian academia and the Church at large. Too rarely do individuals in one realm avail themselves of the resources proffered by those in the other.

To these ends, issues of this publication will include academic articles from rising scholars, thematic reflections from lay believers outside of the academy, poetry from Christian writers, and book reviews from current and former students. Placing diverse materials side-by-side primarily highlights ongoing conversations on the selected topic in both academic and non-academic arenas. Ultimately, however, we hope that readers glean that both the questions grappled with and the answers posited by these two groups lie in close relation—that the pursuit of godly mindedness extends to all Christians, regardless of occupation.

ἜΩμεν θεόφρονες

THEOPHRON EDITORS

ARTICLES & POEMS

WISDOM IN CONFLICT

THOMAS DUTTWEILER¹

ABSTRACT: Stephen Grimm has recently argued for a theory of wisdom that denies the ancient theoretical-practical divide and makes knowledge of the good the chief component of wisdom. Paul O’Grady, while attracted to Grimm’s theory, argues that it cannot show how Jesus and the Buddha, who each hold radically different theoretical beliefs, both count as wise. O’Grady’s solution is to contextualize the contrary truth claims of each, such that we can attribute knowledge and, therefore, wisdom to both. I argue that O’Grady’s solution to the problem of conflicting wisdom ascriptions suffers from unpleasant skeptical implications and is undercut by considerations from the broader epistemological literature on the nature of wisdom as well as on peer disagreement. I argue further that two contemporary theories of wisdom—namely, those of Sharon Ryan and Shane Ryan—fare no better when trying to show how Jesus and the Buddha are both wise. I offer a modified version of Grimm’s theory, substituting understanding for knowledge as the key criterion for wisdom, arguing that this modification answers the problem of conflicting wisdom ascriptions.

STEPHEN Grimm has recently argued for a theory of wisdom that denies the ancient distinction between practical wisdom—what Aristotle calls *phronesis*—and theoretical wisdom—what he calls *sophia*—and makes knowledge of the good a necessary condition for being wise.² Paul O’Grady has written favorably about Grimm’s theory, finding it plausible that a wise person must know how to live well but noting that it has the unpleasant implication that teachers of differing religious traditions, like Jesus and the Buddha, cannot both count as wise. Since Grimm’s theory admits of no theoretical-practical distinction, and since Jesus and the Buddha have differing theoretical beliefs,³ at most, one of them has the knowledge requisite for wisdom. O’Grady’s solution is to contextualize the theoretical truth claims of both teachers relative to their differing practices, such that one can attribute wisdom to both under Grimm’s theory.⁴

¹ Thomas Duttweiler is a PhD candidate at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

² Stephen R. Grimm, “Wisdom,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 93, no. 1 (2015): 139–140.

³ In contemporary discussions around wisdom, theoretical wisdom is typically thought of as a deep understanding of an academic domain, e.g., physics or theology, whereas practical wisdom is thought of as knowledge or understanding about how to live well in the world.

⁴ Paul O’Grady, “Grimm Wisdom,” *Annals of Philosophy* 66, no. 1 (2018): 67–77.

In this paper, I argue that O'Grady's attempt to handle cases of conflicting wisdom attributions is unsuccessful; debates around the relevance of moral goodness to wisdom suggest that there is a certain class of truth claims—namely, morally evil ones—that we are seemingly able to evaluate regardless of context, providing the seeds for a *reductio* against contextualism. Moreover, the literature on peer disagreement raises the possibility of full evidential disclosure between disputants, a disclosure which I argue undercuts attempts to contextualize their truth claims. O'Grady fails to reconcile Grimm's knowledge-based account of wisdom with cases of conflicting wisdom attributions. Attributing wisdom to two sages with conflicting theoretical beliefs while respecting at least the spirit of Grimm's original theory of wisdom requires not contextualization but rather an altogether different set of necessary conditions for wisdom.⁵ While we cannot make flat-footed attributions of wisdom to all purported sages, we can attribute internal consistency and a weak variety of wisdom by substituting Grimm's knowledge criteria with understanding, yielding several salutary benefits for our theorizing about wisdom. In Part 1, I examine and evaluate O'Grady's argument, concluding that it cannot save Grimm's knowledge-based theory of wisdom. In Part 2, I survey and critique two alternative theories of wisdom—namely, those of Sharon Ryan and Shane Ryan—finding they fall short as solutions to the problem of conflicting wisdom attributions. Finally, in Part 3, I beef up Grimm's theory of wisdom by substituting understanding for knowledge as the key ingredient for wisdom. This augmented theory of wisdom lets us make substantial headway in un-knotting O'Grady's problem, though a full resolution of the conflict remains elusive.

⁵ An anonymous reviewer, commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, asked why pluralism is not an option at this juncture. O'Grady himself considers and rejects a number of potential pluralistic resolutions of the problem, including a version of pluralism proposed by John Hick, whereby Jesus' and the Buddha's concepts each refer to the same underlying reality of which neither has a fully accurate grasp. O'Grady finds the prospects for this solution dim. Jesus, according to O'Grady, speaks as though God is the cause of everything in the universe, whereas the Buddha denies any distinction between ultimate reality and its manifestations, so causality between the two is impossible. One cannot apply Hick's pluralism about religious concepts without first resolving this fundamental metaphysical disagreement between Jesus and the Buddha, and so pluralism offers no way out of the conflict. "Grimm Wisdom," 72–73.

Grimm's theory of wisdom is distinct from other contemporary definitions in that he denies the ancient distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom;⁶ the primary meaning of wisdom, he argues, is knowing practically how to live well, and so wisdom extends only analogically into theoretical domains like math and science. Theoretical knowledge is important for wisdom, but it is practical knowledge of living well that comes first. Wisdom, for Grimm, consists of three knowledge conditions:

- (1) Knowledge of what is good or important for well-being.
- (2) Knowledge of one's standing relative to what is good or important for well-being.
- (3) Knowledge of a strategy for obtaining what is good or important for well-being.⁷

Grimm defends his knowledge-based account against two objections by Sharon Ryan; she argues that knowledge conditions for wisdom are too strong since it is possible for one to be wise while having some false beliefs. We take Ptolemy to be wise even though he held a number of false astronomical beliefs, and Confucius, if placed in a skeptical scenario like the Matrix, would have many false metaphysical beliefs yet intuitively remain wise.⁸ Grimm refutes Ryan's first objection, arguing that Ptolemy's false astronomical beliefs have no bearing on whether he knows how to live well, but concedes the second; Confucius' false metaphysical beliefs preclude his having wisdom. Theoretical knowledge of at least some truths (e.g., about the ultimate source of goodness or happiness) is necessary for knowing practically how to live well.⁹

O'Grady attempts to reconcile Ryan and Grimm.¹⁰ Intuitively, we

⁶ For recent articulations of the practical-theoretical divide in wisdom, see Jason Baehr, "Sophia: Theoretical Wisdom and Contemporary Epistemology," in *Virtues and Their Vices*, eds. Kevin Timpe and Craig A. Boyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 303–23, and Dennis Whitcomb, "Wisdom," in *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard (Milton Park, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 95–105.

⁷ Grimm, "Wisdom," 140.

⁸ Sharon Ryan, "Wisdom, Knowledge, and Rationality," *Acta Anal* 27 (2012): 99–112.

⁹ Grimm, "Wisdom," 147.

¹⁰ O'Grady, "Grimm Wisdom," 67–72.

think of great world religious figures like Jesus and the Buddha as wise, and any theory of wisdom worth its salt should map onto this intuition. Yet, Jesus and the Buddha cannot *both* be wise on Grimm's theory, since their respective sets of metaphysical beliefs, like that of Confucius, impact their knowing of how to live well, and these sets contain many mutually exclusive beliefs (e.g., about whether there is such a thing as a self). At most, one of Jesus or the Buddha has the requisite theoretical knowledge for wisdom, and thus Grimm's theory yields the counter-intuitive result that at least one of them, owing to this lack of theoretical knowledge, is not wise. While Grimm's theory admits of degrees of wisdom, such that one who knows more about the good counts as wiser for Grimm than one who knows less, he denies wisdom to those with false beliefs about the good.¹¹ One obvious solution is to replace Grimm's knowledge condition for wisdom with some less demanding epistemic object like justification or rationality, but O'Grady prefers to keep this criterion, finding it attractive that the wise person must know how to live in the world and how the world fundamentally works. O'Grady's solution is to contextualize the truth claims of Jesus and the Buddha, arguing that the concepts they use, while referring to real, existent entities in the world to which everyone has cognitive access, at least in principle, are "partially constituted by the attitudes, practices, and values of those" who use them.¹² We cannot fully determine (1) the lexical meaning or (2) the justification conditions for certain truth claims without inhabiting the cultural and practical context of those making the claims. What Jesus and the Buddha each mean by a concept like the self, for example, can only be understood by one who shares Jesus' or the Buddha's cultural and practical context. This contrasts with mainstream concepts like gold or dog that are "more fully constituted by the world,"¹³ i.e., the sorts of concepts involved in

¹¹ Grimm, "Wisdom," 143.

¹² O'Grady, "Grimm Wisdom," 73. More precisely, O'Grady refers to this solution as "non-indexical contextualism;" non-indexical because the difference between two truth claims is not merely lexical (75). Elsewhere, he remarks that indexical contextualism "locates the difference in the realm of meaning," whereas "non-indexical contextualism puts it into the world." Paul O'Grady, "Relativism in the Philosophy of Religion," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Relativism*, ed. Martin Kusch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 545.

¹³ O'Grady, "Grimm Wisdom," 73. O'Grady does not assert that his argument about contextualized truth claims is committed to those truth claims being incommensurable; he calls incommensurability a "troublesome outcome." (O'Grady, "Grimm Wisdom," 74). Elsewhere, however, O'Grady distinguishes between what he

truth claims we can straightforwardly grasp and evaluate across contexts. O'Grady does not argue that Jesus and the Buddha use the concept "God" to refer to different entities or that they refer to the same entity in complementary ways. Rather, he holds that we cannot fully say what they mean or who is right since we do not share their contexts. O'Grady appeals to Linda Zagzebski's work on wisdom for support, noting that for Zagzebski, practical wisdom affects theoretical wisdom, just as theoretical knowledge affects the practical for Grimm. We cannot have theoretical knowledge without good practice,¹⁴ and thus we cannot evaluate theoretical claims apart from their practical contexts. We can evaluate whether the practices of Jesus and the Buddha really do lead to a good life but cannot tell whose truth claims are accurate in any non-question-begging way. To put it another way, because of these contextual differences, the apparent conflict between Jesus' and the Buddha's truth claims does not count as evidence that one or both has false theoretical beliefs.

O'Grady's attempt to retain a knowledge condition for wisdom in the face of conflict between two purported sages is both novel and thought-provoking, but there are reasons to question its cogency. He is surely right that we cannot as easily compare the competing metaphysical truth claims of Jesus and the Buddha as students in a freshman-level world religions class might imagine; the practical impacts the theoretical and, as in all areas of evaluation and interpretation, context is king. Yet, even if the contextualist solution succeeds in screening off the truth claims of Jesus and the Buddha from our evaluation, it is doubtful whether this outcome preserves our intuition that both Jesus and the Buddha are wise.¹⁵ If we cannot in any non-

calls meaning incommensurability, under which two individuals cannot grasp the meaning of each other's sentences, from knowledge incommensurability, under which justification conditions vary across domains and cannot be applied across domains. The former he critiques as lacking credibility, but the former admits of limited application. Plausibly, cases where two sages who occupy different cultural contexts with differing justification conditions represents such an application of knowledge incommensurability. Paul O'Grady, *Relativism* (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 156–170.

¹⁴ Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 264–72.

¹⁵ O'Grady assumes throughout his paper the universal intuition that both Jesus and the Buddha are exemplars of wisdom. Plausibly, both men are good candidates for wisdom, since they are the founders of world religions with millions upon millions of adherents and their systems of thought continue to be studied and taught centuries

question-begging manner evaluate whether either of them possesses knowledge, the rational response is not to give each the benefit of the doubt and count them wise but rather to remain agnostic about the matter, particularly if something as valuable as wisdom hangs in the balance. Furthermore, we ought to take this stance regarding the wisdom of *any* purported sage whose historical period, culture, attitudes, and practices are sufficiently different from our own as to push their truth claims beyond our evaluation. The only persons on this contextualist scheme to whom we could ever rationally ascribe wisdom would be those who occupy our own cultural and practical context; this is not only a skeptical implication but a culturally and historically imperialistic one, which O'Grady would surely not welcome.

Even if we lay aside these skeptical worries, we run into problems trying to find the limits of contextualism for screening off truth claims from our evaluation. Consider a long-running problem in the epistemology of wisdom, that of Mephistopheles,¹⁶ the manifestly wicked but purportedly wise demonic antagonist of *Faust*. Mephistopheles is cunning and knowledgeable about the world in ways superior to any human being; one would be hard-pressed to find a better-informed guide to how the world works at a fundamental level.¹⁷ Yet, one would be just as hard-pressed to find someone more committed in practice to the opposite of the good life if we make the plausible assumption that one characteristic of a good life is that it benefits others in addition to oneself, which is surely not the case with Mephistopheles. Epistemologists have debated whether evil *behavior* precludes one from having

after they were first articulated. Yet O'Grady nowhere defends the intuition that both are wise, and I will follow O'Grady in making this assumption.

¹⁶ In the literature on wisdom, as well as for my present purposes, it is irrelevant that Mephistopheles is a literary character rather than a concretely existing individual; the use of this character as an example is merely to establish the plausibility of a thoroughly wicked individual for the purposes of exploring more deeply the nature of wisdom. I thank Michael Cervering for his helpful comments on this point in private correspondence.

¹⁷ Whitcomb argues that since Mephistopheles provides advice, he knows will lead to Faust living a bad life; plausibly Mephistopheles also knows what would lead Faust to live well, and, therefore, Mephistopheles knows how to live well. What he lacks is good behavior, leading Whitcomb to conclude he is wise though evil. "Wisdom," 97–98. Space does not permit me in this paper to engage with the important debate in the literature about whether one must live a good life in order to count as wise. For my present purposes, I will adopt Grimm's view that one who knows how to live well also lives well. See Grimm, "Wisdom," 152–153.

practical wisdom,¹⁸ but if we adopt Grimm's view of wisdom, which admits no theoretical-practical divide, then a closely related question emerges—namely, whether Mephistopheles' evil *theoretical beliefs* preclude his having wisdom. For in addition to being wicked in practice, Mephistopheles has all manner of wicked theoretical beliefs; for example, he believes that it is morally permissible for one to purchase human souls for one's own benefit. Mephistopheles does not count as wise on Grimm's original theory, since he has false theoretical beliefs that preclude his knowing how to live well, but O'Grady's contextualist amendment to Grimm does not get off so easily.

The example of Mephistopheles provides the basis for a *reductio* against O'Grady's contextualism. Because Mephistopheles' theoretical truth claims are embedded in a context vastly different from our own, they are screened off from our evaluation as surely as those of Jesus and the Buddha, and thus we cannot render judgment that Mephistopheles lacks knowledge and, therefore, wisdom. Most of us would, intuitively, hold that Mephistopheles' theoretical beliefs are false¹⁹ and, therefore (assuming a knowledge criterion for wisdom), that he is not wise, so something is amiss with the contextualist solution. O'Grady faces a dilemma; he can bite the bullet and accept that we just cannot say for sure whether Mephistopheles is wise any more than Jesus or the Buddha, or he must say that there are limits to the contextualist approach and that Mephistopheles' theoretical beliefs are so wicked as to be beyond the pale. If O'Grady takes the latter horn, he will be hard-pressed to non-arbitrarily define just where the boundary line falls between theoretical truth claims that can and cannot legitimately take shelter behind the contextualist veil. If he opts for the former, then his contextualism leads us into a skeptical moral bog, unable to evaluate even the most heinous and villainous of moral truth claims.²⁰ If we cannot say for sure

¹⁸ Grimm, "Wisdom," 6–8; Andrew Pinsent, "Wisdom and Evil," in *The Wisdom of the Christian Faith*, eds. Michael T. McFall and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 99–120; Whitcomb, "Wisdom," 95–105.

¹⁹ This is because representative of Mephistopheles' views about the good is the belief that it is good to acquire human souls for one's personal benefit, a belief that most would find obviously and intuitively false.

²⁰ A third option would be to rule out Mephistopheles as wise because evil claims, e.g., about acquiring human souls, do not lead to a good life, since O'Grady allows that we can make relative judgements about whether one set of truth claims or other supports well-being. "Grimm Wisdom," 75; see also O'Grady, "Relativism in Philosophy of Religion," 548. We can easily imagine, however, instances where Mephistopheles' evil truth claims nevertheless lead one to a good life given a very rough sort of contextualist

whether the fictional Mephistopheles has knowledge and wisdom, then we can do no better when it comes to real-life moral monsters like Stalin and Hitler. Intuitively, if the theoretical impacts the practical on our conception of wisdom, then Mephistopheles' having wicked theoretical beliefs precludes his having wisdom, but O'Grady's contextualist defense cannot show this.

Further issues arise for the contextualist solution when we consider the literature around peer disagreement. In a widely influential essay, Richard Feldman argues that when two epistemic peers (people who share all the same evidence about some question, are on par with one another cognitively, and are therefore equally likely to be right about that question) disagree, the epistemically proper response for both is a suspension of judgment about that matter. Reasonable disagreements where both peers just agree to disagree are impossible, according to Feldman. Feldman considers and critiques a number of potential objections to this admittedly skeptical conclusion, but I shall only consider one relevant proposal here. We might think that the two peers can reasonably disagree if each has access to some sort of private evidence, such as a unique insight or intuition that neither can share with the other; this effectively breaks the evidential symmetry between the two peers and, therefore, each can reasonably disagree with the other. Feldman rejects this potential resolution, however; even if *S* cannot fully share his or her insight or intuition with his or her peer *R*, *R* will still know via testimony that *S* has this insight, and this knowledge will be a part of *R*'s evidence. Thus, what might have otherwise counted as private and inaccessible evidence is dragged into the public and accessible sphere by the circumstances of full evidential disclosure that characterize peer disagreement cases.²¹

The shareability of otherwise private evidence under full disclosure further undermines O'Grady's contextualist solution to conflicting wisdom attributions. Let us suppose that two epistemic peers, one a devout Christian, the other a faithful Buddhist, disagree with one another about whether the universe has a creator and that, embedded as

ethics, e.g., one might only acquire human souls in exchange for vast wealth and power contingent that the recipients use at least a portion of that wealth and power to make the world a better and happier place. There is an important sort of evaluation that takes place at the level of truth claims and concepts themselves, and simply evaluating the practical impact of these claims leaves us handcuffed in evaluating wisdom in ways we intuitively are not.

²¹ Richard Feldman, "Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement," in *Epistemology Futures*, ed. Stephen Hetherington (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 216–236.

these truth claims are in the complex sets of cultural norms, attitudes, and practices of each of the disputants; neither peer can evaluate the claims of the other in any non-question begging way. Much like a unique intuition or insight, neither party can share his or her truth claim and its justification conditions in their full context; each can therefore evaluate his or her own claim but not that of his or her peer. Yet, each peer will, under full disclosure, still have access to what the other has to say about the other's context-relative truth claims, and this testimony will count as evidence for him or her, just as a peer's report about that peer's unique insight or intuition counts as evidence even for one who does not share that insight. Furthermore, a third party to the dispute will have access to both peers' testimony about their truth claims. While this third party cannot inhabit the contexts of the disputants any more than he or she can assume their first-person perspectives and gain access to their private intuitions and insights, he or she is still confronted evidentially by their conflicting, contextual truth claims and evaluations.

The foregoing example suggests that even if we grant the basics of the contextualist move put forth by O'Grady, *something* pertaining to these truth claims can nevertheless penetrate the contextualist veil—namely, how someone within that context evaluates his or her truth claims relative to that context—and provide one with evidence that the disputants cannot both be right. O'Grady might object that we still cannot evaluate each party's contextualized truth claims and thus resolve the conflict, which I readily grant, yet we are nevertheless in a different epistemic position under the assumption of full disclosure than we were before. We might conclude that the truth lies somewhere in the middle, or try to find some symmetry-breaker between the two disputants, or even suspend judgment altogether. We cannot, however, posit that, for all we know, the two disputants each have knowledge and, on this basis, ascribe wisdom to them both; the evidential force of their competing truth claims cuts off this escape route.

O'Grady could respond here by opting for one of the solutions to peer disagreement on offer; he could take a steadfastness approach and argue that each of the disputants can hold to their beliefs and corresponding truth claims in the face of disagreement. Yet, even if the steadfastness move succeeds, this only vindicates the two disputants' maintaining their beliefs and says nothing about what we, as third-party observers of the dispute, are epistemically permitted to do. We might grant that it is permissible for both disputants to remain stead-

fast in their beliefs based on their reports about their contextualized truth claims, but it is not clear that we can thereby conclude that both parties have knowledge and, therefore, wisdom. The contextualist veil is too thin to keep out contradictory truth claims and is unsuccessful as a solution to the problem of conflicting wisdom ascriptions.²²

O'Grady's solution flounders when we consider its skeptical implications, the limits of contextualism, and the ramifications of full evidential disclosure as described by Feldman. O'Grady wants to keep Grimm's knowledge-based account of wisdom, but this theory cannot bear the weight of cases where, intuitively, we want to grant wisdom to two disputing sages. Because knowledge is a success term, where truth claims conflict at most one party has it; Grimm's theory leaves us wanting to have our epistemological cake and eat it too, but we just cannot hold to his knowledge requirement while ascribing wisdom to both sages in O'Grady's problem. O'Grady's contextualist veil, which he attempts to draw between our epistemic evaluations and the wisdom claims of Jesus and the Buddha, is too thin to provide a way out, but O'Grady's recourse to contextualism is only made necessary in the first place by his standing on the faulty foundation of Grimm's analysis of wisdom. Attractive though Grimm's theory may be, it fails to track our intuitions about conflicting wisdom claims, and so we must give it up. Fortunately, Grimm's theory is not the only analysis of wisdom on offer.

PART 2: ALTERNATIVE THEORIES OF WISDOM

In evaluating alternative theories of wisdom, I will try to hew as closely as possible to O'Grady's stated reasons for accepting Grimm's model. The theory of wisdom we are looking for ought to provide three desiderata: (D1) admit of no practical-theoretical distinction, (D2) posit some strong cognitive relationship between the wise person and the way the world works at a fundamental level, and (D3) allow us to ascribe wisdom even where two purported sages make incompatible

²² The contextualist veil also seems too thin in the other direction. Michael Cevering in private correspondence pointed out to me that it is possible for one to read, say, Confucius' writings and notice points of consonance between his theoretical beliefs about the good and my own. Assuming for the moment that I myself am wise, there seems to be no difficulty in attributing wisdom to Confucius insofar as he and I agree about the good. While this observation by itself is not enough to resolve the problem of conflicting wisdom attributions (since I might be wise and agree with Confucius but not Jesus about the good), it does demonstrate further the weakness of the contextualist veil. It has holes running in both directions.

theoretical truth claims. With these desiderata in mind, I turn first to the theory of wisdom put forth by Sharon Ryan.

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Ryan has offered two different versions of what she dubs a “hybrid theory of wisdom;” in her initial formulation, she argues that *S* is wise if *S* (1) has extensive factual and theoretical knowledge, (2) knows how to live well, (3) is successful at living well, and (4) has very few unjustified beliefs. In her subsequent formulation, Ryan essentially eliminates all but (4) and proposes that *S* is wise if *S* (1*) has many justified beliefs about valuable academic subjects and how to live rationally, (2*) has few unjustified beliefs and is sensitive to *S*’s epistemic limitations, and (3*) is deeply committed to both (a) acquiring wider, deeper, and more rational beliefs about the subjects under (1*) and (b), living rationally. This latter formulation Ryan calls the Deep Rationality Theory of wisdom or DRT. Ryan, as I alluded to in Part One, contrasts DRT with Grimm’s theory of wisdom, noting that a sage stuck in the Matrix like Confucius, who lacks wisdom on Grimm’s theory, *does* have wisdom on DRT, although he is still worse off overall epistemically than a sage in the real world.²³

Suppose we substitute Ryan’s DRT for Grimm’s theory of wisdom; how do our conflicting wisdom ascriptions to Jesus and the Buddha shake out? Ryan’s theory apparently improves upon Grimm’s by weakening the primary epistemic condition for wisdom since mere rationality will do in place of knowledge. While, at most, either Jesus or the Buddha has the theoretical knowledge requisite for wisdom on Grimm’s theory, presumably, both sages can evidence the necessary preponderance of justified-versus-unjustified beliefs and commitment to living rationally for wisdom on DRT. Yet, two complaints immediately arise if we adopt Ryan’s view in place of Grimm’s; the first is that we lose any semblance of the mind-world connection that motivates O’Grady in favoring Grimm’s theory in the first place, that is, D2. While this connection cannot be *too* strong if we are to salvage our intuitions about conflicting wisdom ascriptions, a mere *commitment* to rationality seems to lose this connection altogether since one need not even succeed in reaching rationality either doxastically or practically to count as wise on DRT.

The other complaint is that even if we accept Ryan’s definition of wisdom, it is not immediately clear that it will satisfy our intuition that both Jesus and the Buddha are wise. Traditional Christian theists like O’Grady accept that Jesus was the incarnation of the divine Sec-

²³ Ryan, “Wisdom, Knowledge, and Rationality,” 108–110.

ond Person of the Trinity and need to make sense of the biblical assertion that Jesus Christ was “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24, ESV). Ryan, however, states that God, classically understood as having the property of omniscience, *cannot* satisfy her account of wisdom since an omniscient being is incapable of growing in either knowledge or rationality. To sidestep this objection, Ryan stipulates that DRT sets out conditions for merely *human* wisdom, utterly separate from divine wisdom.²⁴ It is difficult to see, however, if we accept this distinction whether we can make sense of the wisdom of Jesus, who in his earthly life taught and exemplified *divine* wisdom, not merely human. Ryan could endorse a two-minds conception of Christ as advanced by Thomas V. Morris, holding that Christ’s divine mind knew all his human mind did, though not vice-versa, and positing that the former mind informed the latter sufficiently for the incarnate Christ to exemplify divine wisdom, but this seems inconsistent with scriptures stating that Christ progressed in wisdom²⁵ and was not omniscient.²⁶ Ryan could perhaps offer a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for divine wisdom nevertheless attainable by a non-omniscient, progressively wise human, but the tenability of her distinction between divine and human wisdom would then become dubious. A Christian like O’Grady would be unlikely to accept a theory that cannot explain how Jesus was wise, and so Ryan’s theory fails to give us D3. DRT will not do as a substitute for Grimm’s model.

A more promising approach to wisdom is that of Shane Ryan, who argues that neither knowledge nor rationality but rather *understanding*

²⁴ Sharon Ryan, “Wisdom, Knowledge, and Rationality,” 14.

²⁵ Luke 2:52.

²⁶ Matt. 24:36. According to Morris, the divine mind of Jesus contained the human mind, and the two were joined in an “asymmetrical accessing relation,” such that the divine mind knew all that was in the human mind, but the human mind knew only some of what was in the divine mind. Morris does not specifically address the question of to what degree Jesus exemplified divine wisdom, though he does state that this model explains how Jesus was able to undergo intellectual and spiritual growth in his human life. Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 103–107. DRT fares no better on a traditional, reduplicative approach whereby, following the Chalcedonian Definition, one holds that Christ has two natures—namely, a divine nature and human nature—and that one can apply complimentary predicates of the two natures, e.g., Christ is omnipotent qua divine and non-omnipotent qua human. This will not work for DRT with its divine-human wisdom distinction because the reduplicative strategy yields that Christ is divinely wise qua divine and human wisely qua human, not that Christ is divinely wise qua human. I thank Drew Smith for his helpful comments on this point in private correspondence.

is the key ingredient; he thus rejects Sharon Ryan's DRT and knowledge-based theories like Grimm's and Dennis Whitcomb's. Shane Ryan argues that DRT makes wisdom too easy to come by since someone who has the requisite preponderance of justified-versus-unjustified beliefs, as well as a commitment to rationality, might nevertheless come to hold some morally horrendous belief that is intuitively incompatible with wisdom (that it is permissible to harvest the organs of one's child). Similarly, Grimm's and Whitcomb's knowledge criteria let one have wisdom on the cheap since one can get this knowledge with minimal effort via testimony; such knowledge is intuitively too bare bones for the possessor to count as wise since we tend to think of wisdom as a richer epistemic state than possessing mere testimonial knowledge.

Moreover, Shane Ryan argues the knowledge requirement is also too *strong* since one can plausibly have some trivial false beliefs about the world yet still count as wise. In contrast, he argues that the wise person does not merely know how to live well but rather understands how to live well. Understanding is "intuitively a higher epistemic standing than knowledge, or, in other words epistemically better than knowledge."²⁷ We prefer understanding to knowledge since one who understands some domain like chemistry grasps how the information in that domain fits together as opposed to merely knowing disparate facts. What Shane Ryan has in mind here appears to be one particular variety of understanding, namely *objectual* understanding, commonly referred to as understanding-of.²⁸ Like many contemporary epistemologists, Shane Ryan holds that understanding, in contrast to knowledge, is only partially factive since one can have a number of false beliefs about some body of information but still have a high degree of understanding, provided one accurately grasps the coherence-making relations within that body.²⁹ For at least this reason, many epistemolo-

²⁷ Shane Ryan, "Wisdom: Understanding and the Good Life," *Acta Anal* 31 (2016): 242.

²⁸ See, among others, Hannon, "Recent Work in the Epistemology of Understanding," 282; Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, "Toward a Theory of Understanding," in *Epistemic Values*, by Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 79.

²⁹ This grasping of coherence-making relations is commonly held to be an epistemic state distinct from believing or knowing some proposition or even some set of propositions. See Zagzebski, "Toward a Theory of Understanding," 80; Catherine Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," *Philosophical Studies* 132.1 (2007): 33–42; Catherine Elgin, "Exemplification in Understanding," in *Explaining Understanding: New Perspectives from Epistemology and Philosophy of Science*, eds. Stephen R. Grimm, Christoph Baumberger, and Sabine Ammon (New York: Routledge, 2017), 76–91;

gists hold that understanding is neither identical nor reducible to propositional knowledge.³⁰

Shane Ryan's understanding-based approach marks a significant improvement over knowledge and rationality-based theories alike since it makes wisdom suitably difficult to come by and yet compatible with having some false beliefs. The latter benefit has real import for the problem of conflicting wisdom attributions. Jesus and the Buddha can both count as wise on Shane Ryan's theory just so long as each possesses an understanding about how to live well, even if one or both has a number of false beliefs about the matter, thus yielding D3. Moreover, Shane Ryan's model seems to give us D2 in an even stronger form than Grimm's theory; plausibly, positing understanding in place of knowledge better captures the notion that the wise person is cognitively connected to the world at a deep level since the coherence-grasping essential to understanding seems to put one in a better position to live in harmony with the world than does mere propositional knowledge.

I have my doubts, however, that Shane Ryan's picture of wisdom can make such quick work of the problem of conflicting wisdom attributions. For one thing, Shane Ryan, in effect, accepts the theoretical-practical divide in wisdom, which Grimm and O'Grady reject;³¹ theoretical beliefs about living well play no role in his theory, so all we have to worry about are practical ones. The problem identified by O'Grady, however, turns on the conflicting *theoretical* beliefs of Jesus and the Buddha and whether those beliefs preclude us from attributing wis-

Riggs, "Understanding Virtue," 218–19; and Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 191. Finnur Dellsen has argued that understanding is not reducible to knowledge because understanding requires neither justification nor even belief, though this is minority view even among non-factivists. See her "Understanding Without Justification or Belief," *Ratio* 30 (2017): 239–254. I thank Drew Smith for his helpful comments on this point in private correspondence.

³⁰ Another reason for thinking understanding cannot be reduced to knowledge is that understanding appears to be compatible with epistemic luck in a way that knowledge is not. See Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge*, 198–199; Morris, "Defense of Lucky Understanding," 357–71; and Duncan Pritchard, "Knowledge, Understanding, and Epistemic Value," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 64 (2009): 35–37.

³¹ Shane Ryan, "Wisdom: Understanding and the Good Life," 244–245. More specifically, for Ryan wisdom is a purely practical matter, and theoretical or academic knowledge and beliefs are irrelevant to it. Someone who displays a deep understanding of some academic subject matter is applying the key ingredient for wisdom in a theoretical field but does not necessarily have wisdom since the requisite understanding for wisdom is of how to live well.

dom to them both. Leaving theoretical beliefs to the side in analyzing wisdom gets us D3, but only at the cost of D1. For another thing, even if we simply substitute Shane Ryan's understanding condition for Grimm's knowledge condition while keeping Grimm's erasure of the practical-theoretical divide, we are left with the problem that at least one of Jesus or the Buddha has very many false theoretical beliefs, plausibly more false beliefs than true. Shane Ryan offers no specifics as to just how many false beliefs one can get away with and still have understanding (and wisdom by extension), stating only that wisdom is compatible with having "some false beliefs,"³² but even if that just means fewer false beliefs than true, we cannot count both sages as wise since at least one will have a preponderance of false theoretical beliefs.³³ So, this theory does not give us D3 after all. Shane Ryan's theory represents an important improvement over those of Grimm and Sharon Ryan but falls short of untangling the conflict in wisdom attributions drawn up by O'Grady. In Part 3, I will offer my own understanding-based theory of wisdom in an effort to finally resolve the problem.

PART 3: THE CONFLICT RESOLVED

Somewhat ironically, in attempting to offer a theory of wisdom that can handle cases of conflicting ascriptions where Grimm's cannot, I start with Grimm's own theory of understanding, which stands out for its incisive treatment of the internalist and externalist elements of understanding. Grimm analyzes an argument by Linda Zagzebski that understanding is not a species of knowledge because understanding has purely internalist success conditions and is transparent. According to Zagzebski, it is possible to have knowledge without knowing you have it, but it is impossible to have understanding without under-

³² Shane Ryan, "Wisdom: Understanding and the Good Life," 242.

³³ The contemporary epistemological literature on understanding contains little-to-no detail on just how many false beliefs one can have and still count as wise. Kvanvig argues that one can have false beliefs at the periphery of some body of information and still have understanding. *The Value of Understanding*, 201. Likewise, Zagzebski holds that one must have true beliefs about the key features within the relevant body of information ("Toward a Theory of Understanding," 83). Elgin is much more liberal, arguing that scientific theories frequently contain known falsehoods as a central feature, yet, nevertheless, impart understanding to one because they help one come closer to the truth ("Understanding and the Facts," 39).

standing that you have it.³⁴ In response, Grimm argues that many of the objects of our understanding are not transparent and that we can go wrong when it comes to understanding; therefore, the conditions of understanding's success must be partially external to the subject. He concedes, however, that there is an important and valuable internalist component to understanding—namely, grasping the relations that exist within our internal, mental representation or model of some body of information in the external world. Grimm refers to this internalist component of understanding as *subjective* understanding. By contrast, *objective* understanding (not to be confused with *objectual* understanding) is what one has when one's mental representation of the world accurately mirrors the world's nomological structure. To sum up, one has subjective understanding (SU) when one grasps the relations among one's beliefs that make up one's mental representation of the world, and one has objective understanding (OU) when that representation mirrors the way the world really is.³⁵

Grimm, to be sure, thinks of OU as a species of knowledge,³⁶ but we need not follow him here to make use of his analysis of the two components of understanding. We are free to hold that understanding has both internalist and externalist components while jettisoning the further claims that understanding is vulnerable to the Gettier problem or other forms of epistemic luck, for example. So long as we agree with Grimm that, contra Zagzebski, understanding has a mixture of internalist and externalist conditions, we are keeping to the spirit of his theory of understanding, even if not the letter. For my present purposes, I will side with the majority of epistemologists in holding that understanding is not a species of knowledge while otherwise following Grimm. With Grimm's analysis of understanding suitably modified, we can press it into service, responding to O'Grady's conundrum for wisdom.

We saw in Part 2 that Shane Ryan's understanding-based approach is a much sturdier theory of wisdom than Grimm's knowledge-based and Sharon Ryan's rationality-based models, but that it still cannot

³⁴ Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, "Recovering Understanding," in *Epistemic Values*, by Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 72.

³⁵ Stephen R. Grimm, "The Value of Understanding," *Philosophy Compass* 7.2 (2012): 103–117.

³⁶ Grimm rejects the claims by some epistemologists that understanding, in contrast to knowledge, is immune to the Gettier problem and that understanding is always an achievement. Stephen R. Grimm, "Is Understanding a Species of Knowledge?," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 57.3 (2006): 515–535; and Grimm, "The Value of Understanding," 111.

bear the weight of a solution to the problem of conflicting wisdom attributions. An understanding-based theory of wisdom like Shane Ryan's allows the purported sage to have some false beliefs (just not too many) and to still count as wise. The drawbacks we saw were Shane Ryan's acceptance of the practical-theoretical divide when it comes to wisdom (ruling out D1) and the necessity of at least one of Jesus or the Buddha having many more false beliefs than true, undermining the attribution of wisdom to both sages (and thus D3). What I propose here is that we return to Grimm's analysis of wisdom (including his denial of the practical-theoretical divide, thus yielding D1) but replace knowledge as the key criteria for wisdom with understanding, specifically with the analysis of understanding I offered in the preceding section. What is required for wisdom on such an essay is not knowledge but rather:

- (1) Understanding of what is good or important for well-being.
- (2) Understanding of one's standing relative to what is good or important for well-being.
- (3) Understanding of a strategy for obtaining what is good or important for well-being.

On this analysis, understanding consists of both subjective and objective elements, is distinct from any species of knowledge, and is compatible with one having some (but not too many) false beliefs about the good, one's standing relative to it, and a strategy for getting to it.³⁷ Call this the subjective-objective understanding (SOU) analysis of wisdom.

Where is this analysis of wisdom supposed to get us that Shane Ryan's does not? Even if we replace Grimm's knowledge criteria with understanding, we are left with a new version of O'Grady's old pickle; at most, one of Jesus and the Buddha has an accurate mental mirroring of the world sufficient for OU, and thus we cannot attribute wisdom to them both. The advantage of the analysis of wisdom I have drawn up is that while we can attribute OU to at most one of Jesus and the Buddha, we can, with perfect consistency, attribute SU to them both.

³⁷ Wisdom is often thought to have understanding as a prerequisite. See Riggs, "Understanding Virtue and the Virtue of Understanding," 215–216; Zagzebski, "Recovering Understanding," 75–76; and Jason Baehr, "Wisdom, Humility, and Suffering," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 53 (2019): 399. Grimm, while advocating for a knowledge-based conception of wisdom, nevertheless allows that understanding within certain theoretical domains can contribute tangentially to one's being wise, even if such understanding is not as central as the relevant knowledge of the good. "Wisdom," 151–152.

Both Jesus and the Buddha can hit the relevant internalist success conditions for understanding by grasping the coherence-making relations within their respective mental representations of the world and thus achieve an important and valuable epistemic state that is a key element of wisdom, though not independently sufficient for wisdom. Thus, we can attribute something of epistemic significance and value to both purported sages, even if it falls short of full-blown wisdom.

At first blush, this proposed solution to the problem of conflicting wisdom ascriptions seems rather underwhelming; since we still cannot attribute wisdom to Jesus and the Buddha jointly, one might question whether it qualifies as a solution at all! Let me briefly provide three reasons for holding onto SOU as at least a partial solution to O'Grady's problem. First, even if we cannot attribute wisdom in its full richness to both purported sages, we can still attribute to them both either a lesser degree of wisdom or at least a downgraded or incomplete variety of wisdom. Whichever sage falls short of OU and has to settle only for SU still achieves consistency within his own mental representation that can provide a good guide for living well in the world. If you go to that sage for advice about living a good life, you might not get as close to the good on that advice as if you had gone to the sage in possession of full-blown wisdom, but you are likely to get closer to the mark just by learning to live an internally consistent life. Living life without contradictions is commendable, even if it is not as good a life as it might otherwise have been. This is an important advantage for SOU over Shane Ryan's understanding-based theory of wisdom since that model cannot even attribute this weak version of wisdom to both purported sages. SOU admittedly comes up a little short of D3 but gets much closer than Sharon Ryan's, Shane Ryan's, or Grimm's theories.³⁸

Second, even if SOU does not allow us to attribute full-blown wisdom to both sages in O'Grady's conflict, as an analysis of wisdom, it preserves and even improves upon D2 over Grimm's theory since a wise person on SOU not only knows but *understands* what the world is like and how to live in it. Virtually all epistemologists, even those like Grimm who hold that understanding is a species of knowledge, agree that understanding is a higher and more valuable epistemic state than mere propositional knowledge. Requiring understanding rather than

³⁸ Note that both humans and God can count as wise on SOU, and so we sidestep all of the difficulties for an incarnate God counting as both divinely and humanly wise as with DRT, although, of course, God will have a vastly higher degree of wisdom than any human being.

knowledge, therefore, strengthens the factive cognitive connection between the wise person and the world upon which Grimm's theory of wisdom is based. Sharon Ryan's rationality-based theory, by contrast, sacrifices D2 in order to attribute wisdom in the absence of knowledge, and thus we have another reason to favor SOU over its rivals.

Third and finally, while I have been primarily concerned in this paper with the problem of conflicting *third*-person attributions of wisdom, holding that understanding is not a species of knowledge and is therefore immune to worries from epistemic luck makes peer disagreement much less of a *first*-person threat to wisdom on SOU than on other theories. Peer disagreement threatens our knowledge and our beliefs' justification by alerting us not just to the possibility that we might be wrong but the possibility that we are only right because we got lucky; had we believed just as we do and based on the same evidence in nearby possible worlds, we might have believed falsely.³⁹ Skeptical arguments about environmental luck do not threaten understanding the way they do knowledge, argues Kyle Scott, because what counts for understanding is just having accurate information about some phenomena and integrating that information into one's wider set of beliefs. How one comes by that information is not relevant to understanding in the same way it is to knowledge.⁴⁰ Peer disagreement, at least insofar as it alerts us to the possibility that we got things right by being lucky, cannot undermine understanding and thus cannot undermine wisdom on SOU. This is a third important benefit of the SOU account over Grimm's theory. In sum, SOU gets us D1, D2, and about half of D3 and edges out competing theories that only give us one or two of these desiderata at best while providing further general benefits as a theory of wisdom.

CONCLUSION

O'Grady, in analyzing the problem of conflicting wisdom attributions, has raised several interesting issues for the epistemology of wisdom and understanding. While I sympathize with his motivation to preserve our pre-theoretical intuitions about who is wise along with a

³⁹ James Kraft, *The Epistemology of Religious Disagreement: A Better Understanding* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

⁴⁰ Kyle Scott, "Religious Knowledge versus Religious Understanding," in *New Models of Religious Understanding*, ed. Fiona Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 134–150.

knowledge-based account of wisdom, the contextualist veil he draws between Jesus, the Buddha, and ourselves is too thin to keep out the evidence that at least one of them has their theoretical beliefs wrong. We cannot deny the theoretical-practical divide while holding to a knowledge-based theory of wisdom as Grimm does and consistently attribute wisdom to two purported sages with radically different theoretical beliefs. The best we can do, in my judgment, is to attribute to each sage a version of wisdom based upon SU about the good, one's standing relative to it, and how to get at it. We can hold that each sage represents a way to live out a more internally consistent, and therefore good, life, and thus possesses a weak sort of wisdom, even if at most only one of them has the genuine article.

INCOMMENSURABILITY & WISDOM: REPLY TO DUTTWEILER

PAUL O'GRADY

THOMAS DUTTWEILER has written an insightful, clear and thought-provoking response to my attempt to engage with Stephen Grimm's account of wisdom. He believes my approach suffers from serious problems, leading to kinds of incommensurability, and this in turn ends up with skeptical consequences. Since I don't want to embrace either incommensurability or scepticism, I want to re-examine the position to ensure these don't follow. Duttweiler's criticisms are welcome, as they provoke me to clarify and finess the views I defend. In this brief response I shall focus on the incommensurability issue and leave aside the discussions of the other theorists and Duttweiler's own very interesting proposed alternative theory (using Grimm's account of understanding), which would require a much longer discussion.

THE FRAMEWORK

Stephen Grimm's account of wisdom drops the distinction between practical and theoretical wisdom, retaining a knowledge component. Grimm also distinguishes between partial and full wisdom. So any putative wisdom claim is a blend of theoretical and practical strands, is truth evaluable and is limited (being partial). The problem I identified with this is one where paradigmatic wise persons with conflicting views cannot both be construed as wise—hence Jesus and the Buddha can't both be wise, as their theoretical views are antithetical to each other.

My way of retaining Grimm's framework while avoiding this conclusion is to suggest that, in discussing wisdom claims (as distinct from every day, common-sense or scientific claims), one might use a form of non-indexical contextualism. The meaning of terms such as "book," "computer," "dog," and "hydrogen" is clear and fixed in a socially agreed fashion with a strong link to observation. Terms such as "God," "heaven," "Nirvana," and "Sunyata" are less clearly connected to observation and are embedded in a system of similar, interlocking concepts. Pointing to the same animal and saying, "This is a dog," and then "This is a cat," yields incompatible claims. It is not the case that

both claims can be correct. Saying, "The goal of human existence is Heaven" and "The goal of human existence is Nirvana," if construed in the same way, would also yield incompatible claims, and so these claims cannot both be instances of wisdom on Grimm's model. Contextualism suggests that meaning changes with context while still retaining some unity or core common meaning—the paradigm example being "know." I might in an ordinary context say, "I know my wallet is in my pocket," whereas I might concede, "I don't know my wallet is in my pocket," under skeptical challenge in an epistemology seminar. Indexical contextualism is where the shift in meaning is primarily in the concept or term used, as in where standards shift (the "know" example). Non-indexical contextualism is where meanings change by virtue of the reality referred to being different as referred to by the utterer. An example here is someone saying, "Coffee is tasty," and another person saying, "Coffee isn't tasty." "Tasty" here refers not to an independent property of the coffee but to the interaction of the person's taste system with the drink. So as Jesus says, "Coffee is tasty," referring to his gustatory interaction with coffee, and the Buddha says "Coffee isn't tasty" referring to his, they are talking about different (although obviously related) things. So my thought was that this kind of meaning shift might be possible with attributions of wisdom. When Jesus speaks of Heaven (a wisdom concept as distinct from an empirical concept) what is being referred to involves some constitution on the part of Jesus. When the Buddha speaks of Nirvana, likewise some constitution on the part of the Buddha is involved. What distinguishes a wisdom claim from an empirical claim is the claim's relationship to the utterer. It isn't a detached, theoretical, objective claim but one which informs the actions, emotions, thoughts, and goals of the utterer. The claim has the blend of theoretical and practical elements Grimm identified, which makes it partially constituted by those practical concerns, distinct from wholly objective claims such as "This is a dog." The role the concept plays in shaping the life and actions of the utterer is therefore relevant to its overall meaning. So while "Heaven" and "Nirvana" as used by Jesus and the Buddha in the context of how they impact their lives may be incompatible states on a purely theoretical level, the realities referred to are different and not necessarily incompatible, as they involve the lives of the utterer. So the contextualism is non-indexical because the cluster of theoretical commitment and personal response differs from utterer to utterer.

INCOMMENSURABILITY

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Duttweiler homes in on this picture as entailing incommensurability. It seems that Jesus cannot understand the Buddha, since he lives a different life and vice-versa. If the meaning of “Heaven” is partially constituted by Jesus’ interaction with the concept, then the Buddha is sealed off from its meaning. And anyone not sharing the same social, historical, and psychological context is likewise not able to grasp the meaning. In a broader sense, it seems that we can only ascribe wisdom to people who share our social, historical, and practical context, which is a troublesome claim. Duttweiler notes that I elsewhere distinguish meaning incommensurability and knowledge incommensurability. The former is what seems to be in play here, and I have rejected it elsewhere. So I’m in trouble if my views here entail it.

As I presented the view, it didn’t occur to me that I might be committing myself to incommensurability, since I consider it an implausible position. Duttweiler’s challenge is good, as it shows how natural it is to think that incommensurability follows from the account I’ve given. How might I avoid it? First, I think the distinction between meaning and knowledge incommensurability will help. I don’t think Jesus and the Buddha are sealed off from each other’s views (meaning-incommensurability), but I do think that the conditions under which each are justified in making their claims have something specifically contextual about them. It was the justification issue I was more concerned with; hence, I neglected to consider the possibility that the former would be a problem.

I think that it is clearly possible to get a list of “wisdom terms” (e.g., Heaven, Nirvana, soul, sunyata) and give technical definitions of them—the kind of things accessible via a comparative religion or philosophy textbook. And clearly one can have shallower and deeper grasps of the concepts while, at a minimal level, remaining able to both distinguish and deploy them correctly in sentences. So how does this relate to claims about the partial constitution of concepts by their users? On a simple level, one can speak about the difference in “meaning” of the term “God” to someone who is a committed theist and to one who is not. Both a theist and an atheist can agree on the lexical meaning, but the way each relates to the term differs. For the theist, there is an engagement of heart, mind, affect, and action with what the term denotes. This is not there in the atheist. One way of marking this distinction is to say that the theist assents to a reality associated with

the concept while the atheist doesn't. But I think there is also a distinction between a lukewarm or nominal theist and one who fully embraces the term. It "means" more to the latter than to the former. How so? For the latter, assent to the term triggers a range of responses in cognition, affect, action, and sensibility, which is lacking in the former. This kind of engagement adds more to the "meaning" of the term for the dedicated theist than for of the lukewarm theist or the atheist. It doesn't alter the lexical meaning, but it makes a difference to the person holding to purported truths associated with the concept.

I think this might be what is behind a rather puzzling passage in Aquinas, where at ST II-II.2.a.2 he says:

Unbelievers cannot be said 'to believe in a God' as we understand it in relation to the act of faith. For they do not believe that God exists under the conditions that faith determines; hence they do not truly believe in a God, since, as the Philosopher observes (Metaph. ix, text. 22) 'to know simple things defectively is not to know them at all.'

At face value this seems to be committed to the same kind of incommensurability that Duttweiler finds in me. Some commentators use this to argue that believers and unbelievers cannot refer to the same ideas and so traditional theistic debates make no sense. Or indeed that pagan philosophers (e.g., Aristotle) mean something different by "God" than do Christians. But since Aquinas does engage in these debates and recognizes that there are people who just deny God's existence, or who have different conceptions of God, he doesn't seem to entertain incommensurability. Talking about believing in a God in relation to the act of faith seems to entail a set of responses in the individual to the concept of God rather than to suggest that atheists or pagans just have no purchase on the idea of God.

So coming back to talk of Jesus and the Buddha and their wisdom concepts, I want to allow for widespread grasp of the meanings of the terms they use by people outside their cultural and historical environs (though knowledge of culture and environs deepens one's grasp of the concepts) and so deny incommensurability in the sense Duttweiler fears is there. But I do want to argue that the way Jesus and the Buddha relate to their wisdom concepts—informing their thinking, action, and feelings—makes a difference in how they, as opposed to others who do not share the same responses, engage with those concepts. It is in this way that the "meaning" is different. The set of reactions they have makes a difference to the wisdom concept. And plausibly, this is what

distinguishes such wisdom concepts from others—what makes something a candidate for wisdom is its capacity to inform one’s life. Lexical knowledge of “Nirvana” or “Heaven” is merely information. Using this information as part of one’s cognitive economy to structure one’s other dispositions transforms the information into a wisdom concept.

SKEPTICISM

Since incommensurability is what motivates the skeptical challenge and Duttweiler’s alternative account, I think that showing that incommensurability doesn’t arise goes a long way in answering the subsequent challenges. If, as I claim, there isn’t a veil between Jesus and the Buddha (and their respective followers) in terms of understanding what their beliefs are and about the dialectical supports that can be brought to justify those beliefs, nevertheless there is a difference between a person who merely knows those beliefs in an intellectual way and one who uses them to structure their cognitive, ethical, and affective lives. It is precisely the way in which those beliefs have a structuring and integrative function for the believer that constitutes them as wisdom beliefs rather than simple instances of knowledge. Now the way these beliefs work to yield a coherent package of cognitive, affective, and moral dispositions will result in subjective wellbeing for the individual holding them. And insofar as someone not sharing those beliefs and that cluster of dispositional responses doesn’t have them, this yields an asymmetry in evidence for those beliefs. Committed Buddhists, by virtue of their experience, are in a different epistemic situation to their beliefs than are committed Christians. This doesn’t seem skeptical to me. There is always the possibility of rational debate about the views and dialectical attempts to refute core ideas such as God or sunyata. These debates will feed into the retention or rejection of those beliefs, but the further dimension of experiencing how those beliefs work together with the believer’s dispositions to secure subjective wellbeing for the believer is not available to an outsider—at least not in the same way as to the believer. Someone may see how the believer is in a state of flourishing, but that seems different to the first-person experience of the believer. And that first-person experience is a source of justification for holding the belief which is unavailable to someone without that experience. Jesus, therefore, has a kind of justification not available to the Buddha and vice-versa. But, crucially, this is not due to incommensurability. One can understand the beliefs and indeed try

them out for oneself if attracted by them (Duttweiler characterizes me as a traditional Christian believer, but I have espoused Christianity, Buddhism, and atheism at different stages of my life, and it does seem that an insider's perspective yields insight not available to outsiders).

In terms of anti-skepticism, it seems to me that this view of wisdom is compatible with a traditional realist approach to the reality and truth conditions of the beliefs in question as long as one is a fallibilist about the belief systems. It may be that the Buddha is right and Jesus wrong, but I think we are not in a position to make a definitive call on this in this life. So they both count as candidates for wisdom. It may be that, ultimately, some beliefs are closer to reality than others, but in terms of our epistemic situation, we make fallible judgments about what we think is the truth. We can be justified in holding our views by virtue of the reasons we have for them, including the benefits in living well. We can treat them as being committed to genuine metaphysical claims. It's just that we're not in a position to tell whether they're ultimately correct, which I take to be the fallibilist stance. However, this position is compatible with giving our beliefs a high degree of credence, in being justified in holding to them.

Duttweiler presents a variety of further challenges, such as the problem of Mephistopheles and the peer disagreement challenge, all motivated on my being committed to meaning-incommensurability, which he thinks leaves me with insufficient room to answer the challenges. Incommensurability aside, I think there are further considerations which weaken these challenges. There is a long tradition of reflection on wisdom which holds that there is an internal connection between wisdom and goodness. This is a starting intuition of many discussions and is at least as strong as the intuitions about paradigms of wisdom. Hence Mephistopheles is a non-runner as a wise person, since he is self-consciously evil. However we describe him—cunning, astute, worldly-wise—he doesn't seem like a candidate for real wisdom. And in respect to the peer-disagreement challenge, it seems that practitioners of a wisdom tradition can argue for an asymmetry in relation to their interlocutors; their own experience of the wellbeing adduced by their cluster of beliefs and practices serves as evidence sufficient to allow them to retain their beliefs.

Duttweiler's positive account—drawing on Grimm's account of understanding, distinguishing subjective understanding from objective understanding and advocating what he calls subjective-objective understanding (SOU)—looks fruitful and clearly responds to the

problem I identified. It merits consideration in its own right and is a welcome addition to wisdom epistemology. However, the burden of this short reply has been to try to respond to the motivating argument by which Duttweiler rejects my own account.

FOLLOWING THE BLOOD TRAIL

36

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner
So says the prayer I pray line after line
I finger the knots that I've tied into my rope,
A prisoner bound in my place to time.
I live in the tension as the Gordian knot
Between the heavens and the clay below
Like Gyges or Gollum I reach beyond my grasp,
To pluck the fruit I'm not prepared to know.

Here I stand, the fulcrum 'tween the maybe and the is
My tragedy: to make my natures mesh,
The breath that gives potential, and the earth that gives me flesh
The call and the desire, the kindling and the fire.

I am the imitation that yearns to be the thing
But slip with ease to Circe's proffered role.
I root for the Ashes of a lost and ruined claim,
And digitize the thirst inside my soul.

My slaves abroad defenestrate, choose hell instead of iPhones
Sex slaves at home insist that they are free
And I make proclamations that I'm free cause I'm a slave
Then use phones to stream preachers on TV.

The power that cracks the heavens lies within my fingertips
It rots the roots, tradition topples down
My rationale, the mad, nests in the mind dissolving swipes
In books and clocks and birds, desires drown.
So well I know the spheres that I can't comprehend their purpose—
Since dashboards don't give meaning on their own
Desire, sated, blinds me to my deathly situation
I settle for the life in which I'm thrown.

The memes and imprecations that I lob across at others—
Feeds back in looping, cyclic, fun-house mirrors
Reveals to me a "truth" that I suspected of my brothers
They're monsters from the darkest of my fears.

Like Scylla I consume, removing love from bent desire
 (My lovers sit like trophies on my shelves)
 The anal Ouroboros of our echo chamber pot—
 A sacrament of feasting on ourselves.

Grey theory takes an axe, cuts down the tree that gives us life
 Rips off the branch and bids it bear much fruit
 It slits my soul and bleeding out to desert, calls it peace
 Desire wakes, demands I seek the root.

The sea calls in my veins, the heavens tug upon my sleeves
 The stars cast thirsty spears to pierce my brow
 My drunken blinded stupor comes into full resolution
 I smell fish, bread—swim past the prophet's prow.

In-fleshed God a faded specter in the corner of the eye
 Resolving when I've hardened my resolve
 To cut out the cataract, at its riverhead,
 Tear down the shored up fragments I have damned—
 Redirect the river, beg for living water,
 Flush my eyes with oceans and be clean.

We, the Doctors who see ourselves as whole
 One day will fail our charge, and it will die.
 So we fight the long defeat toward the victory we've been promised
 And give the wounded surgeon steel to ply.

Live not by lies, Live Not By Lies, but by the Word that breathes
 For sages say that Beauty saves the world.
 It draws us to each other, Its gravity is Love,
 Between the dirt that birthed us and the stars.

PIERRE BAYLE'S PARADOX: COULD AN ATHEIST EVEN BE VIRTUOUS BY AKRASIA?

ANDY SERIN¹

ABSTRACT: Although *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet* was initially well received in 1682, the paradox of the virtuous atheist and its hypothesis of a perfectly viable society of atheists shocked society, and its author, Pierre Bayle, had to justify and re-justify himself until the end of his life. This scandal is usually explained by the Modern context which exhibited the following concept: Even if Christianity is criticized, religion is still deeply rooted in the mentalities and mores of society (particularly in the seventeenth century). But this contextualizing answer runs the risk of being a historiographical lure that prevents us from fully understanding why Bayle's virtuous atheist was so paradoxical and scandalous. Consequently, we must get closer to Bayle's text and pay attention to the different rhetorical strategies he deploys—the issue lies not just in Bayle's disruptive idea that atheists can be virtuous but also in Bayle's polemical ways of arguing his claim, especially in what I call his “akrasia argument.” Indeed, Bayle does assert akrasia, or the notion that, “Man does not act according to his principles.” What, then, is to be inferred from the akrasia of a believer, but also of an atheist, in matters of virtue and vice? If an atheist could have immoral principles, could he be virtuous by akrasia? In answering these questions, I investigate (1) how Bayle makes akrasia an argument for the virtuous atheist and into which rhetorical strategy this argument fits and (2) whether an atheist could, therefore, be virtuous by akrasia.

IN ADDITION to Pierre Bayle's superstitions of comets in *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, the work's paradox of the virtuous atheist and its hypothesis of a perfectly viable society of atheists made Bayle² famous. Indeed, a virtuous atheist was “paradoxical.” Such an idea went against the doxa: In the religious culture of the modern era, there existed a tenacious prejudice that because of their unbelief, atheists have strong inclinations to vice. That is why atheists were not entitled to the presumption of innocence—they were always suspected of being potential criminals or of having already hidden their misdeeds. On the other hand, such an idea was even oxymoronic: Be-

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² Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) was a French philosopher and Reformed Protestant during the reign of Louis XIV, serving as a key figure in the European intellectual network of the second half of the seventeenth century.

cause unbelief was seen to essentially and necessarily lead to immorality, atheism and virtue were viewed as contradictory terms. Furthermore, several cases of libertinism (Theophile de Viau, Giulio Cesare Vanini, Dom Juan) contributed to making atheists the great human figures of vice. Therefore, while *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet* was initially well received in 1682, the paradox of the virtuous atheist and its hypothesis of a perfectly viable society of atheists shocked society, leaving Bayle to grapple with accusations of hidden atheism hurled by his own coreligionists Pierre Jurieu and Jacques Bernard.

Bayle's scandalous paradox is usually explained by the context of the modern era. However, this contextualizing answer faces many difficulties. First, the idea of a virtuous atheist was not completely new—there had already been the theological debate on “pagan virtue” from François La Mothe Le Vayer's eponymous work, and Bayle knew it very well.³ Second, contextualization struggles to explain why Bayle's virtuous atheist took so long to become a scandalous paradox after *Various Thoughts*' publication date. Third, in the theological-political society of that time, both common people and the intellectual elite had right in front of them a plethora of vicious believers. Experience testified that virtuous atheists and vicious believers both existed, and this was enough to impugn the vicious atheist prejudice. This is, in fact, Bayle's empirical argument. Unless we assume that all have fallen into a logical blunder, was it really out of range of the modern mind and its outillage mental⁴ to deduce the possibility of a virtuous atheist from the possibility of a vicious believer? Thus, while the contextualizing answer is not devoid of historical truth, it is only part of the whole answer and runs the risk of being a historiographical lure⁵ that prevents us from fully understanding why Bayle's virtuous atheist was so paradoxical and scandalous. Consequently, we must get closer to Bayle's text and pay attention to the different rhetorical strategies

³ See Didier Foucault, “Vertu des païens ? Vertu des athées ? Héritages humanistes et libertins et position de Bayle dans les Pensées diverses sur la comète” in *Pierre Bayle et la liberté de conscience, colloque du Carla-Bayle*, October 2009 (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2012), 109–134; Isabelle Moreau, “Pierre Bayle et La Mothe Le Vayer : de la liberté de conscience à l'indifférence des religions” in *Pierre Bayle et la liberté de conscience, colloque du Carla-Bayle*, October 2009, eds. Philippe Fréchet et Antony McKenna (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2012), 135–150.

⁴ Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI^e siècle* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1947), 23.

⁵ Argaud, *Épicurisme et augustanisme*, 179–189. I agree with her on the danger of a historiographical lure.

Bayle deploys. I argue that scandal arose not just from the disruptive idea of a virtuous atheist but also from Bayle's polemical ways of arguing this claim, especially in what I deem his "akrasia argument" which focuses on the weakness of the will. A proof of this can be found in the later works in which Bayle replies to Pierre Jurieu and Jacques Bernard that his ways of arguing are not "scandalous" but rather totally suitable for Christian theology.⁶ Indeed, Bayle asserts that, "Man does not act according to his principles." What, then, is to be inferred from the akrasia of a believer and that of an atheist in matters of virtue and vice? If an atheist has immoral principles, could he still be virtuous by akrasia? So, compared to the secondary literature,⁷

⁶ Jacques Bernard, *Extrait critique sur la continuation des Pensées sur la comète* (1704) Pierre Jurieu, *Le philosophe de Rotterdam accusé, atteint et convaincu* (1706). Isaac Jaquelot, *Examen de la théologie de M. Bayle* (1706). See our footnote 41 and Hubert Bost, "L'apologétique protestante du xviii^e siècle face aux défis du rationalisme et du scepticisme," *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études* (EPHE), Section des sciences religieuses, no.129 (2022), 413–434.

⁷ For an overview, see Élodie Argaud, *Épicurisme et augustanisme dans la pensée de Pierre Bayle. Une affinité paradoxale* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2019), 173–245; Hubert Bost, *Pierre Bayle* (Paris: Fayard, 2006). Hubert Bost, "Protestantismes et culture dans l'Europe moderne, xv^e–xviii^e siècles. Les pensées diverses sur la croyance de Pierre Bayle (1647–1706)," *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études* (EPHE), Section des sciences religieuses, no.116, (2009), 283–288. Gianfranco Cantelli, *Teologia e ateismo. Saggio sul pensiero filosofico e religioso di Pierre Bayle* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1969), 51–99. Charles Devilennes, *Positive Atheism: Bayle, Meslier, D'Holbach, Diderot* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021). Nicole Gengoux, "Le mal est-il un problème? De l'athéisme du Theophrastus redivivus à Bayle" in *Libertinage et philosophie à l'époque classique (XVI–XVIII siècle): Pierre Bayle et les libertins*, eds. Nicole Gengoux, Pierre Girard, Mogens Laerke, no. 15 (2018) 81–103. Jean-Michel Gros, "Bayle et la banalisation de l'athéisme" in *Pierre Bayle et la liberté de conscience, colloque du Carla-Bayle*, October 2009, eds. Philippe Fréchet et Anthony Mckenna (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2012), 239–264. *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 330–341. Alan Charles Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 24–262. Élisabeth Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle, t. II, Hétérodoxie et rigorisme* (La Haye: M. Nijhoff, 1964), 103–129. Thomas Lennon, *Reading Bayle* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999), 107–142. Dmitri Levin, *The Kingdom of Darkness: Bayle, Newton, and the Emancipation of the European Mind from Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 423–497. Gianluca Mori, *Bayle philosophe* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999). Gianni Paganini, *Analisi della fede e critica della ragione nella filosofia di P. Bayle* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1980), 290–312. Richard Popkin, *The history of scepticism, from Savonarola to*

this article aims at exploring (1) how Bayle makes akrasia an argument for the existence of virtuous atheists (and on which rhetorical strategy this argument depends) and (2) whether an atheist could, therefore, be virtuous by akrasia.

I. FROM THE VICIOUS ATHEIST PREJUDICE TO THE EMPIRICAL ARGUMENT

The common vicious atheist prejudice is exposed in §133 of *Various Thoughts*. Far from believing it, Bayle wants to understand the debate. The prejudice is not a simple and totally unjustified opinion, but is based on an argument which, at first sight, appears to be sustainable.⁸ When an atheist can enjoy impunity on earth, nothing restrains him anymore from doing evil, as he does not believe in the existence of any deity or in the salvation of the soul. Since a consistent atheist will not miss an opportunity to sin, the atheist tends “necessarily” to vice. Bayle highlights the premises of the argument: a conception of God, of mankind, and of happiness.⁹ Believers are afraid of a providential and vigilant God who will infallibly reward in the hereafter the virtues and vices of men in their life here below. Let us remember that being an atheist in the modern era was less defined by the pure denial of the existence of divinity than by the denial of divine providence, and this makes it possible to accuse both Epicureans and Spinozists of atheism and immorality, even though they did not deny the existence of divin-

Bayle: revised and expanded edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Paul Rateau, “Leibniz, Bayle et la figure de l’athée vertueux,” in *Leibniz et Bayle : confrontation et dialogue*, eds. Christian Leduc, Paul Rateau, Jean-Luc Solère (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), 301–331; Walter Rex, *Essays on Pierre Bayle and religious controversy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 3–77; Anne Staquet, “De l’athée vicieux à l’athée vertueux. Genèse du démontage d’une idée toute faite” in *Libertinage et philosophie à l’époque classique (XVI–XVIII siècle): Pierre Bayle et les libertins no.15*, eds. Nicole Gengoux, Pierre Girard, Mogens Laerke, (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018), 59–79.

⁸ Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet, translated with notes and an interpretative essay by Robert. C. Bartlett* (State University of New York Press, 2000), §133, 165–166. For convenience, I use the English translation above. However, there is no English translation of the *Addition to the Various Thoughts*, the *Continuation of the Various Thoughts*, the *Responses to a Provincial’s Questions*, and *Institutio Brevis*. I, then, give the *Oeuvres Diverses* edition as [OD III, p.x]. For the *Clarifications on the Atheists*, I use the *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1991).

⁹ Argaud, *Épicurisme et augustinisme*, 190.

ity. Furthermore, man is a reasonable being in search of happiness. He uses his faculty of reason to know his best interests. If he is a believer, he will know that true happiness is in heaven, with God, and is the result of a life devoted to virtue instead of deceptive earthly pleasures which often lead to vicious and sinful conduct. But if he is an atheist, happiness is only on earth in the daily success of present desires. From this, it seems reasonable, in terms of practical rationality, for the atheist to do evil when he can enjoy impunity. This argument creates the presumption that an atheist has principles which lead him to evil, as unbelief in the existence of God and in the salvation of the soul was viewed as the atheist's principles of bad behaviour. "Principle" here means what is accepted as the reason for acting in a particular way, the rule or standard for someone's behaviour which serves to explain it. However, the prejudice tends to obliterate the circumstance that the atheist enjoys impunity on earth and that unbelief does not lead directly and positively to evil but only removes the motivational barriers from vice.¹⁰ To demonstrate that the vicious atheist prejudice is a "false prejudice,"¹¹ Bayle intertwines two rhetorical strategies: (1) refutation by empirical argument and (2) refutation by the akrasia argument.

In §134 of *Various Thoughts*, Bayle argues, "That Experience combats the Reasoning Made to Prove That the Knowledge of a God Corrects the Vicious Inclinations of Men." If the atheist's principles necessarily lead him to evil, the believer's principles should, on the contrary, therefore lead him to good; but since there are a lot of vicious believers,¹² experience proves that moral performance does not depend on religious affiliation—and that immorality does not depend on atheism either. In the fourth proposition of the Clarification on the Atheists, Bayle replies to Pierre Jurieu and Jacques Bernard that what is very scandalous is not so much the paradox that an atheist can be virtuous but the contrary fact that Christians do not act according to their belief in God (from whom moral duties have clearly been given to Chris-

¹⁰ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §133, 166: "as a result, being untouched by all these considerations [an atheist is not afraid of any deity], he must necessarily be the greatest and most incorrigible scoundrel in the universe."

¹¹ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §133, 165.

¹² Jacqueline Lagrée, "Athéisme et idolâtrie dans les 'Éclaircissements'," in *Les "Éclaircissements" de Pierre Bayle*, eds. Hubert Bost et Antony McKenna (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010) 265–282. Bayle gives many obvious cases of vicious believers: pagans such as Tarquin, Catiline, Nero, Caligula, Heliogabalus (*PDC*, §130), crusaders, and Christian women (*PDC*, §§139, 140, 142).

tians). In other words, believers have no excuse.¹³ Nevertheless, Bayle's virtuous atheist also has a mirror-inverted effect that confronts believers, especially Christians, with the reality of their vices, and it does not make sense to object that all these vicious believers are not true believers. Those who do vice by living as if God does not exist, are they not the (empirical) proof that atheists tend necessarily to vice? Bayle replies to this objection of the practical atheists by going back to its origin: the modern debate on what essentially defines atheism.¹⁴ In the *Continuation of the Various Thoughts*, he points out that two common typological distinctions must be used and combined. First, a speculative atheist is sincerely convinced of the non-existence of God. He is thus different from a practical atheist who is called "atheist" only for practice. Although he still believes internally and theoretically in the existence of God, he lives an immoral life as if God does not exist. That is why Bayle explains that "practical atheists are not true atheists,"¹⁵ because Bayle conceived of them as being repressed and insincere in order to do evil more freely without bad conscience. Second, there are some true or speculative atheists who are "negative" by involuntary ignorance—the native peoples of America and Africa—and some who are "positive," having investigated the (non-)existence of God.¹⁶ Thus, Bayle retorts that the objection of practical atheism is not valid, as it "changes the state of the question" to whether positive speculative atheists are vicious.

But experience also testifies to the existence of virtuous atheists,

¹³ Bayle, *Addition to the Various Thoughts*, IV, reply to the eighth objection, [OD III, p.173].

¹⁴ Bayle, *Continuation of the Various Thoughts*, §LXXXIV, [OD III, p.310]. Bayle quotes the typology of atheists established by M. du Bosc who distinguishes: (1) atheists about God's existence, (2) about divine providence, (3) about divine nature, (4) about God's service, that is to say, in practice. See Gianluca Mori, "L'athée spéculatif selon Bayle: permanence et développements d'une idée," in *De l'humanisme aux Lumières. Bayle et le protestantisme. Mélanges en l'honneur d'Élisabeth Labrousse*, eds. M. Magdelaine, M.-C. Pitassi, R. Whelan et A. McKenna (Paris-Oxford Universitas: The Voltaire Foundation, 1996), 595–610; Gianluca Mori, *Bayle philosophe* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999). Gianluca Mori, "Athéisme et philosophie chez Bayle," in *Pierre Bayle dans la République des Lettres: philosophie religion, critique*, eds. A. McKenna and G. Paganini (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 381–410; Gianni Paganini, "Pierre Bayle et le statut de l'athéisme sceptique," *Kriterion*, no.120 (December 2009), 391–406.

¹⁵ Bayle, *Continuation of the Various Thoughts*, §CIII, [OD III, p.327]. See Bayle, *Clarification on the Atheists*, §13.

¹⁶ Bayle, *Continuation of the Various Thoughts*, §CIII, [OD III, p.328].

even if they remain very rare in Christian society. In §§175 and 182 of *Various Thoughts*, Bayle gives the cases of philosophers accused of atheism whose lives are notoriously blameless (Epicurus and Spinoza) and of atheist martyrs (Vanini and Mahomet Effendi). For the first, Bayle ironically advocates that true atheists are not usually voluptuous people, as they devote themselves exclusively to knowledge and do not have time to sink into vice, sin, and debauchery, so that atheism is safer from vice than religious adherence.¹⁷ As for the latter, if an atheist can die for his ideas, it is because he has an “idea of honesty.”¹⁸ These atheist martyrs were not completely vicious and devoid of all conscience (i.e., of a natural and rational morality as Bayle discusses it later with Jacques Bernard).¹⁹ In these two cases, it is clear that atheists can have moral principles, and Bayle precisely uses this notion to refute the argument that atheists’ principles necessarily lead to evil. This appeal to experience appeals to a rhetorical strategy. When one looks to experience and concrete facts, what seems true about the atheists’ principles? If the prejudice is true, it should be easily confirmed by experience, but it is not. In Bayle’s mind, empirical argument is the most immediate and clearest way of verification, as it refers to people’s lived experiences up to the time of reflection. However, Bayle does not stick to a purely empirical argument (PDC, §134) but rather intertwines it with another one, the akrasia argument (PDC, §135–136).

II. THE AKRASIA ARGUMENT

Experience raises the question of why not all believers are virtuous and not all atheists are vicious. The empirical argument, therefore, leads to the akrasia argument. To this, Bayle famously answers that, “Man does not act according to his principles,”²⁰ insofar as man does not accomplish what he knows he must do and often even does the opposite. In §§135–136, Bayle explains in Aristotelian-Thomistic terms that this situation exhibits the problem of akrasia due to the necessary conditions of human action. Firstly, there is a mediatization of

¹⁷ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §175, 217–218.

¹⁸ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §182, 227–228. Bartlett chooses to translate “honnêteté” as “decency.” I prefer a literal translation.

¹⁹ Bayle, *Responses to a Provincial’s Questions*, III, §29, [OD III, p.986]. Bayle grants that an atheist cannot logically “have a conscience” if “conscience” means the “judgment of the mind” which depends on religion and revelation. But it is possible in the framework of natural and rational morality. That is why atheists feel remorse.

²⁰ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §136, §160, §177.

the particular judgement: General knowledge of duties, which the agent holds to be his moral principles, never determines the agent immediately and by itself to act, as the decision to act is always made at the level of a particular judgment which takes the particular circumstance into account. Bayle here reformulates the thought of Thomas Aquinas,²¹ who speaks about the human need for a double science, universal and particular, to act well. In his analysis of the sin of passion based on the reading of Aristotle, Aquinas explains that the agent must both know that one should, in the universal case, never fornicate and that, in the particular case, one should not do this act which is fornication. Secondly, there is the inner heteronomy of passion on the particular judgment: “It almost always accommodates itself to the dominant passion of the heart, to the inclination of the temperament, to the force of adopted habits, and to the taste for or sensitivity to certain objects.”²² When the particular judgment does not conform to general knowledge, passion acts (though often at the cost of an internal conflict or even a moral dilemma). Inspired by the scholastic distinction between synderesis and conscience,²³ Bayle describes how the particular judgement, out of passion, may conflict with “the lights of the conscience” (synderesis) which remind the agent of his duties. In Aquinas’ account,²⁴ passion impedes the agent’s having in mind in the particular case that which he knows he ought to do. For example, passion modifies the bodily organism in such a way as to prevent the use of reason, such as in states of sleep and drunkenness. Consequently, if man does not act according to his principles, it is because principles in the sense of someone’s opinion, belief, and ideas of his duties, do not actually have enough normative force on his actions and behaviour. Through the akrasia argument, based on this double structural reason (mediatization of the particular judgment and the inner heteronomy of passion), Bayle supports the broad thesis “That Opinions Are Not the Rule of Actions.”²⁵

²¹ Thomas de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Prima Secundae, Q. 77, art. 2, in Thomas de Aquino, *Opera Omnia*, IV–XII, Editio Leonina, Roma, 1888–1906.

²² Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §135, 168.

²³ Bayle, *Institutio Brevis*, Pars Ethica, “De conscientia et recta ratione,” [OD IV, p.260]. It is Bayle’s course at the Reformed Academy of Sedan. He uses the latin word “synderesis.” Thomas de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Prima pars, Q. 79, art. 12–13. See Jean-Luc Solère, “The Coherence of Bayle’s Theory of Toleration,” *Journal of Philosophy*, no. 54–1 (January 2016), 41.

²⁴ Thomas de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Prima Secundae, Q. 77, art. 2.

²⁵ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §138, 171.

Bayle illustrates this conflict of the agent with the famous words of Medea: "The poet who has Medea say I see and I approve the good, but I do the evil has represented perfectly well the difference encountered between the lights of the conscience and the particular judgment that makes us act."²⁶ Medea's words are a literary topos of *akrasia*. Quoting Ovid, Bayle thus indicates that his answer, "Man does not act according to his principles," fits into the framework of *akrasia*. Most importantly, Bayle uses it to illustrate his distinction taken from the scholastic one between *synderesis* and conscience, which Thomas Aquinas, commenting on Aristotle, also uses for explaining "incontinence" (the Latin word for *akrasia*) in the Christian sin of passion. This quotation is part of an Aristotelian-Thomistic legacy and should not be attributed only to Bayle's Augustinian moralism,²⁷ even if it is

²⁶ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §135, 168. There is a synthetic version of the *akrasia* argument in *Responses to a Provincial's Questions*, III, chapter XXIX, [OD III, pp. 984–985]: "That it is right to hold that men do not behave according to their lights. Mr. Bernard falls into a third delusion which is worse than the other two; for to prove that it is wrong to say that men do not behave according to their lights, he says that it is certain, on the contrary, that they always follow the last dictate of their understanding. I grant him that the acts of the will are never opposed to the last act of the understanding, to that judgement which is called *ultimo-practicum* or last dictamen, but I maintain that this last dictamen is very often opposed to the lights of the mind and of the conscience. The morals of the Christians are an unanswerable proof of this. All Christians know that they must live soberly, justly, chastely, forgive insults, abstain from deceit, etc. They do not lose these lights when they fall into intemperance, and do harm to their neighbour: they are not ignorant that they are sinning, their conscience warns them of it, but their passion is so strong that it makes the mind judge that *hic et nunc* it is better to satisfy it, than to conform to the principles of Religion. In all these cases the last dictate of the mind is a judgment contrary to the general judgments of the soul, and it happens that the will conforms not to the general judgments, but to this particular judgment. This is how the famous words of Medea, (f) *Video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor*, are explained in all lessons of morals: I see and I approve the best, and I hold on to the worst. This is the way to understand what Mr. Bayle has so often observed that men do not live according to their principles, or according to their lights. He has explained himself so clearly on this subject that he leaves no ambiguity. Judge, I pray you, whether Mr. Bernard's remark against this dogma can do any harm. Can he ignore what so many people have said (g) that the life of the Epicureans was better than their doctrine? Still less can he ignore that the doctrine of the Christians is better than their life."

²⁷ See Labrousse, *Hétérodoxie et rigorisme*, 81. Argaud, *Epicurisme et augustinisme*, 191–192; Antony McKenna, "Pierre Bayle: moralisme et anthropologie," in *Pierre Bayle dans la République des Lettres, Philosophie, religion, critique*, eds. Antony McKenna et Gianni Paganini (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004) 327–329; Lorenzo Bianchi, "Il y a d'autres principes qui font agir l'homme": *mœurs et passions humaines*

true that Bayle knew Pierre Nicole's *Moral Essays*, which presents akrasia in terms similar to Calvin's quotation from Paul.²⁸ Bayle precisely does not quote Paul but rather Ovid. Let us recall that Aristotle himself first posed the problem of akrasia in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and that the Greek word for akrasia is variously defined as the "weakness of the will,"²⁹ the act of acting against one's choice and better judgement, and the inability to control oneself. Aristotle makes akrasia a serious borderline case of Plato's moral intellectualism and its Socratic paradox that "no one is wicked voluntarily." If I really know what the good is, I can only and automatically act well. Akrasia is totally unthinkable and even denied in Socrates' conception of virtue science. Through the quotation, Bayle indicates that the vicious atheist prejudice subscribes to a kind of moral intellectualism: Atheism is viewed as an ignorance which prevents from being virtuous. On the contrary, akrasia proves that the problem of moral action is less cognitive than volitional. In fact, akrasia is not a problem of knowing what to do but of actually doing that which you know you should do. People usually have the mental and cognitive abilities to know their duties, but knowledge is not enough for action. For Aristotle, akrasia is precisely when someone acts against his knowledge, so that we could say that he knows and does not know what he does is evil. Hence, akrasia is not to be confused with vice, namely, the will of evil. To understand in what sense one can know and not know, we should understand akrasia as a conflict of two judgments which occurs when desire accidentally causes the defeat of the practical syllogism. An akratic, then, is said to know and not known in the same manner as a sleeping, mad, or drunk man. In Aristotle, the explanation of akrasia appeals to his syllogistic theory of action.

dans l'Éclaircissement sur les Athées," in *Les "Éclaircissements" de Pierre Bayle*, eds. Hubert Bost et Antony McKenna (Paris : Honoré Champion, 2010), 294.

²⁸ Rom 7:15 in Calvin, *Institution de la vie chrétienne*, "De la connaissance de l'homme."

²⁹ For an overview, see *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy. From Socrates to Plotinus*, eds. Christopher Bobonich and Pierre Destrée, *Philosophia antiqua* no.106 (Brill, 2007); *Das Problem der Willenschäche in der mittelalterlichen Philosophie*, eds. Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller und Matthias Perkams, *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales Bibliotheca* 8 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006); *Weakness of Will from Plato to the Present*, ed. Tobias Hoffmann, *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, no.49 (Washington, The Catholic University Press, 2008); *Faiblesse de la volonté et maîtrise de soi. Doctrines antiques, perspectives contemporaines*, eds. René Lefebvre et Alonso Tordesillas (Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009).

In Aristotle, the explanation of *akrasia* appeals to his syllogistic theory of action, and in §136 of *Various Thoughts*, Bayle also increasingly refers to a syllogistic model of action: “Let man be as reasonable a creature as you like, it is no less true that he almost never acts in accordance with his principles.”³⁰ Unlike *akrasia*, acting according to one’s principles manifests the coherence of practical rationality. Conformity of acts to ideas is nothing else but the relation of consequences to principles. In this respect, Bayle points out that the practical syllogism is a matter of inferring action, while that of the demonstrative or scientific syllogism is rather a matter of finding true principles. For moral duties are quite clear and easy to know for everyone, as much by natural reason as by Revelation: “Almost never giving in to false principles, almost always retaining in his conscience the ideas of natural equity, he nonetheless almost always concludes in a manner advantageous to his unregulated desires.”³¹ Like Aristotle and Aquinas, Bayle emphasizes the agent’s defeat in the practical syllogism: It is not that he does not conclude at all, but that, out of passion, he concludes badly. Indeed, Aristotle theorizes that the practical syllogism puts in relation a universal major (“it is forbidden to taste what is sweet”) with a particular minor (“this is sweet”). The action of tasting or refraining from doing so is meant to be the conclusion.³² In the *akratic* case, desire suggests another opinion, such as “all that is sweet is pleasant,” which interferes in the initial practical syllogism. Commenting on Aristotle, Aquinas adds that the incontinent concludes a practical syllogism but of four propositions (two universal and two particular).³³ If the incontinent does not conclude according to his universal science, it is because passion substitutes a second universal principle (“one must seek one’s pleasure”) for the first universal principle (“one must never fornicate”). That is why Bayle is so ironic about man’s reasonableness—having reason does not guarantee coherence. Human action is not irrational as beasts’ is, but it is not purely rational either. Thus, it is wrong to reduce man to his reasonable being, as the vicious atheist prejudice does, because man is no less a body with strong passions that always determine his particular judgment to act in a certain way. In the middle of §136, Bayle shifts from “principles” to the “principle.” Bayle claims that if man does not act according to his principles, it is because the

³⁰ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §136, 168.

³¹ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §136, 169.

³² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1146b35-1147a9, 1147a24-1147b9.

³³ Thomas de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Prima Secundae, Q. 77, art. 2.

“true principle of the actions of man”³⁴ is the agent’s impassioned body. In other words, not ideas of duties (moral principles), but only passions (the true principle) are the efficient causes of human actions.³⁵ And then in §144, Bayle specifies that the impassioned body is “the same principle” of action for all men. Now quoting the verse of another famous poet Virgil—“*Trahit sua quemque voluptas*”³⁶—Bayle means that as the human body is guided by pleasure, so, too, is his action. That is why actions should not ultimately be explained by ideas about God³⁷ and that men, in spite of their different ideas, often have the same behavior. Bayle gives the example that an atheist does not start drinking out of atheism but out of temperament and passion. But other atheists do not drink and many Christians are drunks. Bayle’s anthropology of passions thereby trivializes the vicious atheist.³⁸

What results from the “application”³⁹ of the problem of akrasia to the atheist? (1) The vicious atheist prejudice is based on the rationalist premise that man is a “reasonable creature” and that a consistent atheist will do evil because his principles—unbelief in God and the salvation of the soul—necessarily lead to vice. (2) But it is contradicted by the empirical argument that many believers are vicious. In other words, they are akratics because they do not “act according to their principles.” If believers are not always virtuous, why should atheists necessarily be vicious? So this prejudice seems to be false. (3) In fact, Bayle’s akrasia argument is included into a rhetorical strategy of *datum non concessum*.⁴⁰ A proof of it is his irony about man’s reasonableness which targets the rationalist premise. But he is not challenging that the practical rationality of an atheist is to do evil. *Given that but not conceded that* it is true because Bayle really thinks that atheists have access to natural and rational morality, he only argues that the akrasia of vicious believers proves the broad thesis that “Opinions Are Not

³⁴ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §136, 169.

³⁵ Bayle, *Instituto Brevis*, pars Ethica, [OD IV, pp.259, 264]: The same shift occurs from the section “Moral principles” to the section “Principles of human actions.”

³⁶ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §144, 178–179.

³⁷ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §144, 178: “to inquire into the passions to which their temperament subjects them.”

³⁸ Gros, *Banalisation de l’athéisme*, 255.

³⁹ Argaud, *Epicurisme et augustinisme*, Introduction, 28. Here, she analyzes Bayle’s rhetorical strategy of quotes.

⁴⁰ *Datum non concessum* or *dato non concesso* is one of Bayle’s favourite rhetorical strategies. See Antony McKenna, “Les masques de Pierre Bayle: pratiques de l’anonymat,” *Littératures classiques* no.80 (2013/1), 237–248.

the Rule of Actions.”⁴¹ It is not ideas but passions which are the efficient causes of actions. (4) What about an akratic atheist? Bayle does not explicitly deal with it. He focuses on the akrasia of vicious believers. He nevertheless speaks universally of akrasia in maintaining that “Man does not act according to his principles.” So what if an atheist is akratic? *Given that but not conceded that* an atheist has immoral principles and is akratic, then he does not do evil. In the case of an atheist, akrasia seems not so bad, which again produces a scandalous, mirror-inverted effect on vicious believers.⁴² Indeed, the akrasia argument is not symmetrical: An akratic believer acts badly, while an akratic atheist does not. Consequently, an akratic atheist seems better than an akratic believer. But does it mean that an atheist could be virtuous by akrasia? If “virtue,” strictly speaking, is defined as acting according to good principles, then nobody can be virtuous for wrong reasons.⁴³ Refraining from killing, stealing, or committing adultery is far from being the same as being respectful of others or giving alms. Is it really virtuous to merely not be vicious, all the more so by weakness of the will and not by a positive moral capacity? On this last point, Bayle replies to Jacques Bernard that he does not have to prove that virtuous atheists have been so “because they have been atheists,”⁴⁴ since his starting

⁴¹ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §138, 171.

⁴² Bayle, *Addition to the Various Thoughts*, IV, reply to the eighth objection, [OD III, p. 173]. According to Jurieu: “Page 392. (Chapter 133) and following, he lays down this wicked principle, That Atheism does not necessarily lead to the corruption of morals; and proves it in all the following articles with a very great scandal: for if this is so, the Magistrates have no reason to chase away the Atheists and put them to death. The belief in a God, in punishment and reward after this life, is regarded by all as a brake which prevents the overflow which would destroy societies.” Then Bayle replies: “He is right in saying that I prove this principle; for I give demonstrative reasons. Among the Philosophers a necessary cause is always followed by its effect: since, therefore, I have shown by history that there have been Atheists who were quite regular in their lives, it is incontestable that Atheism is not a necessary cause of the dysregulation of morals. See the other proofs I have given. I admire the imprudence of our man; what does he have in mind to give us such an unfavourable picture of his heart? He sees with great scandal that a truth is proved to him. So he does not love truth in itself. He hates it when it does not conform to his prejudices.”

⁴³ In the *Philosophical Commentary*, it is the problem of good intention in religious persecution: Bayle explains that a materially good action is making bad by bad intention. But conversely, a materially bad action is not good by good intention. It’s only a lesser sin. See Jean-Luc Solère, “The Coherence of Bayle’s Theory of Toleration,” *Journal of Philosophy*, no. 54-1 (January 2016), 31.

⁴⁴ Bayle, *Responses to a Provincial’s Questions*, III, 19, [OD III, p.984].

point was that man does not act according to his principles and *akrasia* is, again, universally asserted. Hence, Bayle claims that his paradox is not scandalous but rather orthodox because it completely fits with the Augustinian system of grace. The knowledge of faith is not sufficient to act well, and it explains why a lot of believers are vicious. True and perfect morality also needs the special grace of God which makes the heart love the good.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Bayle promotes the thesis of a civil morality for all men⁴⁶ which guarantees sociability. In this impure and more “human” morality, passions and self-interest can fortunately lead to good action—and it eventually opens the door to the hypothesis of a viable, functioning society of atheists.

III. THE WHY BEHIND THE SCANDAL

The diverse objections to which Bayle replies in the *Addition to Various Thoughts*, the *Responses to a Provincial's Questions*, and the *Clarification on Atheists* manifest that the hypothesis of a perfectly viable society of atheists shocked readers.⁴⁷ It was precisely as a social threat that atheism had arisen in the first objection in the *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*.⁴⁸ Indeed, the atheist is prejudiced not only as being vicious but also as being antisocial, law-breaking, and untrustworthy. Princes feared and fought atheism, which was suspected to atomize the social bond and to engender a fall into anarchy. Modern tol-

⁴⁵ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §157, 195. *Addition to the Various Thoughts*, IV, reply to the seventh objection, [OD III, pp.172–173], *Clarification on the Atheists*, XIV, 406.

⁴⁶ See Labrousse, *Hétérodoxie et rigorisme*, 107–112, 286–288.

⁴⁷ Isabelle Delpla, “Pensées diverses sur l’athéisme ou Le paradoxe de l’athée citoyen” in *Figures du Théologico-politique*, eds. Laurent Jaffro, Emmanuel Cattin, et Alain Petit (Paris: Vrin, 1999), 117–147. Isabelle Delpla, “Le parallèle entre idolâtrie et athéisme: questions de méthode” in *La Raison corrosive. Études sur la pensée critique de Pierre Bayle*, eds. Isabelle Delpla et Philippe de Robert (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003), 143–173. Isabelle Delpla, “La société d’athées selon Pierre Bayle. Une expérience de pensée ?,” *Éthique, politique, religions – 1, Émergence du libéralisme, transformations du républicanisme : XVII–XVIII siècles*, no. 20 (2022); 159–180. Jean-Michel Gros, “Le désenchantement du politique chez Pierre Bayle” in *Pierre Bayle et le politique*, eds. Xavier Daverat et Anthony McKenna (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2014); 175–186. Gianluca Mori, “Politique et religion dans l’œuvre de Pierre Bayle,” in *Pierre Bayle et le politique*, eds. Xavier Daverat et Anthony McKenna (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2014), 79–96. Alex Schulman, “The Twilight of Probability: Locke, Bayle, and the Toleration of Atheism,” *The Journal of Religion*, no.89-3 (July 2009), 328–360.

⁴⁸ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §102, 134. *Addition to the Various Thoughts*, IV, eighth objection, [OD III, p.173], *Responses to a Provincial's Questions*, III, 17, [OD III, p.944].

erance, thus, was not usually extended to atheists, as false religion, such as pagan idolatry, seemed a lesser evil (and even more tolerable) than radical irreligion. The conjecture of a society of atheists served as a foil to show the mortal danger of a society without religion, doomed to self-destruction. In fact, because the idea of a society of atheists seemed on the horizon in the modern era,⁴⁹ it seriously challenged the Western Christian society.

But man does not act according to his principles. For Bayle, it implies to admit that the atheist is not a greater social threat than other men, especially vicious believers. Crime and vice do not depend on opinions and belief but on the temperament and passions of each one. To be a good subject of a Prince, there is no need to be religious. Bayle argues that the condition for a viable society is only provided by the existing legislation, punishment, and the great passion of men for social esteem.⁵⁰ Bayle insists on the fear of dishonour and bad reputation because it is the brake that keeps the atheist from doing evil when he would otherwise enjoy impunity.⁵¹ Thus, an atheist can be trusted when he makes and acts on a promise, such as returning a loan. Lacking grace to be truly moral, men nevertheless can act well because passions, mainly social esteem, ensure civil morality. In the *Clarification on Atheists*, Bayle stresses that the believer also has the fear of dishonour and that it has even more power over him than his fear of God: "I. The fear and love of God are not the sole springs of human actions. There are other principles that make people act; love of praise, fear of infamy ... on the human heart" and, "II. The fear and love of God is not always a principle more active than all the others."⁵² The atheist only has the fear of dishonour, but it is strong enough to prevent him from doing evil. It echoes with Bayle's analogy that a society can "walk" without religion in the same way an old man does without his cane or a sick queen does without her squire.⁵³ The point here is that

⁴⁹ In the context of the Great Discoveries, modern-era Christianity was faced with the existence of peoples without religion. *Continuation of the Various Thoughts*, §LXXXV, [OD III, pp.311-312]: "The savages of Canada," §LXXXVIII [OD III, p. 316]: The Kaffirs, the Iroquois, and the Mariana Islands. Bayle relies on the travelogues of Jean de Léry or Marc Lescarbot.

⁵⁰ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §161, §172.

⁵¹ Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, §179, 223: "For it is to the inward esteem of other men that we aspire above all."

⁵² Bayle, *Clarification on the Atheists*, 399.

⁵³ Bayle, *Addition to the Various Thoughts*, IV, reply to the tenth objection, [OD III, pp.173-174].

religion is only an additional “support” for a viable society. Hence, it is no longer a question of tolerating a few virtuous atheists as exceptions to the rule but of taking the consequences of Bayle’s argument to their logical ends: If men do not act according to their principles, then societies do not depend on a politics of opinions, however religious they are, but on the government of the passions. In Bayle’s virtuous atheist paradox, religion no longer seems to be the cement of societies, and that was what deeply shocked Pierre Jurieu and Jacques Bernard. After morality, it was the turn of politics to be made autonomous of religion.

CONCLUSION

There is no denying that modern era’s context helps in explaining why Bayle’s virtuous atheist was so paradoxical and scandalous, but the historiographical lure to avoid is the reduction of the entire controversy to historical context. So, to fully understand the paradox, I have paid attention to the *text*. Bayle’s style is polyphonic and dissonant with himself, which makes him difficult to read and relies on differing strategies, particularly his polemical ways of arguing (empirical and akrasia arguments, irony, *datum non concessum*) and his eclectic sources of thought (not only Augustinian moralism but also an Aristotelian-Thomistic legacy). In short, §133—where Bayle exposes the prejudice against the vicious atheist—sets the conceptual framework of Bayle’s rebuttal, the empirical claim from which the akrasia argument emerges. This, again, is seen clearly in Bayle’s central claim that “Man does not act according to his principles.” Akrasia is a problem about the conditions of human action, how practical rationality is often disturbed by the mediatization of the particular judgement and the inner heteronomy of passion. Thus, Bayle aims at supporting the thesis that “Opinions Are Not the Rule of Actions.” Vicious believers here are the main case of akrasia, but what if an atheist is akratic, all the more so as Bayle speaks universally of akrasia? Given that (but not conceded that) it is true that an atheist has immoral principles (the practical rationality from unbelief to immorality), it has to be inferred that an akratic atheist would not do evil. In this implicit consequence, akrasia is not symmetrical, because an akratic believer still acts badly. But could an atheist be virtuous by akrasia? Bayle does not seem to think so, and it still remains that merely refraining from committing evil is hardly equal to acting well. Or Bayle’s answer can be found in two lev-

els of morality, the true and perfect morality by the special grace of God and an impure civil morality. In the latter, passions lead men to practice virtue. Finally, let's remove the *datum non concessum*. Bayle does not actually think that atheists have no moral conscience, since natural and rational morality is available to all men. It follows that atheists who do not act according to principles of natural and rational morality are guilty of bad akrasia. The atheist who has immoral principles is then virtuous or, strictly speaking, "not vicious" by akrasia—but out of Bayle's *datum non concessum*, an akratic atheist becomes vicious again.

GENERALIZED ANXIETY
DISORDER, OR, AN ENDLESS GAME
OF RED ROVER, RED ROVER

It begins with a headlong run
toward interlocked arms
that clothesline your waist,
doubles you over, breathless.
There is no weak link, only this loop.
There is only over and over
and a wall that never crumbles.
A wall that grows taller and thicker
with layers of stone, and moss covers
the stone until the outline retreats
into a great bramblecrown head.
There is no over, or under
but the choice is moot. The stone
mouth consumes from the inside out,
or the outside in—
nothing is certain, except
the insistent chant. You push, push, push
against the wall as tremors rise
from your soles, vine through your veins
alarm your heart until it pulses, pulses, pulses
without regard. There is no here, or there.
There is only the increasing...
until, finally, nerves settle, slow
with the receding sound. Echoes
fold into blood lines
retreat and scatter.

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FREE WILL VS. FREE CHOICE IN AQUINAS' *DE MALO*

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ABSTRACT: The goal of this paper is to show that Thomas Aquinas, in his *Disputed Questions on Evil*, presents a theory of free will that is compatibilist but still involves a version of the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP) and even requires alternative possibilities for a certain kind of responsibility. In Aquinas' view, choosing between possibilities is not the primary power of the will. Rather, choice arises through the complex interaction of various parts of human psychology, in particular through the indeterminacy of the intellect and through the interaction between reason and passion. Both of these ways provide cases where Aquinas not only allows for alternative possibilities but thinks that they are necessary for moral responsibility, all the while remaining, strictly speaking, a compatibilist.

THE GOAL of this paper is to show that Aquinas, in his *Disputed Questions on Evil* (*QDM = Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*), is a compatibilist who upholds a version of the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP). Aquinas does not think that you have to be able to choose between possibilities in order to be responsible for your action in a general sense. However, he does think that you need to be able to choose between possibilities in order to have a certain kind of responsibility, *moral* responsibility.²

Because Aquinas' position seems to defy current categories in the debate over free will, it will be helpful to locate Aquinas within that debate. I first discuss libertarianism and compatibilism and the range of possible subviews. I will show that compatibilism, in the strictest sense, does not require determinism: A compatibilist can affirm that people genuinely choose between alternative possibilities but deny that this is a necessary condition for free action. Next, I will discuss how Aquinas' account of the will entails that we can be generally responsible for our actions in the absence of alternative possibilities. Then I will show that, for Aquinas, alternative possibilities are required for moral responsibility and how this kind of choice is possible according to Aquinas. The choice between possibilities is not the primary power

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² I will be focusing specifically on free will in relation to ordinary human moral action. I am not going to discuss how free will is compatible with Aquinas' view of divine sovereignty and omnicausality, another difficult and important question for scholars of Aquinas.

of the will. Rather, choice arises through the complex interaction of various parts of human psychology in at least two ways: as a result of the indeterminacy of the intellect and as a result of the interaction between reason and passion.³ Finally, I will briefly consider the relevance of Aquinas' view to contemporary discussions relating to the will.⁴

COMPATIBILISM DOES NOT ENTAIL DETERMINISM

What makes an act free? What is it about my actions that make them mine, rather than someone else's or mere workings out of the laws of nature?

The first distinction to make is between *moral responsibility* and *general responsibility*.⁵ The question of free will is often glossed over as a question about moral responsibility, but it need not be. Someone who runs a four-minute mile is sufficiently responsible for his action to incur non-moral praise in a way that a running robot would not (though its creators might). A skilled painter deserves admiration even if she is a scoundrel.⁶ So in what follows, I will refer to the defining feature of acts of free will as mere *responsibility* without specifying the kind of responsibility:

³ See Hoffman, "Free Will Without Choice," for an excellent overview of key medieval figures on this topic. My paper can be seen as a companion to Hoffman, a tree-level examination beneath Hoffman's forest-level summary. Hoffman agrees with me that Aquinas has a two-level theory of free will, where one level does not require libertarian free choice, and another does. He does not cash this out in terms of contemporary debates on libertarianism and compatibilism, nor does he identify Aquinas as a compatibilist or distinguish between general and moral responsibility. He also does not go in-depth into the psychology of choice according to Aquinas. He assembles a wide variety of Thomistic texts from outside the *De Malo* and shows that Aquinas' view is continuous with a broader medieval tradition stemming from Augustine.

⁴ See W. Matthews Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), for a recent and well-known contemporary Thomistic account of free will.

⁵ King, in his forthcoming book, *Simply Responsible*, similarly argues for a concept of "simple responsibility" that is not necessarily moral. But whereas he seems to assimilate moral responsibility to a more general notion of responsibility, I distinguish them (and so too, I think, does Aquinas).

⁶ According to Aquinas, all human action is meritorious or demeritorious, that is, involves moral responsibility (*Summa Theologica* 1a2ae 21.4). But even given this, it is still true that some human actions also involve other kinds of non-moral responsibility, allowing us to distinguish moral and non-moral responsibility: The scoundrel painter deserves credit for his art even if he also deserves condemnation for his crimes.

FREE WILL: For an agent P and an act a , if P is generally responsible for a , a is a freely willed act of P .

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Note that this definition involves general responsibility only. There may be cases in which someone is generally responsible for an action but not morally responsible.

Let's call the ability to have responsibility for one's actions free will. The controversy relevant to our purposes concerns what makes an actor responsible for an act. One view is that what I will call free choice between alternatives is essential to responsibility.⁷ An agent has a free choice between alternatives if, under the same conditions, they could have refrained from doing a :

Free Choice: For an agent P and an act a , a is a freely chosen act of P only if P had an unconditioned ability not to do a .

Note the distinction between "free will" and "free choice." According to libertarians, free choice is required for general responsibility and, therefore, for free will:

Libertarianism: For an agent P and an act a , P is generally responsible for a only if P freely chooses a .

According to determinists, free choice is never possible:

Determinism: From one state of affairs, only one state of affairs follows.

If determinism is true, the state of affairs that obtained when P was about to choose a could only have resulted in the state of affairs that includes P 's choosing a . Not choosing a would only have been possi-

⁷ I have borrowed the terminology of "free will" and "free choice" from Hoffman and Furlong's article, "Free Choice," M. V. Dougherty, ed., *Aquinas's Disputed Questions on Evil: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 57. "Free choice" corresponds to Aquinas' *libera electio and liberum arbitrium*. Aquinas does not use "free will" (*libera voluntas*) in a technical sense. However, he does distinguish between acts of the will (*voluntas*) and acts of free choice. When I use "free will," I am referring to the faculty to perform the former, which Aquinas simply calls the "will" (*voluntas*). Scott MacDonald, "Aquinas's Libertarian Account of Free Choice." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 52, no. 204 (2) (1998), 309, uses the same terminology, arguing that *libera electio and liberum arbitrium* are close enough to be treated under the same label, using "free will" to translate *voluntas*.

ble if the state of affairs leading to a had been different. We'll call this determinist flavor of choice conditional choice, in contrast to the libertarian's "free choice." According to compatibilists, the conditional choice is sufficient for general responsibility:

Compatibilism: For an agent P and an act a , P is generally responsible for a if P conditionally chose a .

Since conditional choice and free choice are incompatible, this definition amounts to the claim that free will and determinism are compatible.

Typically, someone who affirms libertarianism would deny determinism, and someone who affirms compatibilism would affirm determinism. But affirming determinism is compatible with affirming either libertarianism or compatibilism. For instance, a hard determinist who denies free will outright would affirm both libertarianism and determinism: free will requires free choice, but free choice is impossible, so there is no free will.⁸ It is equally possible to affirm compatibilism while denying determinism. This amounts to saying that determinism is false, but if it were true, we still would have (do have) free will. For instance, one might affirm that agents generally have free choice, but even under circumstances where their choice becomes determined (conditioned) by their circumstances, they are still responsible for their actions. Someone who held this position would say that, in most cases, we freely choose between alternatives, but even if we did not, we could still be responsible for our actions.

I do not know anyone in contemporary philosophy who holds this position, but it is a logically possible position to hold. Aquinas, I will now argue, did hold this position for general responsibility. There are two questions to answer on this topic:

1. Did Aquinas teach in the *De Malo* that free will requires free choice? That is, in order to be generally responsible for actions, must we have had an unconditioned ability to refrain from those actions?
2. Did Aquinas teach in the *De Malo* that some agents do have free choice? That is, do some agents actually have the uncondi-

⁸ Here I'm making hard determinism into a subspecies of libertarianism. This may be taxonomically disorienting, but since Aquinas was not a hard determinist, we can allow this simplified version of things.

tioned ability to refrain from the actions they perform?

62 I have shown that these questions are distinct. The first determines whether Aquinas is a libertarian or a compatibilist. The second can be affirmed or denied no matter what the answer to the first is and clarifies the kind of libertarian or compatibilist Aquinas is.⁹

AQUINAS IS A COMPATIBILIST

Although Aquinas denies that the will is subject to natural necessity in all cases, there are at least some cases in which it is, in which cases it does not have genuine free choice between alternatives. Aquinas, therefore, thinks that free will does not require free choice. Therefore, according to the definition I gave above, Aquinas is a compatibilist but not a determinist: He does not think the will is determined, but he thinks that even when it is, the agent in question is still sometimes responsible for his or her actions.

According to Aquinas, humans have a dual principle of action: the intellect, whose object is “being and truth,” and the will, whose object is “the good” (*DM* 6.1).¹⁰ The will is the executive power within the human being: It moves every power in the human soul into action, including the intellect. Thus, the will is the efficient or moving cause of the intellect’s action.

The will, however, does not move the powers arbitrarily or with complete freedom of choice. The function of the will is to pursue whatever is perceived to be good. But it is the intellect whose task is to determine what is good, and it is “the good intellectually grasped” that “moves the will” (*DM* 6.1). The good apprehended by the intellect thus acts as a formal cause on the will, giving shape to its action: that the will moves at all is by its own power, but that it pursues this particular object is due to the intellect.

⁹ I hope that this way of laying out the question also helps clarify why I am defining the terms the way I am. The way “libertarianism,” “compatibilism,” and “determinism” are used in contemporary discourse track views that are the combination of answers to two distinct questions: whether we have free choice, and whether free choice is required for moral responsibility. This use of terms can give the impression that one’s views on these two questions must correlate in a certain way and that these three particular combinations of answers exhaust the possible positions on free will. Neither of these is true. This is why I am using “libertarianism” and “compatibilism” in a stricter sense than the one in which the terms are usually used.

¹⁰ For Aquinas, of course, these are the same thing, apprehended in different ways (see *Summa Theologiae* 1a 5.1).

If something is good to such a degree that there is no way for the intellect to perceive it as bad, that object sets the will in motion “necessarily” (*DM* 6.1). The obvious example, according to Aquinas, is happiness. There is no way to think of happiness, as such, as a bad thing; therefore, the will is necessarily moved to pursue happiness. Yet the will’s pursuing happiness is still an act of free will: It is not coerced, and the efficient cause of the will’s motion is the will itself. Elsewhere in the *De Malo*, Aquinas infers that we “cannot will misery” (*DM* 16.5), and therefore it is impossible to will evil directly but only “apprehended under the aspect of good” (*DM* 16.5). And since the vision of God is the ultimate happiness, someone who sees God in his essence “cannot not adhere to God” (*DM* 3.3). In this life, it’s impossible not to will happiness, but different people may come to different conclusions about the best means to get happiness. Once someone has seen God and thereby achieved the highest happiness, they will God necessarily. Yet Aquinas ascribes this adhering to God to the will and not to an external principle, so it is a natural, not a coerced, necessity.

Aquinas, then, is a compatibilist, and quite strongly so. It’s not that it simply happens to be the case, due to our circumstances or general laws of physics, that our wills are determined. Rather, being determined is something essential to the will in particular: the will, in essence, is a power for seeking one determinate thing, the good. The will is, at its core, fixed on a single goal. Its nature is to follow the leading of the intellect, and its characteristic action is to pursue the good, not to make choices.

FREE CHOICE EMERGES FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE WILL

Although Aquinas is a compatibilist, he nevertheless maintains that humans are able to make unconditioned choices between alternatives. In this section of the paper, I will discuss how he can hold both views at once.

Some compatibilists have claimed that it is sufficient for responsibility, and therefore for free will, that one not be externally coerced. David Hume, for example, defines free will in terms of “hypothetical liberty,” or as I have called it, conditional choice: “By liberty, then, we can only mean a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of our will,” which are in turn just as determined as material events.¹¹ As long as we are not forced to do something by an external

¹¹ David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the*

power, we have willed freely, according to Hume.

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Aquinas agrees with Hume as far as free will is concerned, but he thinks the lack of coercion is not sufficient for what he calls “free choice” (*libera electio*). Despite saying that the will is, with regard to its seeking the good, moved necessarily, Aquinas also says that the will has “free choice,” meaning that “the will has to do with contraries, and is not moved necessarily to either one of them,” that “a person is master of their actions, and it is up to them whether to act or not act. Otherwise, they would not have free choice over their actions” (*DM* 6.1). It is clear that “free choice,” for Aquinas, means free choice as defined in the first section of this paper: the ability to act or not act in an unconditioned way. And Aquinas makes this claim in exactly the same passage he shows his compatibilist credentials, *De Malo* 6.1. How are we to square this circle?

One possible position is that it is a simple fact about the will that it can freely choose between alternatives. Descartes can be read in this way when he says that “willing is merely a matter of being able to do or not do the same thing.”¹² The will either simply is an ability to make free choices, or that ability follows immediately from the nature of the will unless it is blocked somehow. A compatibilist could maintain this view by saying that, although the will can choose between alternatives, this is *accidental* to responsibility: Even if the will could not choose, it would still be responsible for its actions.

Aquinas, however, takes a different route: Free choice is not essential to the will *simpliciter*, but it does emerge necessarily from the interaction of the will with its particular objects and with other psychological powers, namely the intellect and the passions. More precisely, free choice becomes possible when the intellect fails to determine the will toward a particular good. This happens in two ways: through the interaction between the will and the intellect, when the objects are not apprehended by the intellect as absolutely good, and through the interaction between the will and the passions when the will is hindered by the passions from following the directives of the intellect.

CHOICE & THE INTELLECT

Principles of Morals, eds. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 95.

¹² René Descartes, *Discourse on Method; and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by Donald A. Cress. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 84.

In *DM* 6.1, Aquinas explains how the human will has free choice by comparing it with inanimate objects and irrational animals, which do not. Following his line of thought will make his position clear.

According to this passage, any natural thing has a principle of action in two parts. One part specifies the action, and another inclines it to act based on the first part. For inanimate objects, the first part is their form, and the second part is an inclination dictated by the form. Since their forms are completely contained in matter, their inclination is “determined to one.” The form of a stone, for example, dictates motion toward the center of the earth. The inclination that follows from the form is determined by that one movement and nothing else. The stone does not have any other option than moving downward, so its movement is necessary. If I were to pick up the stone and throw it into the air, I would be doing violence to the stone because I am forcing it to act against its nature.¹³ In either case, the movement is necessary—but only in the second case is it coercive.

Nonrational animals present a highly complicated version of a fundamentally similar phenomenon.¹⁴ The forms of animals are also completely contained in matter, and therefore, like inanimates, they have an “inclination to one.” The difference is that animals are receptive to their environment, receiving other forms through their senses. The animal’s particular inclination, then, is altered based on the animal’s perception. The reason that an animal does not act the same in all cases is not that there is anything indeterminate (not “determined to one”) in the animal. Rather, it is that the animal is responsive to its environment: Its internal state (in its imagination and memory) changes based on its environment, and its internal state inclines it to a certain response. Since the brute animal’s inclination is determined by its environment, does that mean animals are coerced into action? No: The efficient cause of their action is the “active principle” within them. Yet, as in the case of inanimate objects, their action is necessitated or “inclined to one” because their principle of action is material and, therefore, particular. In other words, nonrational animals are particularly sophisticated instances of ordinary material beings. They are “determined to one” and therefore necessitated because they have only one response to any particular situation (this distinguishes them from inanimate objects, which cannot respond to their environment at all).

¹³ See, e.g., *Summa Theologiae* 1a 2ae 6.4 resp., where he calls a stone’s upward movement “violent” because it is contrary to the downward-moving nature of the stone.

¹⁴ Aquinas does not mention plants in this section.

Like irrational animals, rational animals (humans) also have a two-part principle of action, one part of which specifies the action and the other part of which makes the action happen. But for rational animals, the first part is the intellect, and the second part is the will. It is this difference that ultimately allows Aquinas to accommodate free choice, although it will take us a few steps to get there.

The intellect and will, unlike the senses and appetite of irrational animals, are immaterial powers. Since the intellect is not contained in matter, the forms that the intellect cognizes are universal rather than particular, conceptual rather than material. But because action always deals with particular cases, the universality of the will means that it is “indeterminately related to many.” Aquinas gives the example of an architect building a house. The architect decides that it would be good to build a house; this does not automatically entail that he build a round house or a square house.

How does one decide which particular action to take? Aquinas says in *DM 6* that this happens by “counsel.” The will, once presented with options, is not immediately able to simply pick one; instead, it using the information provided by the intellect, one deliberates about what to do. The resulting feedback between the intellect and the will (the will directing the intellect to deliberate; the intellect presenting its deliberation to the will; the will, perhaps, directing the intellect to provide more information; and so forth) eventually results in action.

But this has not quite gotten us to unconditioned free choice. For as Thomas Williams points out, the intellect, for Aquinas, “operates deterministically ... We have no control over how things look to us.”¹⁵ And so, in cases where there is only one possible means to the good, the intellect gives only one possible course of action to the will. What this would mean, though, is that the human will is no less “inclined to one” than the sensitive appetite of nonrational animals. The acts of nonrational animals are “inclined to one,” not because they only perform one action (as in the case of inanimate beings), but because they have only one possible response to any given circumstance: they have conditioned choice, but not unconditioned, free choice. In the case of nonrational animals, the relevant circumstances include the sensitive forms received into the animal’s imagination. In the case of humans, the relevant circumstances include these plus the universal forms received into the intellect and any more complex thoughts formed out of these. If these universal forms

¹⁵ Thomas Williams, “The Libertarian Foundations of Scotus’s Moral Philosophy,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 62, no. 2, (1998).

lead to only one possible determination of action by the intellect, even if the human will is capable of infinitely more complex decisions than the animal appetite, in the final analysis, it is no less “determined to one” and therefore no less necessitated than the animal appetite.

CHOICE & THE PASSIONS

But this is not the whole story. In *DM* 6.1, Aquinas says that counsel is “not demonstrative”—in other words, it cannot lead the intellect to a single, irrefutable conclusion. And in *DM* 3.3, he says that just as the intellect does not have to assent to conclusions that are not irrefutably proven, the will does not have to be moved toward any action that does not have a “necessary connection to happiness.” It is by the deliberation of the intellect that the will perceives this or that particular course of action as good. So if the intellect cannot prove that a particular choice must be good or that a particular choice would be better than other alternatives, it cannot propose to the will that it must pursue that good.¹⁶ In that case, the will has an unconditioned free choice to act or not act.¹⁷ If this were not so, Aquinas would have no grounds to distinguish the freedom of rational animals from the non-freedom of irrational animals as he does.¹⁸

¹⁶ Franklin et al. say that in *De Malo* 6 Aquinas lists three circumstances in which the will can reject a decision to which it is attracted and argue that all of them are compatible with a non-PAP free will. But they leave out a fourth condition: The will can reject a decision to which it is attracted when there is another possible decision that is as good as or better, or when the decision to which it is attracted is not necessarily good.

¹⁷ Colleen McClusky, “Intellective Appetite and the Freedom of Human Action.” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 66, no. 3 (2002), 443ff explains this by citing a Buridan’s Ass type case from ST 1a 2ae 10.2 resp.: A hungry man is set equidistantly between two equally good bits of food. How can he choose between them? McClusky interprets Aquinas’ answer thus: The intellect can consider the bits of food from any specific criteria (their relative tastiness, size, nutritional value, texture, color, one’s own left- or right-handedness, etc.) and eventually find some criterion that privileges one over the other. But even if we ignore thought experiments where there is no such criterion by which they differ, there is a higher-level problem: How does the intellect decide which criterion to employ? Since the intellect is deterministic, it must, in fact, be the will that makes this decision. But then we must ask by what criterion the will makes this higher-level decision; and then we are off on an infinite regress, unless we concede that, at some point, the will just chooses. So, I think McClusky’s interpretation of the case is correct, but it does not fully answer the question of how the will comes to choose between equal alternatives.

¹⁸ MacDonald, “Aquinas’s Libertarian Account of Free Choice,” 326ff comes to a

Aquinas even takes this further and claims that no particular created good has a necessary connection with happiness, and so the will is not moved to any particular created good necessarily. Other than generally willing the good or happiness (and, we must suppose, when actually experiencing the Beatific Vision), the will always has unconditioned power of choice over its actions.¹⁹ But the will's ability to freely choose between options does not arise because it is intrinsically a choice-making power, but because of the finitude of created goods and because of its interaction with the intellect. I conclude, then, that Aquinas' *libera electio* answers to free choice as defined above and that Aquinas, while remaining technically a compatibilist, thinks that we do choose between genuine alternatives most of the time.²⁰

But even that is not the whole picture. The will is influenced in its

similar conclusion by other means. He argues that, for Aquinas, the decisions of the will are based on second-order "meta-judgments." In other words, we can subject the inclination of our will or the deliverances of our intellect to judgement and decide whether to follow it. MacDonald, along with McClusky, may show a significant way in which Aquinas' view differs from contemporary libertarianism: We do choose freely, but this may occur more at the level of selecting criteria for choice rather than directly choosing action (whether that is what Aquinas means is beyond the scope of this paper).

¹⁹ Kevin M. Staley, "Aquinas: Compatibilist or Libertarian?" *The Saint Anselm Journal* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2005), 77, responding to McClusky, adds another wrinkle to the Buridan's Ass type case from ST 1a 2a 10.2: Even if we could explain why the will chooses one criterion over another, Aquinas is quite clear that no finite good can move the will deterministically, and so even the will's choice of criterion of choice (its "meta-judgements," in MacDonald's terms—see fn. 16), does not fully explain why the man chooses one bit of food over the other.

²⁰ Loughran, among many others, have argued that Aquinas is a compatibilist in a more traditional sense: Aquinas, on this view, thinks that free will does not require free choice, and, in fact, we do not have a capacity for free choice. Loughran is right to point out that, for Aquinas, the free will of rational animals is distinguished from the appetite of irrational animals because the will is not passively moved by any finite, particular object, and that the will's decisions result from an interlocking chain of intellectual apprehensions and voluntary decisions. He is even right that "this deliberative chain must ultimately terminate in [rather, begin with] acts of apprehension which are not commanded by the will" (p. 17). But he is wrong to conclude that, since the chain must start outside the will, "there is no element of potency left in the will which is not being determinately moved to act" (17). For even if the chain of deliberation begins with an intellectual apprehension, that intellectual apprehension under most circumstances does not necessitate the will in one direction or another. Otherwise, there would be no ultimate difference between the human ability and non-human inability to choose to act or not act. But Aquinas is quite clear that there is.

choices not just by the intellect but by another aspect of human psychology: the passions. What emerges is a view of free choice that does not involve the will choosing unilaterally but interacting richly with the intellect and the passions. Examining the relation between the will and the passions will show that, although Aquinas thinks not all acts of the will involve free choice, all acts of the will that are morally meritorious or demeritorious do. In our terminology, free choice is not required for general responsibility, but it is required for moral responsibility.

Under ideal circumstances, the will does whatever the intellect presents to it as good. But because human beings are partially material, we have, along with our will, a sensitive appetite like that of nonrational animals. This natural appetite can weaken or shut down the intellect and motivate the will to act in a way that it would not if it were following the intellect. In such a case, the will is confused by the passions and does not consciously consider that what it is willing is evil because the “vehement” passion resulting from the sensory appetite “repulses” knowledge and takes its place in the will’s calculations (*DM* 3.9, response and ad 7).

When this happens, do we have free choice? Sometimes yes, and sometimes no, and this, according to Aquinas, is what decides whether we are morally culpable for our actions: “It does not seem to be meritorious or demeritorious for someone of necessity to do what he cannot avoid” (*DM* 6.1). So, even though Aquinas thinks that we can be generally responsible for our actions even when we could not have chosen otherwise, he thinks that there is another, stricter kind of responsibility, which we have been calling *moral* responsibility, that requires free choice.

To see more clearly what Aquinas means, consider *DM* 3.10, where he considers the case of sins due to weakness. The objector argues that when we sin out of weakness, we do not sin voluntarily (obj. 1). Rather, our will is blocked by our passions (obj. 3). In *DM* 3.10 obj. 3, the objector argues that when “the judgment of reason is impeded by passion,” the will cannot avoid sinning and therefore has not sinned. If the will cannot do other than sin, then the sin is not imputed to the agent as a moral fault. In his reply, Aquinas does not contest this principle but simply replies that even if the “fettering of reason” necessitates a sin of weakness, the will normally has the power to remove the fettering of reason by the passions and, therefore, could have avoided the sin (“the will has the power to apply or not apply its attention;” “it is in the power of the will to exclude the fettering of reason;” it “has the

power to remove the fettering of reason;” and so on).

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Aquinas acknowledges that sometimes the passions are so strong that the will truly loses control. But then he makes a further distinction. First, Aquinas says that in the case of an “insane” person, “the fettering of reason by passion” has “advanced to such a point” that the will cannot avoid the passions of the appetite (*DM* 3.10). In this case, the person’s actions are not imputed to them as a sin. Note that the insanity has “advanced”—the person becomes insane as they lose control over their passions. That means that the insane person previously had a normal person’s ability to avoid sin, but, against their will, their mental state deteriorated until they lost this ability.

Second, Aquinas says that if the start of the emotion was voluntary and could have been blocked by the will at an earlier point, then we can consider the person to have sinned, even if they could not control themselves in the moment of sinning.²¹ He gives the example of someone who commits homicide while drunk (*DM* 3.10). The idea seems to be that, as long as the person voluntarily got drunk, they are responsible for any crimes they commit while drunk. And we know that their getting drunk was voluntary, according to Aquinas, because “at the beginning of the process, the will could have stopped passion from going so far” (*DM* 3.10).

So, Aquinas is distinguishing between three kinds of people committing sin, whom I will label as follows:

1. The *Akratic*: In their right mind, they were beset with passion, were perfectly able to resist the passion, but chose not to, and committed a sin due to that passion. They are guilty of moral fault.
2. The *Insane*: The state of their mind deteriorated until they were unable to resist passion and committed a sin. Their will was unable to stop this deterioration. They are innocent of moral fault.
3. The *Drunk*: The state of their mind deteriorated until they were unable to resist passion and committed a sin. At the beginning of this process, their will was able to stop it, but they chose not to. They are guilty of moral fault.

²¹ For a similar contemporary view, responding to Frankfurt scenarios, one can look at Wyma’s *Principle of Possibly Passing the Buck*, explained in Keith D. Wyma, “Moral Responsibility and Leeway for Action,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (1997); John Martin Fischer, *My Way: Essays on Moral Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 109ff.

It is clear what distinguishes the Akratic from the Insane/Drunk: The Akratic is able to do otherwise at the moment of the sin, while the Insane and the Drunk are not. But this is not the deciding factor in moral responsibility according to Aquinas, for it is also clear what distinguishes the Insane from the Drunk: The Drunk had the ability to check their passions at the beginning of the progression, while the Insane did not. In other words, the Drunk could have done otherwise, while the Insane could not. If this were not Aquinas' criterion for moral responsibility, he would have no grounds to attribute moral fault to the Drunk and not to the Insane: He would have to either condemn both or excuse both.

Aquinas, then, accepts a limited principle of alternate possibilities, one that fits within a theoretically compatibilist framework but understands most or all cases of moral choice in a libertarian way. On the one hand, he does not accept a principle of alternate possibilities in a simple sense: To be generally responsible for our actions, we do not have to have been able to do otherwise in the moment. He introduces two qualifications:

1. Alternate possibilities are required not for general responsibility but specifically for moral responsibility. (He brings in the idea in the case of determining moral fault, and he does not seem to think it applies to, e.g., the Beatific Vision.²²)
2. We do not need to have alternate possibilities at the moment of action but merely at some point in the process leading to the action.

Aquinas, I conclude, is a compatibilist about the will in general but upholds a version of the principle of alternate possibilities for moral responsibility.

CONCLUSION

A remaining concern: Although Aquinas seems to say that the will

²² Of course, moral decisions prior to reaching the Beatific Vision presumably can influence whether or not someone actually reaches beatitude (I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out). One might think of the Beatified as the positive analogue to the Drunk, and in that case, perhaps there is a way to say that the Beatified is morally responsible for achieving beatitude, even if they cannot choose otherwise once they reach that point. To my knowledge, Aquinas does not ever approach the question in this way.

chooses between alternatives under most circumstances, he never explains exactly how it comes to its choice. But Aquinas' lack of a unified account of free choice does not mean that he is a determinist. In "What is Freedom?" Jamie Anne Spiering argues that Aquinas intentionally refrains from giving a single definition of *libertas* or freedom because he thinks freedom cannot be understood apart from the nature in which it is instantiated. This paper agrees: We can observe two kinds of freedom in Aquinas, neither of which he explicitly distinguishes, and these two kinds of freedom are characterized by a complicated interaction between different aspects of human nature as well as influence from God and angels. If we demand a complete explanation of why the will chose this rather than that option, the question has been begged in favor of determinism. To be fair, how the will chooses when it is not necessitated is not clear in Aquinas. But maybe demanding such clarity is wrongheaded from the start. This ability may be an unanalyzable property of the will, just as it is an unanalyzable property of the intellect that it can choose between undemonstrated conclusions. The lack of such an answer in Aquinas' writings is no evidence that he was a determinist.

Another possible concern with nondeterminist compatibilism is that, even if it makes free choice between alternatives possible, it also makes it merely accidental to the will, a side effect of the indeterminacy of the intellect or of the passions rather than something essential to the will itself. And if we're responsible for our actions whether we have this kind of free choice or not, then its primary intuitive appeal (i.e., that without it, we do not have moral responsibility) is undercut. Another problem, which does not seem to be on Aquinas' mind but is certainly dear to contemporary philosophy of religion, is that nondeterminist compatibilism undermines a free will theodicy. If we can have free will and be determined not to sin (say, if we were all given the Beatific Vision at birth), there is no reason for God to give us the ability to sin. Yet another, which Aquinas would have been aware of, is that if free will in the proper sense does not require choice between alternatives, then there is no non-dogmatic reason to maintain, as Aquinas did, that God freely chose to create the world and could have done otherwise.

But the distinction between general and moral responsibility we've drawn out of Aquinas helps us solve all these problems. If moral responsibility is due to free choice in addition to free will, then even if mere free will confers a different kind of responsibility and thus a different kind of value, the need for free choice retains its intuitive ap-

peal. And the free will theodicy relies on a similar intuition: The value of God's creatures freely choosing Him when they could have done otherwise might be so great that it outweighs the evil risked by such rejection. But such rejection is possible due to free choice, not free will. So, even for a compatibilist, a free choice theodicy is still possible. A compatibilist could even maintain that the blessed in heaven cannot sin, that their not sinning is up to them, and yet that they have no choice, in the proper sense, in the matter.²³ Finally, our ability to choose between alternatives may answer to some perfection in God, and to deny Him the ability to freely choose might involve denying a perfection of God.

²³ Aquinas' view, then, can get around one of the difficulties of libertarianism for Christian theology highlighted in Jeremy W. Skrzypek, "Are Christians Theologically Committed to a Rejection of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities?" *The Heythrop Journal* 64, no. 1 (2023).

HOSANNA (HOW TENDER IS THE
WRECKAGE)

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Everyone understands the passion
of fury.
Everyone knows the
king, riding on a chariot
with a sword lifted
high into battle.
Everyone knows fear
inspired by anger.
Few remember the passion of grief.
The wail that goes up for a city,
for a people, for an age.
Few know drowning like this.
No one remembers the
passion
of mercy.
No one knows the cry, the
scream of agony required for forgiveness
that splits ears and stone.
Who now would comprehend
the relief of forgetfulness
and the way
the earth rumbles
when old ways are rent and
new ways are born?
Who now knows the sound
of labor pains
when a mother gives birth to the
world?

JESUS THE PROTESTER: A POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF HOPE

WILLIAM ORBIH¹

ABSTRACT: Protests have remained an essential feature in African society since the colonial era. Today, they remain a great source of hope for a continent struggling for survival and development. But what contribution can theology make to the contemporary protest culture and, by extension, the social transformation of Africa? This article proposes an understanding of Jesus' salvific work as a protest of sin and the social effects of sin. Drawing from the image of the crucified God in Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope and Jana Gunther's discussion on theatricalization as a strategy contemporary protest movement, "Jesus the Protester" is a political theology of hope that engages Africa's protest culture. For people who must continue to protest against internal and external factors inimical to their social, political, economic, and cultural survival, the image of a God who protests sin and is both an inspiration and a source of hope.

IF CHRISTIANITY will transform Africa, argues Emmanuel Katongole, it will be through Christian activists witnessing to Christ's salvific work and God's new creation.² While I agree with him, I will add that the positive role of Christianity in society is not limited to the witness of Christian activities, nor is Christianity the only force of social transformation in Africa. Rather, Christians must be willing to identify and engage with the other forces of transformation in their society. And since, in Africa, protest has remained one of the most effective weapons of transformation and great sources of hope, this essay calls for a greater engagement of Christian theology with Africa's protest culture.

As a background, I lament the noticeable lack of interest in protest culture among theologians. While there have been many protests in

¹ William Orbih is a PhD student in theology at the University of Notre Dame.

² This argument forms the basis of at least three of his recent monologues: *Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2011); *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017); and *Who Are My People: Love, Violence, and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022). Using a theological re-adaptation of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's and Jessica Hoffman Davis' *Portraiture Methodology* in *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), he carefully retells stories of Christian activists whose lives, according to him, "testify" to a different—nonviolent—way of living within the reality of modern Africa." *Who Are My People*, 2.

Africa and across the globe in the past decades, and while other disciplines have paid attention to the rising trend of protest culture, there is still a noticeable lack of interest in the subject matter in theology. For example, *Protest Cultures: A Companion*, published in 2016, discusses the phenomenon of protest from historical, psychological, and political perspectives.³ What is conspicuously missing in this well-edited volume, made up of 57 chapters, is a theological (or even religious) voice.

In response to this lacuna, I am proposing a theology of hope that engages Africa's protest culture. At the heart of this theology of hope is the image of Jesus as a protester. Jesus the protester is a political theology of hope. It is a theology that is attentive to the protests and yearnings of Africans for a better future. It is Jesus in the public sphere, actively reshaping African and world politics through the missionary action of the church and individual Christians. It is Jesus touching our history with His hope and salvation, including our experience of conquest and colonialism and the lingering effects of these historical events. It is Jesus affirming Africans in their rich protest culture while accompanying contemporary protesters in their desire for social transformation. Above all, it is Jesus inviting us all to participate in His protest of sin and all structures of sin in our societies.

This is the image of Jesus that Jürgen Moltmann prioritizes in his theology of hope.⁴ For Moltmann, Christ is our great hope because He "protests" against sin and human suffering and invites us to participate in his great and eternal protest. I will argue that by employing Jana Gunther's concept of "theatralization" in her essay in *Protest Cultures*, "Protest as Symbolic Action," we can more adequately understand Jesus' salvific work as, on the one hand, a self-representation of His protests against sin and the social effects of sin, and on the other, one who invites us to become protesters.⁵ Also, while Africa already has a rich culture of protest, and while this is a source of hope, Jesus the pro-

³ Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Martin Klimke, and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *Protest Cultures: A Companion* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).

⁴ My critical engagement of Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope is limited to three of his works: *Theology of Hope* (New York: SCM Press, 1967), *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis Fortress Press, 2015), and *Experiences of God*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). These works were first published in 1965, 1973, and 1979 respectively.

⁵ Jana Gunther, "Protest as Symbolic Politics," in *Protest Cultures*, edited by Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Martin Klimke, and Joachim Scharloth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).

tester is the great, living, blessed and certain hope that leads and guide all our effort toward social transformation.

PROTEST & HOPE IN AFRICA

On May 13, 2000, *The Economist* published an editorial titled “Hopeless Africa.”⁶ This very somber verdict is a conclusion based on an observation recorded in one of the articles in the edition. “The new millennium has brought more disaster than hope to Africa. Worse, the few candles of hope are flickering weakly.”⁷ This, of course, is neither the first nor last time that Africa will be tagged hopeless. Long before Africa became Europe’s colonial interest, Georg F. W. Hegel mislabeled and dismissed sub-Saharan Africa as not just hopeless but as of no historical consequence.⁸ In 1962, Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper popularized the image of Africa as the “dark continent.” According to him, there is nothing like African history. “There is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness ... and darkness is not the subject of history.”⁹ Today, Africa remains synonymous with hopelessness and darkness, poverty, hunger, disease, violence, and death.¹⁰

However, when scholars describe Africa as hopeless today, they are often not only referring to the prevalence of poverty, disease, conflicts, bad leadership, mismanaged economies, or even the presumed darkness that characterized Africa’s past. They are also highlighting what they observe to be a lack of confidence among most Africans in the face of these social travails. In other words, the widespread presupposition is that Africa is backward because Africans are mostly passive and thus have failed to take their destiny into their hands and move their continent forward. For instance, the already referenced article in *The Economist* blames colonialism for the lack of self-confidence

⁶ “Hopeless Africa,” *The Economist* (May 13-20, 2000), 17 <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2000/05/11/hopeless-africa> (accessed 2/1/2023).

⁷ “Africa,” *The Economist* (May 13-20, 2000), 23, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2000/05/11/hopeless-africa> (accessed 2/1/2023)

⁸ See Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, translated by H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁹ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Rise of Christian Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), 9.

¹⁰ Paulinus Odozor, “Truly Africa, and Wealthy!” in *The True Wealth of Nations: Catholic Social Thought and Economic Life*, ed. by Daniel K. Finn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 267.

among Africa's people and thus calls on Africans to become more active in their social transformation. "More than anything, Africa's people need to regain their self-confidence. Only then can Africa engage as an equal with the rest of the world, devising its own economic programs and development policies."¹¹

What is problematic about this otherwise valid call is that it implies that Africans have been mostly passive in the face of their numerous challenges, beginning with colonialism. This image of Africa as a continent of passive people, which remains popular in the West, is one of the myths that was perpetuated during colonialism. For example, the African natives in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, first published in 1899 (at the start of European colonization of Africa), are uncivilized, prehistoric, and passive as they await the benevolence of Western civilization, modernization, and humanization.¹² Chinua Achebe was particularly offended by Conrad's refusal to accord humanity to the African natives in the same sense he accords it to his fellow Europeans. To the latter, Achebe observed, he bestows human expression while withholding it from the former.¹³ Yet Achebe never blamed Conrad for originating this image of Africa. Far from being Conrad's invention, "It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination, and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it."¹⁴ Unfortunately, more than three decades after Achebe vehemently challenged the inaccuracy and offensiveness of the image of "passive Africans," it has remained dominant in the Western imagination.

We must, therefore, continue to reject this image of a continent of passive people. Africa might be full of sufferers; it is not a continent of passive sufferers. A more accurate image of Africa is a continent of protesters. This is true today and has been true throughout modern history. For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Africa's history, since modern history, is a long story of perpetual struggle against slavery, colonialism, and

¹¹ "Africa," *The Economist*, 24.

¹² Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Selected Short Fictions* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2003). In one passage, Conrad described the African natives as human, albeit prehistoric. "They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (76).

¹³ Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa," in *Hopes and Impediment* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 8.

¹⁴ Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 17.

neocolonialism.¹⁵ The 2022 movie *Woman King* tells the story of an African kingdom's struggle and resistance against the Portuguese slave trade. Never reconciled to foreign conquest and oppression, Jack Woddis insists, African people "fought continually, first to defend themselves against the invaders, and then, after defeat, in protest against the consequences of conquest."¹⁶ While it destroyed many things in the continent, imperialism, in its colonial form, says Ngugi, was not able to destroy the African culture of resistance.¹⁷

Africans sustained their anti-colonial protests in the form of writings, demonstrations, and in a few cases, armed struggles until the colonialists were forced out. And because vivid lingering effects of colonialism continue to characterize Africa's so-called independence, it is not surprising that African literature has remained, for the most part, protest literature, with protesters featuring prominently as protagonists in novels and plays.¹⁸ Africa's politics too has remained a theater of protest. The Arab Spring, for example, started in Tunisia.¹⁹ South Africa remains the world protest capital.²⁰ The sustained protest that finally led to the ousting of apartheid in 1994 left the rainbow nation a legacy and culture of protest.

The spirit of protest and resistance in Africa remains alive. Bedeviled by a myriad of challenges, including irresponsible and unaccountable leadership, the struggle of Africans for greater freedom and progress continues to this day. African people are still struggling to gain complete control of their economy, politics, and culture.²¹ In Jan-

¹⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (Oxford: James Currey, 1993), 54.

¹⁶ Jack Woddis, *Africa: The Roots of Revolts* (New York: Citadel Press, 1960), 246. It is insightful that Woddis wrote this in 1960, the "great year of African independence."

¹⁷ Ngugi, 45.

¹⁸ See Barbara Harlow, "Protest and Resistance," in *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, edited by F. Abiola Irele, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 51–52.

¹⁹ And according to Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly, *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 3–4, the Arab Spring, which the West has ingeniously divorced from its geographical location, which is the African continent, "speaks to the continued vitality of long histories of protest throughout Africa."

²⁰ See Silvia Bianco, "South Africa: The 'Protest Capital of the World,' *The South African*, <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/south-africa-the-protest-capital-of-the-world>

²¹ Ngugi, 82. In this struggle and resistance, argues Ngugi, lies our physical, economic, political, cultural, psychological, and spiritual survival.

uary 2023 alone, there were over 210 protests across Africa.²² The point of this essay is, however, not just that this culture of protest in Africa challenges the Western image of “passive Africans.” Rather, it is that it points to the existence of hope in a continent that has often been dismissed as hopeless. Towards the conclusion of his 1986 Nobel Lecture titled “Hope, Despair and Memory,” Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel uttered these powerful words: “There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.”²³ While Africans have often been powerless to prevent injustice, they have never ceased to protest, resist, and raise their voices against oppression. Far from indicating hopelessness, Africa’s culture of protest is proof of the existence of hope.

Numerous studies on the concept of hope from diverse perspectives have emphasized the relationship between hope and concrete action. First developed by C. R. Snyder in 1994, “Hope Theory” highlights the relationship between hopeful thinking and the human desire to pursue goals that they perceive to be attainable.²⁴ From a political science point of view, Loren Goldman has more recently studied ways hope is “a practical orientation in thought necessary for concrete undertaking,” which thus makes it “a creative companion to sober, self-reflective despair on pathways toward a better future.”²⁵ Both studies are not just about the potency of hope but also about the indicators of hope. If people are resisting, protesting, demanding change, and speaking against oppression and injustice, it indicates they have hope. Widespread protest across Africa is an indication of hope and not of hopelessness or despair.

The conclusion is that while Africa is indeed struggling according to every available development indicator, it is not hopeless. Africans are not hopeless. If hope were absent in the continent, there would be no protests or resistance whatsoever. Instead, we will, as Donald DeMarco wrote many years ago, “merely go through the motions of living until we finally reach the stage when we feel so drained and depressed that death begins to

²² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1203224/number-of-non-violent-protests-in-african-countries/>.

²³ Elie Wiesel, “Hope, despair and memory,” *Nobel Lecture*, December 11, 1986, in <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1986/wiesel/lecture/> (accessed 1/27/23).

²⁴ Kevin L. Rand and Kaitlin K. Touza, “Hope Theory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 425.

²⁵ Loren Goldman, *The Principle of Political Hope: Progress, Action, and Democracy in Modern Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 150.

appear comforting.”²⁶ When people protest rather than do nothing about a situation, they do so only because of their ability to hope to dream of a different future, or more accurately, because of the presence and reality of hope in them. Resistance, says Moltmann, “is the protest of those who hope; and hope is the festival of those who resist.”²⁷ We can always hope, even in the face of injustice beyond our power to prevent. We must continue to protest and resist, expect, and demand something better.

JESUS THE PROTESTER: OUR HOPE

Protest is hope. From a Christian perspective, however, it can only be one of the lesser/minor hopes. In his 2007 encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI distinguishes between lesser hopes and great Christian hope.²⁸ According to him, while “All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action,” the Christian mission is to bring all human hopes, actions, and concepts of progress before the “radiance of the great hope that cannot be destroyed even by small-scale failures or by a breakdown in matters of historic importance.”²⁹ In other words, while there are many lesser hopes, they lack the radiance and resilience that Christian hope alone possesses.³⁰

This crucial call to mission is based on an understanding of what is distinct and significant about Christian hope, which Moltmann clarifies better than anyone else. Firstly, Christian hope, a free and gratuitous divine gift, is essential to our Christian identity and mission. Moltmann rightly describes hope as faith’s “inseparable compan-

²⁶ Donald DeMarco, *Hope for a World without Hope* (Cashel Institute, 1990), 3.

²⁷ Moltmann, *Experience of God*, 33.

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of hope, primarily a response to Ernst Bloch’s philosophy of hope, presumes a similar distinction between Christian hope and secular hope.

²⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, “*Spe Salvi: On Christian Hope*” (November 30, 2007), no. 35, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html (accessed 1/31/2023).

³⁰ If, as the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* teaches, the Church’s mission is to elevate rather than reject whatever is true and holy, then part of the church’s mission is to bring the bright illumination of Christ to the lesser, albeit authentic, hopes of humankind. This respectful engagement with non-Christian hope is integral to the Church’s mission. See Pope Paul VI, “*Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*” (October 28, 1965), no. 2 https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

ion.”³¹ While “faith is the foundation upon which hope rests, hope nourishes and sustains faith.” Without hope, faith is both incomprehensible and intangible. For, while faith binds us to Christ, hope sets this faith open to the comprehensive future of Christ.³² Without hope, faith is, at best, weak and, at worst, bound to fail and even die. His conclusion, therefore, is that while in the Christian life, faith has priority, hope has primacy.³³

Secondly and even more importantly, the essence of Christian hope is neither an idea nor an event, whether past or present. Rather, the Christian hope is a person—Jesus Christ. Christ is the foundation and telos of our hope. Christian hope is Christ’s history and future, His suffering and victory. As Moltmann again explains, based on his close reading of the New Testament, the raising of the crucified Christ is the theological foundation of Christian hope.³⁴ Because the crucified and risen Christ is our hope, the New Testament employs some choice adjectives to describe this hope. In 1 Peter 1: 3ff, St. Peter calls it a living hope, for it is made possible by the resurrection of Christ. In Titus 2:13, Paul calls it a blessed hope. In various places, the New Testament also speaks of the certainty of Christian hope. Hebrews 6:18-19, for example, describes the hope that lies before us as the anchor of our souls as sure and firm.

What is most striking about Moltmann’s theology of hope is the image of God it prioritizes. For Moltmann, the image of the crucified God is the center of all theology. From it, “all Christian statements about history, about the church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope stems.”³⁵ He emphasizes that the God of hope is not just the all-powerful God who will, at the end of time, right all wrongs and reward all those suffering unjustly. Instead, right here and now, God suffers with all those who suffer. The foundation of his theology of hope is “divine passibility” and, by implication, God’s active involvement in human history. In fact, he insists that “To speak of a God who could not suffer will make God a demon.”³⁶ For God not to be a demon, God would have to be in Auschwitz, suffering with the sufferers.³⁷

³¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 20

³² Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 20.

³³ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 20.

³⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, xi.

³⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 293-4.

³⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 274.

³⁷ Moltmann lived through the horrors of World War II, and his experience of the

Hope is the fruit of God identifying with our humanity, suffering in solidarity with us, and participating in our existential and historical struggles. God's participation in human suffering results in transformation. Margaret B. Adam's reading of Moltmann makes this point even clearer. "God's suffering presence with human suffering is a fundamental source of hope, when understood from the perspective of God's future indwelling with the transformed new creation."³⁸ While our deliverance from suffering is certain, this salvation is not just something that will happen in some future time. It is already achieved in God's solidarity with us. The God of hope is in Auschwitz, Africa, and all the other sites of human suffering, not just as one other sufferer but as the assurance of salvation for all those who suffer, both in the present and the eschaton. God's salvation is thus both historical and eschatological.

In addition to its apparent eschatological dimension, Moltmann's theology of hope also has a crucial missiological dimension. Adam highlights this dimension in her critical appraisal of Moltmann. Not only has Moltmann "invigorated theological scholarship about hope" and made it a less "forgotten" virtue, argues Adam, he has also made hope a more "responsible" virtue. According to her, Moltmann's hope is a "responsible hope because it presupposes an 'ethics of hope,' while making us 'a people of hope.'"³⁹ True and enduring hope, says Moltmann, "is based on God's call and command."⁴⁰ The command is to resist death, and the call is to divine life, "to stand up to life until death is swallowed up in victory."⁴¹ In other words, God does not only suffer in solidarity with us; He invites us to participate in His life and salvific ministry. Therefore, Christian hope is God's solidarity with us in our suffering and His invitation to participate in his salvific mission.

Moltmann's theology of hope variously refers to Christ's salvific work as a protest. In *Theology of Hope*, he writes, "Hope finds in Christ not only a consolation in suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering."⁴² In *Experiences of God*, he describes the

brutal war transformed him. While before the war, he was not a Christian (at least not an active Christian), shortly after the war, he became a Christian and, eventually, a church minister and theologian. For his account of his Christian conversion, see "Why I am a Christian," in Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, 1-18.

³⁸ Margaret B. Adam, *Our Only Hope: More than We Can Ask or Imagine* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 26.

³⁹ Adam, *Our Only Hope*, 45-55.

⁴⁰ Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, 19.

⁴¹ Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, 20.

⁴² Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 21. Italics mine.

“raising of the tortured and crucified Son of Man as God’s great protest against death and against everyone who plays into death’s hands and threatens life.”⁴³ Moltmann also reflects on the implication of the hope for the Christian in terms of a protest. For the Christian, he explains, “the resurrection of Christ is not merely consolation in suffering; it is also the sign of God’s protest against suffering.”⁴⁴

However, while Moltmann succinctly describes Christ’s salvific work as a protest, what is lacking is an explanation of the precise dynamics of our participation in it. Jana Gunther’s concept of “theatralization,” in her essay “Protest as Symbolic Action,” can help make this clearer. A vital background to Gunther’s essay is another essay in the edited volume by Donatella della Porta, which discusses the aim and strategy of protest. According to Porta, “Protest includes nonroutinized ways of affecting political, social, and cultural processes.”⁴⁵ Quoting Michael Lipsky, she immediately adds that a “protest is successful to the extent that other parties are activated to political involvement.”⁴⁶ However, whereas Porter is concerned with the meaning and efficiency of protest, Gunther is interested in the strategy protest groups employ to engender public participation.

For Gunther, theatralization is the strategy protesting groups employ to engender public participation. Simply put, theatralization is the symbolic public self-representation of a collective identity.⁴⁷ As symbolic action or politics, protests are strategies individuals and groups use to raise their level of visibility, gain recognition and, if possible, achieve political change.⁴⁸ She also notes how symbolic actions potentially influence the perceptions of the public viewing the protest action and its participants.⁴⁹ Finally, it is important to emphasize the element of visibility. For protest actions to be effective, they must be visible. Thus, while the ultimate goal is symbolic power and, by extension, social change, the first step in theatralization is making one’s action visible in the public sphere.⁵⁰

⁴³ Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, 30.

⁴⁴ Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, 11-12.

⁴⁵ Donatella della Porta, “Protest in Social Movements” in *Protest Cultures*, eds. Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Martin Klimke, and Joachim Scharloth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 13.

⁴⁶ Porta, “Protest in Social Movements,” 13-14.

⁴⁷ Gunther, “Protest as Symbolic Politics,” 56.

⁴⁸ Gunther, “Protest as Symbolic Politics,” 49.

⁴⁹ Gunther, “Protest as Symbolic Politics,” 57.

⁵⁰ Gunther, “Protest as Symbolic Politics,” 57.

Using Gunther's framework, we can likewise describe the salvific work of Christ as a theatricalization of his identity and mission while highlighting our invitation to share in this identity and ministry. As Paul explains, we are all members of the one body of Christ, and this identity we share in Christ is founded upon or made possible by Christ's salvific work. Christ's salvific work includes his incarnation, public ministry, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. In the incarnation, the invisible God became visible. Jesus' teaching, preaching, healing, and deliverance were always performed in public. His death was a public execution, with his crucifixion site accessible to passers-by. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His followers. Finally, His ascension was witnessed by many of his followers.

The New Testament, in several places, calls us to follow the footsteps of Christ, as well as participate in his salvific work. Not just to experience its saving power, but also so that through us, others may experience the salvation of Christ. Our fundamental mission as Christians is thus to celebrate and proclaim the saving work of Christ, both within our communities of faith and to the world, in order to engender participation. In general, Christian evangelization consists of making Christ present and visible to the world. It also consists of emulating the virtues of Christ, as much as possible, in our daily lives and public spaces.

Moreover, if Christ's salvific work is a protest against sin and suffering, then in Christ, we are called to become protesters. We are called to participate in Christ's identity and mission as one who protests sin and all the social effects of sins. As Moltmann puts it, "We are called to hope."⁵¹ We are also called to "show our hope for the life that defeats death in our protest against the manifold forms of death in the midst of life."⁵² Christ, the protester, invites us to become more active in the struggle for social transformation. Christ, the protester, accompanies us in our struggle against the social effects of sin. Above all, Christ the protester is our great hope that guarantees that all our actions for social transformation will not be in vain.

JESUS OF AFRICA: THE PROTESTER

Who is Jesus for Africa today? In *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, Diane B. Stinton's exploration of this question

⁵¹ Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, 36.

⁵² Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, 32.

above yields four christological models, each representing a cluster of christological images. These models garnered from both the carefully crafted works of scholars and the active faith of non-scholars are Jesus as life-giver, Jesus as mediator, Jesus as loved one, and Jesus as leader.⁵³ According to Stinton, each creative image of Jesus is forged in the furnace of contemporary African realities; from this, they acquire both urgency and potency.⁵⁴ We can add that they prove that for African Christians, Jesus is not just significant; He is the ultimate answer to the human quest. They prove that many Africans have come to recognize Jesus Christ as the savior of the whole human race. He is no longer merely the savior of the white missionaries who brought Christianity to their continent but has become their savior as well. They approach Him as healer and provider, bringing him all the afflictions of their life.⁵⁵ They express faith in Jesus through songs, prayers, clichés, and epitaphs. And they boldly display their faith in billboards and stickers, which they place on their doorposts and vehicles.

However, while each model is an authentic expression of faith in Jesus, this does not mean that they “are either static or faits accomplis” or exclusive of each other.⁵⁶ Most importantly, the validity of the African experience of Jesus, which each conveys, does not imply that they are beyond critique. Stinton certainly does not think so. Hence, she does not merely enumerate them; she critically evaluates them. For her, it is not enough that these models align with the core elements of Christology. They must also be accountable to the African people. Accountability to the African people means historical, cultural, contemporary, linguistic, and conceptual relevance, gender appropriateness, and credibility of witnesses.⁵⁷ In other words, are these models relevant to the contemporary African experience? Do they answer the question, “Who is Jesus for Africa today?” Stinton’s landmark study thus also provides a theoretical framework for evaluating the theological appropriateness and contextual relevance of christological models.

Using Stinton’s criterion of accountability, for instance, we can critically evaluate the “Jesus the protester” christological model, which this article proposes. One of the christological images under the Jesus

⁵³ Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 21.

⁵⁴ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 21.

⁵⁵ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 4.

⁵⁶ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 21.

⁵⁷ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 46.

as leader model, which Stinton discusses at length, is Jesus as liberator, and it is the fruit of her engagement with the liberation theology of Jean-Marc Ela. Interestingly, it has so many points of intersection with the Jesus the protester model. As Stinton rightly points out, Ela shapes his theology around two focal points: the suffering of the crucified Christ and the historical suffering of Africans, which includes the continent's experience of slavery, colonialism, and post-colonialism.⁵⁸ But even more interesting is how Ela does not, as Stinton puts it, "see an exclusively suffering Africa, but also an Africa of struggle and resistance."⁵⁹ Sadly, it is the image of "suffering Africa" that writers and media outlets have often emphasized. In contrast, the more accurate image of an Africa of "struggle and resistance" is largely ignored.

Like Moltmann, Ela also prioritizes the image of the crucified God. In *My Faith as an African*, published in 1988, Ela looks to the cross for meaning and hope in the face of Africa's numerous challenges. According to him, because "Jesus transforms the cross from an instrument of humiliation into an instrument of struggle against slavery and death," Christians are called to "place themselves beside Jesus for the life of the world."⁶⁰ The challenge, he argues, is not to become passive in the face of suffering. Rather, we should resist it in the firm conviction that "Living in the universe of the cross and of the resurrection implies one radical peculiarity: a state of affairs can change. The reign of death can be reversed."⁶¹

However, while similar to Ela's Jesus as liberator in many ways, the Jesus the protester model differs from it in at least three points. First, it reflects and emphasizes a more contemporary political imagination regarding the now preferred strategy for participation and social change. Theatralization, through which protesting groups struggle for visibility, has become the preferred mechanism for social change. A report by Adam Taylor published in the *Washington Post* based on "a study that looked closely at 900 protest movements or episodes across 101 countries and territories," concludes that we are indeed living in an era of protest, "like the years around 1848, 1917 or 1968, when large numbers of people rebelled against the way things were, demanding change."⁶² Taylor's report concludes on a very hopeful note:

⁵⁸ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 195–196.

⁵⁹ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 196.

⁶⁰ Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 109.

⁶¹ Ela, 111.

⁶² Adam Taylor, "Why is the world protesting so much? A new study claims to have

“Roughly 42% of protests in the study were judged as successful, though that varied significantly by region and the type of protests and included partial successes—a higher figure than some other studies. If our era of protest continues, that suggests that many more protesters are going to get at least some of what they want.” As Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly observe, the increasing rate of success of protests has continued to provide new inspiration for many who had lost faith in the potential for transformative struggles.⁶³

Secondly, Jesus the protester emphasizes human participation and recognizes the authenticity of the secular hopes that power protests. Jesus protests for us and with us against sin and the social effects of sin. He leads us in protest as well as accompanies us in our protest. As Moltmann puts it, “Christ suffers with us and Christ suffers for us. The two images of Christ belong together.”⁶⁴ In other words, Jesus’ death has soteriological value, and this salvation is holistic because while Jesus willingly submitted to death, He at the same time offered His death as a sacrifice for sin and, to use Khaled Anatolios’ expression, as a “representative repentance” for humanity.⁶⁵ But Jesus does not just protest on our behalf but also leads us in the protest against sin and human suffering. In both senses, Jesus represents hope for a continent full of people relentlessly struggling for freedom and development, justice, and peace. For African Christians, the image of Jesus, the protester, represents both inspiration and hope. It is a call to action. It is the assurance of final victory over sin and the social effects of sin.

Thirdly, Jesus the protester is a theology of hope that, while recognizing the authenticity of secular hopes, equally acknowledges their vulnerability and temporality. It concedes that protests do not always achieve desired political change. Yet, even when protests might not often lead to desired political change in Africa, they always indicate the reality of hope, which can be defined as confidence in the possibility of a different, better, and brighter future. From a Christian perspective,

some answers,” *The Washington Post*, November 4, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/11/04/protests-global-study/> (accessed 1/27/2023).

⁶³ Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly, *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

⁶⁴ Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, 50.

⁶⁵ Khaled Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 154.

the certainty of fulfillment is the quality that makes Christian hope primarily different from the many kinds of secular hopes. However, according to Moltmann, while only Christian hope is certain, it directs all authentic worldly hopes to a bright horizon of possibility. Because it is directed toward a *novum ultimum*, that is, toward a new creation of all things by the God of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it “opens a future outlook that embraces all things including also death, and into this it can and must also take the limited hopes of a renewal of life, stimulating them, relativizing them, giving them direction.”⁶⁶

Finally, as a theology of hope, Jesus the protester model also acknowledges that protest is often politically limited. As Branch and Mampilly rightly note, “Even as protest challenges state power, it is structured by that power and so reveals both political possibilities and political limitations.”⁶⁷ It is thus also a theological critique of secular hope. Because too often, hope is understood in a way that affirms rather than challenges the status quo. Vincent Lloyd, in his 2016 article, “For What Are Whites to Hope?” urges that we must always endeavor to probe the content and test the authenticity of every hope.⁶⁸ Lloyd insists that “hopes are idolatrous if they are not oriented by our relationship to the good.”⁶⁹ Rather than the number of participants, this should be the criterion for evaluating protest since, for Christians, the desire for a freer and more just continent is shaped by our faith in God’s promise and future.

⁶⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 33–4

⁶⁷ Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*, 4.

⁶⁸ Vincent Lloyd, “For What Are Whites to Hope?” *Political Theology* 17, no. 2 (March 2016), 168.

⁶⁹ Lloyd, 170.

REFLECTIONS

QUAESTIONES DISPUTATAE

Objection. — Last morning he was rushed to the ER, throwing up blood. He spent all of yesterday at D— and was flown out back to S— A— around 7 p.m. last night. I stopped by twice, once as soon as I heard, and the second up until he left. I walked in while he was asleep and knelt and prayed a Rosary for him at his bedside. I was trying to really mean that same prayer I keep coming back to: “God, let me suffer with him.” Why do some hold onto faith even in the midst of great trauma and others don’t? Why do some even come to the faith after or during intense suffering? Is this why you haven’t given me suffering even though I’ve asked for it? Do you know that I am not yet ready to affirm your goodness even in the face of evil? Am I still the unrepentant thief on the cross?

Objection. — Why is it that I don’t feel close to you? As I was walking to the hotel, I thought it odd that, in retrospect, I feel closer to you after having committed some sin than in those times where I’ve done everything right—those days when I try to examine my conscience and can’t find anything without worrying about scrupulosity. Perhaps I’m like a toddler breaking things. When he does that, he has his mother’s attention. Then, he feels close.

Objection. — Perhaps the greater scandal of the suffering servant was not that he introduced weakness into the Godhead, but into the ideal of humanity.

(Let the above remain)

Faith. — It is tragic to see anyone abandon their faith when they cannot understand where God is in the evil they face. They don’t know that it is precisely there where faith begins. Now that I think about it, Father, if one can deny your goodness even in the face of a “final answer,” then one might as well affirm your goodness even in the face of endless evil. That soul, on the contrary, waiting for that one piece of datum—that one argument that will bring them to the faith—has not yet understood faith. That everyday duty of the Christian, *faith*, is not something one simply makes a leap toward and then leaves aside. It is the constant command of supernatural courage. That chasm between where God call us and where we are comfortable, that chasm of faith—all around it are miracles. Avoiding faith, they avoid life itself.

Hope. — Fallen again, I understand. You are not where you want to be, and you're fully aware that you do not deserve the name "Christian." But God is your Father, God is your Brother, and you are his home. For us Christians—yes, that name describes you, and you fit it well—God is not some distant force or some removed judge. He is Emmanuel forever. "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and this shall be my name forever." Which is to say, "I am the God of sinners forever." There is no other God than the one who longs for your redemption. Always remember: A person who keeps falling into sin but repents before God in prayer even with dried up eyes is closer to the feet of God than the one who does everything right and yet is full of himself. That fisher of men spent more of his time with repentant sinners than he did the self-righteous Pharisees. So repent, and repent always, even if the prayer of your repentance is that you are not yet repentant enough.

Love. — Jesus Christ, our God, is not a God whose love we fight for but a God who fights for our love, who embraces the humiliation of the cross in our place, a God who steps on the throat of Death. For Death had made a terrible mistake: It has tried to get its hands on you, and your Shepherd cannot stand such an offense against his beloved. We worship a God who bursts forth from the tomb with one resolution commanding his every step: "I will not let Death take you, my friend whom I have loved with an everlasting love, you whom I have called by name, you whom I have declared mine, you who are worth all of this." Our Lord embraces that cross because he knows that this is how he will win you, O you beloved of God, worthy of the cross of our Lord. Fools for Christ, after all—fools for a boundless love.

(Let the above contend and gnaw)

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INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS & THE YOUTH

96

NAVIGATING interfaith issues can be an exhausting and emotional journey. Lack of understanding, lack of listening, and lack of humility all contribute to making these conversations difficult to interact with. As Christians, I think it is necessary we clean our lens from the smudges that block us from seeing the pain that those of other faith backgrounds experience in any given situation. This became a main topic of contemplation as I traveled throughout Indonesia, which is predominantly Islamic. Personally, I allowed my lack of exposure to create an attitude of indifference toward the Muslim community, and I was rudely awakened to the fact that engaging as Christians with interfaith issues is complex and leaves no space for indifference. It was then that I grasped the importance of fostering relationships with the youths in society and of being an ongoing learner in interfaith issues for the Gospel.

While in Indonesia, I heard many stories of Muslim youths' experiences and recognized the importance of caring for the next generation. I was told that certain extremists would influence the youth, carefully and intentionally developing relationships to create teenage terrorists. When adults are willing to step into a child or young adult's life and be a listening ear and a model of behavior, a seed is planted that impacts the youth. My hope is that these adults would be Christ followers and bearers of love, peace, and humility. In many extremist cases, however, the wrong people get to the youth first and "convert" them to destructive ways. Interestingly enough, I also noticed Indonesians' general desire to refrain from dehumanizing the extremists who led children down violent paths; it was then that I truly recognized that even the extremists are also people worth saving.

As I reflect on my past and the adults who poured their energy into my own life, I wonder how to engage the next generation. I suppose I would argue for the urgency Christian adults should feel for building up our youth in virtue and Christ-like love, and that may start with an emphasis on family discipleship and neighboring youth. In my own testimony, I can look back and see how the adults around me deeply influenced my faith. Before my walk with Christ, I was surrounded by very discouraging adults. Once God led me to joining a church, the adults of the youth group flocked around me in support, something I

had yet to experience. Those adults changed me. They believed in me when I thought I was at my end, and it was this influence that pushed me to explore my relationship with Christ more deeply.

I believe that Christian adult engagement should extend even beyond the Christian fold. We must actively engage those outside Christianity without seeing interfaith interaction as forced consensus or agreement with other religions. Behaving in this manner is proactive cooperation that affirms the wellbeing of all. I think Christians can be quick to assume that interfaith initiatives or pluralism in this sense necessarily mean accepting all religions as true. I used to think this way. The pluralism I have in mind embraces people's traditions, acknowledging existing theological conflicts while still seeking to find common ground with people through service and the workplace. For Gospel conversations to be able to take place, we must humble ourselves and not immediately recoil when others' faith claims come into conflict with our own; we should listen to what they believe and why they believe it. This is particularly true when interacting with the youth of all cultures and religions. These populations desperately need guidance, love, and support, and they will be forever affected by the one who provides it. I admit that the specifics of this are very complex, and I am still trying to fully comprehend how God calls us in situations such as these.

Even though I am no longer in Indonesia, the Lord has currently placed in my life non-Christians who pursue other faith traditions. As God has enabled me to befriend their families and be a loving adult toward their kids, mutual respect has now opened doors for conversations that I wouldn't have foreseen occurring. My new friends notice how their children interact with me and have asked me how I have such childlike joy. All glory to Christ for those conversations. I pray that the Lord grants me a listening ear, a heart of humility, and a sense of love for Christians and non-Christians alike so that I may boldly intervene in their lives and point them toward the truth of the Gospel.

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THE GLORY OF GOD & THE LIVING MAN

98

For the glory of God is a living Man, and the life of man is to see God¹
—Irenaeus of Lyons
Against Heresies

HAVING been raised in an Christian home, I have always accepted the Incarnation, but the reality of it never really hit me until my journey in faith took an unexpected turn, and my worldview shifted forever.

Around October last year, I felt extremely burnt out. I was listless and I could not think straight. I craved the tranquility I felt during my previous experience with contemplation and *lectio divina*, so I started researching it. I soon found myself diving deeper into the Patristics.

My theological rediscovery of the ancient Christian tradition changed how I saw myself, how I saw my faith, and how I saw the world around me. The all-powerful God suddenly became much more alive, and I realized how shallow my previous understanding of the Faith was. When Jesus became Incarnate, the spiritual really became physical, and once again knit together the spirit and the flesh, which have been at odds ever since the Fall. While I had always affirmed the doctrine of the Incarnation, I realized that I had been treating it as a mere historical event instead of a reality intimately related to me.

The Incarnation is still alive today; the Ascension did not put an end to the Incarnation but brought our human nature to Heaven, introducing our humanity into the Trinity. This renewed understanding led me to reflect upon my understanding of human dignity. Being brought up in Hong Kong in a Christian family that emphasized being living witnesses for Christ, I thought that it was easy to always treat others with the respect and dignity that they are due. That was the case until 2019. The relative peace and stability of Hong Kong society were torn apart when the government attempted to introduce a bill to amend the current extradition arrangements. This made it much easier for the Chinese government to extradite persons of interest to stand trial in the Mainland. This issue was so divisive that the populace

¹ This passage is often translated as, “The glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of a man is the vision of God.”

became embroiled in the debate and felt forced to take a side, however unwilling they were.

Political correctness aside, the worst of human nature was on display. Both sides relished in finding the ugliest moniker for those who did not agree with them and rejoiced when someone came up with something very offensive. We justified the use of these derogatory names, as the opposite side was deemed not to be a decent human being. Attempts at being charitable led to accusations of “being soft” in a time when we all felt required to maintain decisive stances.

It was so easy to forget that we are all humans made in the image of God. He himself came and became man, walked on Earth and died for every one of us, and is still giving Himself to us every day. I recall participating in some of the name-calling, of which I am now ashamed, but every time I see that piece of bread, I am reminded of His love and glory, and both my significance (Jesus considers me worthy to die for) and insignificance (who am I but a sinner?). The Incarnation of Christ reflects the paradox of our Faith: The true humility of Jesus is the summit of our Christian life, and His willingness to take up the human flesh brings true dignity to each of us.

The Devil thrives on discord and broken relationships. I constantly try to remind myself of what true justice is, and how imperative it is for Christians to be able to live that out, especially with our neighbors. Political conflict and social discord are not unique to Hong Kong; they are increasingly observed in all societies around the world. If you have ever tried to remain charitable while speaking to someone who sees the world in a completely different way than you do, you know how difficult it can be. Perhaps the only way out is to take the Incarnation seriously—personally and presently—and allow it to remind us of how precious each of us is to God. We are ultimately no different than one another, and none of us should presume to be worthy by trusting in our own righteousness.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us Thy peace. Amen.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Benac, Dustin D. *Adaptive Church: Collaboration and Community in a Changing World*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2022. pp. xix, 297. \$54.99 (hardback). ISBN: 978-1-4813-1708-5.

In *Adaptive Church*, Dustin D. Benac, visiting assistant professor of practical theology at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, interweaves practical theology, organizational theory, sociology, and leadership studies to explore how religious communities can not only survive but thrive in environments of uncertainty and change. Based on the author's doctoral research on two entrepreneurial Christian organizations in the ruggedly secular Pacific Northwest, Benac argues that collaboration between churches, parachurches, and adjacent religious institutions can catalyze the innovation and relational connection necessary for religious life to flourish in adverse circumstances. Particularly useful is Benac's pioneering analysis of religious "hubs," defined as "[n]either a megachurch nor a denomination" but "a densely networked organizational form that anchors religious life within a particular community and facilitates webs of connection across a broader ecclesial ecology" (104). Because hubs serve as beehives of collaboration and religious entrepreneurship, they offer a promising organizational structure for navigating the challenges of post-Christendom.

In his introduction, Benac overviews how he conducted the book's underlying research, the core of which included 51 interviews, focus groups, and participation at regional events. In chapters 1 and 2, Benac surveys the two Pacific Northwest-based organizations on which his research focuses: the Office of Church Engagement at Whitworth University (OCE) and the Parish Collective (PC). The former, an extension of a Presbyterian-affiliated liberal arts university, enriches Christian leaders and congregations through a partnership network and resources for theological training, leadership development, and vocational discernment. The latter supports ministry practitioners focused on local neighborhoods, offering them training, events, and networking with others who work out of the same "parish-as-neighborhood" framework. Common to each organization is a focus on trust-based relationships, the priority of innovation over technical solutions, and a startup mentality.

Both of these two "hub" organizations have a track record of religious innovation, so in chapters 3 and 4 Benac provides a descriptive account of how hubs catalyze adaptive expressions of church. Chapter 3 explores how hubs are structured. The key insight here is that this

structure is primarily relational, allowing practitioners to encounter each other in ways that cultivate innovation and help overcome common challenges practitioners face, including isolation, loneliness, and lack of resources. Chapter 4 is an organizational analysis of hubs. Drawing on three concepts from organizational theory, Benac looks at hubs as fields, networks, and ecologies in order to argue that hubs act as “anchors” and “webs” that draw various expressions of ecclesial life together in ways that stimulate adaptive growth.

Chapters 5 and 6 move from organizational description to theological reflection. For churches to adapt and innovate, leaders and congregations must learn to think creatively. So, borrowing from Craig Dykstra’s account of pastoral and ecclesial imagination, Benac argues in chapter 5 that hubs foster this kind of creativity by offering a discrete space for practitioners to imagine new possibilities for ecclesial life as they rub shoulders with a wider web of people and ideas. In chapter 6, Benac explores what kind of practices cultivate a fertile pastoral and ecclesial imagination. Here the essential practice is the development of a shared life: With Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Benac sees life in the church community as the locus where Christ is known, such that community creates the possibility for faith to exist and grow. An additional conversation partner in this section is Luke-Acts. Drawing on Acts’ account of the church at Antioch, Benac notes multiple conditions that tend to stir up ecclesial creativity, including the presence of uncertainty and adversity, God-ordained social networks, and teaching that strengthens these networks once they are formed.

In his final chapters, Benac develops two conceptual frameworks for adaptive churches. Chapter 7 asks what kind of leadership facilitates adaptive change. Benac’s answer takes the form of a paradigm that reminds one of a personality test, in that it defines six types of adaptive leaders (caretakers, catalysts, champions, connector-conveners, surveyors, and guides) and how these modes of leadership overlap and complement each other. Chapter 8 provides a second conceptual framework by overviewing the unique contributions six different kinds of people (pastors, Christian educators, lay leaders, nonprofit ministers, philanthropists, and ecclesial entrepreneurs) can make to an adaptive church or ecclesial ecosystem. Seven brief appendices follow that provide further documentation of Benac’s research process.

With the recent COVID-19 pandemic having exposed the weaknesses of many existing church models, *Adaptive Church* is a fresh, timely, and stirring invitation to reimagine how the church might exist

in the world. One of the strengths of the work is its interdisciplinary approach, allowing Benac to import into practical theology organizational and leadership insights that help open up an understanding of religious leadership based less on technocratic solutions—which tend to falter in complex, uncharted environments (read: post-Christendom!)—and more on creativity and adaptivity. As a ministry worker who also happens to be a Pacific Northwest native, this reviewer found plenty that “rang true,” not just in Benac’s description of the challenges that accompany ecclesial life in a secular setting, but also in his prescription of collaborative, adaptive leadership as a necessary ingredient for religious groups to thrive. Moreover, Benac’s novel account of religious hubs will be an especially welcome gift to practitioners seeking inspiration for how to understand, catalyze, and organize inter-ecclesial partnerships.

For a book not just on adaptive leadership in general but on adaptive *churches* in particular, one wonders whether more could have been said about a specifically theological rationale for ecclesial collaboration. Hints are given, for example, that Bonhoeffer’s insight regarding the communal nature of Christian existence could be expanded to encourage more heterogeneous partnerships. Benac’s prescription here—patience and trust—is a helpful step, but given that churches can be notorious for refusing to work together because of differences in theology or practice, one wishes there could be a more thorough account of how theology can actually build bridges rather than burn them.

A final comment is that at times *Adaptive Church* is heavy on concepts and light on concreteness. Though this is appropriate for an academic work of organizational and theological analysis, further examples and even anecdotes of personal or community transformation catalyzed by the OCE and PC would add welcome color, especially for ministry practitioners looking to envision how a somewhat abstract concept like a hub can bring about concrete change “on the ground.” Indeed, one of the reasons Benac’s work is so stimulating is because of how immensely it stands to benefit not just theorists of practical theology but those “on the ground” above all, including pastors and laypeople. If Benac’s wise reflections in *Adaptive Church* were taken to heart, churches and leaders would greatly benefit.

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Reeves, Josh A. *Redeeming Expertise: Scientific Trust and the Future of the Church*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2021. pp. xii, 186. \$44.99. ISBN: 978-1-4813-1615-6.

Josh Reeves seeks to engage the evangelical church's general epistemology in order to examine whether or not it has the tools to engage intellectual expertise in a constructive manner. Reeves examines the intellectual history that led to the formation of the evangelical church's epistemology and proposes a way forward for the church to make room for scientific expertise without resorting to blindly trusting experts.

Reeves begins by exploring the church's present relationship with expertise and how that relationship developed. Tracing the development of modern science from the beginning of the sixteenth century with Francis Bacon, Reeves argues that modern science initially started as a practice of amateur observers attempting to develop a system with which to understand the natural world (26). In such a context, laypersons were encouraged to participate in observing natural phenomena. The "scientist" was anyone able to make observations about the world and communicate them to other scientists. However, as this sort of natural observation became more technical and complex, "science" became increasingly professionalized beyond what any lay person could understand on their own. This specialization eventually created both a need for increased training in a given field, leading in turn to the creation of "experts," and also a suspicion of those experts by laypersons who were increasingly unable to understand the scientific process (40). The formation of insular scientific communities, particularly when they questioned traditional church teachings, created a narrative of distrust between the church and "experts" in general.

To begin addressing the contemporary mistrust by many Christians of the scientific community today, Reeves considers several common objections Christians might make to trusting experts. Reeves suggests that Christians do not trust experts because experts do not share a worldview with Christians, or because experts do not have the Holy Spirit, or perhaps because of an epistemological conviction that one should believe only what is clear to one's own common sense. Reeves argues that all three objections fail to provide sufficient reason to reject expert input in scientific matters. At the heart of all three objections is a misunderstanding of either what science is attempting to accomplish or the role of the truth-seeker in evaluating scientific truth claims. Reeves holds that modern scientific inquiry is not attempting to produce a cohesive worldview,

and that generating important truth claims doesn't require a unity of worldview to begin with (61, 139). As for the truth-seeker, Reeves rejects the modernist assumption that the independent truth-seeker can, using "common sense" reason, evaluate professionalized scientific truth-claims with a high-degree of accuracy (81, 90). Reeves joins contemporary authors such as James K.A. Smith and Ellen Charry in objecting to the modern understanding—particularly its Cartesian undertones—of the self as an independent truth-seeking instrument. There is simply too much to know in this specialized world to seriously hope to develop a "common-sense" understanding of everything. It is inevitable that we rely on others in order to understand the world around us (94, 111).

With those objections considered, Reeves promotes trust of expertise as a default: It is impossible for Christians to engage with the contemporary world in any sort of intellectually honest way without acknowledging our dependence on expert knowledge. Reeves then moves to tackle the inevitable follow-up questions: If the layperson cannot understand professionalized science, but must rely on experts to acquire knowledge, how does the layperson determine which experts to trust? On what subjects should the layperson defer to experts? Reeves is not advocating full scale resignation of the church to whatever any scientist tells the church it should be, as he offers an extensive section on what science cannot tell us (151). Instead, churches should look to communities and institutions that regulate expertise as a means of discerning which information and which experts to trust. Institutions—particularly institutions that contain diversity of thought—provide frameworks and standards that not only regulate what constitutes good scholarship but also offer the layperson a reason to trust various experts who emerge out of these regulated communities (154). While communities are still liable to err, a body of well-regulated and diverse truth-seekers arriving at an uncoerced conclusion provides a compelling case for that conclusion. In summary, the church and individual Christians must form, reform, and participate in communities searching for scientific truth, as well as utilize other communities of truth as a means of evaluating expertise in unfamiliar territory.

One point of inquiry Reeves does not answer: What happens when institutions begin to revise what qualifies someone as an expert? While Reeves argues that institutions of diverse voices can provide a helpful way to both regulate experts and to allow laypersons to discern which experts to trust, institutions make frequent value judgments (which Reeves argues science cannot make) about what constitutes certified expertise. How is the layperson to discern which value judgments re-

garding the nature of “good” scholarship are significant enough to render the contents of the scholarship suspect? While this question is of primary importance in the humanities, whose content is much more likely to be determined by value judgments, the content of scientific investigation is not immune to institutional value judgments. Reeves argues that worldview is oftentimes irrelevant to a diverse scientific communities’ ability to answer a given question (60), but he does not provide a guide for how a layperson can determine which questions may be affected by worldview—and the extent to which worldview may be an influence—and which questions will not.

Regardless, Reeves succeeds in his aim to make a case that the church must find a way to engage with expertise, regardless of how challenging it may be, and he provides an excellent, if not entirely comprehensive, guide as to how the church should go about doing so. “The assumptions by which Christians approach the Bible and the world must evolve to a more social view of knowledge ... if Christianity is going to thrive in the information age” (186). Reeves’ compelling arguments against the ability of the lone “common-sense” thinker, as well as his robust understanding of how institutions can serve the layperson navigating expertise, provide a clear path for Christians to re-engage science with cautious enthusiasm.

Overall, Reeves’ work provides a worthy guide to the Christian navigating her relationship to expertise. Reeves does all this while taking the claims of conservative, evangelical Christianity very seriously. On numerous occasions he engages with concepts such as “theistic science,” creationism, and creation science, and offers constructive criticism that takes their theological commitments seriously (see 58-59). In short, he takes his own advice on how an expert is to present himself: He is modest and nuanced in his conclusions and is speaking into a context he desires to dialogue with. Those in the church searching for a guide on how to engage with contemporary scientific development would do well to read his work.

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Waters, Brent. *Common Callings and Ordinary Virtues: Christian Ethics for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2022. pp. vii, 268. \$18.99 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-8010-9942-7.

In *Common Callings and Ordinary Virtues: Christian Ethics for Everyday Life*, moral theologian Brent Waters explores the role of ordinary activities and relationships in the Christian moral life. Waters' thesis is that through our attention to the ordinary relationships and activities of everyday life, we gain a deeper understanding of what is most important in our lives and what contributes to human flourishing (ix).

Waters argues that our callings and vocations are expressions of neighbor love (25). Callings are commands from God or neighbor to adopt a task or way of life (13). Vocations are sets of skills and practices necessary for fulfilling a calling (14). Waters draws on the work of Martin Luther, who says that through baptism, Christians respond to Jesus' call to love God and neighbor (23). This calling involves attending to the good of the other, which requires what Iris Murdoch calls "unselfing" (30). Through the process of unselfing, we come to view the other as another self instead of a means of benefiting oneself (30).

Fulfilling our calling to love our neighbor also requires virtue (35). Waters defines virtue as "an innate or divinely infused quality or faculty that, with the aid of God's grace and leading of the Holy Spirit, can be practiced and habituated in ways that align one's life with the good" (45). It is primarily through mundane activities and relationships that we cultivate virtuous habits with the help of God's grace. These habits form our character, which reveals our alignment with the good—God Himself (48–49).

Time and place enable us to flourish as embodied creatures (56). Humans experience time as linear and cyclical. We experience past, present, and future, but also the recurrence of similar events like family dinners and morning routines (56–57). Drawing on David Hogue, Waters argues that we order time through the interplay between remembering the past and anticipating the future (58–59). As Christians, we remember Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and anticipate His return (60).

Waters turns toward examining everyday relationships between kinds of neighbors: friends, spouses, parents and children, and strangers. Good friends are loyal, which helps them learn lessons from one another about loyalty to God (99). Friends also draw each other closer to God by holding each other accountable for their actions. By

helping one another pursue their vocations, friends practice unselfing because they learn to attend to the good of their friend *as* other.

Marriage, says Waters, is “the most intimate expression of neighbor love” (111). While we can form close, loving bonds with friends and family, these will not reach the intimacy of spouses who know one another in soul, body, and spirit (111). Marriage is also a lifelong covenant, an extended exercise in mutual unselfing through which both parties learn and promote the good of the other (108). The marital calling involves loving the other *as* other, which makes it such that the two become one while remaining two (112).

A family should be a place of mutual belonging that navigates changes over time (123–124). For example, a parent should treat their grown children as adults, and as children grow up, they should view their relationship with their parents as reciprocal instead of dependent (123). Members of Christian families are also called to help one another exemplify love of neighbor by serving others (126).

With strangers, the key is to appropriately balance love and fear (133). One should avoid treating strangers with contempt, but also realize that not all strangers can be trusted (134). Our command to love neighbors who are strangers requires that we love them *as* strangers, which often involves acknowledging their presence while respecting their privacy (135–136).

Finally, Waters explores everyday activities that contribute to human flourishing, starting with work. Even for those who enjoy their work, it has its boring aspects (164). Nevertheless, we express the love of God through work (165). We fulfill the command to be stewards of creation by transforming our world into a more hospitable place. We also exhibit love of neighbor when others benefit from the fruits of our labor (166–167).

For embodied beings to flourish, the physical places in which they belong require maintenance (177). Houses are physical structures that enable us to cultivate bonds with others, but a home involves particular people living in a shared place (180). Housework supports homework because by devoting time and attention to mundane activities like doing laundry and washing dishes, one is demonstrating care for others (182).

Moreover, we demonstrate love of neighbor by eating well. Eating is vital for human flourishing, and eating well requires time and attention (218). One must be attentive to the details involved in meal preparation and table setting. Meals provide us with the opportu-

nity to exhibit love of neighbor by extending hospitality to others (222). The table also allows us to engage with our Creator because it is reminiscent of the Lord's Table where we eagerly anticipate Christ's return (226).

Waters ends by discussing the value of leisure. He argues that we work to be at leisure, not vice versa (240). Leisure is a receptive mode of being through which we form the capacity to appreciate all of creation (230). When we are at leisure, we are truly free from the "tyranny of always having to act" (230). It is thus through leisure that we flourish because we are able to worship God and express joy and gratitude for His gifts (230).

Overall, Waters makes a compelling case for the importance of ordinary activities and relationships. He uses a wide range of strategies, often drawing on the work of philosophers like Augustine and Aquinas, as well as theologians like Karl Barth and Martin Luther. Perhaps most crucially, Waters makes reference to biblical passages to support his claims throughout. In his discussion about time and place, Waters points out that the Word became flesh in a particular time and place (62). In the chapter about marriage, Waters cites Scripture frequently, particularly verses in Genesis and the New Testament that talk about two becoming one flesh (106). Through these verses, Waters successfully highlights the uniqueness of the spousal relationship and its role in unselfing.

Another technique Waters uses is illustration through stories. At the end of many chapters, Waters describes the plot of a novel and its relation to the main points of the chapter. Sometimes this strategy works, but other times it is less clear what its purpose is. In particular, the chapter on work ends with Waters describing George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (171–174). Though this keeps the reader's attention, it does so primarily because the reader wants to find out what happens in the novel. When one is engrossed in the plot, however, it is easy to forget that the purpose of the example was to illustrate the role of work in human flourishing.

Waters makes a unique contribution to the literature by emphasizing the often forgotten aspects of everyday experience. It is not very common to read a book by a moral theologian on the eschatological importance of doing laundry and washing dishes. Insofar as Waters is trying to reach other scholars in the field, he does his job well. It seems, however, that Waters may also be targeting adult Christians more generally. Since Waters explains the ideas of academic philoso-

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phers and theologians in relatively accessible terms, a wider range of Christians could pick up this book and benefit from doing so.

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