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An All Too Radical Solution to the Problem of Evil: a Reply to Harrison

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Abstract Gerald Harrison has recently argued the evidential problem of evil can be resolved if we assume the moral facts are identical to God's commands or favorings. On a theistic metaethics, the moral facts are identical to what God commands or favors. Our moral intuitions reflect what God commands or favors for us to do, but not what God favors for Herself to do. Thus, on Harrison's view, while we can know the moral facts as they pertain to humans, we cannot know the moral facts as they pertain to God. Therefore, Harrison argues, the evidential problem of evil inappropriately assumes God to be intuitively moral, when we have no reason to suppose a perfectly good being would match the expectations provided by our moral intuitions. Harrison calls his view a new form of skeptical theism. In response, I show Harrison's attempt to dissolve the problem of evil exacerbates well-known skeptical consequences of skeptical theism. Harrison's new skeptical theism leaves us with problems motivating a substantive religious life, the inability to provide a variety of theological explanations, and, despite Harrison's comments to the contrary, worsens problems having to do with the possibility of divine deception.

Introduction

According to the evidential problem of evil, empirical observations concerning various sorts of sufferings, pains, injustices, and other evils undermine the notion that our universe was created and is sustained by a perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient God who is personally concerned for us. Gerald Harrison has recently argued the evidential

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problem of evil may be dissolved by (i) distinguishing morally perfect persons (herein: MPP) from intuitively moral persons (herein: IMP) and (ii) assuming a divine command metaethics. God, by Harrison's definition, is morally perfect, but—according to Harrison's divine command metaethics—this only means God does whatever She desires (or favors) and not that God acts in ways that are intuitively moral. Empirical observations of our world's various evils provide evidence against the notion that our world was created by an omnipotent, omniscient IMP, but God is not an IMP. Thus, Harrison concludes, empirical observations of our world's various evils provide no evidence against theism.

In this paper, I show Harrison's view comes at a great cost, because Harrison exacerbates troubling skeptical consequences well known to follow from skeptical theism. In 'The Evidential Problem Of Evil', I summarize Harrison's reply to the evidential problem of evil. Then, in 'Harrison, Skeptical Theism, and Anthony Collins', I describe Harrison's novel version of skeptical theism in relation to an issue in 18th century theology, utilizing an argument developed by Anthony Collins to describe a series of skeptical consequences of Harrison's view. In 'Theological Explanation', I show Harrison's view undermines the possibility of theological explanation and, finally, in 'Divine Deception', I show Harrison's response to the problem of divine deception is not only inadequate, but that his version of skeptical theism exacerbates the problem. I conclude Harrison's attempt to resolve the problem of evil is far too radical a proposal.

The Evidential Problem of Evil

Harrison, like most analytic philosophers of religion, defines God as essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and 'perfectly morally good' (Harrison 2016: p. 1). The typical way to approach the evidential problem of evil involves pointing out some feature (or features) of our universe which is (or are) incompatible with the moral facts, at least insofar as we understand the moral facts. For example, according to Rowe's (1979), there are various evils in our world which do not seem to serve any greater good. There seem to be some evils which do not fulfill any morally justifying function. Moreover, according to most theodicies, God would allow evils only if those evils accomplished some greater goods. Thus, Rowe concludes we have evidence contrary to God's existence. In Draper's version, pleasure and pain are correlated with the biological facts, but not the moral facts. Thus, the facts concerning pleasure and pain seem to undermine the hypothesis that the universe has, at bottom, some very powerful, perfectly good entity who personally cares about us—reality, at bottom, seems indifferent to us (Draper 1989). Lastly, in the version offered by Linford and Patterson, the geographic distribution of well-being, suffering, and of opportunities for amelioration, does not appear to be related to the moral facts; thus, given contemporary theories concerning distributive justice, the geographic distribution disfavors the hypothesis that the universe was created and is sustained by an all powerful, perfectly good entity personally concerned for us (Linford and Patterson 2015). In each of the three arguments, various sorts of empirical facts, together with our best normative ethical theories, is understood to undermine theism.

An MPP is someone who maximally exemplifies goodness. In contrast, an IMP is a person who acts in ways consistent with our strongly felt moral intuitions. According to

Harrison's divine command metaethics, 'morality is composed of the commands and favourings of God'.[1] Thus, a morally good person is someone who does as God commands and favors; since God allows us access to the moral facts by way of some intuition,[2] those human persons who are IMPs do as God commands and favors. Moreover, to say God is 'perfectly morally good' (as stipulated by definition) is just to say God does whatever She favors for Herself to do. But God has not provided us an intuitive grasp of what God favors for Herself, and therefore we do not have information about whether any empirical observation of the various evils in the natural world is inconsistent with that world having been God's creation. In other words, traditional versions of the evidential problem of evil inappropriately assume God would be an IMP, when we should only say God is a MPP. As Harrison puts the point, '[...] does it follow from the fact that God approves of us being IMPs that he approves of himself being an IMP (and therefore is one)? Does it even provide us with a reliable basis for concluding that God approves of himself being an IMP (and therefore is one)? I think the answer is fairly obviously 'no' to both' (Harrison 2016: 4).

Harrison, Skeptical Theism, and Anthony Collins

Harrison's view results in a novel form of skeptical theism. By way of contrast, I will first summarize traditional skeptical theism and then explain how Harrison's view differs. Several versions of the evidential problem of evil were formulated in terms of various seemings. For example, on Rowe's argument, we observe suffering which does not *seem* to accomplish any greater good. Skeptical theism is the conjunction of theism with a broad moral skepticism, according to which our knowledge of moral truths, and our knowledge of the entailment relations between various moral truths, is not a representative sample of all of the moral truths (or their entailment relations) that there are. We might imagine ethical inquiry as a process which unfolds over time; perhaps at some future time—at some Peircean end of inquiry—we'd know all of the moral truths. But our moral inquiry is youthful and we should be humble. Moreover, reflecting on past ethical inquiry, we might formulate a kind of pessimistic meta-induction, according to which most of what were thought to be well supported ethical theses in the past have, on further inquiry, often turned out to be wrong (i.e., the inferiority of women or of certain races). Thus, we have good reason to be suspicious of our present day moral convictions. But, due to God's omniscience, God knows all of the moral facts without having to proceed through any process of ethical inquiry. Given their broad skepticism concerning our moral knowledge, skeptical theists maintain we cannot estimate the probability God would create and sustain a universe with the evils

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[1] Harrison 2016: p. 3. Note Harrison's metaethical position is distinct in important ways from what has been called 'modified divine command theory', according to which axiological properties are identified with God's essence and deontological properties are identified with God's commands or will. See, for example, Alston 2002. Modified divine command theory was formulated as a response to the Euthyphro Dilemma, but Harrison has his own response. See Harrison's (2015).

[2] Or whatever. Harrison seems largely indifferent to our moral epistemology; see his comments in his 2016: 4. Nonetheless, Harrison does suggest that however we learn the moral facts, God is, in some sense, responsible for communicating the moral facts to us. Many (though perhaps not all) naturalistic moral epistemologies will be consistent with Harrison's (2016), because the operations of nature could (perhaps) be understood as the result of God's providence.

we find in ours. Therefore, they say we are not licensed to make the inference from what seems incompatible with theism to what is probably incompatible with theism.[3]

Notice that on traditional forms of skeptical theism, the only reason we do not know God's reasons for permitting various evils involves the present state of our ethical inquiry. Similarly, traditional theodicies, in which theologians attempt to explicate God's possible reasons for allowing various sorts of evils, may be presently unsuccessful or unconvincing simply because of present day limitations on our moral knowledge. On either traditional skeptical theism or in traditional theodicy, God's reasons are often understood in terms of the same categories as our evaluations of the morality of human actions. In other words, on either traditional skeptical theism or on traditional theodical projects, morality is univocal between God and creatures. In contrast, Harrison effectively divides the moral realm into two categories: (i) the moral facts as they pertain to creatures and (ii) the moral facts as they pertain to God. Although both (i) and (ii) result from God's commands or favorings, they importantly differ. Harrison says nothing to suggest skepticism concerning our knowledge about the moral facts as they pertain to humans. For all Harrison says in his paper, we might as well have exhaustive knowledge of the moral facts as they pertain to us. But, even on the supposition that we possessed exhaustive knowledge of the moral facts as they pertain to us, we still would not know what God favors for Herself to do, and, thus, we still would not be able to provide a successful explanation of our world's evils. In other words, on Harrison's skeptical theism, even if we reached the end of ethical inquiry, theodicy would still be just as impossible as when we started.

As described, Harrison's account has an odd implication. Analytic metaethicists typically distinguish between deontic and axiological properties; typically, we say that, i.e., an action can be bad in a different sense (a deontic sense) than the sense in which, i.e., a tornado is bad. For example, for Kant, bad actions are those resulting from a maxim that one cannot will for everyone to follow. But states of affairs—such as natural disasters—are sometimes described as 'bad' even though states of affairs are not themselves actions. Consequentialists might describe a tornado as bad if the tornado resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people without any consequent countervailing goods even if the tornado was not the result of any intentional act. On Harrison's account, God is perfectly good because God always does what She wills for Herself, but this describes the sense in which God's actions are always good. Consequentialists would have insisted God's actions are good if the states of affairs they bring about are good, but Harrison's account differs. Even if God has not provided us intuitive access into what God wills for Herself, God may still have provided us an intuitive grasp into which states of affairs, in the created world, were good or bad in the axiological sense. And so, one may suppose, consistent with Harrison's account, God remains perfectly good even if the states of affairs God wills are perfectly bad. God may remain good even if She wills states of affairs that are gratuitously evil and involve widespread, pointless suffering. God may have non-moral reasons for bringing about a world without gratuitous evil and widespread, pointless suffering—for example, God's love for Her creatures—but Harrison hopes to resolve the problem of evil by only invoking his metaethical position. Though I find this result deeply counterintuitive, in itself, as

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[3] For more on skeptical theism, see Almeida and Oppy 2003; Bergman 2001; McBrayer 2010; Dougherty 2014.

far as I can see, this does not constitute an objection. Moreover, Harrison does not draw out, and may have reasons for resisting, this implication. But, if he does, he has not told us what his reasons might be.

Harrison's partitioning of the moral facts between God and creatures resembles a strategy William King utilized in the early eighteenth century to immunize Christian theism from objections (King 1709). On King's view, God's infinite and radical transcendence results in the incomprehensibility of God's nature, as taken in itself: '[...] the Nature of God, as it is in it self, is incomprehensible by human Understanding; and not only his Nature, but likewise his Powers and Faculties, and the ways and methods in which he exercises them, are so far beyond our reach we are utterly incapable of framing exact and adequate Notions of them' (King 1709: 4–5). In order to attribute properties to God, we begin by making observations of the world and notice what sorts of powers or faculties we would have to possess in order to achieve the ends God fulfills. For example, we observe 'great Order, Conveniency, and Harmony in all the several Parts of the World' and that 'every thing is adapted and tends to the preservation of the Whole'. In order to achieve those ends, we would have required wisdom, foresight, and understanding and so we say of God, in some non-literal sense, that God has wisdom, foresight, and understanding (King 1709: 5). In other words, on King's view, properties are attributed to God on the basis of God's functional roles as they are discovered through empirical observation and revelation, but not on the basis of some positive conception of God's characteristics.

Thus, according to King, when Christians attribute various characteristics to God—when, for example, they say God has wisdom, foresight, or understanding—they cannot mean the same thing as what they mean when those words are applied to creatures (and, for King, the same is true for any and all predicates when applied to God). But how should we understand the relationship between predicates as they are applied to creatures and as they are applied to God? Various sorts of characteristics are attributed to God throughout the Bible which, if understood literally, are incompatible with traditional notions of who God is. For example, God is sometimes said to have hands, eyes, and feet. But, King reasoned, God does not literally have hands, eyes, or feet. Instead, we should understand those passages analogically; God possesses various characteristics which allow God to fulfill the functional roles our hands, eyes, and feet allow us to fulfill. God has a 'Power to exercise all those Acts, to the effecting of which these Powers in us are instrumental: that is, he can converse with Men, as well as if he had a Tongue and a Mouth; he can do all that we do or say, as perfectly as if he had Eyes and Ears; he can reach us as well, as if he had Hands and Feet; he has as true and substantial a Being, as if he had a Body; and he is as truly present every where, as if that Body were infinitely extended' (King 1709: p. 6). Likewise, King reasoned, all of the powers and faculties attributed to God—including God's foreknowledge and understanding—are only analogous to those of creatures.

Since God's various characteristics are only analogous to those of creatures, and the analogy only holds in the weak sense that God analogically possesses limbs, we cannot infer a contradiction from Christian doctrine. For example, we cannot infer God's tripersonality to entail that God is three substances as opposed to one (King 1709: p. 13), that God's foreknowledge poses a problem for human free will (King 1709: pp. 7–9), or that God's passionate nature contradicts God's moral perfections (King 1709: pp. 33–34). We know God's characteristics, as they consist in themselves, similar to the

way in which the blind know colors (which is to say, not at all): 'Since we have no more proper Notion of foreknowledg and Predetermination in God than a man born blind has of Sight and Colours, we ought no more to pretend to determine what is consistent or not consistent with them, than a blind Man ought to determine from what he hears or feels to what Objects the Sense of Seeing reaches' (King 1709: p. 9).

In other words, King's radical conception of theological analogy shielded Christian theism from certain kinds of attacks. Harrison's argument does not concern religious language and nothing in his paper indicates he would argue for King's radical version of the doctrine of analogy. Nonetheless, both King and Harrison effectively partition moral properties into two categories and we could, if we wanted to, assign predicates for each of the two categories.[4] Unfortunately, King's view was dealt a devastating blow by Anthony Collins, and, as a consequence, Harrison's skeptical theism inherits some of Collins's sharp criticisms.

As Collins points out, to say God is good (for example) only in the sense that God possesses limbs is just to say God is not good (God does not literally possess limbs). Thus, King's conception of theological analogy severely undermined the divine attributes. Moreover, if the divine attributes are so radically ill-defined, then nothing can be shown about God. We would be left without the ability to distinguish atheism from theism (Collins 1710: pp. 19–20), to do natural theology or prove God's existence (Collins 1710: pp. 17–18), to demonstrate any sort of soteriology (Collins 1710: pp. 20–21), to show God to be worthy of worship or that we owe various obligations to God (King 1709: p. 21), or that God's one and only Son died on the cross for our sins (Collins 1710: p. 21). Collins was not alone in these conclusions. In the 19th century, John Stuart Mill offered similar arguments against Henry Longueville Mansel. If God is good in no sense that we can understand, then we have lost the ability to motivate several key aspects of the religious life (that God is the proper object of prayer or worship, for example, the motivation for which depends upon an appeal to God's moral attributes) (Mill 1979: pp. 89–108).

To be sure, Harrison does not inherit all of Collins's objections to King. According to Harrison, God has not endowed us with intuitions as to what God wills for Herself; beyond the consequences in the created order, we have no epistemic access to God's will for Herself. Therefore, we have no reliable access to God's moral characteristics; the sense in which God is good is largely inscrutable. But Harrison has not argued that God's other characteristics are inscrutable, so—unlike King's conception of theological analogy—Harrison's view does not have the implication of (for example) rendering atheism indistinguishable from theism. In fact, because Harrison endorses a divine command metaethical position, Harrison's view is consistent with the moral argument for God's existence and therefore at least one way of distinguishing theism from atheism. Nonetheless, as I will argue, Harrison's view disables several important arguments for God's existence. While my objection will leave intact the possibility of constructing a moral argument for Harrison's theism, the moral argument is typically understood, by both theistic and atheistic philosophers, as a weak argument for theism. Many theistic philosophers would say that theism provides a metaphysical explanation

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[4] On some conceptions of analogy, a term is analogous if the term has two different, but interrelated, meanings and can therefore be defined disjunctively (see, for example, McDaniel 2010). On Harrison's view, 'goodness' means either what God commands (or favorings) as they pertain to God or creatures. Thus, on Harrison's view, 'goodness' can be defined disjunctively and the meanings of the two disjuncts are related. Thus, at least on some conceptions of analogy, Harrison's view just is that goodness is analogous between God and creatures.

for the moral (and perhaps other evaluative) facts while acknowledging that our awareness of the moral (and perhaps other evaluative) facts provides only weak, if any, evidence for theism. As far as I am aware, no one has delivered a convincing and non-controversial argument against the possibility of a tenable secular metaethical position, nor has anyone non-controversially (or, by my lights, convincingly) demonstrated ethical facts—if there are ethical facts—to be evidence of theism.

Harrison's context is slightly different from King's (and Mansel's). As the archbishop of Dublin, King was interested in defending Christian doctrine. I do not know what Harrison's personal religious convictions are and he does not mention them in his paper. Moreover, Harrison's skeptical theism involves only an in-principle reason for us to doubt our ability to apprehend God's moral reasons, not the sort of grandiose skepticism of King's theological analogy (or of Mansel's philosophy of the conditioned, as inherited from William Hamilton). Nonetheless, many of the traditional characteristics of God that matter for a traditional and substantive religious life are moral characteristics. For example, whether God is the proper object of worship or offers any particular kind of salvation follows from God's moral characteristics.

Harrison might object that, on his view, God's inscrutable moral characteristics do not determine our obligation to praise or worship God; instead, our obligations, including our religious obligations, are determined by God's commands or favorings and are known through whatever means we know other moral obligations. For example, if we know our moral obligations through some faculty of moral intuition, we might intuit our obligations towards certain kinds of religious activities. Still, for the theological traditionalist to adopt Harrison's view, they would have to explain why many people do not have intuitions towards religious obligations. Other ways in which ethical inquiry might proceed—for example, by deliberative processes aimed at global reflective equilibrium—do not obviously lead to any religious obligations. Furthermore, as I show in 'Divine Deception', the inscrutability of God's moral characteristics will have other troubling consequences for Harrison's view and for ethical inquiry.

Theological Explanation

Harrison's brand of skeptical theism creates problems for theological explanation closely associated with the arguments I examined in 'Harrison, Skeptical Theism, and Anthony Collins'. There are several different kinds of theological explanation. We can divide theological explanations into three categories: (1) those which explain aspects of the supernatural in terms of other aspects of the supernatural, (2) those which explain the supernatural in terms of the natural, and (3) those which explain the natural in terms of the supernatural. Here, I am interested in type (3) explanations. Type (3) explanations include arguments which attempt to invoke God as the best explanation for some natural phenomenon (design arguments, arguments from miracles, or certain versions of the cosmological argument), but may also include explanations which do not purport to demonstrate God's existence. On standard conceptions of explanation, some set of explanans successfully explain a given explanandum if, among other things, the explanans are appropriately related to the explanandum. If God is offered as the best explanation for some phenomenon, God's moral attributes or loving character are likely to be invoked. Importantly, theism offers an explanation for a

universe with such-and-such features if God can be stipulated to have relevant preferences and therefore moral qualities. But, on Harrison's view, God's moral qualities are entirely and in-principle inscrutable, so that no degree of further ethical inquiry would help in deepening our understanding of God's moral qualities. In consequence, whatever the relevant sort of relationship is between theological explanans and explanandum, if the explanans invoke substantive claims about God's moral properties, their relationship to the explanandum cannot be maintained.

Therefore, if Harrison is right about God's moral qualities, we would have an in-principle reason to reject the use of God's moral qualities or loving nature in explanations. (We can distinguish God's loving nature from God's moral qualities, but, given that both God's love and moral qualities are relevant for the problem of evil, plausibly, Harrison means for us to treat some combination as inscrutable.) Thus, Harrison's skeptical theism should worry many theological traditionalists, either insofar as they depend on God's moral qualities for substantive religious doctrines or insofar as they invoke God as the best explanation of some phenomenon. As Thomas Aquinas wrote, terms should not be 'applied to God and creatures in a purely equivocal sense, as some have said. Because if that were so, it follows that from creatures nothing could be known or demonstrated about God at all; for the reasoning would always be exposed to the fallacy of equivocation.'[5]

As an anonymous reviewer pointed out in response to a draft of this paper, the argument I've offered in this section might be too strong. According to Harrison, our moral intuitions provide us no reliable insight into what God wills for Herself; as a result, our intuitions provide no reliable insight into God's moral character. Nonetheless, we may still infer God's attributes from other sources, and we might still have some partial insight into the consequences of God's moral attributes. For example, perhaps we could examine nature and infer, from nature, some of the Creator's characteristics and preferences. But recall that Harrison's argument is supposed to be a response to the problem of evil, according to which—among other things—the world we observe contains a significant and seemingly unwarranted amount of suffering. We may infer from our observations of the world that if there is a Creator, the Creator is probably sadistic. We have strong moral intuitions that sadism is morally bad and therefore that a good person is not sadistic; but, as on Harrison's view, our moral intuitions are not at all a guide to God's moral characteristics, and because God is stipulated as morally perfect, we may instead infer that God prefers for Herself to be sadistic. In fact, one may take this to be Harrison's point; God possesses characteristics which, if discovered in humans, would rightfully be regarded as monstrous or evil. But, if discovered in God, must be regarded as morally perfect.

There are a variety of problems a response of this sort faces. I turn to examining two. First, supposing we could infer some of God's preferences or favorings from nature, we are left without many traditional arguments for, e.g., religiously significant theological doctrines. For example, we would be left without the possibility of an argument that theism offers salvific hope. If God prefers for Herself to be sadistic, as may be suggested by the evidence of nature, we have no reason to suppose God would grant us salvation in a

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[5] ST 1.Q13.A5. Quote from Aquinas (1920). Thomas's conception of theological analogy differed from King's; King's conception of analogy corresponds to what Thomas called 'equivocal predication' and what others have called metaphor. On Thomas's conception, analogical terms have distinct but related meanings. But, for King and for Harrison, we do not, and cannot, know how moral terms are similar in their application to God and creatures due to in-principle prohibitions on our knowledge.

serene afterlife. Or, even if we do not infer that God is sadistic, we might infer God prefers to punish the righteous and reward the wicked; after all, in the world we observe, the righteous often suffer and the wicked often prosper. One could not object that punishing the righteous and rewarding the wicked is inconsistent with God's moral characteristics, for that would suppose precisely what Harrison disallows—that we have some independent grasp of God's preferences or favorings. Nor could one object that God's infinite love for Her creation disallows, i.e., the suffering of the righteous, for then Harrison could not maintain that facts concerning suffering are no evidence contrary to his theism.

Second, my objection concerned the ability to construct successful theological explanations of natural phenomena. Theological explanations often require substantive claim concerning God's moral characteristics. While an inference could begin with nature, and then infer God's preferences or favorings (arguably, this is much of what classical natural theology attempted to do), theological explanations of natural phenomena should have theological postulates among the explanans and natural phenomena as explanandum. Therefore, arguments beginning with nature and ending with theological postulates are not theological explanations in the required sense.

There is a different sort of response Harrison might pose, according to which, contrary to the objection I've maintained in this section, his account allows for a wider variety of theological explanations. According to theological positions on which God is intuitively good, we may explain some phenomena in terms of God's intuitively good actions or providence. But other phenomena—e.g., certain facts about suffering—could not be explained in terms of God's intuitively good actions or providence. Harrison's view may be supposed to have the upshot that intuitively monstrous phenomena may still be explained by God, because, on Harrison's vew, God is not intuitively good. Nonetheless, I don't see how an explanation of this sort could be convincingly constructed. One could postulate an ad hoc explanation—i.e., whatever we observe, no matter what we observe—is the result of God's actions or providence. But I don't see how one could construct a non-ad hoc explanation. How could one move from postulating that God is morally perfect, but not in any way we understand, to the conclusion that some phenomena are the consequence of God's moral perfection? Moreover, on the view that God is intuitively good, we might have been able to offer theological explanations for some phenomena on the basis of God's intuitive goodness. But if God is not intuitively moral, then intuitive morality is no help in explaining God's actions.

Divine Deception

Our inability to apprehend the consequences of God's moral characteristics has still further implications for the trustworthiness of our ethical inquiry, and these implications apply whether we have religious obligations or wish to provide any substantive theological explanations. In his paper, Harrison lists a few ways ethical inquiry might proceed—perhaps we know moral facts by 'a faculty of moral intuition' or perhaps at least some moral facts are properly basic beliefs—and we might add a number of other ways authors have understood ethical inquiry (i.e., deliberative processes aimed at achieving global reflective equilibrium). However ethical inquiry proceeds, on Harrison's view, ethical inquiry is the process by which God reveals the ethical facts to us. As Harrison describes, 'whatever means' by which we have 'become aware of

the goodness of certain character traits [...] is the mechanism by which God is giving us insight into what he wants us to be and do' (Harrison 2016:p. 4). Nonetheless, if ethical inquiry is a process whereby God is effectively speaking to us, and we have no knowledge of God's moral characteristics, on what grounds would we rule out the possibility that God would favor deceiving us? As Harrison describes the objection, 'If we could not trust that their [our moral intuitions'] source is honest, we would not be able to trust our clearest and most widely corroborated moral intuitions and beliefs' (Harrison 2016: p. 8). Note that nowhere would this involve lessening God's perfect goodness. By hypothesis, God is a morally perfect person who is morally perfect precisely because She does whatever She inscrutably wills Herself to do; the question concerns how, on Harrison's view and given the inscrutability of God's will, we could ensure God would not will for our deception. As Mill put the point in the 19th century, 'Unless I believe God to possess the same moral attributes which I find, in however inferior a degree, in a good man, what ground of assurance have I of God's veracity? All trust in a Revelation presupposes a conviction that God's attributes are the same, in all but degree, with the best human attributes' (Mill 1979: p. 103).[6]

Previous authors have argued other versions of skeptical theism similarly result in the inability to rule out divine deception.[7] Harrison considers the possibility of divine deception and argues his skeptical theism should not lead us to think God might deceive us. Why? Because when someone tells us something, the very fact of their telling us whatever they've told us is prima facie reason to believe whatever they've told us (Harrison 2016: p. 8):

> Consider an analogy: you know nothing about my character. You do not know how honest or dishonest I am. Yet I ask you to make me a cup of tea. Surely it is reasonable for you to conclude that I want a cup of tea? You do not have to assume I am scrupulously honest. All you need to know is that people who want cups of tea tend to ask for cups of tea and vice versa. Likewise then, if it appears that God is asking us to be IMPs, then one can on this basis reliably conclude that God favors us being IMPs without having to assume that God is scrupulously honest (Harrison 2016: p. 8).

In sum, Harrison argues we do not need to rule out the possibility of divine deception in order to have a defeasible reason to trust God. Harrison's response to the problem of divine deception will not do. Contra Harrison, the problem of divine deception is not the problem of how we can be sure God is scrupulously honest.[8] Instead, the problem of divine deception, as applied to other versions of skeptical theism, is that if our moral

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[6] Mill's argument that the inscrutability of divine properties entails the possibility of divine deception was expanded upon by Lionel Tolemache, in a little known essay entitled 'Hell and the Divine Veracity' (1877).

[7] For several recent entries in this genre, see Wielenberg 2010, 2015, Hudson 2012, and Law 2015a, b.

[8] There is an ambiguity in Harrison's response to the possibility of divine deception worth resolving. Notice requests can be phrased as questions and not all questions are truth evaluable. In particular, 'may I have a cup of tea?' is not truth evaluable. Nonetheless, 'may I have a cup of tea?' expresses, among other things, our desires. If lying involves the intentional utterance of a falsehood, then we might not be able to say that someone making a request is lying. Nonetheless, someone can still request something they do not want. In general, utterances which are not truth evaluable can still be deceptions.

knowledge is as poor compared to God's, as the skeptical theist supposes, we have no way to estimate the probability or improbability of God lying to us.

One cannot respond, as Harrison seems to do, by appealing to epistemic conservatism—that, all things being equal and without reason to think otherwise, things are as they seem to be—for the point of skeptical theism is that we cannot rely on what seems to be the case in examining God's actions. As Stephen Law puts the point, 'If the fact that we cannot think of a divine justification for a given evil fails to justify the belief that no such justification exists, then, presumably, the fact that we cannot think of a justification for God lying to us fails to justify the belief that no such justification exists. So, if the sceptical theist is to apply her scepticism consistently, she should acknowledge that the probability that God is lying to us is similarly inscrutable' (Law 2015B: p. 92). In consequence, propositions which are justified because they are taken to be the word of God cannot be justified after all. 'If the only reason I have for believing that p is that God asserts that p, but for all I know God is lying to me, then I do not know that p' (Law 2015B: p. 92). Harrison's skeptical theism not only inherits the problem, but makes matters worse by partitioning the space of moral facts. Not only do we presently have little understanding of God's moral characteristics, but we have an in-principle reason as to why no amount of further ethical inquiry will ever uncover the moral facts as they pertain to God. Moreover, the only access we do have into moral reality systematically misleads us to consider the problem of evil. God could have provided us moral intuitions concerning what God wills for Herself, but—according to Harrison—neglected to do so.

Harrison is right that when another human person tells us something, all things being equal, we have reason to believe them. When someone asks me for a cup of tea, they probably want a cup of tea. But the ceteris paribus clause is important. Law considers a parallel case concerning a principle of testimony (PT): 'if t asserts that p, then, *ceteris paribus*, it is reasonable to believe both p and that one knows that p' (Law 2015B: p. 99). For our purposes, we can modify Law's PT to a principle of requests (PR): 'if t requests that r, then, *ceteris paribus*, it is reasonable to believe t desires r'. PR seems to be the principle Harrison employs; if someone requests a cup of tea, ceteris paribus, one can reasonably believe they desire a cup of tea. Given PR, and given only that someone—such as God—has requested r, does it follow that they desire r? Not necessarily; Law provides reason to think ordinary skeptical theism undermines our trust in what God tells us even if we grant PT. Parallel reasoning shows that, even if we grant PR, Harrison's skeptical theism undermines our trust that God accurately represents God's desires.

Given Harrison's brand of skeptical theism, we have no way of assessing the probability God wills for God to accurately represent God's desires to us. The ceteris paribus clause in PR is meant, in part, to exclude cases in which the probability someone accurately represents their desires is known to be low. For example, if someone is known to chronically lie about their desires, we do not have reason to think they have accurately represented their desires in any particular request. If, in some case, the probability someone accurately represents their desires is inscrutable, we do not know whether the case is excluded by the ceteris paribus clause. Following Law's discussion (see Law 2015B: pp. 99–100), we can construct the following thought experiment. Suppose we know Sally is randomly drawing balls from an urn containing some inscrutable fraction of black and white balls from 0 to 1. By construction, the

probability of Sally drawing a black or white ball is inscrutable. And suppose we know Sally will accurately represent her desires to us if the ball is black, but will misrepresent her desires if the ball is white. Sally draws a ball, examines the ball while keeping the ball hidden from me, and then requests that I recite the Gettysburg Address. On these conditions, can I know Sally desires for me to recite the Gettysburg Address, if I know only that Sally has represented herself as desiring that I recite the Gettysburg Address? No—but why not? As Law describes, 'Because for all I otherwise know Sally [misrepresents her desires]. The fact that the probability that Sally [misrepresents] is otherwise inscrutable to me provides me with a defeater' (Law 2015B: p. 99).

Greek mythology records an instance in which a god issues a command, despite desiring—and achieving—a state of affairs contrary to their command. Though I am not advocating the accuracy of the account, the account establishes that, conceivably, one may issue a command contrary to one's desires. According to Herodotus's *Histories* 1.157–160, Pactyes fled from Persia to Cyme. The Persians demanded the Cymeans surrender Pactyes. The Cymeans were not sure whether they should surrender Pactyes, so they consulted an oracle at Branchidae. The oracle communicated a message from a god (Herodotus does not tell us which one), who commanded the Cymeans surrender Pactyes. One Cymean citizean—Aristodicus—was skeptical; had the command been communicated accurately? Aristodicus went to speak with the oracle himself. The oracle again communicated the god's command: give Pactyes to the Persians. Aristodicus proceeded to remove the birds who were residing in the temple. A voice was heard emanating from the temple's inner shrine: 'Vilest of men, how dare you do this? Will you rob my temple of those that take refuge with me?' Aristodicus replied, 'Lord, will you save your own suppliants, yet tell the men of Cyme to deliver up theirs?' And the god replied, 'Yes, I do command them, so that you may perish all the sooner for your impiety, and never again come to inquire of my oracle about giving up those that seek refuge with you' (quotations from Herdotus 1975). In order not to be destroyed by their deity, the Cymeans do not surrender Pactyes to the Persians. By issuing a command Aristodicus doubted, the god was able to communicate two lessons: first, do not bother the gods with silly questions and, second, do not surrender those who seek refuge with you. Moreover, since the Cymeans did not surrender Pactyes to the Persians, the Cymeans did what the god desired, even though they directly violated what they had been commanded to do.

Other examples in which commands are issued to achieve contrary ends can be identified outside of Greek mythology. For example, suppose Alex works for Margaret. Margaret knows that Alex will work more efficiently—and consequently more quickly—if Alex does not have as much stress on her mind about finishing her tasks on time. So, Margaret tells Alex to slow down and not worry about meeting the deadlines. Though Margaret commanded Alex to slow down, Alex, now psychologically able to work more efficiently, speeds up and finishes all of her tasks before the deadline. The success of Margaret's command for her desired aims plausibly requires subterfuge. Margaret's command would not have been likely to have had the desired consequences if Alex had known Margaret's reasons for issuing the command. Moreover, Margaret's command was instrumentally rational, so long as we suppose Margaret was acting upon good evidence as to how her command would affect Alex. In other words, there are instances in which one may rationally request r in order to achieve an opposed state of affairs.

Why do we have the expectation that, in ordinary circumstances, if someone represents themselves as desiring r, then they desire r? I can think of a few possible reasons. The most obvious seems to be the constraints of prudential reasoning; for creatures like ourselves, if we desire r from others, the most prudent way to have one's desires fulfilled typically (or often) involves accurately representing our desires. If Sally desires for me to recite the Gettysburg Address, more often than not, she will be most likely to get me to recite the Gettysburg Address if she accurately represents her desire for me to recite the Gettysburg Address. We don't have to know anything about Sally's character in order to know the requirements of practical reasoning. Given God's omniscience, perhaps we should expect that God recognizes the constraints of practical reasoning. And given that God is supremely rational, all things being equal, God has reason to do whatever is required to fulfill Her ends. Therefore, one might have thought we had reason to think God would do what is most prudent to fulfill God's ends.

This response has a definite strength in that it does not appear to rely on knowing any moral claims about God; instead, we (apparently) only need facts concerning prudential reason. Nonetheless, this response fails for two reasons. First, as I've already established, there are cases in which one may have prudential reasons to make a request contrary to one's desired ends (as in the thought experiment with Margaret and Alex). Therefore, what is 'most prudent to fulfill God's ends' is not necessarily commanding us to do as She desires. Second, moral imperatives are typically thought to categorically override prudential reason. On Harrison's view, God's will determines the moral facts and, because what God wills for Herself is inscrutable, the moral facts as they pertain to God are inscrutable. Whether the moral facts, as they apply to God, categorically override prudential reason, in application to God, will presumably depend on what God wills for Herself. Consequently, whether God adheres to prudential reason in any particular instance is inscrutable. Therefore, if the reason we trust others to accurately represent their desires is based upon the constraints of prudential reason, whether God misrepresents Her desires is inscrutable.

There are other reasons we might ordinarily have the expectation that when someone represents themselves as desiring r, they desire r. We can form the expectation through prior experience that IMPs, and those who approximate the behavior of an IMP, do not typically lie. Most people are intuitively moral much of the time, and we therefore have defeasible, prima facie justification for trusting most people most of the time. But recall Harrison's view distinguishes between the moral facts as they pertain to creatures and as they pertain to God. God is not an IMP, which is why God allows all of the horrendous, nightmarish sufferings which appear in our world. If there are no bridging principles between the moral facts as they pertain to creatures and as they pertain to God (or at least a bridging principle epistemically available to us), then we have no reason to suppose an inductive generalization constructed through our experience with other humans would provide us reason to trust God. After all, inductive generalizations are understood to occur over some domain of relevantly similar objects. Presented with another domain of objects that are not relevantly similar, we should not extend the inductive generalization to the new domain. Likewise, since God is not an IMP, inductive generalizations that may hold over the domain of human beings—whose behavior often approximates that of an IMP—should not be extended to God.

Perhaps Harrison will object that though God is not an IMP, God is a person. And so although we may not be able to extend an inductive generalization from IMPs to God,

perhaps we can extend an inductive generalization from other persons to God. Through my experience with persons, I have found persons generally favor what they represent themselves to favor; shouldn't I then infer that God favors what She represents Herself to favor? In my experience, I have found people typically favor that their children do not needlessly suffer. Therefore, if we can extend an inductive generalization from persons to God, we should expect God not to favor the suffering of Her children. But, according to (for example) Rowe's (1979), we have evidence our world contains needless suffering. Harrison's view is supposed to block Rowe's inference; we cannot infer that needless suffering is inconsistent with God's moral perfection because what God wills for Herself, to which we do not have reliable access, determines Her moral perfection. Since we do not have reliable access to what God wills for Herself, we do not have grounds to infer that the creation of needless suffering is inconsistent with God's moral perfection. But, if that is an effective response to the problem of evil, then the suffering in our world should be taken as evidence that God's favorings are radically different from the favorings of persons with which we have experience. And if that's so, then my experience of the favorings of other persons cannot be inductively generalized to God's favorings. As such, we do not have inductive grounds on which to infer that God favors what She represents Herself to favor.

Another reason which might license our prima facie trust in other human persons involves an analogical inference. All things being equal, other people tend to be like ourselves in important ways. Reflecting on our own experiences with others, we notice that we do not typically have reason to lie to other people (perhaps because of, e.g., prudential reasons), so, by parity, other people do not typically have reason to lie to us. In Harrison's example, we might find ourselves asking, 'why would I ask someone for a cup of tea if I didn't actually want one?' Again, this reason cannot extend to God because, on Harrison's view, there is no relevant similarity between the moral facts as they pertain to creatures and as they pertain to God. The analogical inference is blocked precisely because of the way in which Harrison's view partitions the space of moral facts. On other versions of skeptical theism, so long as the skeptical theist's skepticism is not too strong, we may be able to extend a kind of prima facie trust to God on an analogical basis. (Nonetheless, I admit to some skepticism as to whether this can be done.)

Perhaps a prima facie trust in others can be generated by our social expectations. Some of our social expectations originate in mutual desires for successful collective living and, through a process of social coordination, we come to avoid lying. As Kant pointed out, the consequences would be disastrous were everyone to adopt deceitful behavior as their maxim. Or, as Hobbes argues, fear causes us to leave the state of nature and to form a civilized society adverse to, among other things, deception. Note that I am not invoking the normative machinery from Kant or Hobbes; instead, my point is only that we can provide a plausible sociological and psychological account of why people avoid deceptive behavior most of the time and why we form associated social expectations in response to our time spent with people who avoid deception. Nonetheless, our social expectations, formed as they are through a project of collective living, would not extend to God, as God would be totally alien to that project. After all, God is not, on Harrison's view, an IMP, nor is God a participant in our social affairs.

As we've seen, our inductive generalizations over our experiences with other people, our analogical inferences from ourselves to others, and our expectations formed through projects of collective living provide no reason for us to extend a prima facie

trust to God. Importantly, each of these three involves defeasible reasons for trusting others with limited domains of applicability. When we meet strangers who are radically unlike ourselves, whose values are foreign, and who could potentially do us harm, we approach with caution for good reason: our inductive basis needs to be broadened, we need reason to extend the appropriate analogical inference, and we need to know the stranger recognizes our shared humanity (that is, that we are both participants in the same social project). Harrison has provided us an in-principle reason as to why none of these inferences could ever be extended broad enough to include God and has thereby blocked any reason to think we ought to trust God. As a solution the problem of evil, Harrison's comes with far too radical a cost.

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